

"Roll Out the Beryl"

by Dave Lines, John Sorg, Ralph Gamba, Mary Cramer, Mike Saniga and Patrick Saniga



On the morning of April 17th, six members of the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club met at a site in Amelia County, Virginia, which is historically known for its beryl crystals. As soon as we arrived, we parked and conducted an orientation and safety brief. Then we spread out to surface check bare spots throughout the area.



Almost immediately, Dave Lines found a small segment of an opaque greenish beryl crystal. After everyone calibrated their eyes to this piece, we each picked a spot, cleared the leaves away and started digging and screening what we dug up, while looking for that telltale greenish color and hexagonal crystal shape..

The original mined area is an open trench about 100 feet long with dump areas immediately adjacent to the trench. The trench, which is still visible, is about 10 feet deep and about 20 feet across. The sides have caved in considerably and small trees have grown up in the trench and on the sides. In fact, the entire location, which covers more than one acre, is wooded with pine and hardwood trees to 6 inches in diameter. Large boulders of massive white and smoky quartz, some with large beryl crystal impressions, are scattered about the dump. Mica is common. A private gravel residential road now goes directly through part of the dump area. Nevertheless, beryl crystals can be found just about anywhere by digging and careful screening with a 1/2 inch mesh screens. Water and a brush can also be used to rinse off the red clay to further identify any suspected finds.



For this trip report, each participant submitted a brief summation of his/her impressions. Our comments follow:



John --- Another great outing with the SMRMC. Our trip leader Dave did a good job of putting the team on the trail of the gems. This location has to rank as one of the easiest access sites to gather specimens. You could dig right beside your vehicle since the road base and parking area were made from the mine tailings. The challenge of working tailing piles is the randomness of the material. There is an element of luck involved as some piles are richer than others. My strategy was to focus on one shady spot near the original trench. I found beautiful beryl crystals in quartz matrix. As the day went on the beryl's found were increasing in size. I definitely would recommend this location for a return trip.



Ralph --- Mary and I found a few beryl crystals. Mary found one in matrix, I found a number of matrix pieces and one nice solitary crystal (which I will give to Mary). I still enjoyed the trip and hope to go again.

Mary --- I really did not find much. One little thing may have had a beryl in it, but now I cannot find that. However, it was a fun day and it was encouraging that other folks came up with some beauties.

Mike --- First, a thanks need to go out to Dave for his efforts, not only to get this property open to our club, but to keep it open for us. Dave and crew did such a good job at mine restoration that the land owner couldn't tell that anyone had been there. It took Pat and me a little while to figure out that we should have been digging in the hard packed tailings and not the loose



(probably already sifted) dirt. I managed to find several good crystals and Pat found one very special specimen. This is a very easy access trip, but to get to the good crystals, it could be some hard digging. I can't wait to go back!



Pat (age 10) --- I thought we were going to go into a big trench and dig around, but it turned out to be a hill where we just started digging. My dad and I dug in the spoil pile because we thought we would find something big. I found a big stone with beryl on it. It is yellowish. There are 3 crystals that were clearly visible from the surface but there were more on the bottom. When I found it,

I felt really happy and it was very cool that there was more than one crystal in the stone. I thought we could try to chisel it out, but we didn't. Then we found this huge piece of beryl that was cut in half. We found one stone with a hole where there used to be a beryl that was as big as my leg. Then we washed it off and found out that it had a piece of beryl and then everyone started to come over where we were and started digging there. Eventually we connected the holes and then everyone was digging in one hole. There were about 3 good spots and we quit about 4:00 pm because it took 3 hours to get home. It was a lot of fun and was worth our while. We had a good time and found some good specimens.

Dave --- As a group we dug until early afternoon. The weather was nice ---sunny and in the 70's. It was just right for gold panning, and since John has gold fever, he left about 2 p.m. to travel to Contrary Creek and check out what his friends had found there. Before John left, he refilled his hole and sprinkled pine straw back over the area --- it looked beautiful. One would have never guessed that someone had just been digging.



Well, John had been doing pretty good in that spot, so, soon after he left, all the rest of us moved in and began digging there again. Almost immediately, we began finding beryl crystals. They seemed to be just below the level of solid red clay --- only a thin layer of a few inches, but we found at least ten crystals --- loose and in white/smoky quartz matrix. All of these in a small area about 6 feet long by 2 feet wide and 1 to 2 feet deep.



We dug and screened the tailings until 3:45 p.m. and decided to call it a day. Then we spent about 30 minutes refilling our holes and covering the areas with old leaves and pine straw. The whole place looked pristine when we left. For the day, our group spent about 6 hours there and found perhaps a total of 30 pieces of beryl. So overall, it was productive and safe fun.

