

DAN DESCENDS ON DALLAS 121403

Last month I made a couple of friends over the internet who (gasp!) appear to be as fanatical about fossils as I am. I saw a short break in the clouds at work this past Sunday which gave me the opportunity to shoot up to Dallas and meet up with these guys for the first time. Sleep went out the window as I left a Christmas party in New Braunfels around midnight Saturday, clipped off a couple hundred miles in the middle of the night, and catnapped in my back seat for a couple hours at a rest area.

I hope I can work the family into fossil hunting as well as Robert Bowen does. I met him and his wife Maria and 3 year old daughter Trinity for breakfast around 8. Since they were most hospitably guiding me around the Dallas area in search of shark teeth all day, the least I could do was take them out to breakfast to kick off this friendship on the right note.

We arrived at a local exposure of the Kamp Ranch limestone around 9. Out of respect for these folks, I'll go into no specific detail pinpointing their collecting sites. Anyway, the Kamp Ranch was quick to give up a number of shark teeth, but productivity was proportional to collecting effort. I was introduced to some collecting methods more aggressive than I am used to. Robert directed me in digging a foot down through wet clay to expose a hard limestone layer. We then used gorilla bars to pry these slabs out of the ground for inspection. It usually took 2 guys to flip a 24 x 40 x 4 inch slab.

After a quick visual inspection the fun began. I was instructed to smash these slabs to bits using a 10 LB sledgehammer. This leads to smaller slabs allowing closer inspection along planes of separation. We exposed quite a number of teeth this way, and surprisingly, I saw none destroyed by the sledge.

I'm not yet familiar with all the species we collected, but the accompanying photo shows some of the nicer ones. The whole right hand column (5 specimens) are *Ptychodus* teeth. These rounded "pavement teeth" are not what most people visualize in shark teeth. They are quite complex however in their enamel folds and are desirable to collectors. They lined the palate of the shark and were used for crushing and grinding.

I elected to leave one nice tooth in matrix as can be seen in the top center of the photo. The stubby triangular teeth in the bottom left are *Squalicorax* specimens and were pretty common finds.



After a couple of hours we moved on to a creek where Robert had spotted a curious looking piece of bone jutting out from the Eagle Ford shale exposed in a creek bank the night before at dusk. With no light to work, his find had nagged at him for hours. I don't know how he stayed patient enough to hang with me collecting teeth in the morning!

Swinging a miner's pick, Robert made quick work of the shale overburden, better exposing the bones. What the heck was this thing? The more we dug, the bigger the bones got. They were large and flat, and one piece looked sort of like a crushed pelvis. A couple others looked like long fins, sort of like the upper and lower fins of a marlin's tail. Was it a turtle? Was it a fish? No way of knowing yet. Whatever it was, an estimate of several hundred pounds live weight seems conservative. We made our best attempt to stabilize the bones before transferring them to 3 big tote boxes and hauling them out.

Our final stop was at a local Atco exposure where we got down on hands and knees and crawled around scanning for microteeth. Passers by probably thought we were looking for a lost contact lens. We got about a hundred teeth including several *Ptychotrygon* sawfish teeth too small for me to photograph with current equipment. I was particularly interested in the small fish vertebrae found at this site. The 3 round objects in the lower right of the above photo show some of

these verts. Nick Deluna made the scene at this site briefly and produced a nice 1 ½ inch shark tooth, the largest we saw that day.

With wet feet and a cold night approaching, we opted to call it a day around dusk. While these guys felt the wet conditions hampered collecting, I was ecstatic to come home with a couple hundred teeth and verts which provided me a couple nights of fun prep work in the garage. These folks were an amiable bunch, quite generous with their time and collecting knowledge. I look forward to many future collecting adventures with them on my turf, their turf, and new turf as well.