

CRAWFORD FIELD TRIP – LINCOLN GEM & MINERAL CLUB

By Linda Hansen (photos by Linda)

As a newer member of the Lincoln Gem & Mineral Club, I have been interested in going on a field trip since I first heard about them, but the timing didn't work out for my first year.

This summer (my second year), Sarah Nichols and I made plans to attend the Crawford Rock Swap for Labor Day weekend. It was a quick trip with a lot of driving and a lot of rocks!

We decided to take Highway 2 out to Crawford on Friday, then head home via Highway 26 to Ash Hollow State Park and I-80 on Sunday. I had never been to Crawford, nor had I driven Highway 2 through the Sandhills, so I was delighted to see parts of Nebraska I seldom have a chance to see.

Because Sarah and I share a tendency to be nerdy, I brought along two books that I read while we travelled across the state: "Roadside Geology of Nebraska," a 2003 edition, and "Nebraska, a guide to the Cornhusker State," originally published in 1939 by the Federal Writers Project and reprinted in 1979. This second book includes several Tours of Nebraska highways and tidbits about the things you'd find along the way. Thus, we learned that Highway 2 in 1939 had a graveled and oiled roadbed, open all year, with side roads of fine sand that you'd better be careful driving on.

Sarah has made many trips through north central and northwestern Nebraska, so she was familiar with the route and had some preferred places to stop. On Friday, we stopped for lunch at a park in Ansley, where I found a green rock in the gravel road. I took lots of mediocre pictures through the car windows as we drove and read bits from both books as we passed through the relevant areas. (Ansley was once known for its alfalfa fields!) We arrived in Crawford in time to eat with the club at the park and chat for the evening.

Saturday morning, we joined the Rock Show field trip and headed out to Pasture 27. I think we each quickly realized we might be under-equipped – no buckets, just grocery tote bags and a backpack, no rock hammer, no trowels – but we definitely brought enthusiasm. We didn't get far from the car but found plenty of interesting specimens despite that. We also managed to avoid falling into prickly pear cactus or waking up a rattlesnake; even better. I picked up a lot of smooth white quartz, a couple of pieces of petrified wood, and many pieces that have great colors, shapes, and patterns.

Saturday afternoon we perused the Rock Show itself. I am starting to recognize some vendors from the Lincoln shows I've attended! We also enjoyed sharing meals with the members of the Gem & Mineral Club who attended. The Lincoln group claimed a nice, shady spot that seemed quiet but had steady traffic.

We also drove out to Fort Robinson. It was shocking to see so many burned pine trees around the park from this year's wildfires! We visited the Crazy Horse memorial and nearby buildings, and then Sarah gave me a driving tour, including a trip through Smiley Canyon. We resisted the urge to stop to look for rocks at the roadside cuts in the canyon!



Coal train going through the Sandhills



Sarah hunting for rocks at Pasture 27

Our drive home Sunday included a brief stop at the Ash Hollow Visitor Center, with a quick look at the locked door protecting the Native American artifacts at the cave, sadly. We also stopped at the Sutherland east-bound rest stop as the Geology book mentioned the faded wagon ruts from the settlers were visible there.

All in all, it was a really good trip. I'd recommend the Crawford Rock Swap to anyone who can make the journey out there!