

What happened to the dinosaurs? (Extinction)



The Cretaceous period ended with the Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) extinction. This huge extinction event wiped out most (about three quarters) of the life on Earth. There is a layer of sediment [material] in the Earth that matches this time period. This layer is found all around



the Earth, both on land and in the sea. Dinosaur fossils can be found below this layer but not above it. This layer is rich in a metal that is rare on Earth, but that is quite common in asteroids.

There are a lot of theories



[ideas] about what caused this extinction. Many scientists believe that the K-T extinction was caused when an enormous asteroid or comet hit the Earth. This threw up massive clouds of debris [rubbish] as it disintegrated on impact. These clouds

would have blocked much of the sun's light and heat, causing a very long winter.

Without the sun, plants would have died. Plankton in the oceans would also have died. This would have caused animals that depended on plants and plankton for food (herbivores) to die out. Carnivores [meat eaters] that fed on the herbivores would then also have died from lack of food. Some animals may have survived because they were omnivores [plant and meat eaters]. Others may have been scavengers [rotting animal or plant eaters], or were able to hibernate [sleep] during the extremely bad winter-like conditions.

We can't be certain that an asteroid was the cause of the extinction. It is possible that a number of causes combined to eradicate [wipe out] the Earth's lifeforms. There is, however, a massive impact crater under the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico. It is called the Chicxulub crater and is 180 km wide (112 miles) and was 20 km (12 miles) deep. Evidence of this crater was found in the early 1990's, and greatly strengthened the argument for the killer asteroid impact theory.