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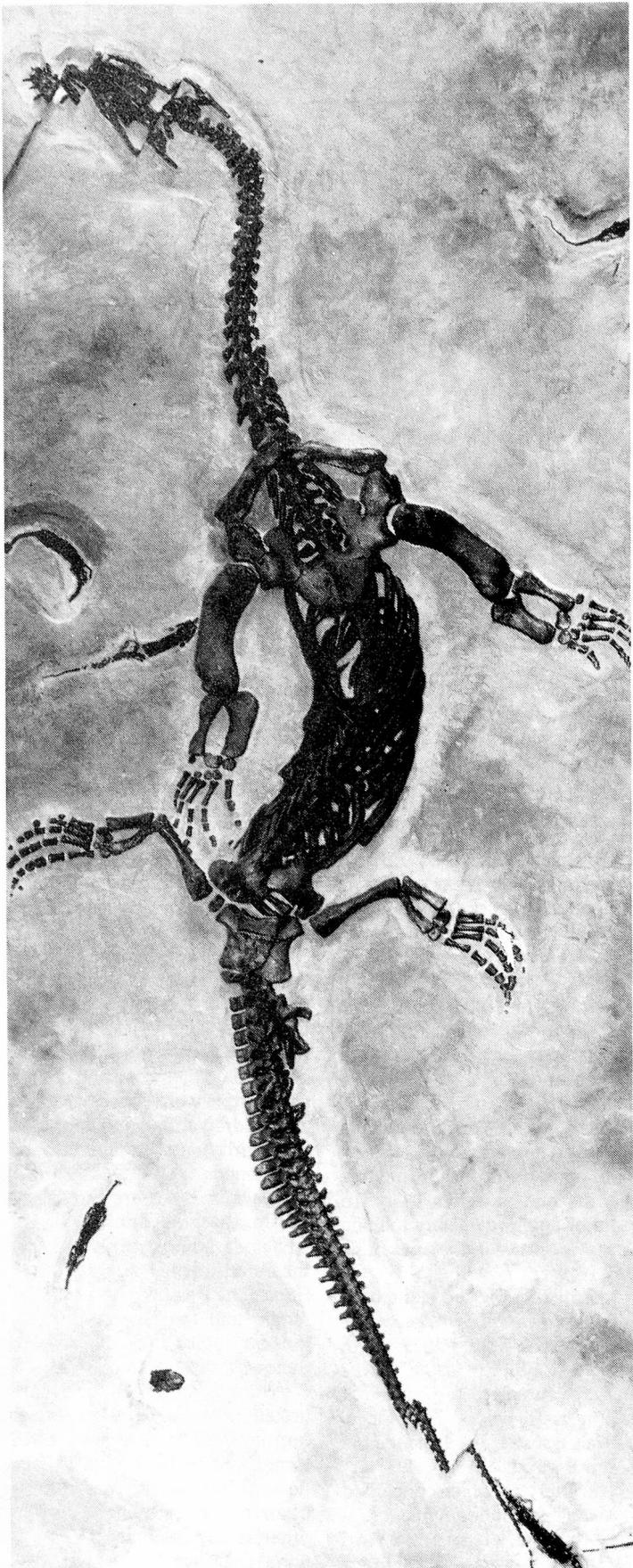
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A saurian fossil – one of those which can be viewed in the small museum in Meride

Dinosaurs raise the roof!

"The jolly old beast is not deceased there's life in him today", sang a chorus of well-wined Victorian scientists at a banquet held inside a dinosaur 130 years ago.

Around Switzerland recently, dinosaurs have been acting pretty lively. Two American dinosaurs have literally raised the roof on Geneva's Museum of Natural History while tracks of dinosaurs have been found high in the Alps.

The tracks were discovered several years ago, but the news has reached the public only recently through an itinerant exhibition in Switzerland.

Long after they had all disappeared, at the time a great upheaval formed the Alps hardly 10 million years ago, a horizontal slab bearing their prints was thrust up to 7,920 feet (2,400 metres).

It lay there at a 40-degree angle under snow until the hot summer of 1976 when a French geologist Georges Bronner, chanced on it. He spotted animal tracks, water ripples, and raindrops.

The tracks were those of semi-aquatic reptiles trekking from the shallows of a lagoon to their feeding and nesting grounds.

Such prehistoric finds are rare in Switzerland. Professor Marc Weidmann of Lausanne's Geology Museum said: "The quantity and variety of tracks brought tangible proof of the existence not just of islands but a great stretch of land".

The trails were attributed to two known types of dinosaurs and various unknown species that ambled about on their hind legs, using their long tails for balance. As dinosaurs go, they were small, four metres tall at most.

This dates them to the Triassic Period, some 200 million years ago.

In other parts of Switzerland, in the cantons of Basle, Solothurn and Argau, deposits have revealed other remains, some spectacular.

This is only part of the dinosaur news from Switzerland.

Until a few years ago, Geneva's museums had none of the beasts, then, when the American Women's Club was hunting for a suitable gift to mark the club's tenth birthday, the curator of the Museum of Natural History laughingly suggested a dinosaur.

"It was the gift: something as big as possible, as old as possible and as American as possible", the club's newsletter commented. The American women's funds bought not one dinosaur, but two.

When paleontologists unpacked the crates in Geneva, however, there was a problem. The larger, fiercer, of the two dinosaurs was fossilised in a rearing position.

It was unthinkable to erect the bones any other way. To allow the 11-metre-high allosaurus headroom, the museum had to be raised one storey.