

## 2011 MCHS SPRING HISTORY TOUR THE DIG SITES OF CLAUDE HIBBARD Guided by Dr. Robert Martin



We couldn't have asked for a more perfect day as we gathered at the Chuckwagon for breakfast Saturday morning, May 21st. The event was the Meade County Historical Society annual Spring History Tour.

We don't usually meet for breakfast prior to our tour, but this year the agenda was set by Dr. Robert Martin who several months ago agreed to guide us on a visit to several dig sites of the late Dr. Claude Hibbard, the paleontologist who worked in Meade County from the mid 1930's until 1973. Dr. Martin started coming to Meade County from Murray State University in Murray, KY, in 1995.

Fifty-five explorers participated in the tour this year with only twenty-eight being from Meade County. We were honored to welcome four members of the Hibbard family... Larry and Tom Hibbard from Toronto, KS, Clayton Hibbard from Fredonia, and Gordon Hibbard from Manhattan, KS. We had eight from the Wichita Gem & Mineral Society and several of Norman Dye's archeologist friends with the Kansas Anthropological Association who traveled from several locations throughout the state.

We ended up with a diverse and enthusiastic group. Everyone was given a 14-page "Field Trip Guidebook" written by Dr. Martin and provided by the Historical Society.

Dr. Martin started with a talk and Power Point presentation at the Chuckwagon. He described "Hibbie" (as Dr. Hibbard was known by his friends) as an untiring field worker. He trained an important group of paleontologists who collectively laid the foundation for the current work being done in Southwest Kansas.



We saw an impressive list of several rodents and five large mammals discovered by Hibbard and named after people and places in Meade County. We learned about migrations, extinctions, and ecosystems and how the fossil record teaches us about these things. We learned that the Meade Basin is an ideal study system because it includes many fossiliferous localities spanning millions of years and that this is the only place in the world so ideal for this study.

As Dr. Martin concluded his lecture he told us, “Some of the sites we will visit today are priceless, not because of the value of fossils they contain, but because they represent a kind of 'rosetta stone' for understanding the last five million year history of mammal assemblages on the Central Great Plains.”



The first site we traveled to was the old Cudahy silica mine. Dr. Martin chose this site because he knew we would have easy access and we could learn about how the event of the ash falling here affected animal life. We could easily distinguish the ash from other types of earth. We all dug around in the bank and, with Dr. Martin's help, identified pieces of bone and very tiny snails.



Next we traveled back through Meade and south on highway 23 to the site called "Borchers/Nash 72." I had seen this area all my life from the road never realizing what the view was like from the other side. It was breathtaking. We didn't dig here, we just observed the striations in the earth... you could see several colors of earth here from a pinkish-salmon color to a green-gray color to a bed of gravel... all neatly stacked by forces of nature into a massive canyon wall. This is one of the richest sites in the Meade Basin for rodents. Literally thousands of specimens have been collected at this site.



From here we traveled to the “Deer Park” site which was on state land near the lake. We got to dig here and I think everyone was able to find a little souvenir or two to take home. We found pieces of teeth and bone... mostly from horses it seems... Dr. Martin was very busy identifying treasures.



Then it was on to the “Rexroad Location 2” site where Dr. Martin had located some interesting teeth earlier in the week. He wanted to stress to us that where they are located is just as important as the fossil itself so he let us “find” these, but stressed that they were “his” teeth. There were few other souvenirs from this site, but many lessons.



The “Rexroad Location 3” site was the last on our agenda. We parked on the county road near this site and Dr. Martin had us looking in the road ditch for fossils where they are known to “wash out” at times.

It was 5:00 before we got back to town... hot, gritty, tired and brimming with knowledge of the Meade Basin.

This was undoubtedly one of our better history tours. We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Martin for guiding this tour and being such a good teacher. We would also like to thank the generous land owners who gave us permission to caravan across their pastures. This tour will be long remembered by all who participated.



We were honored to welcome four members of the Hibbard family to our tour... Larry and Tom Hibbard from Toronto, KS, Clayton Hibbard from Fredonia, and Gordon Hibbard from Manhattan, KS.