

Petrified Wood from Odessa plus Belemnites from the C&D Canal Spoils Piles

By Dave Lines



Four members (Ralph, Mary, Lorna and Dave) of the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club made the 130 mile trip each way to Odessa, Delaware on Saturday March 18th where they joined about 15 folks from other rockhounds from Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. It was an invitational trip from the Calvert Marine Museum Fossil Club that they hold twice each year in memory of their former “member extraordinaire”, John Wolfe.



All week long, Mother Nature played with the forecast --- snow storms, ice, rain, below freezing temps -- - we kept guessing if the snow cover was going to melt off the field in time or if the ground was going to be totally frozen or sloppy and rainy for our trip. As it turned out, the weather was ideal with no snow on the fields and temps in the mid 40's --- and best of all --- totally cloudy skies. Cloudy skies – why is that so great, you say? Well – because a cloudy sky means very even lighting and no shadows on the ground --- plus no glare from bright sunshine. Perfect for surface collecting of petrified wood in a huge no-till agricultural field amply littered with the debris from a soybean crop harvest as well as leftover

cornstalks from the previous year --- plus there were plenty of weeds to further cover the bare ground. All this combined to make it difficult to spot the pieces of petrified wood nestled in the debris. It was sensory overload for our eyes. So the cloudy skies really helped.



We met initially at a nearby “Park and Ride” and caravanned from there to a farm about 2 miles south of Odessa. After a welcome and short safety brief by the overall trip leader Bob Ertman, we posed for a group picture and at about 10:30 a.m., we were turned loose in a HUGE field was almost a mile across at its widest point. We all spread out and started searching for the petrified wood --- reported to be 1.5 to 2 million years old. Almost immediately, we began finding small pieces nestled in the weeds and soybeans stems. It was just a matter of time until everyone found some. And a few of the specimens were spectacular. I saw several that were over a pound each. Ralph found a nice one and I found a very large one laying on the surface. One young girl found several large chunks.



Of course, there were a couple of unexpected, yet interesting finds --- like Ralph's little arrowhead made of yellow jasper. It was very finely chipped and showed excellent workmanship. Ralph did well to spot it among all the stems, stalks and weeds covering the ground. Another neat find was a drone UAV that contained a built-in movie camera. I looked it up online and it was listed at \$799.99 (but there was no "controller" mechanism and that probably cost several hundred dollars to replace). And we don't know if it even works since it was found upside down in the mud.



At about noon, Lorna and I compared our finds with several others, said our goodbyes to new friends and decided to leave the farm field and drive to the dredge spoil piles adjacent to the C&D (Chesapeake and Delaware) Canal located about 15 - 20 minutes north of Odessa near Delaware City. Lorna had never collected either the petrified wood or the fossil belemnites which are also the Delaware State Fossil, so the extra trip to the C&D was a real treat for her. At the spoil piles, we joined Tom Pankratz of the Delaware Mineral Society. We dug virtually in the same location as we did during our February 18th visit and had great luck. In about 2 hours, we dug and screened out several hundred pieces of belemnite. The digging was relatively easy since the spoil piles were mostly sand with some gravel and oyster shells mixed in. Around 3 p.m., we decided to call it quits and said farewell to Tom and headed south back to Maryland. By the way, Tom also generously gave Lorna a nice large chunk of petrified wood. (*We have had some great trips scheduled during March 2017. If you missed them --- maybe you can catch the next ones. Remember, you can't find rocks if you stay at home.)