

Chestnut Ridge, VA Trip Report March 24, 2024

Report by Dave Lines; Pictures by Dave Lines, Maria Nopo, and Tom Zunino; Additional Comments by Maria Nopo and Tom Zunino

“No pain, no gain” is the short version of Chestnut Ridge. The long version? Well, for starters, it is a 200 mile drive from Southern Maryland, then (if you are in shape) a 1-1/2 hour strenuous hike over rocks and logs straight up a steep mountain, then 3 or 4 hours of digging including deciding what to take and what to leave, then a 1+ hour hike back down carrying too much weight, and finally another 200 mile drive back home. It’s not for sissies.



The seven (7) Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club members (Irma U, Maria N, Tom Z, John M, Dave L, John S, Rich S) who went this time were the fittest group I have ever guided up there in the past 26 years. We met at the Burger King in Staunton and caravanned for an hour to the yard of a friend’s property at the foot of Chestnut Ridge. Upon arrival, the outside temperature was 28 degrees F. When we dressed for the hike, I recommended wearing light clothing and carrying the rest until we reached the top because we would all soon be sweating despite the current chilly temperature. I wore a tee shirt --- and put my coveralls in my backpack. We reviewed the safety precautions --- be careful hiking, the dry leaves on the ground were slippery, choose your footing carefully, rest frequently, use common sense, don’t roll rocks downhill --- and warn others if a rock starts rolling. Then I requested all holes be refilled and covered with old leaves and forest litter --- the goal was to leave the area looking untouched. Likewise pick up any trash. I reminded everyone that this was National Forest property and we had written permission to collect quartz crystals here and we wanted to keep it looking good. Then we took a group picture and chipped in for a gift card for the property owner.



The very first part of our hike up the mountain.



Shows us about $\frac{3}{4}$ up.

There were no illusions --- the first five minutes was the easy part --- only a 20-degree slope uphill. Then for the next 100 yards, it increased to a 40-degree slope. My old legs began to feel it. The group following me began to string out. I tied bright survey tape around small trees every 20 – 30 yards so people could follow at their own pace. Slowly we made progress upward. Two areas were nearly flat, most areas were steep, others were steeper. We passed the halfway point. Then the $\frac{3}{4}$ -way point. The folks began to get excited. In the brushy areas, John M. helped me move downed tree limbs and dead laurel bushes out of our way. Then we could see the top. Whew! What a climb! When we began to see almost hidden quartz crystals sparkling in the sunshine, people started chattering and spread out. They soon forgot their aches. Wow -- crystals seemed to be everywhere. We moved to the very top around a sheer outcrop of sandstone laced with visible veins of quartz crystals. The path I took was very steep (at least a 60-degree slope). I noticed a 12-inch diameter tree on the side of that steep area which had fallen and wedged in the top of another tree. I could see crystals winking beneath the upturned root ball and suggested to John M. that he should start digging there.



John S. and Maria on top starting to collect crystals.



Dave trimming a crystal cluster.

He did and was rewarded with some beautiful clusters of clear, undamaged crystals --- probably the best ones found by any of us. We let those who had never been here go ahead of us and see the untouched surface with crystals sparkling all over. It was rewarding to see the excitement on everyone's faces. I tried to point out areas where I thought good specimens would be --- but the best ones seemed to be randomly found. We all settled down into his or her spot and carefully pulled away the old brown (mostly oak) leaves on top and began to remove the dirt. I sifted each scoop of soil with my small screen with $\frac{1}{2}$ " wire mesh. I found crystals in every shovel full. The smallest were $\frac{1}{4}$ " diameter and $\frac{3}{4}$ " long and the largest were 1" diameter and 1- $\frac{1}{2}$ " long. I carefully examined all sides of every rock I dug because some contained clusters of crystals on one or more sides. Another precaution we took was to let the crystals gradually acclimate to the warmer air temperature because the crystals were cold underground. We kept them out of the direct sun. If one held a freshly dug cold crystal in a warm hand, the crystals would instantly cloud up with tiny cracks inside --- a clear crystal would become permanently cloudy. The best crystals were very clear with sharp perfect points. I later found that most of the clusters I found had one or more damaged crystals. I should have moved to another spot, but it was easier to keep digging and finding stuff without losing precious time moving.



John M discovering goodies under the root ball.



Rich in his happy place finding crystals



John S with a beautiful twin

Everyone seemed happy and were finding specimens where they were digging. We all took breaks to eat lunch and drink some water to recharge. We chatted and looked at each other's finds and compared notes. This time together is always one of the best rewards of the trip because we get to know each other better, which in turn strengthens our club. We all continued to collect specimens until around 2:00 pm and then began to wrap our finds with old newspaper for protection and pack them up. Then came the filling of our

holes and covering any bare soil with old leaves and pieces of limbs and logs. When we finished, the area where we had been collecting looked like we had never been there. Well done!

In small groups, we then started descending the mountain following the trail we had marked with bright survey tape. The trip downhill is different than the climb up. Uphill is a cardio workout. Downhill is all strength and endurance --- everyone is tired, and they are carrying more weight. [Confession --- I took a big fall when my feet went out from under me and had to put stuff back in my bucket which had spilled out.] I was literally the last person to leave the top. John M. helped me by removing every other piece of the survey tape. I removed the rest as I descended. We left the mountain looking pristine. Back in the parking area, we packed up our vehicles and counted our blessings for a safe and successful trip. After a little help turning the vehicles around, we all headed back to our home. A fun trip.

The following are some comments written by others in our group:



Irma and Maria with first cluster found

From Irma and Maria: “This was our first time going to Chestnut Ridge, and an enjoyable experience. The hike up was difficult but rewarding and we found some really nice crystals. The mountain was somewhat difficult to hike because of how steep it was, but it can be manageable and worth it for the crystals you can find. Everyone was very kind and helpful. Dave recommended places to dig and he marked the trail up the mountain. It was a very satisfying experience, and we left the trip tired but happy with our finds.”



Irma shows both a cluster they found



From Tom: “The trip to Chestnut Ridge was phenomenal! I get out with a few different clubs and must say all of the people I meet from the SMRMC are wonderful. I always feel welcomed and enjoy everyone’s company. I strongly believe it’s the people you’re with that make the trip. Again, thank you for setting up this wonderful adventure. It is very much appreciated.”



Beautiful clusters found by Tom Z