

Fifth graders seach for treasures in ancient ocean

By Tom Betz
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The two school buses, followed by a caravan of pickups and utility vehicles, came rolling over a hilltop and parked near the edge of a canyon on the Smoky Hill River on Friday, spilling 65 fifth graders and about 30 adults out to search for fossils.

The Outdoor Education trip has been a tradition for North Elementary School for more than 11 years. Each year, a new group of fifth graders spends a day learning about the ancient history of the region, including a few hours scratching and turning over rocks in the canyons of the Smoky Hill, looking for fossils from the ancient ocean of Kansas.

Wind made it cooler Friday, but once the kids and adults scattered down into the canyons, no one seemed to mind.

The kids ate lunch on the bus on the way down, and got a snack and a bottle of juice or water after the fossil hunt.

Many of the kids were happy with the things they found, but were disappointed that no one found any sharks teeth this year.

The area is south of Russell Springs, on land owned by Larry Haverfield, a cattle rancher who has a soft spot for wildlife. Haverfield rode his motorbike out to the site and talked to the kids and adults about his feelings about wildlife. He noted that he is one of a few ranchers who feel that prairie dogs are OK. Haverfield and three or four others ranchers in Logan County who are working to reintroduce the black footed ferret to Kansas as a way to save the endangered little prairie

dog eater.

Amateur paleontologists Larry and Judy Harper and Doug and Pam Whitson from Goodland were available to consult when someone found a potential fossil treasure. Before heading out on Friday, the fifth graders took a short trip to the Harpers' home on North Caldwell Avenue, where they could see the tools used both in the field and in cleaning the fossils once they are brought back. Larry Harper showed the kids a number of fish fossils found in the Smoky Hill region, many of them from the area the kids were searching on Friday.

The fifth graders were from classes taught by Jana Neufeld, Myron Tedford and Stephanie Grippin. Neufeld was in charge of the trip this year. The convoy made a stop at the Wallace County Museum and old Fort Wallace before wending its way to the dig site.

One of the more unusual finds this year was a giant clam shell more than two feet across found by Lisa Paxton and her daughter Ryleigh and Shelley Brown, who helped uncover the large shell. There was no way to get the shell out in one piece, but they got some good photos and took some of the larger pieces home.

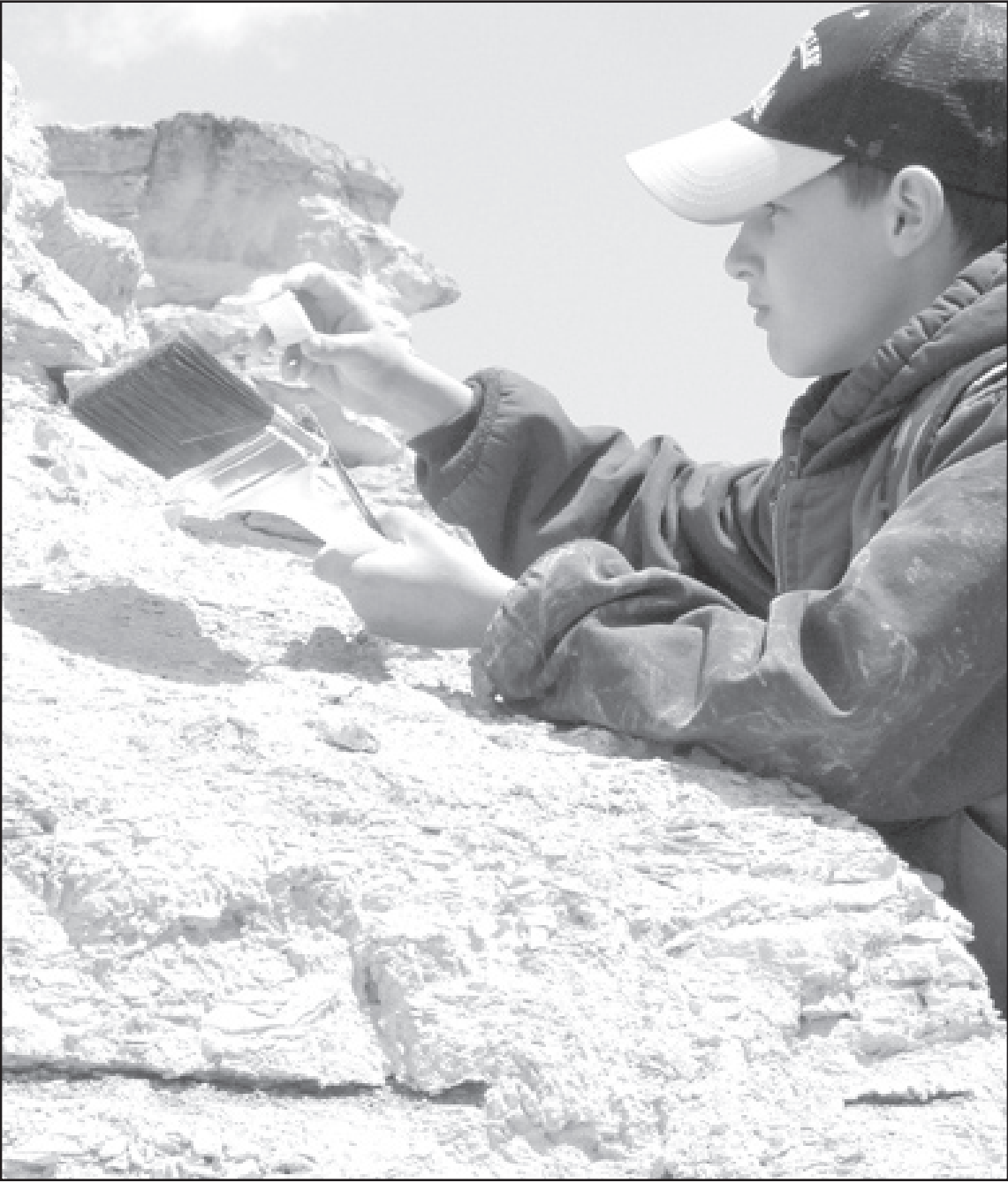
Whitson said it was the largest clam shell he had seen in that canyon. He said it is easy to find smaller pieces of clam shell all over the area.

