

RIVER FIELD TRIP GETS MIRED IN SAND BUT ENDS ON FIRM LAND

By Sarah Nichols, Club Member (photos by Sarah unless otherwise indicated)

On Saturday, August 9, thirteen LGMC members and prospective members met at 10 a.m. at the Pawnee City Casey's for a brief chat before caravanning 21 miles east to Miles Ranch on the South Fork of the Big Nemaha River for a day of rock hunting. Two other prospective members met up with the group at its destination.



Participants were club members Jim and Sharon Marburger; Blake Marlar; Patrick, Gracie, and Chloe O'Brien; Clyde and Barb Ogg; Sarah Nichols; Ed Ridge; and Cindy Rohrbaugh, as well as club prospects Jose Carillo and his daughter Ember (plus a third visitor named Griffin, last name unknown).

Talk at the rendezvous point before the group set out to its destination centered on reviewing the storm that had hit Lincoln and Omaha early that morning. Perhaps half the group had witnessed some of the storm's worst damage, while the other half (those members south of the metro area) had missed it.

However, no one present was to miss out entirely that day on excitement. Later, everyone on this field trip would face an unplanned challenge together and ultimately head home with a story to tell - and maybe also some interesting rocks and fossils for their collection.

After leaving Pawnee City, the group of eight vehicles pulled off farm road 637 Ave. about 10:30 a.m. just before the bridge across the Big Nemaha, onto a track leading about a quarter of a mile to a sand bar on the river, where the group parked and got out of their vehicles to explore. The sand bar, a fantastic spot for rock hunting, would turn out to be treacherous for smaller vehicles and anything without 4WD, although this would not become obvious until the afternoon.



Farm track to river

Through the late morning, field trip participants walked both sides of the river (which was shallow enough to cross without getting your clothes wet if you wore shorts) looking for and collecting cherts and jaspers, fossils, and other rocks or minerals including several agates or other varieties of chalcedony, which were rarer but nevertheless present in the area.

Shortly after noon, Cindy was the first to discover that her car was stuck in the sand. After the rest of the group returned to the parking area - all of them having seen Cindy, Sharon

and Jim digging out sand from around the tires of Cindy's Buick sedan - everyone present spent the next one to two hours working together to push, dig, and try to create traction on the sand with materials at hand.

Ready tools and materials included a pair of fencing pliers, one small snow shovel, two halves of a kayak paddle, car floor mats, tree branches, and flat rocks to serve as paving stones.

One vehicle, an AWD small SUV, escaped in reverse with a concerted push from multiple group members.

No effort, however, proved sufficient to free the rest of the stuck vehicles. Before long it was clear that not only Cindy's car but at least three others were stuck tight in the sand.



Photo by S. Marburger

As this realization sank in, group members took a break to eat the lunches and drink the water they had packed obediently at the recommendation of Sharon and Jim. People chatted quietly, offering each other water and words of encouragement.

Poor Subaru

Eventually, the group, noting the location had cell service if not tire traction, supported a plan for Cindy to call for a tow, which could rescue any cars that were stuck. Around 2 p.m. Cindy confirmed that a tow was on its way and was able to text a pin of the location to the group's anticipated rescuer.

While waiting, group members rested or returned to the river to hunt for rocks. It was during this wait that club member Sarah Nichols found a decent-sized agate, probably a Lake Superior.

The awaited tow arrived at 3 p.m., in the form of a 4WD Jeep with enough tow power to pull Cindy's, Ed's, Blake's, and Jim's and Sharon's cars safely out of the sand, a task that took about an hour to complete. Three larger vehicles, all large and probably 4WD, were able to drive off the sand bar without assistance.

By 4 p.m., all vehicles were safely off the river and back on farm road 637, where field trip participants thanked the tow drivers (and their dog) and then separated to begin the drive home.

Even if it looks like you can drive in and not get stuck, maybe get out of your vehicle and walk it, to make sure of how solid the surface is.



RIVER FIELD TRIP - CONTINUED

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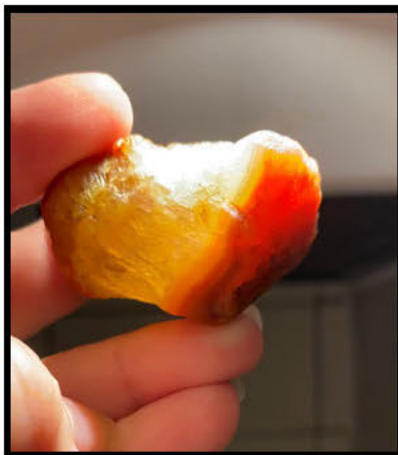
The tow driver remarked that it was not the first time people have needed a rescue from the sand bar, although the stuck victims are more commonly young people out celebrating the weekend with adult beverages.

Participants report that, despite the difficulty, they had a wonderful time and would do it again. The water was beautiful and the rocks interesting and plentiful; also, with cell service present, rescue was only a call away. If there is a next time, and participants hope there will be, the club will recommend participants drive 4WD only—or park at the road and walk in.

As for this year's sand trouble, one participant called the entire incident the best hands-on team bonding exercise she had ever experienced.



Sarah's bucket of finds



Nice agate found by Sarah