

Falls City Rock Hunt Report--April 2003

by Stephen Wilkerson

With a four and a half hour drive, I decided to leave Friday night for the field trip to the Tessman Ranch. Ed Clay asked if he could ride with me, and since he had the final directions to the site, I was agreeable.

We hit the road at 6 pm and made our way west, reaching Falls City at 10 pm. During the trip, Ed realized he had left the directions at home, so we asked for help at a gas station. Fortunately, the lady who was closing up was a neighbor of the Tessmans. With fresh directions in hand, we drove on to the ranch to verify the distance and where to turn. Then we drove back to Falls City. We parked near the Palace Café, put our seats back, and dozed for the rest of the night.

The next morning we woke at 6, had breakfast in the café, and waited for others to show up.

The first arrived about 7 am. Several people arrived in time to have breakfast. By 8:30 there were 18 adults and 1 child. We had Club representatives from Houston, Clear Lake, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, and Austin.

At 8:30, we loaded up and caravanned out to the site. We all greeted Mr. Tessman and paid our \$5, then headed to the parking and camping site. As we started, those of us who had been to this site before took several of the new hunters and showed them what to look for.

The property had a lot of rain over the past three years, and a lot of new material washed to the surface. However, the lake was up also—several feet from three years ago. No doubt much material was under water. I started my search along the shoreline. I found several good pieces of the golden petrified wood and a lot of the clear agatized wood. Since I still have a stockpile from the last trip, I picked up about one piece for every five I saw.

Beverly Mace caught up to me while I was fishing for a nugget of the golden. She had rubber boots and was wading in the water, and she had much easier access to the rocks in the lake. She was keeping an eye on Tiny Kent's granddaughter, Brittney. Brittney was eager to move around the lake and I took over watching her.

We left Beverly and plowed through the brush and cactus following the water's edge. We passed several other people collecting, but didn't stop to collect much material. As we went around the lake, I saw less and less cutting material. There were many pieces of petrified wood that would be decorative in gardens or fish tanks.

Finally, it was near lunchtime and we headed back to the campsite.

Everyone came back in to eat and rehydrate. They were happy to show off their best pieces so far. Several brought back very nice pieces of palmwood.

After lunch, part of the group moved to another part of the property. The area was split between two plowed fields and an area of gullies and rough land. I searched the

gullies and washouts. There didn't seem to be as much material there as last time. An hour and a half later, I was worn out and sunburned. I forgot to bring sun block. I went back to the campsite and started washing my finds.

By 4 o'clock, everyone began returning to the camp. Most were only there for Saturday and needed to head home. Several impressive pieces of palmwood and golden wood were displayed.

In the end, only five people remained to camp out for a Sunday hunt. Two gentlemen had a motel room in town and promised to return the next morning.

Ed Clay talked to Mr. Tessman and learned that several fenced areas were also part of his property. He gave us permission to search these areas as well. It was nearly 7 o'clock, but there was enough light for a quick search. We found several pieces of clear and lots of petrified cycad. Some pieces of cycad were over two feet long.

Once the sun went down and we rested a bit, we set up our gear to sleep. If you are going to sleep in the back of a SUV, be sure it is big enough for you. I am over six feet tall. I discovered my Rodeo is only five feet long in the back with the seat down. It was not a comfortable night.

The next morning, when all seven of us were ready, we drove around to a distant part of the ranch where none of us had ever hunted. After an hour, we decided there was nothing worth finding there.

Ed Clay returned to the campsite to search the areas that had been missed on Saturday. The rest of us went to the plowed fields to hunt. By 11:30, I had found as much material as I had collected the previous day. There were also several very nice pieces of the rare red petrified wood.

I headed back to camp to start packing up. Once I rearranged my gear, I started washing my new finds. I threw away several pieces as unusable, but still ended up with a sizeable pile of rocks.

By this time, everyone had returned and was preparing to leave. Ed got his equipment loaded in my Rodeo and we headed out. Even stopping for lunch, we made it back to Houston in four hours.

I was quite exhausted and very sunburned, but very happy. My bucket weighed in at 18 lbs. of petrified wood material. It will be at least three or four years before we go back to the Tessman ranch, but I think I have enough material to last.