

# Evidence of Petrified Forest Found in Clay County Within Few Miles of Town of Piggott

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Piggott—Added to the wonders of Arkansas are the remnants of a petrified forest, located in the northeast corner of the state, in Clay county, within a few miles of Piggott.

Perhaps you are already saying there is not a petrified forest in Arkansas. But you have only to visit this town to become convinced beyond all doubt that here, on this section of Crowley's Ridge, are hickory and walnut trees that have actually turned to stone. When we say stone we mean stone. The trees have changed to a stone almost as hard as granite and extremely heavy.

To see one of the logs, stripped of all bark, lying out in an old, deeply eroded field atop Crowley's Ridge—and that is where they are found—one is instantly made to think that here lies an ordinary log that has shed its bark. In fact the breaks in the log and the pieces that have been torn away from the log resembles pieces of wood. Upon closer examination, however, one learns that the logs are pure stone and instead of having been rolled into the ditch by the farmer now operating the place, they were there probably thousands of years before the white man came to America.

Seeing is believing, and for that reason some of the local people pooled their efforts and went to the ridge and secured a petrified stump which they hauled to the court square and set up for the benefit of people who have a doubt about the petrification of trees.

Later another piece of the same tree was brought in and set atop the stump, making a "snag" that is several feet in height and weighs several thousand pounds. To drive around the square the motorist probably upon seeing the "snag" would think to himself that there is an old snag, somewhat out of place on that spacious lawn.

The bark is all gone and the places where once the wood worms made their tunnels are still in evidence.

## Unearthed Forest.

I. W. Harlan, 77-year-old Piggott resident, assisted in the erection of the "snag" on the court yard. In fact, he and a brother, who is now dead, have done much to unearth the petrified forest and bring it to the attention of people outside Clay county.

In an interview Mr. Harlan told the writer that the tree from which the specimen on the court yard was taken, was about 36 feet in length and had been broken into five sections. The tree weighed several tons and a number of men were required to handle the parts brought into town.

Mr. Harlan has been a careful student of geology and has put much of his knowledge into practice along the upper end of Crowley's Ridge, especially from the state line down to Jonesboro. He has gone into the ravines of the ridge in search of specimens that would give him more light upon the fascinating subject. And let it be added here that this part of Crowley's Ridge is one of the worst eroded sections to be found anywhere in Arkansas.

It is Mr. Harlan's belief that the upper end of the ridge is still on the move. That is, a disturbance is still going on somewhere way down under the surface. The great upheaval which many thousands of years ago created the ridge left effects that are still felt here.

## Spot Has Risen.

He stated that a survey made not long ago disclosed the fact that the spot upon which the court square is located has risen 13.4 feet in 41 years. This information was had from a report made by surveyors who worked the section about 41 years before the last survey was made. Upon making the last survey the surveyors uncapped the pipe in

the corner of the courtyard and took the previous readings which disclosed the change.

Another proof that the country may not be thoroughly settled is the condition of some of the brick houses that have been erected in this part of the state. In many instances the houses have suffered severe breaks in the walls which some authorities believe is the result of an uneven, unsettled foundation.

The same condition no doubt is the cause of all petrified logs being broken into short lengths. In most instances where a buried tree is uncovered, it is broken into a number of lengths. Mr. Harlan believes the earth at some time in the past twisted about in such manner as to bring reverse pressure on the logs, causing the breaks.

On the farm of General Jackson, nine miles west and one mile south of Piggott, Mr. Harlan pointed out a pile of logs that are perfectly petrified. The logs are strewn along the bottom and the sides of a deep ditch which the water has cut down the side of a hill. The hillside is in an old field that has not been cultivated in many years, and it is unlikely the logs would ever have been found without the aid of erosion.

The petrified specimens are found at various depths, ranging from five or six feet to many feet below the surface. Not having the average rate of erosion on Crowley's Ridge, it has been impossible to estimate how deep the forest was originally buried or how long ago the upheaval occurred.

## Scientist Investigates.

A few years ago a government representative came to the section to investigate the report of a petrified forest. He came to Mr. Harlan to secure specimens and be directed in his search for more if necessary. Finding the few pieces which are on display in town, he stated that it was not necessary that he go into the eroded sections of the ridge to seek more.

He took some of the samples of petrified wood away with him and stated that as soon as a report was made he would forward to this northeast Arkansas town the results. Among other information to be given was the age of the petrified trees and perhaps some information as to the cause.

However, because of other work and limited assistance the report has not yet been made. Mr. Harlan has heard from the department one time since the visit and was informed that such report will eventually be made.

An interesting feature in connection with the petrified forest is that practically all specimens found on the east side of the ridge are hickory and those on the west are walnut. Not much petrified wood has been found on the west side, however.

It is interesting to note, too, that the underground strata of various substances lies at an angle of about 15 to 20 degrees, always sloping toward the center of the ridge. On the east the strata slope is downward toward the west and on the west the slope is slightly downward toward the east.

From this it would appear that the upper end of Crowley's Ridge, although somewhat higher than the surrounding country, is lying in a sort of trough.

That the whole section has seen some history that would make even the most daring person shudder, is evidenced by some things connected with the misty past, which have been unearthed in the region during past years.

## Pre-Historic Skeleton.

Chief among the astounding discoveries came in the form of a giant pre-historic animal skeleton which was found near Marmaduke several years ago and which is still in the

possession of a party near that town.

The skeleton created considerable excitement for a time. It was a skeleton that probably dates back to the dinosaur era, but those who saw it said it was the skeleton of something else. Students of archaeology looked upon the skeleton as being that of a monster which during an age long past roamed about over the region, lord of everything that came its way. When it died, its death occurred in a ravine where the torrential rains soon buried it under a stratum of debris. Then came the disturbances which altered the surface of the earth, lowering it here and raising it there, and in that way the huge monster was sent so well down into the earth that it remained undisturbed until discovered by mere chance a few years ago.

We are told that the skeleton was found by some swimmers who were swimming in a dredge ditch and happened to discover that the thing from which they had been diving, thinking it was a stump, was part of the great skeleton.

Year after year, according to our story, swimmers had been using a certain point in the ditch to bathe and did their diving from what they thought was an old stump studded in the bank of the ditch. Then came a drouth and the water dropped low in the ditch and one day a member of the swimming party discovered that the lower part of the "stump" showed that in reality it was a huge

bone. He excitedly yelled his discovery to others of the party.

Other members of the party only laughed at him. But he was not to be disregarded in his belief, and after much argument and discussion pro and con a team was secured and hitched to the "stump." Sure enough it was bone. It was more than a bone—it was part of the skeleton of the great monster.

Following that discovery much excitement was attracted to this part of the state for a time. A really unusual specimen had been found, and with its finding it was proven that at one time the low lands of eastern Arkansas were a haven for some of the pre-historic mammals, previously read about in story books.

At another time parts of another skeleton were found in the low lands between Crowley's Ridge and the Mississippi. One of the rib bones was said to have been more than six feet in length and several inches in width. Only parts of this skeleton were found and not enough of it was ever assembled to make a guess as to what it might have been.

That this section was once the very bottom of the ocean is also proven by the great beds of mussel shells of the type found only in the ocean. In digging some of the deep wells, these beds of shells have been found, and some have been discovered imbedded in pieces of clay and gumbo.