

A ROCKIN RETREAT 2009

by Andy Johnson

Having recently attended this year's Northwest Rock hound Retreat for the first time which was held at the Hancock Field Station September 7-13 in North Central Oregon I couldn't help but reflect back upon this most interesting and unique location.

Through a collaborative agreement between the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry and the NFMS (Northwest Federation of Mineralogical Societies) rock hounds from British Columbia, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California were once again able to gather for a Fifth year to expand their areas of interest in a wide variety of lapidary activities and to use their free time to explore some of our public lands which surround the Hancock Field Station, in particular, the Clarno Unit one of three units which comprise the 14,000-acre area known as the John Day Fossil Bed National Monument. The Clarno Unit is located 18 miles west of Fossil on highway 218, and offers the public a chance to walk through and gaze upon eroded ancient mud slides which formed cathedral shaped spires 40 million years ago.

Speaking of public lands and Fossil, one of Oregon's lesser known towns, there is a site located behind Fossil's only high school, situated on a hill-side on school land, where lies one of the richest fossil beds of the Bridge Creek flora found in Oregon which is easily accessible and open for public collection for a nominal fee of \$5 which provides a needed source of revenue to Wheeler High School. These fossil beds formed some 30 million years ago when volcanic ash fell in the region, during the formation of the present-day Western Cascades. This site has yielded over 30 species of plants, most of them belonging to the genera that are no longer native to the Pacific Northwest. Fossil hunters and collectors can dig unlimited fossil specimens in relative comfort and safety without fear of being fined, arrested or having their fossil finds confiscated.

These fossil beds were exposed during the construction of the Wheeler High School in 1949, and have been used on a continuous basis by amateurs and professionals alike. So, if per chance you are searching for a public site to collect fossils in Oregon do not overlook the sleepy community of Fossil, where treasures beyond just fossils can be found and enjoyed

