



Greg Sweatt, guest paleontologist, checked out samples from Morgan Hand (right) and Stephanie Lee to see if they found a fossil during the Outdoor Education trip Friday.

Rain can't dampen kids fossil hunt

By Tom Betz
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The rain pelted the area south of Russell Springs Friday, but it let up as the fifth graders from North School arrived on their annual fossil-hunting trip.

Rain had been coming down for about two hours before the line of school buses and Suburbans wound through the pasture along a series of deep canyons on the south side of the Smoky Hill River.

Well equipped with rain gear the adults and kids pulled out their tools and spread out to attack the chalk cliffs looking for ancient fish bones.

By the end of the hunt the kids had found about 16 different species of animal and Greg Sweatt, a paleontologist and high school art teacher from Parker, Colo., examined the finds to give the kids an identification of what they found.

Sweatt, who was making his fifth trip with the kids, talked to the kids before the trip began and showed them some fossil specimens he had, and paintings of the

ancient fish as they might have looked over 65 million years ago. Sweatt, who grew up searching for fossils along the Brazos River in southwest Texas, has been scouring the Smoky Hill chalk of Kansas for years.

The buses stopped at the Wallace Museum so the kids could see some of the fossils that have been found in northwest Kansas. The second stop was to be the site of the German family massacre, north of Russell Springs in 1874, but the rain made it questionable for the buses and Suburbans.

Volunteer experts went ahead to the canyons, looked the area over to spot the best places were for the kids to find evidence of the ancient oceans. The crew included Sweatt, Larry Harper, Doug Whitson and his wife Pam all of Goodland.

The landowner, Larry Haverfield, who lives south of Russell Springs, gave permission for the field trip, and has given permission to other people to search the canyons on his land.



Cooper Slough searched one of the deep canyons and tried to keep dry in the rain.



Cy Paxton and Conner Gray enjoyed the fossil hunting despite the rain, and slick, muddy conditions that stuck to their clothes and shoes.

North fifth graders who fossil hunted

Judy Hayden's class: Sadie Avila, Jacob Becvar, Sydni Callahan, Jayme Davis, Mario Flores, Amy Floyd, Rachel Hagerman, Morgan Hand, Michaela Langley, Stephanie Lee, Dylan McLemore, Michael Mosher, Victoria Mouchette, Trace Waugh, Ray West and Kaleb Zwick.

Nona Neufeld's class: Tiffany Charron, Elias Flores, Chloe Goodwin, Tania Hernandez, Devan Johnson, Dustin Juleson, Belen Ledesma,

Brooke Lockhart, Idalia Martinez, Jordan McCombs, Carly McCracken, Tyler Raby, David Rascon, Brianna Salinas, Spencer Smith, Jazzmin Weis, Elizabeth Wellman, Josh Whisnant and Shirea Woodrow.

Jeremy Samson's class: Lora Brooks, Gloria Bustillos, Sabra Carver, Courtney Cowan, Paige Ford, Robert Gutierrez, Tanner Jones, Brianna Lawrence, Alex Nelson, Gage Owens, Ashlee Roeder, Adam Rust, Jacob

Schnabel, Sheyenne Sharon, Cooper Slough, Nathaniel Smith, Victoria Steggall and Aaron Twombly.

Myron Tedford's class: Thern Bagley, Chantel Coates, Lacie Cowan, Andrew Dautel, Reilly Flodin, Conner Gray, Jed Gray, Jeffrey House, Stetson Johnson, Kimber Linnell, Derek Matthews, Taylor Milke, Shayley Miller, Sheldon Nelson, Cy Paxton, Paige Phillips, Naomi Salinas, Brandon Sissel and Holly Wilkening.



Marjorie Schnabel, right, held pieces of a large pectoral fin she and her son Jacob (center) dug out of the Niobrara chalk south of Russell Springs. Jazzmin Weis and Dylan McLemore looked at the pieces. Brandon Sissel was a member of the fossil hunting group.