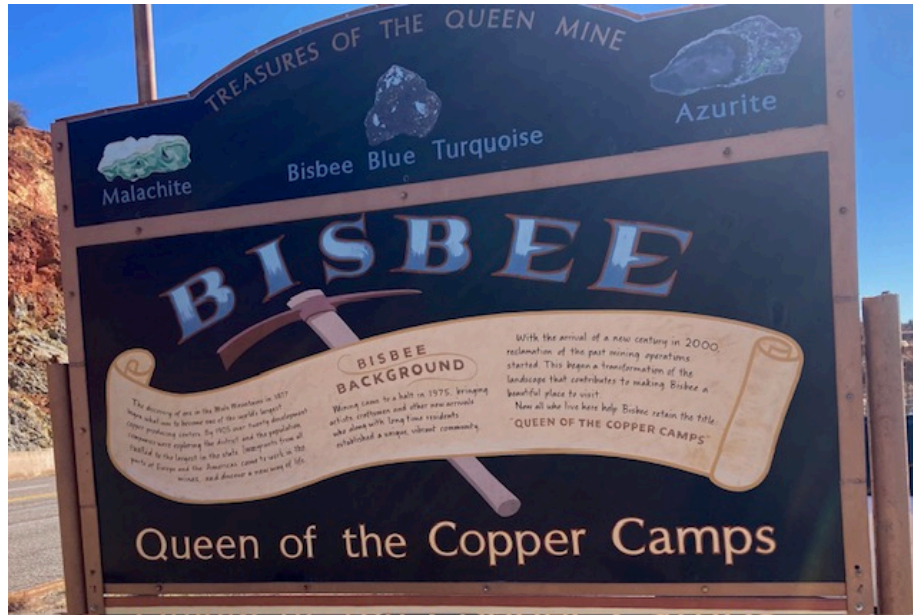


“Sugar Plums Dancing in My Head” --- Our Arizona and California Trip Feb-March 2024

by Dave Lines



Have you ever dreamed about finding great rocks? Beautiful rocks? Lots of them? What if you knew right where they were --- but you lived too far away to get them? 3,000 miles away? It is sort of like the night before Christmas. Sometimes that is me the night before a long trip --- which is really supposed to be about visiting family and old friends --- but hopefully will allow a little time to fit in some rockhounding. □ We arrived in Phoenix on Tuesday (Feb 27th) and drove 200 miles southeast through Tucson to the little town of Sonoita to stay with dear friends who had lived in La Plata (MD) for many years. A full schedule of non-rockhound activities was already planned by our hosts each day of our 3 day/4 night visit. After some tactful re-negotiation by my wife, I had a chance to rockhound and the use of our rental car for the “middle” day of our visit. I left their house on that morning and headed to the town of Bisbee.

Arizona calls itself “The Copper State” --- for good reason. According to Google, Arizona has been the leading copper producing state for over 100 years and currently mines 68% of all USA copper. And Bisbee is one of its copper mining towns. It has plenty of history and boasts many mines. The most famous is the “Copper Queen” which still conducts underground mining tours for visitors. The Bisbee Museum is a great place to see some world class specimens of copper minerals like azurite, malachite and chrysocolla as well as hundreds of mining relics. Evidence of mining is everywhere.



The “Lavender Pit” is a huge open pit mine (named for the mining engineer in charge of mining it) just south of downtown. A little further is the company town of Warren which was built to house the miners. The town is dwarfed and partially surrounded by huge, mountain-sized piles of tailings. Most of the homes in Warren are very modest, but a few are very large mansions which sit high above the rest of the town as homes for the mining big wigs.

Modern mining methods are also visible outside of town --- for example, new plastic lined leach ponds. Reprocessing the old tailings --- especially for silver, gold, and other minerals (over 300 minerals have been identified --- is now feasible. And nearly everything is behind tall chain link fences festooned with “No Trespassing” signs. That is a

problem for casual rock collectors. I solved it by locating the old railroad beds where the tracks have been removed. Outside of town, these track beds extend for miles and miles.



(closeup of rocks on bed)

Interestingly, these were not posted and were easily accessible. Within a few minutes of searching, I found plenty of green malachite coatings on many rocks all along the edges of the old rail beds --- especially where the roadbeds cut through solid rock as well as where the beds were built up across depressions and gulleys. There was also an abundance of slag in the railroad beds from historic smelting operations. Some interesting finds included pyrite, chalcocopyrite and iridescent hematite. I had fun looking. On the way back to our host's house I stopped in the "A to Z Rock Shop" (cool name for an AZ rock shop) in the town of Sierra Vista.



(closeup of malachite)

I spent about 30 minutes talking with the owner and showing him my finds --- who was surprised and pleased that I had found a place to rockhound and had found so much. I also purchased a few Bisbee specimens from him. I especially like the native copper piece with its interesting botryoidal crystal pattern.

Fast forward to Saturday March 2nd, when we flew to California to visit Ann's sister in San Luis Obispo (SLO) which is located near the coast halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. On the first full day there, we took a long sightseeing drive through the mountains north of SLO and then downhill toward the ocean. The well-above-average rainfall had turned the brown mountain pastures to bright green. The scenery was very picturesque and stunningly beautiful. After a delicious lunch in Cambria, we went to nearby "Moonstone Beach" where I spent about 30 minutes searching for moonstones (not feldspar moonstones, but translucent, well tumbled, almost clear agates). The only ones I found were very tiny (less than pea sized), but pretty. I also found some other polished rocks of mostly jasper and chert. No jade, but I was looking.



