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Plano West Discovers Ancient History

PLANO, Texas, Jan. 17, 2014—The little creek running between Plano West’s student activity center and the tennis courts has become a learning laboratory for PWSH AP Biology and Environmental Science students. In the past eight years, students – and their teacher, Wesley Kirpach, discovered several 85 million-year-old fossils. Some of these are species new to the science world.

“We get the kids out there in the creek finding things that are truly discoveries,” Mr. Kirpach recently told the Plano ISD School Board.

In 2012, AP Environmental Science and AP Biology student James Che discovered a Heteromorphic Ammonite fossil, believed to be a new species.

“The feeling is exhilarating,” James said. “My heart was racing and it was an experience I can’t compare to any other in my lifetime. It’s opened so many doors for me.”

After finding the fossil, he began taking concurrent classes at Collin College and taking geology classes. James now plans on making geology his career – and he’s off to a good start. James is working on a research paper about his rare find with paleontologist John Jagt, PhD, curator of Cretaceous Collections at the Natuurhistorisch Museum Maastricht in Maastricht, Netherlands. They plan on publishing their paper in the Texas Journal of Science in a few months. James will be accomplishing the graduate student’s dream of being published before he even graduates high school.

Some discoveries are unplanned, like the October 2014 discovery James Che and fellow Plano West Natural History club member Ben Ghaffar.

“We were just hanging out after school and went to the creek to see what we could find and turn over,” Ben said. “James and I finding the fossil is a dream – I’ve always been interested in paleontology.”

He added, “We were totally freaking out - we didn’t want to just leave it there in case something happened to it.”

Luckily, James had Mr. on speed dial for just such an emergency.

“We were literally shouting at the top of our lungs,” James said.

“I wish more than anything that we had the audio of that conversation,” Mr. Kirpach added.

According to the *PWSH Blueprints*, the fossil is the right lower jaw of a medium-sized *Endochus Petrosus*, commonly referred to as a sabre-toothed herring. The size of the jaw places the specimen at 15 to 20 pounds in weight and four to five feet in length.

It’s hard to wrap one’s mind around the fact that the fossil is approximately 85 to 87 million years old, and even harder to think that until James and Ben turned that rock over, no one ever in human history had seen the fossil before.

“Every rock we turn over is something that has not been seen before in human history,” Mr. Kirpach said. “So every time they peel up one little layer of rock, what’s underneath it could truly be something unbelievable.”

Resources:

PWSH Blueprints story: <http://www.pwshblueprints.com/news/2013/12/19/fossil-finds-on-campus/>

Video from the PWSH fossil presentation to the Plano ISD school board on January 14, 2014: [http://pisd.tv.pisd.edu/communications/features/e1b6fj6IMvJBVo4tHAVm](http://pisd.tv/pisd.edu/communications/features/e1b6fj6IMvJBVo4tHAVm)

ENews story about the 2009 fossil find:

Plano West Students Excavate Rare Fossil Discovered in January

http://www.pisd.edu/news/archive/2009-10/fossil_excavation.shtml

About Plano Independent School District

The Plano Independent School District (Plano ISD) (www.pisd.edu) endeavors to foster the highest level of student learning. The mission of Plano ISD is to provide an excellent education for all students. Plano ISD is located 20 miles north of Dallas, Texas and serves the residents of approximately 100 square miles in southwest Collin County, including 66 square miles in the city of Plano, northern portions of the cities of Dallas and Richardson and parts of the cities of Allen, Parker and Murphy. Plano ISD employs 7,000 faculty and staff members who serve more than 55,000 students in 70 schools and 11 service facilities. Participating in Plano ISD schools enables students to adapt to new learning opportunities throughout their lives, collaborate with, and contribute to, the global community and to be creative and disciplined in their thinking.

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