

Trip Report for Delaware Petrified Wood and Fossils by Dave Lines



We were few of us (only 5 --- Dave, Rich, Renee, Bernie, and Dustin). We met at 7:45 am at the Middletown “Park and Ride”, took a quick group picture, showed our group some sample flats of what to look for, and reviewed our plan for the day --- caravan to the petrified wood location and look in a mowed grassy field, then shift to a wooded area with a stream, and then caravan to the C&D Canal and look in old dredge spoil piles for fossils (belemnites and various fossil shells). At the start, the weather was a chilly 47 degrees with strong westerly winds, so we dressed warmly for searching in that open field. For one of us, this was the first field trip with our club, while two others had looked previously for petrified wood in a farm field in another location and found very little (only 3 pieces for one person and nothing for the other person). I promised that we would do better.

How Many Pieces of Petrified Wood do you see in each picture? (Answers at end of report)



Picture 1 – How Many?



Picture 2 – How Many?

Everyone was enthusiastic and eager to get started as we changed into sturdy footwear, and then spread out looking for any bare patches of ground in the grass. In a few minutes, I found a spot where I could see several small pieces of petrified wood. I called everyone together and told them I could see 3 pieces within 3 feet from where I was standing. They immediately found them all and pocketed each piece. Success --- their eyes were getting calibrated. Soon everyone was finding wood on their own. After about 30 minutes of searching the field in the strong winds, I was getting cold, and my eyes were watering. I suggested that we head into the woods where it would be less windy and warmer.

Inside the woods, the conditions were much more pleasant with almost no wind. By that time, everyone knew what to look for. The best places were the deer trails which had bare ground. Each small gully was productive as well because there had been numerous heavy rain events in the two years since we were last here. I showed our group a particular wash about 30 feet long where there were numerous pieces of excellent wood showing. I looked in only a small portion of that wash and found several nice pieces --- then I went back and looked again and used my handheld small 3 prong garden scratcher to scrape away the leaves and sticks where they had piled up and I found a dozen more pieces of petrified wood.



Picture 3 – How Many?



Picture 4 – How Many?



Picture 5 – How Many?

Persistence and attention to detail as well as getting down on our hands and knees paid the highest dividends in terms of the most petrified wood being found. Our eyes were our best tools. The tiniest pieces of wood showing often led to much larger pieces when pulled from the ground. The difficult to access places were great --- like those under bushes and thorny brush. I searched one gulley where another person in our group had already looked --- I could see their tracks. Yet, I found about ten nice pieces of wood that they had missed, including my largest find of the day which had been protruding about an inch out of the gulley bank under a bit of honey suckle --- perfectly hidden. I was having a lot of fun finding stuff, when I received a call from Rich at about 11:00 am suggesting that we go to the next place. I was on the far side of the field when he called. Then he said, "take your time". Perfect. I did just that and moseyed back through the woods following deer trails and picking up at least 15 more specimens. □ When I reached our parked vehicles, I emptied my very full fanny back into a cardboard flat and we all started the drive to the C&D Canal area.



Arriving at the C&D Canal spoil area on the north side of the canal just east of the Reidy Point Bridge, we parked out of the way along the road beside the canal and we hiked into the spoils area and spread out to look for fossils. There was a fresh pile of sand about 100 feet long and 20 feet high to the right and four of us went there to look. I had remembered that Tom Z. had previously mentioned that he went to the left and did quite well. So, I went left and walked about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile along the perimeter road/berm until I came to a large area of sand that had been bulldozed into a long pile. I walked over to the sandy area and immediately saw several fossil oyster shells and belemnite sections laying on the surface. I picked some up and looked further, finding several more belemnites. I called Rich and told him what I had found and suggested that he bring the group over. Within a few minutes, everyone arrived and started looking for stuff. Some sifted the sand with screens and some just searched the surface.



Rich found the largest belemnite on the surface --- it was $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in diameter and 2-plus inches long with a nice point. Everyone found belemnites and fossil oyster shells. I found 2 exogyra shells that had both the top and the bottom shells intact.

Justin left around 1:00 pm, while the rest of us stayed until around 2 pm. It had been a good day, but everyone was tired from the long drive up and 6 hours of collecting, so we all headed home to clean up our finds and label our new specimens. Another great trip.

How many pieces did you see in each picture?

Picture 1 – 3

Picture 2 – 2

Picture 3 – 2

Picture 4 – 6

Picture 5 - 3

