

Contrary Creek, Mineral, VA ---Gold, Garnets, Magnetite and Pyrite

Trip Report for July 22, 2023 by Dave Lines



July is summer and it is supposed to be hot. The practical solution to staying cool on a summer rock trip is to do it in the water. Gold panning in Contrary Creek fits the bill. Yes, the water quality in the creek is less than ideal. It stains everything a shade of orange. Many of the rocks are orange, too. But not to worry because most can be cleaned with Iron Out. And the rocks you dig up are usually not stained anyway. But I am getting ahead of myself.

We were supposed to meet at 9:00 am, but several folks were late due to various reasons (one person ended up in Culpeper at the 4029 Zachary Taylor Highway address because he forgot to add "Mineral, VA" to his search.) Our safety brief was sporadic. All nine of us (Renee, Rich, Dave, John S., John M., Kenny and Lara, Mike S., and Richard T.) stayed safe.

Four (4) of us carpoled in Rich's truck – that had saved 3 vehicles from each wasting gas for the 75 miles each way from my house to Contrary Creek. Carpooling is more fun anyway because we get to know each other better during the trip.

The weather was actually a bit cooler than it had been during the previous week. Temperatures started off around 70 degrees and rose to the low 80's. Very pleasant.



The creek itself was about the same as always. The water level was relatively low and there were a lot of pine trees that had fallen over into the creek up stream of the Rt 522 bridge.



We spread out, each person picked a spot, and started digging small holes and panning the gravel. I was fortunate – I hit a layer of black gravel about a foot deep that John S. said looked good for gold because it was virgin gravel that had not been disturbed in a long time. He was right --- I found six (6) small pieces

(specs) of gold in my first 2 pans. Eureka! I also found small magnetite crystals (octahedron shaped), and small almandine garnets (dodecahedron shaped). Also, I found a few pieces of massive magnetite (proven by testing with a magnet) and one piece of mica schist with a small garnet embedded.

At 10:30 am, I took a break and walked around to check with each of our group and take some pictures. John S. was the clear leader of gold panning. He had panned over 100 pieces of fine gold compared to my 5 pieces. Wow. Members of the Tidewater Club had also arrived and were panning for gold and garnets immediately downstream of the bridge.

I returned to my prospect hole about 11:30 am, and invited several others to dig for gold there, but the gold layer seemed to have petered out. When John S. left, he offered me his hole, which I tried for both gold and for garnets. Not much luck there either due to a large amount of pyrite clogging up my gold pan each time. A suggestion for finding garnets: Don't use a small mesh classifier to sift the gravel before you pan it. If you do use the 1/4" classifier, all garnets larger than 1/4" will be excluded from your pan.

The Tidewater club members left about noon. Our group mostly left at 1:00 pm. The four of us in Rich's truck remained until 2 pm. We filled in all our holes and left the place looking pretty good. Just as we were leaving a family of four (dad, mom and 2 kids) arrived and started panning. About the same time, three guys arrived and started panning. It has become a popular place to find some rocks.

After we departed for home, we passed a large area that looked like it had been recently timbered. We noticed that there was a lot of bare ground – always a good place to check for rocks. Since there were no "Posted" signs, we turned around and drove onto the property to see if there was anything there worth collecting. If there was, we planned to track down the owner and get permission to collect there another time.



As it turned out, the ground was covered in garnets up to 1/2" in size that had weathered out of the soil. Now we will have to find the owner and try to get permission to collect there. It looked real promising.

Overall, we had so much fun, I decided to hold another trip to the creek on August 5th. Hope you can sign up and join us.