

Jewett Lignite Mine Field Trip, 06/01/01*by Edward R. Tindell**ed-tindell@sprynet.com**2001 CLGMS Field Trip Coordinator, a.k.a. "The Official Cat Herder"*

This was the second field trip conducted by the Clear Lake Gem & Mineral Society (CLGMS) to the Jewett Lignite mine located 158 miles north of Houston just north of the small town of Jewett, Texas. The mine is approximately 17,000 acres in size. It is a strip mining operation that provides fuel for the Limestone Generating Station which produces about ten percent of the electricity used in Houston.

The mine limits the amount of personal vehicles that can be taken into the mine to two (2) so we have been renting fifteen passenger vans to increase the size of the group we can take in. On this trip we had nine van riders. Six of us met in the parking lot of the Hollywood 20 theater complex at Beltway 8 and Pasadena Blvd. at 5:30 a.m. on Friday, June 1, on the east side of Houston. We were loaded up and on our way by 5:45 a.m. We drove around the northeast portion of Houston on Beltway 8 to the Hardy Toll Road, which we took north up to I-45 to avoid the heavy traffic in downtown Houston. Although it was a little foggy at times, we encountered no difficulties and arrived in Centerville, Texas at 7:45 a.m.

We stopped at Woody's Smokehouse to stretch our legs and get something to eat. We arrived in Robbins, Texas at 8:15 a.m. and waited until 8:30 a.m. for everyone else to show up. We started our field trip by taking a site-scouting trip down south Hwy 39 towards Zulch, Texas. We explored some road cuts, got lost on some county roads, and found a really great display of very large petrified wood pieces in the front yard of an earth-moving company. We finally stopped about ten miles down FM 39 at a Department of Transportation gravel pile that was sitting between some railroad tracks on one side of the road and a large road cut on the other. We explored all three and discovered that one of the gravel piles was composed completely of well preserved pink fossils, mostly gastropods and shells, in a white matrix. The contrasting colors were quite beautiful. We returned to Robbins, Texas at 10 a.m. and waited for the rest of the group to show up.

By 10:30 a.m. we had twenty-two people show up. We took the scenic loop all the way around the mine and looked at one of the giant draglines from a distance. We arrived at the mine entrance at 11 a.m., right on time. Our host, Nellie Frisbee, met us and we proceeded to park our cars and transfer people and tools into the mine vans and our van. Three more joined us in the rental van for a total of nine people. Once we were settled in, our host took us on a short drive to Pit B, which is close to the mine entrance. The portion we parked in was about one hundred feet wide and deep and about a half mile long. It looked like a lunar landscape with nothing but white, gray and black dirt or rocks in sight.

We were very fortunate to be there when we were as they were excavating an old underground area of the mine. There were three old mine shafts running into the highwall on our left and lots of old mine timbers and ore car track railings lying around. It was quite fascinating to see these old tunnels from the 1930s being dug up! The pit is located at N31.38507, W96.25503.

One of our hosts, David Edgerly, took those who wanted to go on a mine tour in one of the vans. Everyone else fanned out along a hard dirt road running down the middle of the pit and began collecting. At first we didn't find a lot of shale to split and look for fossils or a lot of petrified wood. Siderite nodules, pyrite concretions and beautiful golden yellow calcite-filled fractures in the black lignite were everywhere. Once we got the hang of what to look for, everyone started finding everything.

An area of the shale just above the lignite seam was just full of pyrite concretions. There was a large log of petrified wood embedded in the road just a few feet from the van, and more large logs were found not far away along the side of the road. We collected for a full three hours inside Pit B under the shadow of a giant dragline at one end. Some of the most interesting finds included nearly perfectly spherical pyrite concretions and several very nice fossil leaves in shale. By 2 p.m. it was 98 degrees Fahrenheit in the pit with little or no wind, and everyone had made many return trips to the vans with specimens to take home.

On our way out, we stopped at the coal pile and looked for more specimens. Several giant pieces of petrified wood, one requiring four people just to lift it (!), were found and taken out with us. By 2:30 p.m. we were back in the parking lot getting cleaned up and loading tools and specimens back into personal cars. Our host even took several people back to the coal pile to remove several more large pieces of petrified wood while everyone got cleaned up! We thanked our host and were road-bound again by 3:15 p.m.

We stopped in Centerville, Texas for lunch, then headed south on I-45. We stopped at a place called Blue Lagoon just north of Huntsville on our way home. Blue Lagoon is a series of six old carbonaceous sandstone quarries that they used to mine sand from. Local scuba divers have leased two of the pits for diving purposes as the pits are full of clear blue water. All over the place you can find excellent fossil plants, and it didn't take us long to find some. I talked with the operators and asked them to inquire of the landowner if we could conduct field trips at the site. Their lease does not currently allow material to be removed from the quarries. Hopefully that will change.

We were back on the road by 6 p.m. and arrived back in east Houston at 7:45 p.m. It was just starting to drizzle a little as everyone said goodbye and departed for home. The weather had been great all day long. The van required little cleanup despite having to drive it across a mudding spot before parking it in Pit B. I got it cleaned and washed and returned it with about forty minutes to spare left on the rental. Many of us had taken Friday off to go on the field trip, and it proved to be a great way to start a three-day weekend. Hope to see you on our next field trip!