

## MANY MILES, MANY FOSSILS: ANOTHER TEXAS PALEO TOUR

December 11, 2004

After many months without time afield together, it was good to hook up with local collector and DPS member Farley Katz once again. Farley hasn't been able to free up time to collect since spring, so I didn't have to twist his arm to agree to my insanely early arrival at his house. We both looked forward to hunting a Paleocene quarry near Mexia (1/2 hour east of Waco), but with the late morning rendezvous, I had a little surprise up my sleeve.

We stopped in the Georgetown formation for some bonus hunting. Within 45 minutes Farley and I picked up a host of ammonites, echinoids, gastropods, and other goodies. Best finds included Farley's gargantuan 8-9 inch *Mariella* ammonite, my little *Mortoniceras* ammonite, and my perfect little *Cymatoceras* nautiloid. Georgetown fossils are thought to be approximately 100 million years of age (MYA).



**FIGS 1 and 2:** Georgetown fm ammonites *Mortoniceras* and *Drakeoceras* left, nautiloid *Cymatoceras* right

Pressing on, we hooked up with 6 or 8 more DPS members and dropped into a quarry 6 miles west of Mexia on Hwy 84. This particular locality exposed the contact of the Kincaid (locally Tehuacana) limestone and the overlying Wills Point Clay. These strata are about 60 MYA. After an orientation, we all spread out and canvassed the exposures. Most of us concentrated on the Wills Point Clay. This formation is rich in brown phosphatic nodules which fossil hunters know often denote the presence of cool fossils.



**FIGS 3-6:** *Turritella* gastropods from Tehuacana limestone (Kincaid) top left, remaining figs include phosphatic molds of gastropods top right, bivalves including *Venericardia* lower left, and corals lower right, last 3 photos from Wills Point Clay



**FIG 7:** Shark teeth and crab carapace from Wills Point Clay

I was quick to locate 6 or 8 shark teeth, most broken, but two perfect. In the same zone Farley found a superlative example of a little dime sized crab carapace which was so detailed, it had clearly defined eye sockets. Pretty cool. The 2 of us made a long sweep along the top edge of the quarry, and I finally found a less spectacular crab carapace, and we both found a host of shark teeth, bivalves, and gastropods.



**FIGS 8-9** Crab carapace found in Wills Point Clay by Farley Katz. Note eye sockets in left photo

We had fun, but decided we could milk the most fossils out of the day by moving on, so we said quick goodbyes and headed over to the Waco Spillway. Del Rio fm strata exposed there are on the order of 99 MYA. We only spent an hour at this site, but in this timeframe Farley landed a number of small pyritized ammonites, and I found about 20 or so of my own of at least 5 species along with a nice *Baculite*, a shark tooth, and a fish vertebra to boot.



**FIG 10:** Del Rio Fm pyritized micromorphic ammonites on right and bottom including *Plesioturrilites*, *Adkinsia*, *Mantelliceras*, and *Scaphites*, two gastropods left and below quarter, *Baculite* far left, fish vertebra and shark tooth *Cretolamna appendiculata* upper left

The sun was beginning its daily descent, so we sped south and hit a different site in the Georgetown fm. I had little faith in the site since Marc de Vries and I had each explored the site once in the past couple months, but persistence paid off. Farley and I found an overlooked tan marl seam containing a half dozen or so *Macraster* echinoids. Pressing on down the exposure, I found 2 ammonites. Working our way back through a gray layer with better preserved fossils, I lifted a nice ammonite. With darkness almost upon us, Farley spotted a large, well preserved *Macraster* partially embedded in hard limestone. I volunteered to “expertly” extricate it from the matrix, but a few whacks into the process I broke the fossil in half! That was Farley’s best echinoid in months, and it was the only thing I broke all day. I hope I still have a collecting buddy.



**FIGS 11-12:** Georgetown fm ammonites *Mortoniceras?* left, oyster *Ostrea carinata* right

**December 17, 2004**

I flew back into town after a few days in Detroit on business last Friday, and I was reminded how lucky I was to live in Texas where I can take the outdoors on my own terms any month of the year. With this sense of appreciation running strong, I found time to poke around a couple Pecan Gap exposures after work. The Pecan Gap is lower Taylor in age, about 83 MYA. In short, recent floods have done me quite a favor.

I first stumbled onto a *Pachydiscus* ammonite compressed on a very strange angle, making for a very cool, distorted display piece for the house. I also found a couple heteromorphic (non-spiral) ammonites, one of which I'm not familiar with. Moving along, I randomly kicked a piece of weathered rock, and a *Trachyscaphites* ammonite fell out! In fading light as I headed back to the truck, I spotted the unmistakable venter (edge) of a large ammonite poking out of the eroded rock. Quick digging exposed the rest of my prize, a very large and inflated *Pachydiscus paulsoni* ammonite on the order of 10 inches in diameter, my biggest to date and quite a prize. It was in pieces, but went back together nicely. Pays to shop here!



