

## National Limestone Quarries --- Another “Iffy” Weather Forecast, but a Great Trip by Dave Lines



The weather forecast all week for central Pennsylvania called for a cold, windy Saturday with 40 to 50 % chance of rain. And the long drive up there surely looked like that prediction was going to be the case. Rich and I were in almost continual light rain showers from 5 am when we left La Plata. With the wet roads and heavy road spray from the traffic, the windshield wipers were in constant motion. Then when we were north of Harrisburg, a “sucker hole” (as Rich called it) appeared --- a small blue patch of sky opened in the heavy clouds. And, lo and behold, when we arrived at the National Limestone office at Middleburg about 9:15 am, the sky became a beautiful blue with some fluffy white clouds.

Our small group (Joe, Harry, Tina, Rich, Ethan, Katie M., Ross, Tim, Lorna, Francesca and Dave) thought we were going to be sharing the trip with about ten members of the Montgomery County, MD club --- but --- surprise --- there was at 30 vehicles already parked in front of the Office. Turns out that the owner Eric had invited other rock clubs as well --- including Pennsylvania Earth Sciences Association (from Lehigh Valley, PA) and the Chesapeake Gem and Mineral Society (from Baltimore). It was a bit crowded with 40 people inside the office when Eric gave his personal Christian testimony and a safety brief. He also mentioned that there had been no new “shots”, but since it had rained all week, the rocks were clean and there was lots of gray mud. He also said that they had recently dug out the “wavellite pit” on the backside of the Mount Pleasant Mills quarry and, although there was plenty of wavellite, he asked that we take only 3 pieces per person so other clubs could find some when they came.



The wavelite balls are 3/8 and 1/2 inch in size. Nice dark green.



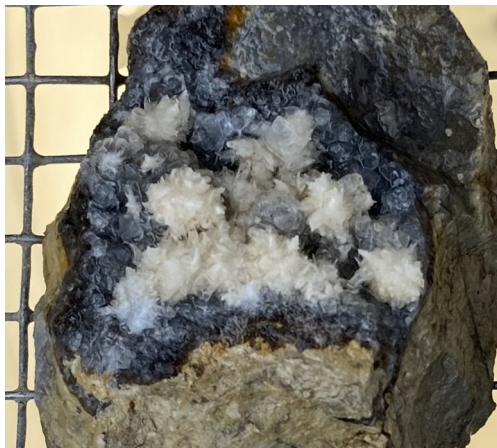
Calcite xls in a blade habit shape



Calcite xls in shape of rugby ball

Starting at 9:45 am, we all caravanned up into the Middleburg quarry. Everyone spread out and searched around the quarry finding druzy calcite crystals, purple fluorite embedded in massive calcite seams, some travertine, and at least one specimen of calcite over sphalerite (zinc sulfide). The mud was impressive, but no one got stuck. At 11 am, we collectively decided to move as a group to the Mount Pleasant Mills (MPM) quarry about 5 miles away.

At MPM, we all split up with many vehicles going to the wavellite pit and the rest going into the main quarry. I heard later that there was a very sizeable crowd searching the wavellite area, so I am glad we chose to remain down below. In the quarry itself, most of the car-sized boulders that were there last summer had been broken into smaller pieces about one to two feet square and segregated by rock type into several large piles.



Strontianite xls in snowflake habit



Strontianite xls in "ball" habit

Rich pulled his truck next to the first pile on the right and we both separated to look for the best collecting. In my truck, I looked over what Rich had spotted, and we decided to tackle a large boulder showing lots of holes and vugs filled with small calcite crystals, some of which were covered with white strontianite crystals. The strontianite crystals ranged from tiny white balls to fluffy half inch diameter mounds. Some looked like delicate snowflakes. We worked on that boulder for about 30 minutes and collected and carefully wrapped several flats of good material.

