

## Dinosaur tracks in Oxfordshire mudflats to be protected

**Dinosaur tracks made 165 million years ago that were discovered in Oxfordshire mudflats are to be protected as part of a geological conservation site.**

Up to 40 sets of tracks at Ardley Trackways, near Bicester, include those belonging to large dinosaurs related to Brachiosaurus and Tyrannosaurus.

The tracks, found in 1997, are located alongside where the M40 now runs.

Natural England confirmed it wanted to make the area a site of special scientific interest (SSSI).

The final decision on whether to confirm the designation in four months, following a public consultation.

"Such extensive and relatively complete dinosaur trackways are otherwise unknown in England and are rare internationally," a Natural England spokesman said.

### 'Great lizard'

Natural England said the footprints were formed by a herd of Jurassic dinosaurs moving along part of an ancient shoreline that extended from the present-day Norfolk coast, south west to Oxfordshire and then east through London and north Kent.

Footprints have been found from groups of large, four-footed vegetarian dinosaurs, known as sauropods, and upright-walking carnivorous theropods.

One type of dinosaur footprint found at the site was that of the Megalosaurus, a type of meat-eating theropod, whose name means "great lizard".

Casts of its tracks were made using plaster and were put on display last May in concrete blocks in the Dinosaur Garden at the Oxfordshire Museum in Woodstock.

All the footprints were formed on mudflats that experts believe were the size of the Florida Keys, and which were miles from vegetated land.

It is

Natural England is working with the owners and operators of the site to ensure that the fossilised



The tracks are at risk from exposure to the elements and damage from erosion



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tracks are preserved.

"This means that the site's owner, or anyone else with reason to make changes to the site, must ask Natural England for permission before such changes can be made," the spokesman said.

The footprints have also been covered with a protective layer to prevent exposure to the elements and damage from erosion.

Natural England's chief executive, Dr Helen Phillips, said: "Geological sites of this quality and importance are few and far between and we are delighted to give this important window on our past the protection that it so clearly deserves."