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# Perfect fossil shows what Yorkshire monster had for its last supper

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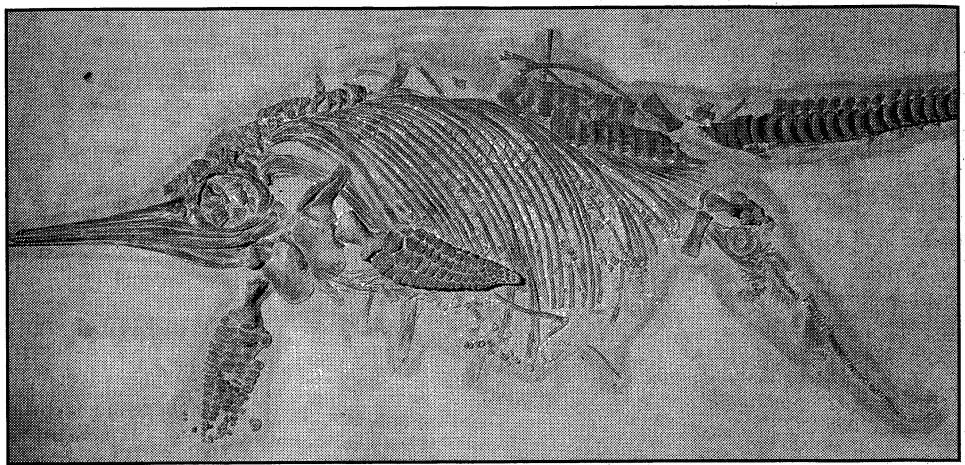
SCIENTISTS have discovered the near-complete fossil of a 15ft-long ichthyosaur, a marine reptile that lived 185m years ago, in a quarry near Whitby in North Yorkshire.

The specimen, one of the best preserved ever found in Britain, is in such good condition that palaeontologists have been able to work out what it had for its last meal: a long-extinct squid-like creature.

Its fossilised bones, including its head (which weighed half a ton), had to be winched up the quarry's 450ft-high cliff face and are now being prepared for more detailed study at a local workshop.

Ichthyosaurs, which are classified as reptiles rather than dinosaurs, roamed the earth's seas for 160m years until they became extinct 90m years ago — before the disappearance of the dinosaurs.

Fossilised ichthyosaurs were first discovered in 1815 by Mary Anning, a founder of modern palaeontology, close to



**A world rediscovered: an ichthyosaur similar to the near-complete one found at Whitby**

The latest example was discovered by Brian Foster, a local amateur palaeontologist. "I was going to search along the coast for fossils, but because the tide was in I thought I would have a look around this quarry," he said. "I started walking along this stream that goes through the middle of it when I saw this tooth, then another, 2ft further along.

"I then glanced round to the side and saw the snout of this

was a classic find. Because it was a quarry you had none of the erosion problems concerned with tides. It also became apparent that it was complete."

It took a week to excavate the fossil, involving the removal of seven tons of rock. The 10-strong team of amateur and professional palaeontologists led by Phil Manning, from the Yorkshire Museum, completed the task last Friday night.

Manning said the find could

have found several bones never seen before. There are small bones within the hips and these help us answer which group they belong to. We will be able to compare this to other groups around the world," he said.

Michael Benton, professor of vertebrate palaeontology at Bristol University, said the find was a rarity. "On the Yorkshire coast you had a whole community of these creatures with maybe three to four different