

Fossil Trail of Washington and Oregon

Where to see and maybe collect fossils.

Todd Folsom • 2024

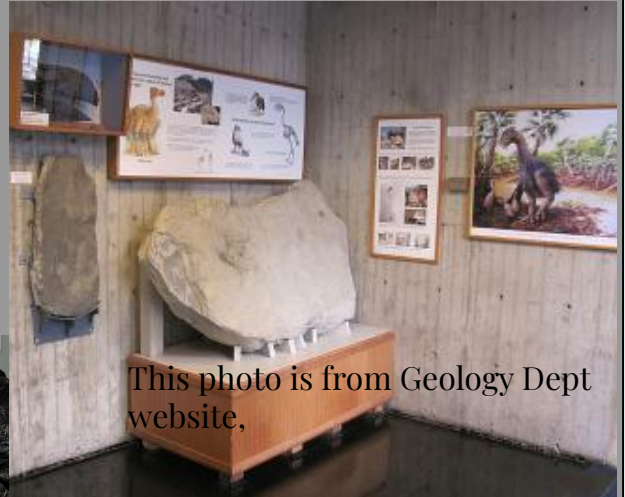
Photos by T. Folsom or are otherwise credited



View crinoid fossils from the early Pennsylvanian (300 MY) in rip-rap on Bellingham Bay. The limestone boulders came from quarries on Red Mountain, north of Kendall and Maple Falls. Directions to 2 locations are at the DIY Field Trips page of our website.



View fossils from Chuckanut sandstone in the halls of the WWU Geology Dept. See the trackway of the terror bird that was exposed by the Racehorse landslide. Our website has info under DIY Field Trips.



This photo is from Geology Dept website,

Our website has links to the WWU calendar for when the Environmental Sciences Building is open on weekends when parking is free. In addition to fossils, there are many exhibits of rocks and minerals, plus mining photos.

Collect fossil oysters and belemnites at Fossil Creek on Church Mountain. They are in cobbles brought down the mountain by the creek. The Forest Service road is in good shape up to the creek crossing.



The marine sandstone of the Nooksack Group was deposited in the late Jurassic to early Cretaceous. Belemnites are extinct nautiloids resembling squid. Bring a shovel.

Slide Mountain is south of the Nooksack River between Welcome and Glacier. It's the site of the famous Racehorse landslide that exposed tracks of the "terror bird". Many kinds of plant fossils can be dug from a convenient ledge beside a gravel road. See our website.



Fossil plants include palm, poplar, metasequoia, swamp cypress. Bring a kneeling pad and a flat chisel for extracting rocks. Clippers to remove vegetation will be useful.

The Stonerose Interpretive Center in Republic provides a collecting site and museum. There are 50 MY old plant fossils and rare insect fossils. See stonerosefossil.org for directions and fees. Bring a small splitting chisel or paint scraper.



You may have to park near the interpretive center and walk to the collecting site. As of several years ago, there was no porta-john at the site. The fossils are in a lacustrine (lake) deposit of tuff from the Klondike Mountain formation of 48-49 MY. The flora was in an upland temperate forest with *Metasequoia*, alder, elm and the Rose family.

Stonerose fossils and the collecting site.



< Photos of fossils are from
the Stonerose website.

You can use the shaded tables to split rocks. This site can be quite hot during the summer.

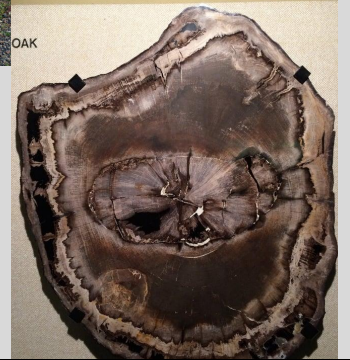
The Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park is located where I-90 crosses the Columbia River at Vantage. The park has an interpretative center and a trail through the petrified wood.



Over 50 tree species have been petrified in Miocene volcanic ash and later protected by basalt flows over the ash.



Oak photo
is by the
State
Park.



Here is me and my dog during our move from NC to WA in 2015. Check the WA State Park's website to find out when the visitor center is open.

Central Oregon has the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument and a collecting site in the town of Fossil. There is a lot of driving between them all.



Cross the Columbia River near Maryhill then climb up to a plateau on the Oregon side. The Oregon state park at Cottonwood Canyon has camping and cabins on the John Day River.

Dig for Oligocene plant fossils behind the high school's playing field in Fossil, OR. Donate at the shed by the parking area. Bring a small splitting chisel or paint scraper and a shovel.



