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Ordovician Fossils in Manitoba, Canada

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I was fortunate to be able to travel to Gimli, Manitoba, Canada on the shore of Lake Winnipeg (the 10th largest freshwater lake in the world) to attend the first meeting of The Wildlife Society's Canadian Section. Arriving in Winnipeg on Monday, August 11th, I had a free day before attending a series of meetings on the 13th. Knowing that the Winnipeg area was rich in Ordovician limestone, I contacted Matthew Leitch, the current president of the Winnipeg Rock and Mineral Club (WRMC) via eMail to enquire about local fossil hunting opportunities. He put me in touch with Jeff Wazney, the former president of WRMC and the present Field Trip Coordinator. Jeff indicated that he was on vacation and would be glad to take me out for a day while I was in town.

At 7:00 AM on Tuesday, Jeff picked me up from my hotel in his four-wheel drive pick-up and we headed out for a full day of hunting. The weather was dismal; cloudy and raining, but that did not dampen Jeff's spirits or mine. Jeff had told me that he was ready to go fossil hunting in either rain or shine.

Our first stop was Stony Mountain, the site of an abandoned limestone quarry, very near the Provincial Penitentiary, a surprisingly attractive older building constructed of Ordovician limestone located just outside the city. At a newly exposed rubble pile near a housing construction site, we found numerous small horn corals and a variety of brachiopods. Excavating one large boulder, I also found a nice trilobite. This particular site was so rich in material that we decided to go back later in the day.

Our second stop was an area referred to as the Floodway, an artificially constructed channel, which carries overflow from the mighty Red River and protects Winnipeg from flooding. On the sides of the channel are huge limestone boulders in which abundant corals, sponges, and other fossils are evident. In order to approach this site, we definitely needed Jeff's four-wheel drive, particularly given the muddy conditions. We picked up some interesting coral specimens, some with patterns reminiscent of brain coral. Mosquitoes were abundant, but fortunately we brought plenty of repellent, a necessity for any outdoor activity in the north.

Last but not least, we drove to Garson, a small town located northeast of Winnipeg, and well-known for its Tyndall Limestone, a fossil bearing dolomite limestone from the Ordovician Red River Formation that is often cut and polished to be used as kitchen counters and bathroom tile. For a small fee we were allowed to explore the rubble pile at the Gillis Quarry. There we found nice specimens of a large cephalopod, horn corals (*Saffordophyllum*), and a few examples of a large gastropod (either *Hormotoma* or *Macurites*). The latter of which had been cross-sectioned during excavation operations in the quarry. We spent a few hours breaking rock with a sledgehammer to get at the large horn corals inside.

Although we were soaking wet from the rain, the weather was warm enough that we never really got cold. We called it quits about 6:00 PM and went back to Jeff's house, where we examined some of his collection, neatly packed away and labeled in boxes in his garage. Jeff is also interested in rocks and minerals and was especially proud of the many large and beautiful selenite crystals that he had excavated from a site near the Floodway.

Despite some curiosity and questions from the TSA employees at the Manitoba Airport (you go through U.S. Customs in Canada), I had no problem getting my specimens back to the U.S. Manitoba's Ordovician limestone provides excellent opportunities for fossil collecting. I plan on going back again someday.