

FOSSIL CLUB OF LEE COUNTY

JUNE 2006

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The river is low!!! Hello, fellow fossil hunters and members of the Fossil Club of Lee County. Yes, the Peace River is about as low as it can get. Those club members who participated in the club sponsored canoe trip on May 21st can surely attest to that, as we had to do a fair amount of walking over shallows. Towards the end of the trip, near Zolfo Springs, we actually had to carry the canoe over a limerock ledge, as the only water flowing past that spot went directly into a downed tree and was impassable for a canoe. Everyone had a good time, though, as it was a beautiful day to be on the river. Most everybody found some fossils, which I hope they bring to the meeting for show and tell. Soon the rains will come, on a regular basis, and the river will rise to the point where we will have to wait until next year again to hunt. So--- go while you can.

If you are new to this and don't know what or where to go, then speak up and ask, or go with another club member who is familiar with river hunting. Either way, do it as soon as possible. Hopefully, by the time you read this we will still have some time left. This month's speaker will be Alex Hastings, who is a student at the University in Gainesville and is the recipient of the Ken Ericson scholarship. This is a fund set up with the University to award scholarships to students of paleontology. Ken Ericson was a longtime member of our club and had an extensive collection. Upon his passing, his wife donated the collection to our club for us to auction it off and set up this scholarship fund.

Please attend and bring any bones you are not sure of as Alex agreed to try and id them for you. This month we will also have another speaker, Sanders Lewallen, the executive director of the Calusa Nature Center. He wants to talk to us about our involvement with the Nature Center and our obligation so as to continue meeting there. Al Govin and I met with Mr. Lewallen since the last meeting, after we were presented with a letter stating that the Nature Center requires us now to donate 660 volunteer hours a year or pay the equivalent of \$6 per hour for every hour not served. We felt this was excessive and met with Sanders to hash it out. He felt that the best way to approach this situation was to speak directly

to the membership in person. This month, Sanders Lewallen will be at the meeting, so I suggest all of you also try to be at the meeting. Our club (your club!) needs your input.

While I have implored all of you to attend the meeting, I will not be there. My wife is making me take a vacation (smile), and the dates overlap the meeting. Al Govin, our newly elected Vice-President will preside over the meeting. (Please give him a hard time, so he appreciates me more!!)

I have had a suggestion from a club member to have a different type of meeting. In July we will have a summer picnic meeting. We will all be the speaker so prepare to gather some of your great fossils together to show and tell. Also bring a small covered dish, like we do for the Christmas meeting. We will have a "meet and greet," "show and tell" and "eat and belch".

Occasionally we need some free time to just talk with each other and tell fossil lies, er, stories. If this meeting is fun, Carl Fricke was the member who came up with the suggestion. If you don't enjoy yourself then the member's name who suggested it will remain secret! Good fossiling and have a good day!!!

Louis Stieffel, Pres. F.C.O.L.C.

JUNE MEETING

Our June meeting will be held on June 15th at 7:00 p.m. at the Calusa Nature Center located at Ortiz and Colonial Blvd. Our speaker will be Alex Hastings who is a Masters of Science student at the University of Florida studying vertebrate paleontology at the Florida Museum of Natural History. He obtained his undergraduate degree in Geosciences at Penn State University where he participated in research on invertebrate fossils from Pennsylvania and vertebrate subfossils from South

ALEX HASTINGS

Dakota. At the University of Florida, Alex is researching a new fossil porcupine from Haile, Florida, which seems to be a missing link between the North American and South American forms. He has had the opportunity to collect fossils from across the country and is looking forward to sharing his research findings as well as his experiences as a nascent paleontologist.

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Nov 21, 2005

QUARRY COULD ANSWER QUERIES OF THE PAST

By JIM TUNSTALL
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NEWBERRY - -- Dean Warner reaches into the past when he digs in the dirt. He may discover a tibia that belonged to a giant sloth. Or he may find the jaw of an ancient tapir. Warner, a chemistry teacher at East Bay High School in Hillsborough County, is one of dozens of volunteers who spend time with Florida Museum of Natural History paleontologists at a limestone quarry eight miles west of Gainesville.

