

FIELD TRIP TO ASHFALL AND GRAVEL PIT

by Sharon Marburger

Jim and I headed out toward Ashfall State Historic Park after work on Friday, June 20. It was a beautiful afternoon, although very humid and partly cloudy with a moderate risk for thunderstorms. We planned to drive as far as Madison, Nebraska, where we would spend the night camping at the county fairgrounds.

When we arrived at Madison to set up our campsite, not another soul was in the campground. We had been told that a very large party was expected, and that campsites would be limited. Hmmm. Oh well, since no one was there, we had our pick of the choicest sites!

Right around dusk, there was a loud knocking at the door. I turned around and saw a face at the window! I nearly had a heart attack!! Fortunately, it was not a serial killer; only the fairgrounds maintenance man. He asked if I knew about the coming storms, to which I responded, "We have a weather radio." He nodded and said he was closing the fairgrounds gates, but not locking them since we were there. I thanked him and he left. Soon thereafter, all the storms that had been going to the north and south of us, suddenly decided that Madison was where they wanted to be. Thunder, lightning, wind, oh my! I was very nervous and was seriously thinking about cuddling up next to the fairground offices, but I was too chicken to make my way through the wild lightning to get there.

It stormed off and on all night, not giving either Jim or me a very good sleep. However, we survived it all, and were able to continue our trip. On our way out of town, we spotted a location sporting lots of river rock. We spent about 45 minutes looking and collecting, then proceeded on to Ashfall, with a promise to ourselves that we would stop at this location on the return trip.

We drove to Verdigre, Nebraska where we set up camp again. We were surprised once more at the lack of campers, since we were told this campground would be heavily populated with bicyclists. We had the entire campground to ourselves!

We arrived at Ashfall around 11 a.m. and were very impressed with the number of visitors at the center. We soon realized that most of the visitors were part of a classic car touring event that stopped to view the spectacular images of excavated rhinos.

It was a gorgeous day with a nice breeze blowing, perfect for being outside, not to mention collecting specimens. Jim and I relaxed while waiting for everyone else to arrive at the prescribed gathering time of noon. I visited with the "gatekeeper," then settled on the ground by one



of the signs to study the rock landscaping. I found a few interesting pieces, which I photographed, because it is illegal to collect on the State Park grounds. Although it doesn't look like much in the photo, it was a very interesting concretion ball; gray with a bright yellow pattern. The agate supporting the ball was okay, too.

Soon, Ed Dvorak arrived, followed by the Beers and the Kempers. Unfortunately, none of the Fort Dodge, Iowa members were able to make it. As I understood it, there was some illness and some broken bones.

We toured the park, amazed at what the archaeologists had uncovered. There is not much to say except, "Wow!" (See pictures on page 7.)

After a couple of hours roaming through the Rhino Barn and other areas of the park, we regrouped and headed towards Verdigre, where we had obtained permission to collect at one of the many gravel pits in the area.

photos by Jim & Sharon
Marburger



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Our collecting was restricted to this one pile, which produced several very nice specimens. Some of the more spritely club members were able to climb to

the top of the pile, while some of us older folks stayed toward the bottom. I have pictorial proof that LGMC does, indeed, have Mineral Monkeys as members!

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Mineral Monkeys Vienne and Julienne at the top of the pile, while the old timers, including Corey, hunt lower on the pile.

One very nice specimen of petrified wood was discovered by one of the Mineral Monkeys. (Sorry, girls. I still don't know who is who.)



There was a lot of laughter and poking fun at poor me because I found it easier to belly crawl up the pile, and I was a lot closer to the rocks so they couldn't escape my eagle eye!

The afternoon wore on with fun and laughter, and the discovery of more rocks. That brought on a multitude of questions for which we sometimes had answers.

Finally, it was announced that certain club members needed to get down the road in order to get home at a decent hour, and others had more stops on their agendas.

Jim and I headed back to the Verdigre campground where I sorted rocks, washed them off, and packaged them in Ziploc bags with their appropriate labels.

It was a lovely and quiet evening, and after the busy, fun-filled day, Jim and I headed for the land of Nod at an early hour. The lack of sleep the night before also contributed to this.

The next morning brought us a gentle rain while we broke camp. We peacefully headed toward home, with a stop again at Madison, to hunt for more rocks. We spent about an hour collecting, then started for home again. The day ended up being lovely, once we drove out of the rain.

As always, we miss you and are saddened at your absence when you cannot participate in our field trips. You missed another good one, folks.

It was unfortunate that this field trip coincided with the June Rock Party. That party was cancelled at the last minute, but not in time for those planning to attend the party to make other plans to join the field trip. These things happen. Hopefully, we can avoid such conflicts in the future.

