

Fossil Foray Outing Report

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By Barb Scott

Illustration: <http://www.giantsrib.ca/escarpment-origins-ancient-seas-and-fossils/trilobites/>

Maybe it was the beautiful fall weather. Maybe it was the location on Saint Joseph Island. Or maybe it was because there is a huge untapped interest in local fossils.

Whatever the reason, over 40 people showed up Saturday, Sept. 28 to hear Lake Superior State geology professor Dr. Paul Kelso talk about fossils and dig around for their own.

After parking at a nearby restaurant, we walked or drove a short ways to an old limestone quarry on the east side of St. Joseph Island. Before entering the quarry, Dr. Kelso talked a bit about the Niagara Escarpment, which is an eroded dolomitic limestone rock formation that stretches in an arc from New York through Ontario to northern Michigan and Wisconsin, ending in Illinois. The most famous



outcropping is Niagara Falls, although it can also be easily observed in the eastern upper peninsula of Michigan near East Lake and Cedarville, as well as this old quarry on St. Joseph Island.

This area was once a vast sea, and the Niagara Escarpment was formed from sediment that washed into the sea, and the remains of the creatures that lived there about 400 million to 450 million years ago in the Late Ordovician age. The invertebrate creatures that lived in the sea included brachiopods, gastropods, crinoids, and trilobites. Dr. Kelso gave us a guide titled “Cincinnati Fossils” (a copy is attached to the email) so we would know what to look for, and he loaned out rock hammers and safety glasses.



We slipped over a narrow creek to the weathered face of the escarpment and began our hunt for fossils.

By hammering at the rock or digging in the softer shale layers, it was easy to find fossils. The landowner had not only given us permission to be there, but generously also allowed us to take whatever we found. Dr. Kelso helped us identify the fossils -- the most common were small brachiopods and pieces of coral, thickly clustered. Unfortunately, no one found trilobites that day.

It was a wonderful occasion to ponder life that existed half a billion years ago before we returned to our Anthropocene (or Holocene) lives.

Photos by Barb Scott and Val Walker. Renee Wysynski took more photos, which can be found here: <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmHuZAJh>. Thanks, Val and Renee!