Millions of years ago, creatures now kept alive by our imaginations and history books roamed this site. An armadillo the size of a pony and a sloth that stood 17 feet tall were among them.

Warner, 48, began donating his time and energy at the quarry six years ago. "I've always loved finding something no one has seen before," he said. "It contributes to the knowledge of our planet." During Veterans Day weekend, he and eight others used screwdrivers to painstakingly explore 1.1-yard squares in a 1,600-square-yard, 10-yard-deep clay formation that millions of years ago was a wet sinkhole.

Inside are the skeletons of two giant sloths that apparently fell into the sink and drowned but remain intact. There was no current to scatter their bones and no creatures that could have consumed them.

The quarry also has produced what's left of tapirs, raccoons and smaller sloths. "We depend a lot on the volunteers," said Richard Hulbert, the museum's vertebrate paleontology manager and the man in charge of the dig. "People like Dean just sort of get hooked and keep coming back."

QUARRY

CHANCE DISCOVERY

Hulbert said the trick is finding the ancient sinkholes. Paleontologists, students and volunteers have been digging at the quarry since 1999. The current excavation, on the eastern edge of the mine, is at a site discovered in May.

That's when one of the museum's invertebrate paleontologists, exploring the mine with his students, saw big bones sticking out of a clay deposit around which limestone mining was under way, Hulbert said. One of the finds was "the skeleton of a species of small ground sloth we'd never found in Florida before," Hulbert said. The limestone is like a huge piece of Swiss cheese with holes that are the remains of ancient sinkholes, he said. From a preservation standpoint, they're excellent tombs.

Other areas west of Gainesville have proved to be rich in fossils dating back 9 million years, including a horse that was no taller than a whippet and a rhinoceros the size of a camel. Most of the critters became extinct about 10,000 years ago. Hulbert said the mine owners have given the museum an additional two or three years to explore the site. The digs are open to volunteers 18 and older. "It's free, but we do ask for donations," he said. This fall, 65 people have volunteered, and Hulbert expects an additional 40. Combined, they will devote 1,600 hours of sweat and muddy fingernails. The work will continue through Dec. 17, and there is still a small amount of time for volunteers to sign up.

Hulbert plans another dig in the spring, probably beginning in mid-March.

EAGER EXPLORERS

Largo lawyer Bill Schneikart, 57, was among this year's newcomers. He spent Veterans Day weekend exploring the ground. "I've always been a frustrated scientist," Schneikart said as he walked down the sloping walls of the dig site. "My dad took me looking for fossils and minerals when I was a kid." More recently, "I joined the Tampa Bay Fossil Club, and I've been on digs with my [14-year-old]

son, Stephen. "He and I found a huge bone near Eckerd College. I think it's from a giant sloth. We have it at home."

That's a no-no in Newberry. "The fossils belong to whoever owns the property," Hulbert said. "But the mine is giving them to us." Participants in both digs must agree to give all the remains found to the museum on the University of Florida campus, with the exception of minor shells and a few other fossils that are common at the site.

Once returned to the museum, most of the bones are studied and stored. Some are rebuilt into complete skeletons, including those of a giant sloth, tapir and armadillo found the first year of digging here. They are on display at the center's fossil hall. Schneikart and Warner say they might be among those coming back for more.

"It's painstaking work, but it's very rewarding," Schneikart said. "And anyone can do it. All you need is two willing hands and a pair of Wal-Mart galoshes."

CAN YOU DIG?

Learn more about Florida Museum of Natural History digs at www.flmnh.ufl.edu/vertpaleo/2005_dig.htm.

This story can be found at: <http://www.tampatrib.com/MGB1OMY8AGE.html>



MINUTES OF MEETING OF FOSSIL CLUB OF LEE COUNTY

A meeting of the membership of the Lee County Paleontological Society was held at the time, date, and place set forth below.

DATE OF MEETING: May 18, 2006

MEETING TIME: 7:00 P.M.

MEETING PLACE: Caloosa Nature Center

Number in attendance: 26

Louis Stieffel presiding.

