



Fossil Hunting on the Peace River

Welcome to Fossil Hunting on the Peace River. It is a popular past time. Go to any boat ramp on the Peace and you'll see fossil hunters. The best way to find fossils though is to rent a canoe and work your way down the river.

Who: The fossils left behind include those of giant sharks, stingrays, fish, whales, dugongs (ancestor of the manatee), dolphins, alligators, turtles, mastodons, mammoths, bison, camels, ancient horses, dire wolves, giant armadillos the size of small cars, giant land tortoises, 20-foot sloths, and saber-tooth cats. The most popular fossils are the shark teeth, with Megalodon (Great White) the most prized.



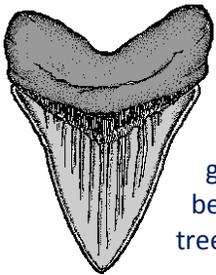
Why: Surface fossils found in Florida are approximately 50 million (Eocene Epoch) to 10,000 years old. There is a mix of the marine and land animals because of the rise and fall of the sea levels from glacial melting. The land would emerge, and then disappear. Most fossils in this area are from the middle Miocene, 16 million years ago, to the earliest Pliocene, about 4.5 million years ago. Dinosaur fossils are not found because Florida was under water at the time of the dinosaurs.

What: Look for black, hard shapes, with and without enamel. Look for textures, ribbing, and angular shapes. Black and shiny "rocks" can be anything so look closely. You can also check with office staff and/or your fossil i.d. sheet to figure out what you have. There is also a fossil i.d. book and laminated i.d. sheets for sale at the office. Go to <http://www.canoeoutpost.com/Peace/prfossil.htm> for links to sites to help i.d. fossils. If it once roamed or swam over Florida, it's hidden as fossilized piece of history in the river.

When: The best time to fossil hunt is any time the river is low, preferably at least 12" below normal. March, April, and May are the usual low times of year. Keep an eye on <http://www.canoeoutpost.com/Peace/prwaterlevel.htm> for the latest water levels. Sunny days are preferred because you can see the bottom better but sunny is not necessary if you are sifting. Sunny days are best for snorkeling and diving and the water clarity needs to be good. The higher the water, the less clarity there is.



Where: Fossils can be found anywhere on the Peace River. The favorite stretches are Gardner south to Arcadia with the Brownville and Oak Hill Runs being the most popular because they are shorter and you have more time to look. You can also leave from our dock and paddle upstream, then back when done. Lots of people go to the public boat ramps but that means *lots* of people. In canoes or kayaks you can get to areas other than the ramps that haven't been picked over. You are looking for eroded banks and gravelly areas at the river's edge and on the bottom. Do not dig into the bank, that is private property! Most fossils are found on the bottom and at the edge of the water. Take your paddle, shovel, or a metal rod and probe the bottom occasionally. You're listening/feeling for a "crunch" under the sand layer. That will be the sound of a gravel layer. Darker colored (not tan sand) areas on the bottom are usually gravel spots. Check out bends in the river where there is a high bank or under overhanging trees (be careful, gators like under the trees). Rocky areas are another indication of a possible fossil spot.



How: To find the fossils, you have to get in the water and get those feet wet! You need a sifter or screen. Macaroni or spaghetti strainers work too. The screens are wooden frames with hardware cloth attached. You can buy them for different suppliers, check the campground next door to the Outpost or build your own. The Outpost usually has some to borrow on a first come, first serve basis. Scoop up some gravel, you can use your hands, a trowel or shovel, and dump it into the sifter. Shake the sifter in the water to wash the mud and sand away and start poking thru what's left in the sifter. The method is similar to panning for gold but you're panning for "black" gold. Another favorite method is to snorkel and/or dive and "fan" for fossils. A lot of fossils are below the sand closer to the limestone bottom. You use your hand or something similar (folded old car tag works good) to fan the sand away.

Suggested Equipment: sifter or screen, shovel or trowel, sunscreen, hat, polarized sunglasses, shoes (glass and rocks on bottom), plenty of water and/or sports drinks, snacks, hat, dry clothes & towel left in car to change into after the hunt, trash bag, bucket or two (one for finds, one for broken glass), and plastic zip bags for treasures. Nail aprons or fanny bags come in handy to put your find into as you sift.

