

Willis Mountain Kyanite Trip Report 9-25-2021 by Dave Lines – Pictures by Kim Jurkowski



A huge turnout of rock hounds --- 10 clubs, 104 people --- and all their various vehicles --- were packed into the office parking lot and adjacent entry road by 8:30 am. The waivers and safety training sheets were required to be read and signed by everyone there --- took a while. Then a verbal safety brief by both Dave Callahan (long time and now semi-retired Lynchburg trip coordinator) and Mike Morris --- Kyanite Corporation man in charge of this giant field trip. Both spoke for a few minutes giving wise advice for all. Mike also described current mining activities on the mountain --- a rock crusher on top --- so much of the mountain was off limits to us. He introduced several other Kyanite employees who would be on the mountain with us -- Dan --- in charge of the operations. Also a new employee since our last trip (September 2019) --- Tom Huddleston -- a young Mining Engineer from Virginia Tech. The weather was great --- sunny and a cool start --- 48 degrees on the truck thermometer upon arrival, but it quickly warmed up to the lower 70's in the sunshine.



We (Rich, Orion, Kim, Cheryl and Dave) took a group picture, then joined the caravan of vehicles that went up the mountain about 9:15 am.



There had been a great deal of mining since our last visit in 2019, but since the rock crusher was actively breaking up large boulders on top, we all had to park and remain a full level below that activity in a relatively small area on the north side of the mine. There had been very little mining where we were allowed to look. Eventually people had scoured every nook and cranny there. There was not much iridescent hematite. There was a great deal of very sparkly pyrite in white quartz/kyanite laying all over the area. Also lots of biotite mica --- some white in color and some red (rutiled). I walked around for nearly an hour looking for specimens, and only picked up a few that I would bring home --- and those had small crystals (1/2" to 1" long x 1/8" wide) embedded in a very solid quartz-kyanite matrix. I gave a lot of specimens to other folks that I met – especially to first timers. One was a fellow (John Campbell who drove from Boston). He had never been to Willis, so everything was a specimen for him. I spoke with several friends and acquaintances on the mountain.

I walked up the road leading to the active rock crushing. Saw at least 20 people collecting --- including a group lead by Mike Morris. I asked if I could lead a group to the other side of Willis Mountain to find some blue kyanite. He said yes (I had asked him permission to do the same thing several other times in past years, so he was not concerned).

At 11:30 am, I lead a group of 4 vehicles to the area near the cell phone tower on the south side of Willis Mountain where a vein of blue kyanite crosses an old dirt access road. The kyanite crystals were very thin and about one inch long, but they were definitely blue. Trouble was, they were in a highly weathered crumbly matrix. Not very exciting, but different if you had never collected any. We collected there about an hour and decided to head back to the Kyanite Corp office parking area since it was about 12:45 pm and time to be off the mountain. Just before we left, John Campbell, the fellow from Boston, generously shared with our group some specimens he had brought down with him ---- some blue calcite with white wollastonite (both massive without crystals) from the Valentine mine, in Harriston, in upstate New York. He also gave out a few specimens of uncleaned tremolite crystals on matrix he had collected at West Pierrepont, New York. The crystals, after washing off with a hose, were light green colored and solid (not the asbestos form of the mineral).

After the trip ended at 1:00 pm, back in the office parking lot area, people began comparing what they had found. Tom Leary of the Richmond club had collected about 200 pounds of iridescent hematite just past and above the rock crusher area. Most had very small vugs with iridescent colors of red, blue, orange, green and yellow. His best specimen was solid and about 1-1/2 inches across with a nice iridescent hematite coating over small crystals of kyanite which were randomly stacked together.

The best specimen collected by someone from our club was found by Rich --- a 4 inch piece of white quartz which had almost clear crystals of kyanite (?) ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch by 1 inch by $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick) embedded in it. Rare to see clear, solid kyanite, if that is what it is.

There was also a gathering of folks under the large picnic pavilion behind the office building where we talked to several of the other rock hounds while we (Rich and I) ate our lunch. A few folks had brought specimens to show and/or sell.

Rich and I headed home about 2:00 pm. Another good trip.