

“If the Weather Forecast is Bad, Just Keep Praying” by Dave Lines



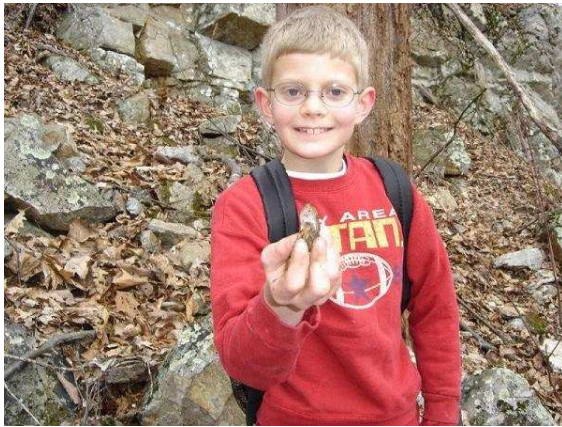
Planning a long distance trip around the weather is a matter of patience, perseverance and praying. Since Chestnut Ridge in Virginia is 200 miles from Southern Maryland and since it was late March and since the weather forecast cycled all week from good to terrible --- the outcome was simply above my pay grade. On Monday the weather guys said it would be cloudy and 43 on Saturday. On Tuesday, it changed to 40% chance of rain on Saturday. On Wednesday, they said 80% chance of rain on Saturday. On Thursday, they said 70% chance of rain and snow on Friday night with a 40% chance of rain all day on Saturday. On Friday morning, the forecast changed again to cloudy with a high of 43 on Saturday --- so we decided to go and an email went to everyone saying to meet at the Burger King in Staunton at 8 a.m. on Saturday morning.

The weather on Saturday turned out to be perfect --- especially for a long hike up a steep

mountain --- cool (mid 40's), cloudy and a calm wind. Thank you, Big Guy in the Sky!!

Eighteen (18)* eager rock hounds from 3 clubs showed up for our (more or less) “Annual Field Trip to *Quartz Crystal Paradise*” --- at least around these parts, it is “crystal paradise”. Plenty of quartz crystals for everyone. *But* --- and there is always a “but” --- you have to hike up over 1,000 feet vertically during a one mile *vigorous* hike (think *Marine Corps* vigorous) over loose rocks, boulders, old logs, fallen leaves and a steep mountain side to reach the best ones.

Despite the challenges, everyone who is determined to reach the top, will do so. The hike up takes anywhere from 1 to 3 hours. [The trip back down is usually faster --- about an hour.] This day, those in the lead --- following Dave's survey-tape-festooned-trail --- reached quartz crystal paradise in 1 hour.



One of those very first club members was 8 year old Christopher. Within seconds, he began picking up crystals. The intensity of purpose displayed by this young man was a sight to behold. Head bent down, eyes focused on the ground, searching carefully for the slightest telltale sparkle. It would make all old rock hounds everywhere grin and nod with knowing approval that the future of our hobby was going to be in good hands. And within a very few minutes, Christopher held up his first big crystal --- a nice clear one --- his face beamed --- his eyes said “Eureka!! I found it!!”

As the others reached the top and spread out to search for crystals, the oohs and aahs increased. The satisfaction and joy of finding crystals was evident in everyone. When the second youngster (Anna) arrived, I sent Anna and Christopher a few more yards further to the very top to search the ground for exposed crystals --- they found lots of them in short order. They were very happy.

But I was not --- because the ground (much to my surprise --- and dismay) had been extensively torn up by a recent unknown person or persons. Across a 20 by 20 foot area there were several holes up to 2 feet deep that were still open and not filled in. There was trash. The bare dirt and rock piles had been rained on several times, but mud and silt had washed down from the area --- and also left the crystal faces easy to spot --- nice for the kids to find crystals, but terrible for the image of rock hounds. This person is not a rock hound. In my opinion, whoever left this devastation is a jerk. I hope they read this.

Here is another message for them: “Don't come back --- unless you fill in your holes, spread some old leaves over your digging area to reduce erosion and pick up all your trash and take it back down the mountain with you. Your actions were reprehensible and could get this area closed to all future crystal collecting.”

For the record, before we departed, we filled in all the holes and smoothed down the dirt and rock piles and scattered dry leaves and old rotten logs and limbs over the entire area. "Thank you" to our group for doing a super job of clean up. We left it looking more like the surrounding woods --- instead of the eyesore that we found upon arrival. Nuff said.

Overall, the crystal collecting for everyone was good --- especially so for the experienced folks who had been there previously. The first timers always find many, many crystals but I am sure that when their items were cleaned at home, there may have been some disappointment because the material looked better on top the mountain. The keys seems to be: (1) keep searching until you find a spot that has whatever you are seeking --- clear crystals, small or large clusters without damaged points, larger singles; (2) be selective and keep only the very best; (3) use a small, stiff scrub brush to remove the dirt and clay from the specimens so you can examine them before you decide to keep them; (4) wrap your specimens well in old newspaper before you take them down the mountain to prevent damage caused by the specimens rubbing against each other.

Safety-wise, there were no accidents, although one club member had some trouble with the return trip downhill because his shoes soles were *smooth* --- as a result, he kept slipping on the dry leaves. The last folks returned to the parking area by 5:30 p.m.. Overall, we had a great trip.



(* Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club members included Joe and Paula, Jim, Rich, Harry and Tina, Steve and Christopher, and Dave L.;
Northern Virginia Mineral Club members include Ted and Anna and Tai (sp?);
Shenandoah Valley Gem and Mineral Society members included Dean, Scott G., Leonard, Jerry, Sue and Sherry.)