

## U. S. Silica Quarry - Montpelier, Virginia

By Ralph Gamba

On July 16, 2011, members of the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club (SMRMC) went on a trip to the U. S. Silica Quarry in Montpelier, Virginia. The Shenandoah Valley Gem and Mineral Society hosted the trip, and they allotted 6 slots for our club. Because of cancellations, we received two more slots. Dave, Rich, Joe, Paula, Ralph B., Marco, Mary and Ralph G. attended from the SMRMC, (Figure 1).



Figure 1. SMRMC members gather for a day of collecting.

Kevin Randesi, the Quarry plant manager met us and provided a safety briefing, a brief description of the quarry, and the products made from quarry material. The quarry mines aplite for use in glassmaking. The aplite contains aluminum oxide which aids in forming the glass along with durability and stability of the glass when heated. Corning Glass and Anheuser – Busch are among the numerous companies that use material from the Montpelier Quarry.

The Quarry received the Safety Sentinel award. Mining is inherently dangerous, so Kevin warned us to stay away from the high walls, banks, and from walking under equipment. Kevin also said to set our parking brakes while in the quarry. He also recommended wheel chocks, but didn't have enough for everybody.

After the briefing, Kevin brought us to the East side of the Quarry. This area contained abundant moonstone and some garnet. The moonstone had a nice silver flash, great for making cabochons. Ralph G. did find a greenish crumbly mineral which no one could identify.

Around 10 AM, Kevin brought us to the West side of the quarry (Figure 2). This area had more garnet in mica schist. A member of another club reported some success in polishing the garnets in matrix. She said the red garnets with the black mica schist and white feldspar made a nice cabochon.



Figure 2. View of the U. S. Silica Quarry from the bench.

After gathering garnets, a group headed to a bench above the quarry floor. Mary gathered pink feldspar. At the end of the bench, Dave reported that there was a boulder with massive rutile, a titanium oxide (Figure 3). There was enough rutile for anyone who wanted samples.



Figure 3. It's a fine time for collecting rutile.

Dave also reported finding some pyrite along with ilmanite and bronzite. Ralph G. found a small amount of iridescent material.

At noontime, we started our exit to return to the office, change clothes, and wash our hands from the morning of collecting at the U. S. Silica Quarry.