

Goin' Back Collecting in Connecticut

Carol King and Jerry Goffin, in their song “Goin’ Back” starts “I think I’m goin’ back to the things I learned so well in my youth.” As a youth, I collected in the Walden Gem Mine in Portland Connecticut. It is there where I first learned about cleavelandite, lepidolite, tourmaline (black, green and red), columbite and beryl. Alas, the Walden Gem Mine is no more.

When planning our trip to Massachusetts, Mary and I researched collecting in Connecticut. Write-ups on the Lapidary and Mineral Society of Central Connecticut (Imssc) listed three quarries that allowed collecting for personal use and educational purposes with permission from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. The collecting places are the Case Quarry in Portland, the Clark Hill Quarries in East Hampton, and the CCC Quarry in Haddam. Time was nearing for the trip, so we rushed our application to collect. A very quick response from Ms. Margaret Thomas, the State Geologist, allowed us to collect on Monday and Tuesday, September 3 and 4. Ms. Thomas was kind enough to email the permission letter because there was not enough time to send the letter in the mail. The letter listed the rules for collecting and warned that we could encounter the state protected timber rattlesnake.

Based on weather forecast, we chose Labor Day, September 3. Our goal was to collect at all three quarries to see if an extended stay at one would be warranted. I also wanted to compare the Case Quarry minerals to what I remember from the Walden Gem Mine. In 2001, we obtained a flat of Walden Gem Mine specimens from the Northern Berkshire Mineral Club rock show. We wanted to compare the Walden samples with the Case Quarry minerals.

The weather was beautiful for collecting so we took the one and one half hour trip from Lenox, MA to Portland, CT to collect at the Case Quarry. Case Quarry is a microcline (perthite – microcline with albite) and quartz pegmatite containing beryl, schorl, spessartine and columbite. Monazite-Ce, the rare mineral pectschekite (UFe(Nb,Ta)₂O₈ only the third discovery world-wide), bismuth minerals and cordierite have been reported¹. Mindat lists 33 valid minerals². Many people have studied Case Quarry including Bob Jones, the Senior Consulting Editor of Rock and Gem Magazine, who wrote his master’s thesis entitled “Luminescent Minerals of Connecticut”³.

We followed the directions we found on the web. We parked on Cotton Hill Road in the Meshomasic State Forest and walked up the hill on the path adjacent to the power lines, Figure 1. On the walk, we could hear the crackling of the electricity from the overhead lines. The literature stated that there are four quarries, but we found only one quarry and the dumps. We scoured the dumps and the Quarry, Figure 2, and Ralph quickly found a small beryl, Figure 3. Mary soon found a green beryl. Ralph also found some brown mica, very reminiscent of zinnwaldite from Morefield. Mindat does not list a zinnwaldite occurrence at Case Quarry. Ralph also found a small muscovite book, pink

feldspar, more small beryl, and spessartine. He also found a micro (.79mm) iridescent columbite, Figure 4. Preliminary examination shows some fluorescence, especially the pink feldspar, which fluoresced green under shortwave UV. Other samples had small areas of green and yellow fluorescence.



Figure 1. Path to Case Quarry



Figure 2. Case Quarry

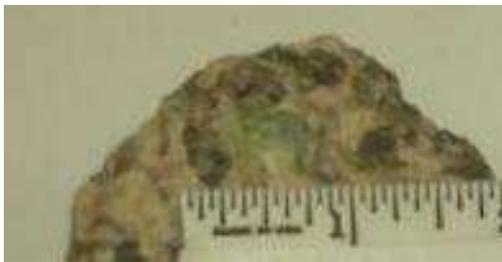


Figure 3. Beryl from Case Quarry



Figure 4. Columbite from Case Quarry
(.79mm long)

Compared to the Walden Gem Mine, the pegmatite at Walden was mostly cleavelandite, where Case has mostly microcline. We did not find any of the tourmaline or lepidolite which was common at Walden.

After lunch, we headed to the second collecting spot, the Clark Hill quarries in East Hampton, CT. The Clark Hill Quarries consist of two collecting spots, the Nathan Hall Quarry and the State Forest Quarry #1. We first arrived at Clark Hill Road in East Hampton because Ralph selected the wrong town. Fortunately, East Hampton was only about 15 minutes away. The directions from the internet listed a Woodchopper's Road, but there was no Woodchopper's Road listed as we traveled Clark Hill Road in East Hampton. A local provided directions and as we arrived, the road was labeled Gadpouch Road. We searched hiking paths off of Gadpouch Road and finally found the Nathan Hall Quarry, Figure 5.



Figure 5. Nathan Hall Quarry

At the Hall Quarry, the dumps had a large quantity of black tourmaline, schorl. Most could be considered massive schorl, but the dumps had partial crystals of schorl, Figure 6. We collected samples of the schorl along with mica. One mica sample had muscovite on the outside and dark mica on the inside. The literature identifies the dark mica as annite, a member of the biotite – phlogopite series⁴. The quarry had massive schorl in the pegmatite.

Seeing it was late in the day – collecting had to be ended by 4 PM - we packed our specimens and left. We did not have time to collect at the State Forest Quarry or the CCC Quarry. Fortunately, we did not encounter any timber rattlesnakes.

On September 9, we visited the Northern Berkshire Mineral Club rock show. One vendor had Connecticut minerals from an old collection. We obtained beryl, both yellow and blue from the State Forest Quarry, Figure 7. We also obtained a clear, gemmy sample of an unknown from the State Forest Quarry. The sample is harder than quartz. It could be clear beryl (goshenite) or topaz. In addition, we obtained a sample from the Strickland Quarry in Portland, CT, now an 18 hole golf course⁵. The sample had whitish beryl in albite. The albite was the variety cleavelandite, more like the samples from the Walden Gem Mine. The vendor had a sample of blue – green cleavelandite, very similar to the cleavelandite at Morefield. We purchased a sample of amazonite and a beryl crystal from Blandford, MA.



Figure 6. Schorl from Hall Quarry



Figure 7. Beryl from the State Forest Quarry

We had a great time collecting at the Quarries. Case Quarry does still have beryl, but they are small. The Nathan Hall Quarry has plenty of schorl for the collecting. We would recommend visiting the Nathan Hall Quarry and State Hall Quarry #1 first if you only have time to collect at one place.

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1. www.lmscc.org/case.htm
 2. www.mindat.org/loc-6792.html
 3. Jones, Bob, On the Rocks, Rock and Gem Magazine, Volume 42, Number 08, August 2012 page 72.
 4. www.lmscc.org/clark_hill.htm
 5. Hartford Courant November 24, 2011|Peter Marteka, Nature's Path & Way To Go