Thank you to Mary Southall for refreshments.
 The meeting began with an excellent talk on Florida Fossil Diving by Mr. Terry Sellari. Thank you for coming all the way from Perry, Florida to speak to us.
 June's refreshments: Chuck; and July's refreshments: Ian.
 Next months speaker a graduate student from U. of Florida, Mr. Hastings.
 Club has butvar and t-shirts for sale.
 Al Govin is selling screens for \$15.00
 Club is having a display in Collier County. Rick is handling it.
 Peace River trip on Sunday, May 21, 2006.
 Show and tell: Sandy showed some fossils from N.C. They were extremely fine fossils.
 Secretary

I am **repeating** this article written by Al about his fossil hunting trip as anyone receiving their newsletter by e-mail did not get to read it.. He brought his collection of 3 days of hunting to the May meeting, it was very impressive.

I had trouble last month publishing for the internet but copies of the May newsletter were at the meeting. I hope you picked one up.
Sandy

Ecstasy and Agony

I recently had the fossil day of my life at the Peace River. On a Sunday, accompanied by Louis and Leslie Stieffel, we went exploring for a spot I had discovered 3 years ago but was never able to revisit because of the high water on the river. That had changed so back I went for the big hunt. We were exploring various spots when Louis suggested I try across the river on the opposite bank. What a great suggestion!!

Over a period of about 4 hours, I found 3 mammoth teeth, 1 mastodon tooth (my first), part of an unerupted mastodon tooth, shark teeth, fossil wood, deer

tooth, glyptodont scutes, deer antler, and turtle foot-pad.

I had dug a relatively small area and planned to return another day. During the last 1/2 hour, a Large group of people canoeing from another fossil club stopped to view my finds. I returned on Wednesday to have another go at the site. Upon my return on Wednesday, I was shocked and disappointed to find my spot had been completely hunted and destroyed. Whoever came from the group had enlarged the area four fold and one man was there when I arrived on Wednesday.

There is supposed to be honor and respect in this hobby. Let this be a lesson for all of us to respect sites others have found.

Al Govin

Send pictures of your finds to put on our web site. Get water levels, club information, new fossil hunting permit. Information, etc. www.fcolc.com

Peace River Float Trip Was A Canoe

Draggin' Good Time

by Chuck Ferber

On May 21, 2006, the Fossil Club of Lee County went on a canoe /fossil hunting field trip. Thanks go to Michael Orchin for organizing the canoe trip. The FCOLC provided canoes free of charge to its members as a thank you. The club met in Zolfo Springs at Pioneer Park and loaded up their gear for a short shuttle trip to the Wauchula site on the Peace River. The trip was well attended with 25 members showing up.

The river level was low, which resulted in a lot of canoe dragging the final half to one third of the trip. The low water levels made it easy to get out of the canoe and dig and screen gravel. I don't know about most people, but the fossil screening results weren't spectacular. Many speculated that the "Govin Bonanza" shown at the May meeting days before was an elaborate hoax. Al was not talking,

but looked awful smug. Ray reported he found over 500 sharks teeth.

From what I saw, most people found small sharks teeth, dugong rib fragments, bone fragments, turtle shell, and ray mouth plates. Near the bridge was an old dump reportedly from the 1920's and the river was loaded with broken glass and debris. Dave Osburn found an old bottle for his collection. Sandy, Dave and I were near the front of the group, so we did not see what everyone else found. All we can do is speculate based on what we found.

Regardless, it was a beautiful day. Clear sky. Warm. It was a good healthy day fossil collecting. The river was very low. If it hadn't rained a couple of days before, the trip would have been cancelled due to the low water levels which exposed the limestone bedrock.

Lisa Hauser and her family went to the rocky area a little north of the private entrance to the campground where her kids could manage safely.

Our President went snorkeling despite two recent deaths due to alligators in Florida. Apparently, Louis' charming demeanor scared all the alligators away, as I did not see one live alligator on the entire trip. Louis and Leslie reportedly were the last in at around 7:30 p.m.

Also, noteworthy, the river was overrun with algae eating fish. These fish are exotics and were probably released into the wild when they grew too large for their owners aquarium. A good lesson on why not to release your pet fish, lizards, snakes, etc. into the wild. Much better to have a fish fry.

And that is all I know about that.

