

A Walk on the Beach in Hip Boots by Dave Lines



It was a late November morning. Chilly. The wind was almost calm. A coat was needed. A hat, too. The low tide was predicted to occur at 8:58 am. I managed to eat some breakfast and leave the house by 7:05. When I arrived at the small gravel parking area around 8:00, there were already 3 vehicles there --- 2 cars and a truck. One of the cars had Virginia license plates. This place has become a popular destination to look for fossils. I changed into my hip boots, grabbed my bucket and headed down the half mile trail to the river --- the Potomac. When I arrived, the water level was low enough to leave about 20 feet of beach exposed. No one else was there, but the tracks in the sand went south. I followed --- but first, I pushed a stick into the beach at the water's edge to mark the level of the water. There were two sets of tracks --- one made the day before and two made earlier in the morning. The tracks showed that they were in a hurry --- long strides. Looked like hip boot or chest wader tracks. I noticed that there was a lot of clean sand on the beach. Not much gravel. Sometimes it is covered with seaweed. When it is covered with mostly gravel, there seems to be more fossils. I, too, decided to walk fast. Within 20 minutes I had passed the second stream that flows across the beach. I saw no one else --- either ahead or behind. The walking from now on was much slower. First, because I was looking for stuff. Second, because there were many trees laying across the beach. Sometimes this jumble of downed trees, limbs, and vines, which had previously fallen from the cliffs, create an almost impenetrable barrier. That is when the hip boots and chest waders pay for themselves because you usually can wade around the obstacles --- at least on low tide.



The beach was still covered with lots of sand. Not many rocks or fossils showing. No worry, the beach will change this winter, and the sand will wash away leaving more good stuff exposed. That is the fun of it. Each time is different. Once I found a fossil crocodile leg bone embedded in an uncovered section of the gray marl beach bottom, but when I returned a few days later with Dr. Stephen Godfrey of the Calvert Marine Museum, the spot was buried under a foot of sand. Never found the bone. It is still there. I kept heading south finding only a few turrítella molds along the way. I kept looking for a croc tooth, but never found one.



I also found several colors of the Maryland State Gem Stone “the Patuxent River Stone”. As I was nearing the day marker at Smith Point, I heard voices behind me. In a few minutes, three people (2 young men and a young woman) and a dog appeared. When they caught up, we exchanged pleasantries. They (the people) were wearing chest waders. They had the day off from work and they were from Bethesda, MD. They waded around me (nice gesture) and kept walking south. I found one 50-yard-long stretch of beach that was covered mostly in rocks --- very little sand.



Found a few more turritlella molds, a few small sharks' teeth, and a piece of antique purple sea glass. My cell phone rang. My lovely wife wanted some help preparing for Thanksgiving. My brother and his wife were scheduled to arrive late in the afternoon. It was time to turn around and head back home. It had been an enjoyable morning.