**How to Collect Fossils**

If you have never collected fossils before, starting on a new project can be a challenge. However, challenge is good for us so let’s step up and learn how and where we find fossils.

A fossil is evidence of prehistoric life. The fossils we collect were once a live animal, insect or plant millions of years ago. We find fossils where oceans, swamps, and ancient lake or sea shores once existed. In Kansas what was left behind by these environments are the rock beds of limestone, shale, sandstone, chalk, and coal. Fossils can be found in all of these rocks.

To collect fossils we need the proper equipment. A small pail is good to carry and also plastic ziploc bags. Small plastic medicine bottle, old film canisters, or small plastic containers and kleenex are good to have to place individual fragile specimens so they do not get broken. Some fossils will require the use of a hammer or chisel to be extracted from the rock. An adult or experienced junior leader should help with this process of extraction.

Now what do you look for when collecting fossils? Here are a few tips for finding fossils.

* Know what you are looking for by looking at pictures of fossils before the field trip.
* Look for something out of place or something looking different than the rock or soil you are working through. Shapes different from the other rocks you are looking through. Triangles stand out from round rocks for example.
* Many fossils are a different color than the rocks where they are found.
* Plant fossils many times will be found in shales and as each layer is separated the fossils are present. If plant fossils are carbonized they will be black and very fragile. It is good to spray them with non-glossy, clear acrylic spray to preserve them.
* Sometimes it is good just to sit down in one spot and look carefully all around you for fossils as you are closer to the ground and they are easier to spot.

Hunting fossils takes patience and persistence; however, it can be very rewarding. Nice collections can be developed to display at the fair or for your own personal enjoyment.