

How ancient mammal spurred war between paleontologists

I'm not sure why I'm so taken with *Uintatherium* and its relatives. Maybe it's because poorly-made models of the beast were regularly included in the plastic peg bags stuffed with dinosaurs I picked up at the supermarket, despite the fact that – duh – *Uintatherium* was a mammal and not a ruling reptile. Or perhaps it was *The Last Dinosaur*, wherein a charging puppet *Uintatherium* is mistaken for a horned dinosaur. Then again, such mistakes might be a clue in themselves. *Uintatherium* and its relatives in the [Dinocerata](#) – the “terrible horns” – were some of the earliest large mammals after non-avian dinosaurs were ushered off the evolutionary stage, and the combination of the paired knobs on their skulls, long saber-teeth, and rhino-range size may make them look dinosaur-ish enough to stimulate the same parts of my brain that respond to images of *Triceratops* and *Styracosaurus*.

What I didn't learn until much later was how fiercely paleontologists had battled over these ancient mammals. If you've had any exposure to the history of paleontology at all, you should know the names Othniel Charles Marsh and Edward Drinker Cope. These late 19th century scientists waged the great “Bone Wars” against each other, each of the pair trying to outpace the other to become America's chief expert on prehistoric life. The exact date and time the two started their “[bitter warfare](#)” is lost to history. A sensible starting point would be when Marsh [paid one of Cope's sources](#) to funnel fossils to him in New Haven. Cope's public embarrassment at putting the head of *Elasmosaurus* [on the wrong end](#) of the marine reptile didn't help matters. But whatever initially sparked the acrimony that would run the length of both men's lives, their publication record shows that the two chose *Uintatherium* and its ilk for their first major showdown.

Read full, original article: [Battle for the “Bone Wars” Beast](#)