Then we moved the truck to the far (south) side of the quarry where I had earlier seen some nice vuggy rocks. To reach that area, Rich drove around the edge of a 100-foot diameter "pond" of red muddy water --- courtesy of the recent heavy rains. His beautiful shiny dark blue truck was now a muddy mess. Rich and I,



plus Katie who was already there, began carefully examining the various rocks in a low rock pile that was spread out over an area of about 1,000 square feet. Sam, Elliott, and Tim joined us. All of us found some keepers. Drusy calcite crystals were plentiful. Rich and I collected several flats of it. Katie found the largest calcite crystals (up to 1") which were all in rather good shape inside a couple of vugs.



Snowflake habit of strontianite on calcite

Elliott was probably the luckiest (...er, most skillful) when he split apart a rock with a thin calcite seam showing --- inside were two beautiful sky blue celestite crystals. Probably his best find-of-the-day! We also found a good amount of unweathered, very delicate white strontianite crystals in both snowflake and round mound habits. In one large boulder which I split open were some calcite crystals with an iridescent hematite coating which sparkled with various rainbow colors in the sunshine. Speaking of sunshine, for several hours around mid-day the weather was wacky --- it rained, the sun shone brightly, it sleeted, it was cloudy and cold, it was warm, it snowed little white pellets of "graupel". I kept putting on extra clothing to keep warm, and then a few minutes later, removing it because I was too hot. Strange.



A rare occurrence of a "hanging cluster" of wavelite xl balls. Unfortunately, xls were covered with quartz sand which was impossible to remove.

By 2 pm, the number of collectors remaining in the quarry had dwindled to less than ten. Rich and I decided to move to the backside of the ridge behind the quarry to the wavellite pit, figuring that the big crowd there was gone. Katie in her small car and another two men (can't remember their names) from the Chesapeake Club in their full-sized pickup followed. Thankfully, the long and very narrow road to the pit had been cleaned up and widened by removing the encroaching vegetation along the sides. There was another collector at the pit when we arrived --- so a total of four vehicles were now parked in a line blocking the road at the pit.

The quarry owner had mentioned at the morning safety briefing that they had recently dug out the pit. Wow! It was twenty feet deep and there was wavellite laying all over the place. I could see where collectors earlier in the day had sorted through their finds to keep the best three specimens, while leaving the rest in piles. Anyway, it was hard to choose only three. Since most of the loose rocks were covered with red clay, I asked Rich if he had any extra water in the truck. Yes. He brought out a one-gallon plastic jug of it. I put about half into my bucket and climbed down into the pit and, hoping to uncover some hidden wavellite, I began scrubbing off the red clay off rocks that might have some wavellite under the clay.

Bingo. I found a couple of keepers, including one that contained a 3" x 3" area of perfect, dark green round wavellite crystals. There were 20 or so crystals that ranged from 1/4" to 1/8" in diameter. The other keeper was a rare 2" x 1" x 1" "hanging cluster" of wavellite balls that were totally complete all the way around. It had one small contact point where it had been attached to the pocket wall. Unfortunately, the cluster was covered with a hard quartz sand that proved impossible to remove. Nevertheless, it serves as a prime example of what potential is in that pit because if the coating had not been there, it would have been a very valuable specimen. I also found a large rock covered on one side with a thin coating of green wavellite and a few scattered wavellite balls. Later at home, I broke this specimen while trying to remove some of the matrix. The rest of the folks had some success as well and everyone took home some wavellite specimens.

We decided to leave about 3:30 pm, but we spent the next 30 minutes shifting vehicles around the first guy's car and then turning them around, so we could drive back out the way we came in. It was a challenge. Rich and I then took the truck out to the quarry office, hoping to find a water hose to scrub off some of the mud that had accumulated on Rich's truck. But --- no hose. So, Rich parked the truck in a large, nearby water puddle and we took turns scrubbing off copious amounts of gray limestone mud and crushed rock.

What a day it had been. We found lots of rocks and drove about 400 miles in the process. And the price of gas? Well, the pump total at final fill-up was amazing. No one ever said rockhounding was free. But overall, the day was worth every penny. I hope you will be able to join us on our next field trip.