(green hills near Cambria)

The next day, I took the rental car and headed north along Highway 1 to where San Simeon Creek entered the ocean. Thanks to the many strong storms and abundant rainfall this winter, the creek had flushed out lots of rocks as well as logs. I chose the beach on the north side of the creek which had rocks showing everywhere. There were a lot of human footprints in the sand showing that I was not the first person there. Some people had piled up abundant driftwood. Someone had spent a great deal of time meticulously constructing a large 10-foot diameter "smiley face" out of rocks. Not just any rocks placed randomly, but color coordinated rocks all carefully laid perfectly. But I digress.



(The "point" which is the barrier to the beach where the "deedeite" is found is on the middle left side.

Nearly all of the rocks were rounded and had been tumbling in the creek for eons. The best ones were smooth and solid without cracks. Because it was also low tide, I was able to wade in the shallow edges of the creek where I could easily spot some outstanding colors in the clear, flowing water. I spent several hours looking carefully and choosing the most solid and best patterned specimens. The jaspers in that area of the country have many variations. Some jasper was "brecciated" which meant the rock had been "intruded" by molten quartz or other molten material to create "broken" pieces of jasper with sharp jagged edges placed in a matrix of white quartz. Other jasper had been formed in an evenly "mixed pattern" of 2 or more colors --- common jasper color combinations were "yellow and black", "orange

and black”, and “red and black”. Some jaspers had been formed in “layers” --- a dark maroon was common. Also, jasper (and chert) in various shades of green was there. There were jaspers with single thin “lines” of white quartz across the face. Sometimes the white lines formed an intricate pattern. I also found some translucent agate. All were interesting. They will make gorgeous cabs and spheres. I could have collected literally tons of good rocks, but I had no way to get them back to Maryland except by suitcase or US Postal Flat Rate boxes (which at \$18.40 per medium size box can get pretty expensive).



(my finds from both San Simeon and Pico Creeks)

After eating lunch in the car (and sharing some with an expectant seagull), I drove to another area just north of San Simeon where Pico Creek flowed into the ocean. This beach was like the first area --- lots of colorful rocks showing and plenty of driftwood including big logs and tree limbs. Collecting was just “okay” at this location, but not as special as where I had been. After an hour there, I returned to SLO.

The next day, I went south --- first to the town of Avila where I planned to look for “deedeeite”. Deedeeite (Google it) was named for the lady (DeeDee Magri) who discovered it. She is a member of one of the local rock clubs in that area. At first, the other club members laughed at her finds when she brought them to a club meeting --- until she shined a shortwave UV light. Wow --- her rocks fluoresced a bright “ivory” white with some pastel blue. The material is a brecciated rhyolite that has agate or chalcedony as the “filler”. In daylight, the rock is rather drab --- a mix of gray and tan, with specks of black. It looks a bit like oatmeal. It polishes well, too. Anyway, this rock has only been found on one small section of the beach at Avila and this area is accessible only around the tip of a protruding point for a short interval at low tide. I showed up exactly one hour before the predicted low tide wearing boots about 10 inches high.



(Pico Creek beach also had lots of rocks to choose from)



(abundant rocks on San Simeon Creek beach)

It was not enough boot. I waited for about 15 minutes while I watched the pattern of waves trying to figure out when I could scoot across about 20 yards when the water was low enough. I finally took my chances and ran across one of those times --- and hoped the tide would continue to fall so I could get back again.



(logs and driftwood at San Simeon Creek)



(The "expectant seagull" waited until I fed it.)



("smiley face" made of rocks at San Simeon Creek beach)



(a windsurfer did his thing while I looked for rocks.)

Meanwhile I had that small portion of the beach to myself. Near the upper edge of the beach, there were plenty of rocks ranging from fist sized to as big as a basketball. After I found my first piece of deedeite, it was easier to see. Anyway, I collected about 10 pieces and decided to leave because the tide was beginning to come back in.

I continued my trip south to Nipomo where I visited Wes Lingerfelt --- my rockhound buddy of 20+ years. I had emailed Wes and his wife Jeannie about a month before to tell them I was coming to CA. Wes greeted me with a hardy handshake and a big hug. It had been five years since my last visit. When I showed Wes my deedeite finds, he brought out a UV light and, after checking them for fluorescence, declared that I had found some good ones. Then I spent the next several hours following him around talking while he was simultaneously cutting various rocks on 3 different rock saws and doing the initial rough grinding of a new 4-inch sphere on one of his four sphere making machines. I peppered him with questions the entire time about the finer points of sphere making --- which is clearly his specialty (see "SphereHeaven.com"). Wes, who is 7 years my senior, is very generous and kept giving me cut offs of various rocks as we went back and forth between the machines.



(one of the "jigs" Wes uses to make the 45 degree cuts.)



(the jig holding a cube of "Cotton Candy" rock preparing to cut off the edges at 45 degrees.)



(another type of jig used to hold thick slabs or "end pieces" that need to be cut in order to utilize more of the rock.)

I showed him pictures of my two rock saws and asked his advice about the style of the jig he makes for cutting the 45-degree angles required for turning a rock "cube" into the "soccer ball shape" that is needed for the first stage in a sphere making machine. He gave me several jigs. We had a great reunion. He is brilliant and very innovative --- after all, he is a retired rocket scientist from Vandenberg AFB. Reluctantly in the late afternoon, I left and returned to SLO. It was a good visit.



Ann and I returned to MD on March 6th. Three (3) of the six (6) Flat Rate USPS boxes of my AZ and CA "rock finds" were already sitting on our back porch when we arrived. As of this writing (March 12th), I have received 5 of the 6 boxes --- one more is still "in transit".



(gas prices in CA are ridiculously expensive.)