“<u>Glendon</u> *Times* <u>Hard Work</u> *Plus* <u>Heavy Tools</u> *Equals* <u>Pyrite</u> ”
By Dave Lines

If you like large pyrite crystals, and don’t mind hard work, then Glendon, North Carolina is *the place* for you.

As a member of the “Gem and Mineral Society of Lynchburg, VA”, I was eligible to participate in a great trip set up and smoothly run by the Southeast Federation on May 15, 2010. The overall Trip Leader was Mike Streeter --- noted author and rockhound of *<u>McRocks.com</u>* website fame. This pyrophyllite mine, about 50 miles southwest of Raleigh, was re-opened (following 2 years of closure) last spring for access by rock hounds after negotiations with Standard Mineral Company.

The mine is basically an open-pit operation which is several hundred yards long and about two hundred yards wide. The purest part of the pyrophyllite deposit has been mined out and the remaining portion of the mine containing pyrite crystals (considered an undesirable impurity by the miners) runs down the center of the open pit in the form of a low hill. Just about anywhere you dig in this hill, you will find pyrite crystals --- of all sizes --- from tiny, perfect cubes to whoppers as large as 4" by 4" by 6". Small blue-green fluorite crystals can also occasionally be found throughout the mine associated with white quartz. But the main thing is pyrite.

There is a "catch", of course. Some of the pyrophyllite matrix is relatively soft and easier to dig in using chisels and 3 pound hammers --- BUT some the matrix (usually containing the largest crystals) is really HARD. Last April, I broke a steel chisel, and my Estwing pointed bullnose just bounced off. This year, I brought along a couple of sharpened jack hammer bits that were pointed. These bits are made of an extremely hard steel. I also brought along a couple of sledge hammers --- a 10 pounder and a 20 pounder. Plus an assortment of other steel wedges and chisels. And a stiff bristled brush to clean off the area I was working on. This brush often revealed pyrite crystals that I had not previously even noticed.

Another “catch” is that the pyrophyllite deposit is tilted at about 45 degrees. This means that you have to dig deeper and deeper to follow a “vein” of pyrite crystals. For me, I had chosen a location where the “vein” went under a deep pile of overburden. So in addition to hardrock mining, I had to do a considerable amount of shoveling.

Weather conditions at Glendon over the years have varied greatly --- sometimes it is wet and muddy --- this time, it was dry, dusty and HOT as blazes. I ran out of drinking water before the trip was half over. A shade umbrella would have been great.

The trip was limited to 120 people, but I heard that 6 slots were never taken. Too bad. The trip started at 9 a.m., after a safety brief by Mike --- stay inside the marked area, drink plenty of water, be careful and be *out* of the mine by 3 p.m.. By noon, I would estimate that over half of the people had left due to the brutal heat --- it was 95 degrees and no breeze. By 1 p.m., only 25 diehards remained. By 2 p.m. when I gave up, only ten people were still hammering.

Overall, I did fairly well digging and brought back several flats of pyrite crystals in matrix. My largest weighed about 3 pounds. I also made a new friend --- Gerald from Atlanta --- he had driven 7 hours. Near the end of the dig, Gerald saved my bacon with a couple of cold sodas. Wow --- they sure hit the spot. And thanks, Gerald, for helping me carry my tools back to the van --- especially the 2 sledge hammers.