

GONIATITE GRAB IN JACKSBORO 080203

Many of you northerners may not realize it, but peanut butter is indeed a Newtonian fluid. And in the August Texas heat, it assumes a pourable viscosity. This is one of many things Texas showed me on Saturday, and one has time to ponder frivolous things when eating up 278 miles of highway each direction.

The main event of the day was a game of hide and seek with the goniatites, ammonites, and indeterminate nautiloids of the Lake Jacksboro Spillway. As can be seen in Figure 1, my eyes are becoming better attuned to picking these things out of the eroded Pennsylvanian period Finis shale and Jacksboro limestone.



FIGURE 1
Ammonite and Goniatite assemblage including
Cooperoceras*, *Metacoceras*, *Tainoceras*, and *Gonioloboceras

Once again I couldn't arouse sufficient enthusiasm of any close buddies to partake in the festivities with me (2 a.m. departure required, back home around 10 p.m.), so I did it solo. Although a little tough on the driving, it sure is nice to let the day unravel at your own pace.

Anyway, I spent 7 hours scouring the hillside, and I came up with a few tips to optimize success. They are as follows:

- Bike into remote areas to avoid a death march back to the vehicle when you are already exhausted. It sure is nice to bike in a cooler full of rations in the morning and then let the bike haul out 20 LBS of fossils in the afternoon.
- Work the exposure slowly, walking up the cuts with your eyes no more than 2 feet from the surface. Small fossils slip by you when standing up straight.
- Since viewing angle is pretty harsh when descending the exposure, sit down each 10 feet or so on the way down. I can't count how many excellent specimens were reduced to possession while I was plopped down taking a break.
- If it is worth picking up to look at, it is worth taking home and cleaning up prior to deciding whether or not to keep it.
- Don't be disillusioned if you find footprints or bike tracks leading to your area. Hundreds of people have combed any given area, but bad eyes, inexperienced eyes, lack of concentration by others and constant weathering will leave plenty of loot for the dedicated.
- Wear a hat and suntan lotion, and drink water constantly. Dark shades hinder my ability to pick out detail, so I've been going without and suffering the headache later. I think I'll try my amber Fitovers wraparound polarized fishing glasses next time instead.

By following these tips, I also scored the assortment of marine goodies shown in Figure 2. In addition, I scored 2 "coveted" shark coprolites, or fossilized turds (not shown). These pictures show a few dozen of the estimated 500-800 fossils I collected and cleaned from Saturday. I usually select about a half dozen for display at the house from a given trip, and the rest are sorted by species in clear tackle boxes for easy viewing by friends and family.



FIGURE 2
Suite of Pennsylvanian marine specimens including gastropods
***Worthenia* and *Strobeus*, brachiopods *Reticulatia* and *Juresania*,**
and cephalopods *Michelinoceras* and *Mooreoceras*

My weary body gave me signs that it was time to leave around 1 p.m., so I briefly picked over 5 more moderately productive road cuts before heading for San Antonio and getting home around 10. I even made it to the early service at Cornerstone Church on Sunday. With a good night of sleep behind me, Jacksboro again beckons. Maybe I'll wait until the heat wave breaks in September, then do it again. In the interim, I have a couple good trips mapped out a little closer to home. Thank God my loving wife semi-understands my obsessions.