Paleo Assault on Jacksboro 083003

A gaggle of goniatites, an agglomeration of ammonoids, a bevy of brachiopods, a compilation of coprolites, a passel of pelecypods, a cornucopia of conularia, a colossal cache of coral, a symposium of cephalopods, a king's ransom of crinoids – the Jacksboro spillway was quite generous after overnight rains, and I was the only paleo enthusiast on site on Saturday to receive its bounty.

I know I'm sick, there's no disputing that fact, as evidenced by my willingness to drive 278 miles in the middle of the night just to be on site fossil hunting at dawn. Learning from past trips, I came prepared this time. I strapped a 28 quart ice chest loaded down with the day's rations on the back of my beach cruiser, slung my pack over my back, and took off across the dam before daylight, rain parka flapping in the wind. I must have looked like a bungled fossil hunting superhero, or maybe just a vagabond more at home on the streets of Austin. At any rate, copious amounts of ice cold water would slake my thirst and allow me to beat the August Texas heat and give this hillside exposure the attention it needed.

When I got to The Flats my tires bogged down in the mud, so I pulled on a pair of knee high rubber boots and charged forward. The sprinkles continued, and while mud presents problems for the casual fossil hunter, rain is a tri fold boon to the devoted enthusiast – it holds back the competition, exposes new fossils, and increases contrast of fossils against the muddy matrix.

Without further adieu, we'll let the pictures describe the impressive assemblage of Pennsylvanian Period marine fossils that the Jacksboro area is famous for. The gray, brown, and black fossils came from the Finis shale at the base of the hillside exposure, while the yellowish fossils came from the Jacksboro limestone above.

Figure 1
Various Nautiloids and Ammonoids
Metacoceras, Cooperoceras, Goniloboceras, many others unidentified

Figure 2
Gastropods: Worthenia, Strobeus, Meekospira, Trepospira, Amphiscapha

Figure 3
Top Row, left to right: Cephalopod phragmacones Mooreoceras, Michelinoceras
Second Row: Conularia, Polypora fan coral, Lophyphyllidium horn coral, Paleacis, massive Cladochonus colony
Third Row: Brachiopods Juresania, Composita, Neosprifier, Crinoid calyx plates, Pelecypods Myalina, Astartella, Allorisma, Yoldia

Figure 4
Shark Coprolites, Cladodus Shark Teeth with Cusps Broken Off

In total I put in 9 hours of hard hunting, crawling over a hillside several hundred yards in length. Overcast skies helped make this possible, but this was still Texas and August so I took a couple siestas in the sparsely available shade, only to be rudely awakened by ants dining on me. Another siesta was interrupted by a curious rumbling that crescendoed in volume. Soon a yellow float plane lurched over the hilltop 50 feet over my head and landed on the lake. Pretty neat.

I was lucky enough to come across a couple of nice Cladodus shark tooth bases. The 5 cusps (fangs) are broken off maybe 1/8 inch from the base, but there is still enough enamel to identify the pieces. Also of interest was a number of shark coprolites (turds) collected. I keep telling Georgia that no home is complete without some fossilized shark scat. Her comments have been stricken from the record.

It took me 4 trips to canvass the entire hillside exposure at Jacksboro, but now that I have, I think I'll rest the place for a while. I don't want to burn myself out on any one place. Some paleontologists may consider the site played out, but I keep leaving with 20 LBS or so of prime goodies each visit. As a matter of fact, I

don’t recall ever having a heavier or more satisfying trick or treat bag. I can only imagine what was taken from the place by the first few lucky souls to hunt it right after it was excavated. As for future endeavors, I hear the Sulphur River calling my name.