

## DONATION OF PLANT FOSSILS TO GEOLOGY

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Through the generosity of Clarice and Clarence Johnsrud and the assistance of the EERC, the UND Department of Geology and Geological Engineering now possesses a truly significant collection of museum-quality Paleocene plants from near the town of Trenton, located about 10 miles southwest of Williston, North Dakota. The "Trenton Hill" locality fossils are in an atypically well-lithified, light-colored, clayey, very fine-grained siltstone from the lower half of the upper Paleocene Sentinel Butte Formation. The flora consists of about 20 species of plants. The events leading to Mr. Johnsrud's acquisition of these fossils is an interesting story, which tells of his perseverance and love of fossil plants. A brief history will show how fortunate we are that these collections even exist. In 1987, the North Dakota Department of Transportation was widening the road from U.S. Highway 2 to the Fort Union Historic Site, which is located on the North Dakota-Montana border. In downcutting the drainage ditch on Trenton Hill, road workers encountered a 20-inch-thick slab of rock that required removal to get the ditch gradient to specifications. Large blocks, up to 25 square feet in area, were extracted for reburial further down the hill near the now idle Koch gas processing plant. A local resident spied the fossil plants and told Mr. Johnsrud of their existence. Subsequently, Mr. Johnsrud asked and cajoled (and put up with a lot of strange looks from) state and local officials to do something about saving what he considered to be an important fossil discovery. Showing considerable endurance, Mr. Johnsrud was eventually told by an on-site construction foreman that he could haul away (with his own equipment) as much material as he wanted. After about seven days of breaking blocks (frequently by hand) to manageable sizes, he was told to clear out on a half hour's notice. The remaining blocks now serve as roadfill and are buried under the blacktop and shoulder of Highway 1804.

On the basis of previous discussions and negotiations, geology students and EERC research assistants Wes Peck and Michelle Rolland, and I made trips to the Johnsrud farm in July and September, where we wrapped and hauled about 2850 pounds of plant fossils and associated matrix to Grand Forks in a three-quarter-ton pickup provided by the EERC. We were greatly aided in maneuvering the larger 400- to 800-pound blocks with the help of Mr. Johnsrud and his John Deere tractor. We ended up "only" exceeding the weight restrictions on the pickup by 1000 pounds on each of the two trips.

These fossils will be used initially as a display in the museum area of the Geology lobby, which will hopefully be ready for viewing this winter. A couple of specimens are currently on display in the "walk through time" exhibit at the Heritage Center.