**FIGS 13-16:** Ammonites from the Pecan Gap fm include *Pachydiscus paulsoni* upper left and right (upper right specimen 10 inches diameter), heteromorph *Didymoceras* lower left, unknown heteromorph ammonite lower right



**FIGS 17-19:** More from the Pecan Gap fm. Ammonites *Trachyscaphites spiniger porchi* and *Baculites* upper left, strangely compressed *Pachydiscus pausloni* upper right, unidentified bivalve? Below

**December 18, 2004**

With permission both from the landowner and Big Mama, I headed southwest for Maverick County early Saturday morning to explore an ammonite locality in the Rio Grande valley within several hundred yards of the river. Things got off to a bumpy start. When I got to Dilley, about 100 miles from home, I rounded a corner on Hwy 85 at about 70 MPH and saw a large whitetail doe cross the road in front of me. The rut is in full swing, and the buck following her threw caution to the wind and ran right out in front of me. I know not to swerve for animals in the road, but I hit the brakes and slammed the back half of the 8 pointer with the driver's side of my big welded pipe bumper. My truck was unscathed, but the deer was upside down dead in the ditch. That bumper proved to be a well spent \$700! The factory bumper was destroyed 3 years ago when I hit another deer in the same area.

Pressing on, I finally arrived at the 160 acre ranch in the Escondido fm, whose rocks are about 67 MYA. Escondido is Spanish for “hidden”, but fortunately the ammonites didn’t stay hidden from me for long! While there are a few species of *Sphenodiscus* ammonites in the area, the prevalent species is *pleurisepta*. Since I can’t yet tell them apart, I’ll refer to only the genus through the rest of this report.

A small canyon winding through the property exposed several siltstone benches at the rear of the parcel, and one horizon quickly gave up 2 perfect little *Sphenodiscus* ammonites with a little matrix on them. A broken “big ugly” of the same species gave itself up in a small gully. I glued it back together and stumbled across 5 pieces of bone eroding out of the wall of the canyon. I’ve tentatively labeled them as turtle based on cross section. I was not able to find more of the specimen in situ. A bluff along the road at the front of the property gave up lots of small white crab claw sections which highlighted well against the brown siltstone. Another nice ammonite surprised me in the road cut. I moved to a steeper exposure along the creekbed which borders the property and was quick to find a couple more.



**FIGS 20-23:** Escondido fm fossils include turtle fragments lower left, ammonites *Sphenodiscus* remaining photos



**FIGS 24-26:** More *Sphenodiscus* ammonites. There are still more broken ones in my garage worth restoring

Retracing my steps from last May, I peeked up under a ledge and uttered some sort of impromptu “Tim the Tool Man” growl...the keel of a HUGE *Sphenodiscus* ammonite was clearly poking out of the exposure. It was perfect in its presentation: only slightly exposed, protected from the elements by an overhang, and bedded in loose marl. With unchecked adrenaline I ripped the 50 LB slab from above and threw it down the slope. I carefully brushed away the dust, lifted my 12 inch prize intact from its resting place, admired its splendor, then made a special trip back to the truck to keep it from being damaged. It still had matrix covering the thinly keeled inner whorl, perfect protection for the long ride home. I am often humbled when I find good fossils where I have walked before. I

guess my eyes were scanning another direction last time. Perhaps I should slow my pace down a bit when in the field.



**FIGS 27-28:** Monster 12 inch *Sphenodiscus* ammonite

I waited until this time of year to hunt this area to let the brush and snakes subside. Well, South Texas is never devoid of plants that prick, gouge, and otherwise impale you, so I just dealt with the discomfort. When I reached a small gorge I heard a curious rustling sound. Soon a large black snake slithered into view. I was safely 6 feet up a vertical ledge from the snake, and it didn't pose any threat, so my pistol stayed holstered.



**FIGS 29-30:** Escondido fm bivalves and gastropods left, strange concretions right

With brush impenetrably thick, I headed upstream and popped up on the other side of the road on the edge of an unfenced field. My hapless meandering dropped me squarely in a weathered field in the *Sphenodiscus* zone as evidenced by the 4 nice ammonites and large gastropod soon filling my hands. I got bold, headed over to the only house in the area, and introduced myself to the landowner. They guy and his wife were a Hispanic couple about my age. I explained my mission to Horacio and he not only gave me permission to collect on his land, but also walked the property with me for a short while and even told me of adjoining property with absentee landowners who wouldn't mind me crawling around.

What unfolded before me was what fossil hunters dream of. Perfect ammonites were everywhere and ranged in size from 2 ½ to over 6 inches in diameter. They were lying out on the sparsely vegetated flat, others washed out in gulleys, and still others in creekbeds or jutting out of the banks. I collected about 10 pristine specimens in 20 or 30 minutes, then returned to the house to thank the family...and found 2 more perfect ones in their back yard!

Heading north I dropped down into an Eagle Ford exposure in a creekbed briefly. For a few minutes I found only bivalves, but I soon located a small 1 ¼ inch diameter ammonite. I'm unfamiliar with the species, but it is a welcome acquisition nonetheless.



FIG 31: Unidentified ammonite, Eagle Ford fm, Kinney Co, TX

I'm weeks behind in my prep work, but finally able to see my work bench. Look for more cool finds from the Del Rio, Buda, Ozan, Glen Rose, and Duck Creek formations in an upcoming report.