

"March Roars in like a Lion with Blowout Tides" by Dave Lines



The winds were ferocious from the northwest and the sand drifted like snow.

Expecting blowout tides on Friday March 2nd, I had decided to try my luck at fossil hunting at Purse State Park in western Charles County, Maryland. According to the computer weather, the ferocious northwest winds were gusting to 72 miles per hour at Reagan National Airport when I drove out of our farm road early that morning. I immediately came to a roadblock in the form of a large pine tree across our driveway. So I turned around and went back to our house, got my chainsaw, re-filled it with gas and returned to cut the tree out of the way. Little did I know that was only the first downed tree I would encounter during the 25 mile trip to Purse. To say the least, the whole day was a challenge.



The drive to Nanjemoy was a challenge as Dave had to "cut" his way.

Although I avoided my usual route through heavily wooded areas, when I reached Nanjemoy, I had to take Liverpool Point Road. All was well during the first couple of miles, then I came to another downed pine which completely blocked the highway. So I figured "what the heck?" and got out of my truck to survey the situation. I did not see any downed electrical wires but the stump end of the tree was across some heavy telephone cables which were sagged down to about 5 feet off the ground. These cables held the whole tree up in the air too high to reach with my saw but too low to drive under. So chainsaw time again. I spent about 15 minutes cutting and dragging away limbs. Then I --- carefully --- started cutting through the main trunk near the phone cables. The tree gave way with a loud crack and the tree top sagged down on the road. Now I could reach it with my saw. Curiously, three other vehicles came to a stop and watched me, but all turned around and departed without offering help. Anyway, in another 15 minutes or so, I had cut and dragged enough limbs and main trunk away to make room for my truck to get through. The rest of the trip to Purse was uneventful as I drove around the many blown down limbs laying on the road. At the Purse parking area, I parked in the very middle of the lot as far from trees as I could get in case more decided to blow over. The wind was howling as I walked down the path to the beach.



The tide level at Purse at 8 a.m. was already low --- it dropped another 2 feet by the predicted time of low tide when over 100 feet of Potomac River bottom was bare and dry..

When I reached the river, it was still several hours before the predicted time of low tide, but the tide was already lower than I had ever seen it and was still dropping quickly. I pushed a small stick into the mud at the edge of the water to monitor the tide level and then looked around the exposed beach for about 10 minutes. When I returned to the stick near my bucket, the tide had already dropped and another 3 feet of river bottom was exposed. Incredible. The wind was blowing sand and water droplets like a sandblaster. It was crazy! I decided to go north along the beach to Douglas Point and the river water continued to recede the entire time. It eventually left a 100 feet of the Potomac River bottom exposed. But I did not find very much. Perhaps it was because the water had receded so quickly and there was no wave action along the edges to wash off the mud. It was like draining a bathtub. Anyway, I walked a good 5 miles and found one piece of petrified wood, few small shark's teeth and lots of Patuxent River Stone.

When I began my return trip home, the wind was still howling from the northwest. And predictably, I encountered many more downed trees along the way, but most had at least a single travel lane cleared through them. I helped a Nanjemoy VFD crew remove one large pine tree across the road. In another location, I also cut some limbs and some brush away so I could drive around a large downed white oak blocking the road (4WD worked great to drive up the road bank around the tree).



On the Chesapeake Bay at Matoaka Cabins, this fossil whale vertebra was uncovered.

The next day, I went to Calvert County to Matoaka Cabins in St. Leonard. It was still dusky dark when I arrived and I was the first on the beach. The Chesapeake Bay was WAY out --- over 100 yards in some places --- and the northwest wind was still blowing hard. The "normal" low tide edge area of the beach was covered with freshly blown sand --- which was basically covering up everything. Bummer. I began looking on the exposed beach and walked south onto Calvert Beach for about 30 minutes, and then walked back north toward Western Shores Estates the rest of the morning. A young fossil hunter from Annapolis soon joined me and I had to walk faster to keep up with him. Apparently, he looked for fossils here every weekend. He even showed me a short video clip on his phone of finding a nice 4 inch megalodon here. We searched out the area of the beach where the cliffs were eroded pretty heavily. He found a nice fossil vertebra and a fossil fish vertebra. I found one snaggletooth shark tooth about an inch long. My poor luck continued as I walked the 4 mile round trip to WSE while finding only a few small sharks teeth. When I returned to the Matoaka beach area, I found a few more fossil shells and some bone, but nothing significant.



At the cliffs at Matoaka, lots and lots of very interesting rocks and fossils popped out that were normally covered with 2 feet of water at low tide.

At noon, I left Matoaka and headed to my Mom's farm near Broomes Island and spent the rest of the afternoon, picking up limbs and re-nailing flapping tin on the barn roof. The electricity was off as well. Was it (2 trips in 2 days) worth it? Probably not. But "hope springs eternal" and there will always be a next time. Cheers.



The water was out over 100 yards on the Bay