Other treasures included some fish fin bones, a small tail fin, lots of oyster shells and at least two small unidentified fish jawbones complete with teeth.

The students wrapped up the afternoon with each group showing their handshake and cheer using the buses as a windbreak, and after a quick trip to the portable-potty everyone packed back on the buses and into their cars for the trip back to Goodland.

Students in the fossil trip include Selena Acosta, Kyler Amthor, Gerald W. Anderson, Aaron Avelar, Paetyn Barricklow, Lindsay A. Bauman, Alexandria Bennett, Keegan Bowling, Britney Brown, Jeremy K. Brown, Rogelio Bustillos, Jr., Xavier Colby, Carlee R. Cooper, Joshua David, Stephani DeLaRosa, James R. Dinkel, Danielle R. Doyle, Jushuia Eli, Brooke N. Fairchild, Laramie E. Farris, Makala L. Fogg, Seth Garza, Donald J. Glassman, Kyler A. Gray, Alec J. Hamilton, Tanner Helton, Matthew E. House, Coy Johnson, Jessica P. Johnson, Sean C. Johnson, Thatcher S. Jones, Tyler R. Jones, Makayla E. Kennedy, Hunter R. Lennington, Jonah McClung, Ricky Milke, Gerell Miller, Matthew Murray, Tyler Neufeld, Kegan Nothdurft, Ryleigh Paxton, Felix Perez,

Davada M. Pummer, Emily M. Purvis, Lyndie L. Ravenstein, Teganie Reicks, Hannah A. Sanderson, Juan M. Sandoval, Elisa M. Santana, Tanner J. Schmidt, Nicole R. Sederstrom, Paul W. Sibley, Kameron Snyder, Jesus M. Soto, Kail- eigh E. Spahr, Kristina M. Stasser, George Sun, Taylor Thomas, Sophia Thompson, Raquel A. Tomsic, Kolt Trachsel, Shaina D. Varney, Brandon L. Verlinden, Hunter C. Williams and Sabre Yarbrough.



George Sun (above) used a screw driver and a large brush to look for fossils. Chris Thompson (below left) and Kameron Snyder checked pieces of chalk they broke off to look for signs of fossil fish. Nicole Sederstrom (below), Jesus Soto and Selena Acosta looked for someone to ask about a prize they found. Felix Perez (bottom left) showed Larry Harper some fish rib bones he found, and Harper put a special glue mixture on the bones to stabilize them so he could get them home.

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