

## DAN WOEHR, MAMMOTH HUNTER

I use that moniker rather tongue-in-cheek, since the hunk of mammoth bone I found the other weekend is perhaps the ugliest discernible piece of proboscidean material ever discovered.

My parents came down from Cincinnati for a visit recently, and in doing so brought me some of my childhood keepsakes since they are downscaling for retirement. One such article was a clay dinosaur eating a chunk of meat which I made in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade art class. Another was some sort of school year log book revealing that I aspired to be a paleontology professor when I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I ended up choosing a different vocation in life, but lets fast forward 25 years and see how these childhood interests have steered my spare time over the last month.



**FIGURE 1:** Boyhood paleo inclinations

### San Antonio Area

In August I poked around briefly in a couple of San Antonio's sparse Eagle Ford exposures. In one creekbed exposure I startled a homeless guy burning plastic to cook his dinner. He thought I was there to run him out, but settled down after I explained my dweeby agenda. Downstream I found the water worn, flaggy slabs of Eagle Ford that were barely distinguishable from the Austin Chalk upstream. A quick look around turned up a nearly complete little ammonite and a slab containing about 15 shark and fish teeth, the best being a pretty brown *Ptychodus* tooth just under  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide.



**FIGURES 2 and 3:** Eagle Ford ammonite, fish vertebrae, and shark teeth left, *Ptychodus* tooth right

Across town I found a dug out pit in the same formation after studying a geological map. Fossils were sparse here, but I found a couple shark teeth, a few loose fish vertebrae, and a slab containing 7 ammonite impressions accompanied by a half dozen fish verts.



**FIGURE 4:** Too bad I didn't find the reverse of this Eagle Ford ammonite slab

A friend took me to a construction site in an Eocene outcrop not far from home after work one day recently, and it was loaded with shark and ray teeth. Out of courtesy I won't go into great detail on

this locality, but I've included some photos of what I found. I landed some cool teeth, but he got some rather large (2 inch) vertebrae and other bones from this site. This was an interesting change in fauna compared to my usual Cretaceous finds. The ray teeth reminded me of those I found at Venice Beach, FL on family vacations as a kid.



**FIGURES 5 and 6:** Eocene shark and ray teeth

### Waco/Killeen Area

I hooked up with my friend Marc de Vries on 9/5 to peruse some Central Texas exposures. Most of the research was mine, and most of the sites were strike-outs! Marc took me to some of his local sites where we found an assortment of echinoids including *Heteraster texanus* and *Phymosoma texanum*. In addition, we each snagged an *Engonoceras* ammonite. Marc was kind enough to give me just about everything he found since he has several good specimens of each echinoid found in his area.



**FIGURES 7 and 8:** Walnut Formation echinoids including *Phymosoma texanum* (spiny urchins), *Heteraster texanus* (heart urchins) plus *Engonoceras* ammonite

Pressing north, we weren't very successful in finding the Eagle Ford. Our best success was in a railroad cut where I found one *Ptychodus whipplei* tooth, we each found some weathered fish verts, and Marc threw back an ammonite imprint. Things were pretty slow, so we dropped into the Waco spillway very briefly, finding a couple shark teeth and a few pyritized ammonites. The

highlight of this leg of the trip (for Marc) was seeing both of my feet go out from under me while I slid 10 feet down a muddy hillside.



**FIGURES 9 and 10:** Duck Creek ammonite and weathered *Ptychodus whipplei* tooth left, various pyritized Del Rio ammonites and shark tooth *Cretolamna appendiculata* right

My research revealed a Marlin Chalk (Pecan Gap) creekbed exposure south of the town of Mart which was rumored to hold *Echinocorys* echinoids, so we took a look. It was a beautiful exposure, apparently not worked recently, but it held nothing for us.

We made a final stop at a streambed exposure on the way back to Marc's house, and I began to look closely at the Pleistocene gravel bars and banks for goodies. My efforts were rewarded with my first piece of mammoth bone. It is about 8 inches long and lying shattered right in the middle of a 4-wheeler track. Oh, well, this specimen gave me the opportunity to reconstruct a 3D jigsaw puzzle and learn to properly stabilize it with Butvar. Anyway, the marrow and cortex of the bone are plainly visible. There is nothing that walks in Texas today requiring bone of this heft, so I'm confident in labeling this as proboscidean material, but I'm not sure if it came from a mammoth, mastodon, or gomphothere. We'll just call it mammoth for simplicity.



**FIGURES 11 and 12:** Mammoth bone cortex (top) and marrow (bottom)

Anyway, I've long been looking for a "bona fide" hunk-o-mammoth, and even though Marc laughed at my ugly "kid's fossil", I proudly have it on display at home. Needless to say, I'll be returning to that site soon for closer scrutiny. It may take me years to attain my loftier goals of finding a mammoth tooth and tusk section, but it will be a fun quest.

### **A Texas River**

Finding that scrap of bone sort of fanned the flames of my interest in Cenozoic material, so I escalated efforts last week to complete a custom motor mount for my kayak. I have a 3.5 HP

Nissan outboard for this setup which allows me easy access to rivers and lakes for hunting fossils, fishing, sightseeing, etc.



**FIGURE 13:** Accessorized kayak

I chose a stretch of the river teeming with abundant Pleistocene mammalian fossils for the maiden voyage of the Woehr “Swift Boat”. Actually, the thing only goes about 10 MPH, but this is fast enough for my needs. I hit the river pretty early and headed upstream figuring that most other folks would head downstream if they put in at the same spot. I surveyed a couple of gravel bars and landed a nice red mineralized metatarsal (?), which in itself made my day.



**FIGURES 14 and 15:** Pleistocene finds front and reverse views. Horse teeth, deer antler tine and rib, unidentified metatarsal (?) right, unidentified pelvis fragment (?) left

The early bird catches the proverbial worm, and I was plucking “worms” from the second bar when another kayak pulled up to join me. Eric and Laura Krueger turned out to be a friendly and helpful couple. They gave me a few hints since I was a first timer on the river. While walking that bar and

talking, Eric and I laid eyes on the same piece of bone at the same time, and Eric graciously suggested that I keep it since he had collected many similar pieces over the years, and I had driven farther than he did. The large red hunk of bone is pretty dense. It looks to me to be a piece of pelvis, but I'll need to have someone else look at it for positive ID. I also found a large fossilized horse tooth while the 3 of us searched together.

We ran upstream to the next bar where we sort of struck out. They passed the next bar and continued on while I stopped and collected a black rib, a fossilized antler tine, and another horse tooth before turning back. Chunks of petrified, river polished wood were available all along the river, and I was fortunate to find bone at each gravel bar which did not already have footprints on it.



**FIGURES 16 and 17:** Eocene petrified wood, possibly swept downstream from Yegua formation

100 yards from my put in point I hit a submerged obstruction and broke the shear pin at the prop. This was a simple on-the-water repair, but I'm glad I was close to the truck since I was quick to discover that one paddle had become detached from the handle, which would have made an arduous return to port. I could have continued to other parts of the river, but after 8 hours and being on my last shear pin, I opted to quit while I was ahead and run home.