

## Odessa Delaware Petrified Wood Trip April 18, 2026 by Dave Lines



Twice a year in early Spring and late Fall, we are generously invited to join the Calvert Marine Museum Fossil Club to search for petrified cypress wood (of the genus *Cupressinoxylon*) in a farm field near Odessa, Delaware.

This petrified wood's origin is a bit controversial --- according to A.I., it is 1.5 to 2.0 million years old. But -- some say it older -- and originated in the Miocene (23 to 5 million years ago [MYA]), eroded out, and was redeposited in the Pleistocene (2.58 MYA). Others say it was from the Paleocene (66 to 56 MYA) and was later redeposited in the Pleistocene (2.58 MYA). Thus, the age remains in question --- but the redeposition theory seems to be the consensus. While some of the wood has sharp edges, other specimens are rounded off with smooth edges --- which shows that the petrified wood had been moved (or tumbled).

According to an article referenced in the link <http://viewsofthemahantango.blogspot.com/2011/08/petrified-wood-from-delaware.html>, the extent of the petrified wood in Delaware covers an area from Odessa in New Castle County south to New Smyrna in Kent County.

Google says there is no map which shows the approximate boundaries of the deposit, although general agreement indicates it is found in local gravel pits, farm fields, and stream banks over a 2-to-3-mile area. Due to a moderate degree of residential development, there are very few places where the soil is exposed --- and thus limited locations to find this petrified wood.

Our group from SMRMC was small --- only 7 people (Rich, Kathryn, Kathryn's mom, John W., Dave, and Tim and Lorna Smith and their daughter Francesca. And keep in mind that there were dozens of other people from other clubs also searching for wood. The main location for the Field Trip was a large farm field (over a mile square) that had significant cover --- several inches of last Fall's corn crop residue (chopped-up stalks and cobs) combined with winter weeds which had been partly killed by a herbicide in preparation for no-till planting of a new crop (probably soybeans) virtually completely covered the ground.

Since the petrified wood could only be seen on bare ground (which was in very short supply), the only way to locate bare ground was to walk around and look. I eventually figured out that the heaviest weed cover on the "left side" of the farm fields was where to look because it had almost no corn crop residue and had at least some bare ground because those areas were low spots where the corn failed (drowned) and the taller (2 – 3 feet) weeds thrived.

Using this technique, I found about 10 – 15 small pieces of wood ranging from an inch to 3 inches long. I also logged over 3 miles (according to my cell phone app) walking around searching for specimens. The only other person in our group to find any wood was Kathryn --- who probably found the "find-of-the-day" with a nice fist sized specimen. No one else in our group found any wood at all. ☺

But not to worry, because all was not lost. Three of us had met two (2) hours earlier that morning at 8:00 am and searched for wood in another separate location. We all left that location with several good specimens. Around 1:00 pm, John W. went home, and Rich and I tried to persuade the others to join us on

a trip to the C&D Canal spoils area --- but we had no takers since they all had other plans and left. Rich and I then decided to check out another very small area for petrified wood. Both of us had our best luck at that location. The picture at the top shows my total finds for the day.