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Truman Tucker of Kenton, Oklahoma pointing to dinosaur track in split rock.

SEPTUAGENARIAN TRUMAN TUCKER TRACKS DINOSAURS

— by Opal Hartsell Brown

A most unusual hobby for a septuagenarian is tracking dinosaurs, but Truman Tucker of Kenton, Oklahoma does just that. For more than seventy years, he has roamed the Dakota sandstone hills in the Panhandle, tracing the movements of prehistoric animals and other creatures, which once lived there in a swamp.

These monsters are not the figment of somebody's imagination. Their skeletons have been found in separate quarries in the area. While WPA workers were excavating a road in the 1930s, they unearthed a dinosaur graveyard of significance and notified the University of Oklahoma.

The late Dr. J. W. Stovall, paleontologist, brought a crew from Stovall Museum on the campus and set to work. Through the years, archaeologists have removed more than 18 tons of fossilized bones from Cimarron County quarries. They reassembled a brontosaurus

skeleton 65 feet long. It is now on display in Stovall Museum.

A concrete replica of a brontosaurus' femur marks the quarry from which the real one came. It is six feet long, 24 inches at the bottom, and 21 inches at the top. The genuine bone weighs 425 pounds and is said to be the prize fossilized bone of Southwestern United States.

Dinosaur bones of five species were found in the same quarry. Other nearby pits yielded parts of giant mammoths: tusks, skulls, etc.

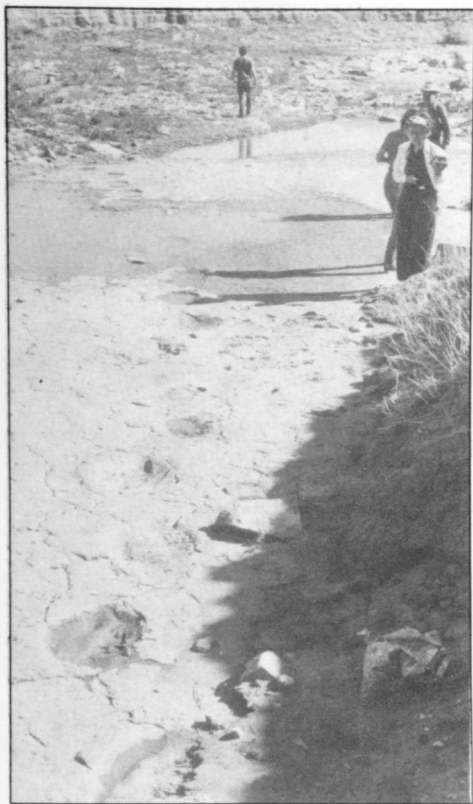
Tucker has found hundreds of tracks. Pocking dry creek beds and layers of stone which have split, they resemble those of birds, lizards, and elephants and range in size from one inch to more than a square foot. One shoeprint in stone is filled with lava. Tucker believes the man was fleeing from lava, flowing from a nearby volcano.

Scientists estimate the tracks were made from 60 to 130 million years ago. Tucker believes they were made in more recent times. He has become so knowledgeable, he is recognized widely as a local historian and host to researchers.

In 1982, he received the Oklahoma Heritage Association's Stanley Draper Award for distinguished service. He is working on a book about the area with Professor Jim Rogers of Central State University. It will be published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Tucker went to the Panhandle when he was four months old. His father bought a relinquished homestead in the hill country in the early part of this century and moved his family from Osceola, Missouri. The young Truman never attended a "real school," but studied in old abandoned houses with children from the small ranches in the area.

— from the Oklahoma Panhandle —

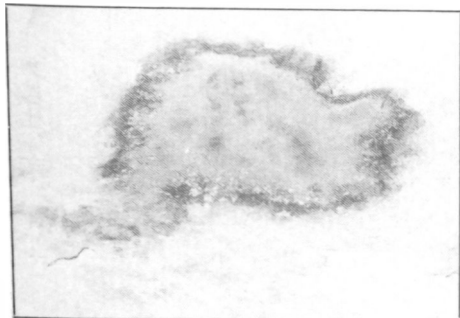


Truman Tucker, wearing hat, as he guides visitors on hunt for dinosaur tracks in Oklahoma panhandle.

In 1941, he married one of the workers from Stovall Museum, and the couple tracked dinosaurs together until her death four years ago.

Meanwhile, he bought small ranches which could not support families and leased school land for grazing. At one time, he controlled about 5,000 acres, including 1,400 in adjoining Colorado. Today, he owns only 20 acres on which he built a house in 1948. He sold a large portion to a millionaire in Lubbock, Texas.

Retired from farming and ranching, he continues tracking pre-historic creatures and hosting visitors. People come from as far away as Isle of Palms, South Carolina.



Close-up of dinosaur track near Kenton

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