

“An Old Friend Revisited” --- Trip Report for Morefield Mine April 16, 2022 by Dave Lines



Only about 50 people showed up for the Fund raiser.



Amazonite finds/purchases

As many of you may know, the Morefield Gem Mine in Amelia, Virginia has been in a “for sale” status for over ten years. Since the late 1990’s, Sam Dunaway (a semi-retired mining engineer) and his wife Sharon had actively mined the complex pegmatite for gem quality amazonite, topaz, beryl, mica plus many other minerals and spread out the mined material for everyone to collect. They were wonderful hosts to busloads of Virginia school children on weekdays and opened the mine every Saturday to the public. Both the owners and the mine were beloved by thousands of rockhounds of all ages. However, despite being world famous --- an actual section of the mine is displayed at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington --- the Morefield has not been sold yet. And the State of Virginia has now required it to be placed in “temporary cessation” --- meaning it will be left intact but sealed up.

This winter, Sam Dunaway mentioned that they were going to have a “rock fundraiser day” at the Morefield sometime in the Spring to both reduce as much rock as possible on the property while raising money to prepare for the mine shutdown. In March, Sam sent me a “flier” which I emailed to our members as well as to many of the other local rock clubs in our area. The event was scheduled for Saturday April 16th from 10 am to 6 pm. The flier emphasized that all items would be priced for sale, but there would be “no digging”. As it turned out, digging was allowed, albeit in a different way than in the past.

Our club had not been to the Moreland since 2012 except for a single visit in 2015. So, in order to support Sam and Sharon, I decided to attend the “fundraiser”. But no one else from our club wanted to go. Perhaps it was because of a competing trip the same day to Odessa for petrified wood. Maybe it was because it was Easter weekend. Or maybe it was because of the “no digging” restriction. Anyway, people had other plans. Unfortunately, not very many people showed up. When I arrived at 9:30 am and proceeded to drive in, I met “Nicko” who said Sam had told him to stop folks at the gate until 10 am. I went in anyway and after giving Sharon some daffodils and Sam a large, sweet potato (12 pounds) (another story), I offered to help them with last minute preps.



Rock pile behind shop -- \$1/pound



Folks started collecting at the stockpile early in the day

Behind their shop was a large rock pile of miscellaneous, but interesting, rocks from all over Virginia. I noticed petrified wood, unakite, and numerous others piled about two feet deep. There was a cardboard sign --- "\$1 per pound". Judging from the tree growing out of the center, that pile had been there a long time. I saw another sign for \$1 per pound for the rocks near the rock saws. There was also a sign on a 2-foot diameter boulder of amazonite "this already sold to Joe". I walked down to the mine with Sam where he posted another sign "\$10/pound for amazonite" above the huge pile of stockpiled material from down in the mine. There was another sign there "\$40 per 5 gal bucket --- no highgrading". Sam said his intent was for people to take a bucket of Morefield mine-run material home to sort through and if they just high-graded the amazonite, it would cost them \$10 per pound.

By this time, people were already arriving at the parking area, so I left Sam while he drove his truck back up out of the mine area. I grabbed a cardboard box from my truck and headed to that rockpile behind the shop where I selected 30 pounds of petrified wood. Then back into the shop to pay for my wood and to see what else Sharon had for sale. I purchased a large pink with black webbing cabochon which was inside a small plastic zip lock bag on which was hand-printed "Rhodonite, Fluvanna, W.B. 92". Bingo! This was a cab made personally by Warren "Bill" Baltzley of rhodonite which he had mined at his rhodonite claim near Kidd's Store, VA. Bill Baltzley was the former owner of the Morefield who developed it for a recreational mine. At one time, he also owned/leased several other area mines including the Rutherford. The cab, in addition to being beautiful, represented a neat bit of history.



Amazonite priced by the piece in the shop



Ever-smiling Sharon writing up sales receipt.

The shop had numerous display cases full of pre-priced amazonite, mica, Rutherford cleavelandite, custom made jewelry, and various Morefield specimens. I left and took my purchases back to my truck and snapped a couple of pics including one overlooking the stockpile area down at the mine. Several people were already there finding specimens. I picked up my bucket, a brush, heavy gloves and a foam rubber pad to kneel on and headed that way. Immediately, I met a friend Bernard from the Lynchburg Club who showed me a 3" x 1" diameter piece of topaz which looked clear and flawless to me. He had just found it in the stockpile area and had paid for it in the shop for the incredible price of only \$12. Amazing! I congratulated him and hurried down the path to the stockpile to look for some more. I picked a spot near Andy Dietz and his wife Chris and started digging. I stayed right there for the next four hours digging with a piece of rock (no tools allowed). I tried to select only the darkest, deepest blue-green, best colored amazonite. I also kept looking for topaz. I found numerous pieces of white opaque massive topaz, some of which I kept and some of which I gave to others there.



Mica for sale in shop



Rutherford and Morefield specimens -- plus other stuff.

It was *really fun!* It was all about the hunt and the thrill of discovery. I have never found or even seen so much amazonite. There were dozens of complete mica crystals. I gave away to Andy and the others most of what I found. I tried to keep only the best. This was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It was like a banker letting you into the vault to take what ever treasures you wanted --- with the significant difference, of course, being that we had to pay for what we found. Therein lies the rub. People were ecstatic while

digging, but at the end of the day, there were a lot of hard decisions to be made deciding what to keep when they realized their 5-gallon bucket had \$500 worth of material in it.



Many folks had fun collecting from the stockpile at the mine.



Amazonite was buried everywhere throughout the stockpile.

When I left at 3:30, there was still over half of the pile that was untouched. There were also other piles that people had barely looked at that were for sale for \$1 per pound that I did not have time to examine. Some of that material had been in the same piles for 30 plus years. Who knows what Bill Baltzley put there? There was also a long row of Fluvanna County rhodonite still left where Bill Baltzley put it in the late 1980's --- all black on the outside. One of Sam's helpers (Nicko) said it was solid pink on the inside. Pieces ranged from 1 to 3 feet in diameter. It was very heavy material. No prices on it, but another cardboard sign said: "everything for sale --- price negotiable with Sam".

There was also a rumor going around that Sam will have another sale in the Fall --- maybe open to the public? That would be great. I hope it will happen --- for the sake of those who missed this one. Until then, I hope you can join us for some other field trips --- they are all fun.

*If you would like to learn more about the Morefield --- its fabulous history, past owners, the 80 minerals found there --- go to their website "morefieldgemmine.com".