

# More information about the Dickinson Area Dig

The site:

The Dickinson Area digs are named such because they are near Dickinson. The staff departs from and returns to Bismarck, ND each day, but will meet diggers in Dickinson. The sites are on private property, and as such we cannot have any semi-permanent structures in them (shade tent, port-a-potty). At this site we pack-in, pack-out. This means everything we may need during the day (food, water, plaster, tools) is brought in by hand. We want to make sure we are invited back in future years, so please make sure that all trash goes back out with you.

This dig is focused on collecting fossils that are between 30-40 million years old. During this time period (the Eocene, Oligocene, and Miocene), North Dakota's environment looked more like a savanna, crisscrossed by the occasional river, dotted by sparse hackberry trees. Today, the sites are part of what is called the Little Badlands – an area with sparse vegetation, and rocky outcrops.

You will be hiking through, and digging into very hard sandstones and mudstones, peppered with silicified concretions. It can be brutal work, but rewarding! Watch out for prickly pear cactus when you sit down, and pay attention to your surroundings. We do not allow headphones out on site – if you are busy listening to music, you cannot hear the warning rattle of a snake.

Be prepared to hike. Keep well hydrated - bring more water than you think you will need.



Wear good shoes! Flip-flops and sandals won't cut it out here.



Each day, staff will bring new diggers to a “starter” area to train their eyes on what to look for; different colors, textures, etc.. After this orientation, diggers will divide up in to groups, and strike off to other areas. Depending on the group you are in, this could mean a brief hike, then digging the remainder of the day at a quarry site, or it could mean scaling up and down the buttes prospecting for something new. If you find yourself getting farther away from your dig-mates, let them know where you are going! Flash thunderstorms can pop up over the prairie, and we need to know where people are at if we have to leave in a hurry.



Heritage Center east entrance, Bismarck, ND



Rugged terrain

Those little black and white specks below are people. Be prepared to move around a lot.



Samples of some fossils you may come across on this dig:



Scattered *Subhyracodon* (hornless rhino) vertebrae



*Subhyracodon* skull (bottom-side)



Tiny mammal jaw with teeth



*Subhyracodon* jaw, with teeth



*Mesohippus* (three-toed horse) skeleton, freshly found



*Mesohippus* skeleton, after an afternoon of work

Samples of some fossils you may come across on this dig:



*Hesperocyon* (early dog) teeth



*Dinictis* (cat-cousin) skull



Dung beetle balls



*Leptomeryx* (early deer) jaw



*Stylemys* (tortoise) shell



*Eumys* (mouse-like mammal) jaw with teeth



How many vertebrae can you spot?



Beautiful spots for lunch - no line!



Watch out for cactus - they bite



Plenty of chances for pick, hammer, and chisel work



Some fossils take multiple days to remove



Local wildlife, if you know where to look