

Raven Hill Discovery Center is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation.

Mission: Raven Hill provides a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong learning for all ages by connecting science, history & the arts.

Polishing fossils

Go for a walk and look for fossils. Take a spray bottle to help you see the fossils in the rocks. Choose a fossil that is small and SMOOTH, so you don't get discouraged! At home, find one smooth spot to polish as "a window into the past." You will also need a small bowl of water, paper towel and wet/dry sandpaper. Use wet/dry sandpaper from the hardware store. Start with a coarse sandpaper (180), then a medium grit (220) and then a fine grit (400). Wet the rock and the sandpaper, put the sandpaper flat on the table and rub the rock on the sandpaper. Work on just one spot for the window into the fossil and leave the rest natural, so you can see the difference. Use coarse first, rub 5-10 minutes in a circular motion—rub hard. Every so often, rinse the sandpaper and keep sanding. At some point, rub the fossil really hard for a minute and then hold it up to your nose and smell the oil. The oil is trapped in the oil shale, which is a common type of rock that contains fossils from the coral reefs that were here, when Michigan was under a shallow sea. The oil comes kerogen, which is the soft part of an animal. The hard parts—shells and bones fossilize, but the soft parts decay and form kerogen or oil, which yields petroleum products with distillation. Continue to sand your window. Rub with medium sandpaper. Feel how smooth it is getting. Finally, rub with the fine sandpaper. Admire your work! Save your sandpaper to use on another fossil. Attached is a Fossil Identification Chart. Identify your fossil from the pictures and write the name of your fossil on a card to display with your fossil.



1 Supplies



2 Wet fossil



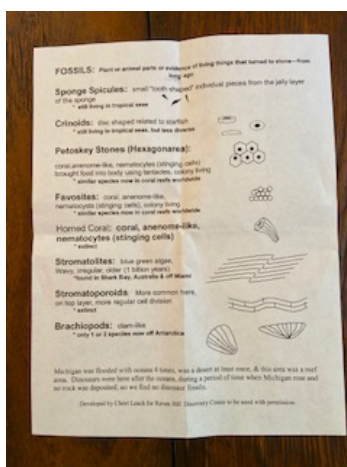
3 Sand to polish



4 Continue sanding one spot



5 Polished fossils



6 Identification for local fossils