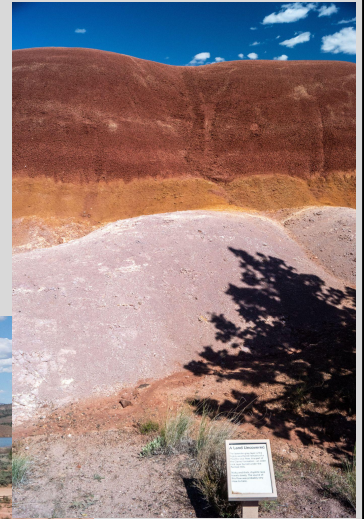
The leaf and needle fossils are from the Bridge Creek flora of the John Day Formation. These are likely oak and metasequoia. There is a porta-john at the parking lot. There is at least one gas station in town.

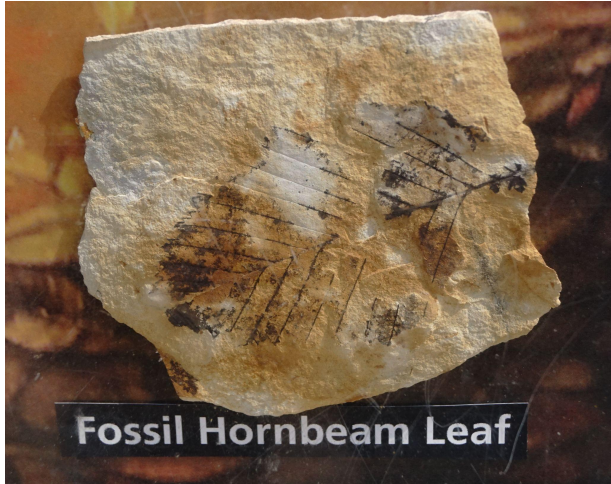
The John Day Monument has 3 units. The Clarno Unit is nearest to Fossil and has the oldest layers: 54 MY old. Walk the trail under the Palisade to see leaf and wood fossils *in situ*. It's the only unit where you can do this.



There is a privy and some picnic tables, but no water available. Explanatory signs are at the parking lot and along the trail.

At the Painted Hills and Sheep Rock Units, fossils that weather out of the clay are destroyed by the elements. But don't skip the Painted Hills! Distinguished by varied stripes of red, tan, orange, and black, this area preserves a sequence of past climate change with fossil leaves and some animal fossils.





Fossil Hornbeam Leaf

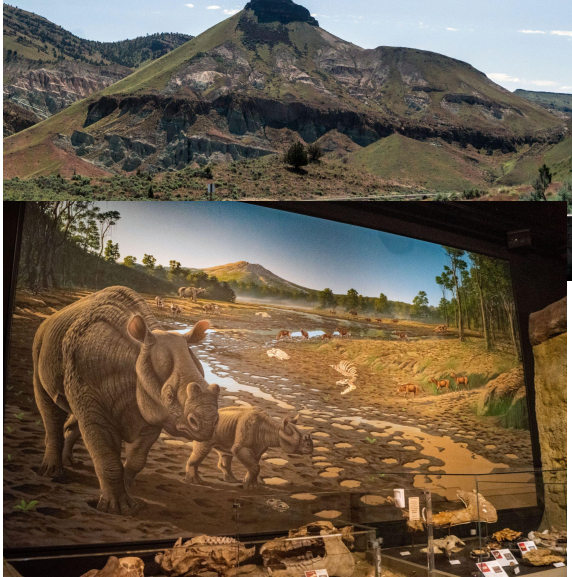


**Fossil Oak Leaf
(with bug damage)**

Here are some of the fossils displayed along trails at the Painted Hills Unit courtesy of the John Day website.

There is a small visitor center at this unit, and I think that there is potable water available.

