

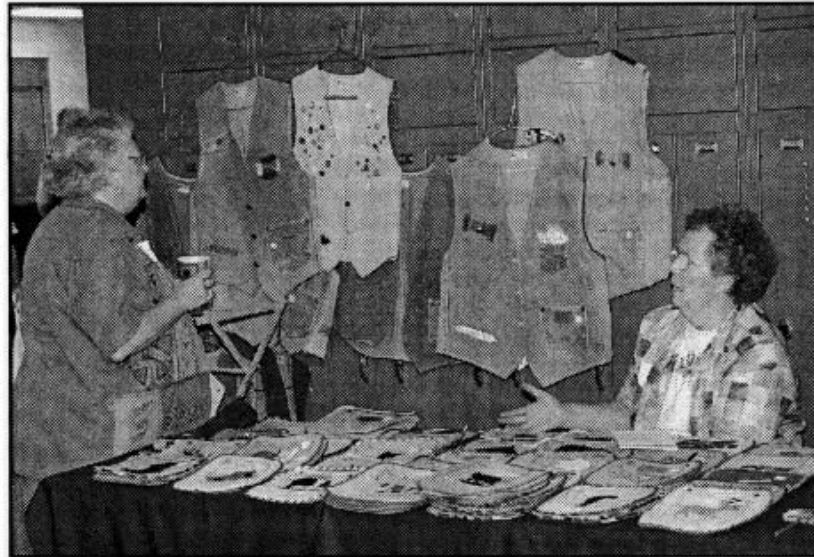
3rd Annual Sand Hills Experience held in Ainsworth

Story by Richard Albrecht

The Sand Hills Discovery Foundation is happy to report that their third annual conference was once again a huge success. Many exceptional speakers presented top-rate information to the public.

Dr. Paul Johnsgard's beautiful slides of the Sand Hills' birds and plants, along with his excellent first-hand knowledge, created a very impressive presentation. Mike Voorhies traced the collection of fossils in this area and explained how President Thomas Jefferson had especially encouraged Lewis and Clark to find the elephants that they believed inhabited this area. He was convinced that there were still living specimens of the bones of elephants that they had brought to the east coast from this area. His presentation included specialized knowledge about the fossils of Nebraska and was combined with a historical perspective which was widely appealing to audience.

Albert White Hat, Sr. explained some of the history of his Lakota people, such as how they actually considered the word "Sioux" a derogatory name when it was given to them by the French. He talked about the struggles of his ancestors during the period of European settlement of this area, the loss of the Buffalo, introduction of alcohol, and the reservation system that imposed its ideas of education and religion on his people. Education was stressed as a very important need of the Lakota. They are making progress but still need to attain skills that will help them get the jobs that they need to survive and maintain their self-respect.



During the 3rd Annual Sand Hills Discovery Experience, the Ainsworth Area Chamber of Commerce lined up a variety of vendors. Above, Arlene Ries (right) shows her denim creations - potholders, ties, baby bibs, vests, and placemats. Other vendors included such things as personalized gifts, jewelry using ivory, fossils, and semi-precious stones; pictures taken by Bob Rooney of the Sand Hills and Sand Hills Life; and Shorty Scheer's Rope Creations.

(Star-Journal Photo)

Jim Swinehart presented some great material on the Sand Hills. He explained that there are actual little dunes that have formed on top of big dunes throughout the Sand Hills region. He explained the impossibility of attaining a more accurate date for when the sand was deposited in the dunes. The geologist spoke about the ancient river that once ran through the area of Ainsworth. The gravel deposits found under Ainsworth can be traced to an ancient river (it is called the ancestor of the Platte

River) that flowed through this area and washed gravel in from Colorado. The river flowed through southwest Nebraska north through the state and continued north to the Hudson Bay. It was eventually stopped when a huge glacier diverted the water into the channel now occupied by the present-day Platte River.

Dennis Bauer used the records compiled by Brown County Extension

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Agents over the past 70 + years to highlight the changes made in farming and ranging practices. His report showed the clear impact that irrigation has brought to the area. He discussed the animal population of Brown County and its neighboring Keya Paha and Rock Counties.

Brandon Painter and Kyle Klammer, students from the middle grades of the Ainsworth Community Schools, presented their science projects. Painter's project was on the West Nile Virus, a topic that he had a personal experience with. Klammer spoke about methods used to determine the age of fish. Both boys helped explain a video prepared about the Long Pine Nature Trail, which the Middle School has worked on for many years. It is located in the Long Pine State Recreation area on Pine Creek. Many people commented on how they enjoyed seeing youth involved in this event and wished that there would have been even more involvement.

Carolyn Hall conducted a mini-session on work she had done following some historic trails that go through eastern Rock County into Keya Paha County. She led several enthusiastic historians on a tour of this area the following day. There was a great deal of excitement about the tour, since it was the first chance many had ever had to see this unique remnant of days gone by.

Probably one of the most favorite and widely-attended events was sponsored by paleontologists Bruce Bailey and Shane Tucker. They manned a display of fossils at the conference and offered identification of fossils that the public brought in. On Monday and Wednesday they offered a field trip to a fossil site that they had been working for four years. This site was found by Rick Irwin of Ainsworth, a highway department employee who saw fossils in the road bank and reported it. It contains a huge variety of fossils, the largest of which are from elephants, camels, rhinoceros, horse and deer. The fossils found in this bed could be dated from 5 to 6 million years in age.

The Tuesday Conference ended with entertainment and historical stories told by Wally Bayzn of Valentine. The crowd broke out in a spontaneous sing-a-long when Bayzn sang some all time western favorites and accompanied himself on the guitar. "The Tumbling Tumble Weed" and "Cool Clear Water" were just two of the many songs he talked about and presented.

A ranch tour led by Sid Salzman and Blair Williams was conducted on Monday.

Attendance at the Conference this year was counted at over 100 when all of the workers, vendors and exhibitors were included.