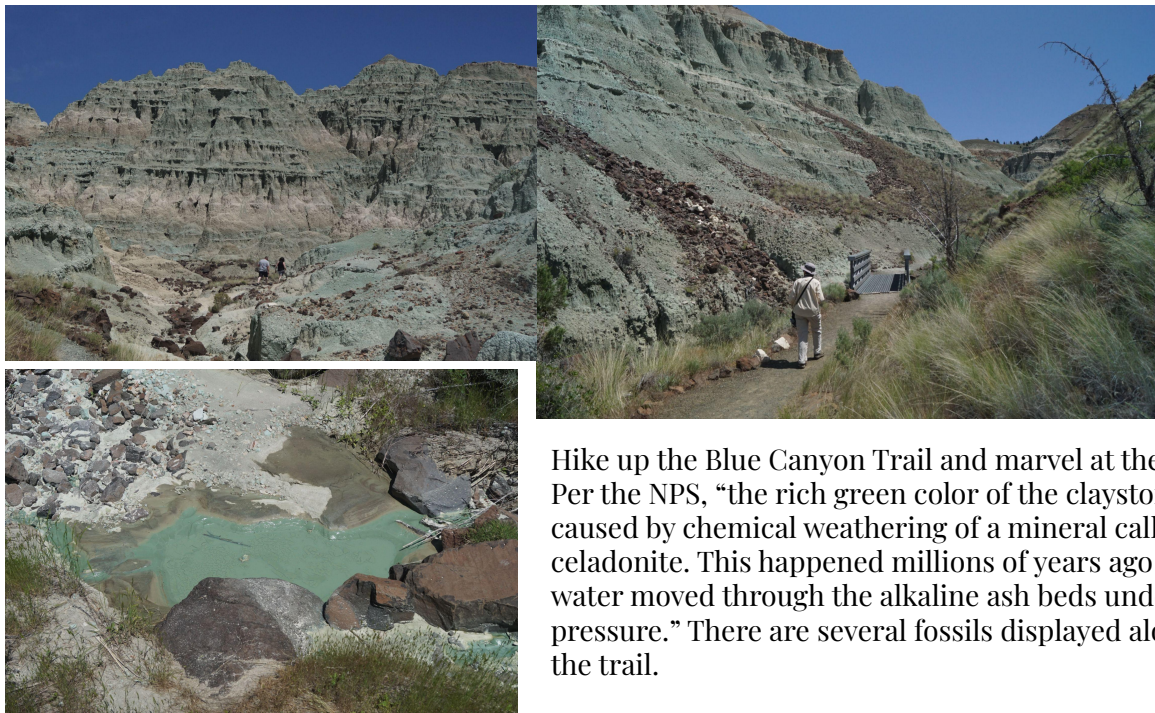
Enjoy the museum at the Sheeprock Unit. View fossils and dioramas.



The Sheeprock Unit is the most southerly of the three units. It includes the Condon Interpretive Center, the monument headquarters, and historic ranch buildings. Fossils from here are circa 20-40 MY old.

The left diorama features the fearsome beardog (Amphicyon sp.)! On the right is the John Day “tiger” Pogonodon from 29 MY ago.





Hike up the Blue Canyon Trail and marvel at the view. Per the NPS, “the rich green color of the claystone was caused by chemical weathering of a mineral called celadonite. This happened millions of years ago as water moved through the alkaline ash beds under high pressure.” There are several fossils displayed along the trail.

This is part of the Sheeprock Unit and well worth your time to hike up the canyon.



At Oregon's Cape Blanco State Park you can see Miocene era marine fossils on the beach. I saw various bivalves and gastropods.



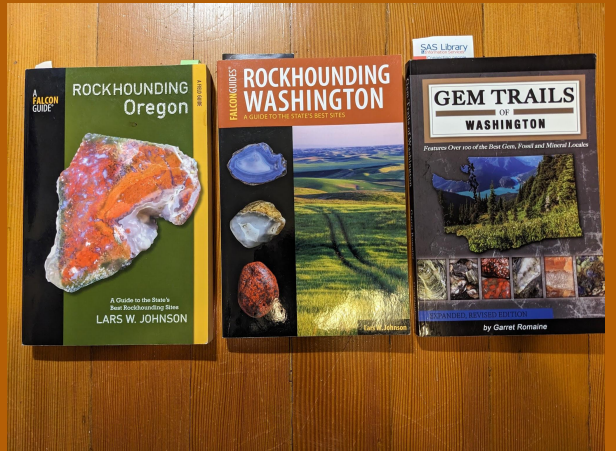
At Beverly Beach, search along the bluff for rocks that show various bivalve and gastropod fossils from the Miocene.

I did the driving so you don't have to! You can see my camper here at the Painted Hills Unit of the John Day Monument. But please visit some of these sites.



For more info:

- Mtbakerrockclub.org Field Trips/ Current Conditions
- Mtbakerrockclub.org Field Trips/ DIY Field Trips
- Nps.gov/joda/index.htm for John Day Fossil Beds
- Stonerosefossil.org
- Easterbrook, D.J., A Walk Through Geologic Time From Mt. Baker to Bellingham Bay. 2010



This presentation will be added to our website as a PDF file later this week.

