

Mountain Mushroom Festival / Agate Hunt

by: Tina League

April 22-26, 2015 : Harry, Tina, Joe, Paula, Monty and Cheryl participated in the three day annual Kentucky Banded Agate Hunt in Irvine, Kentucky. The agate hunt took place Tuesday thru Thursday and the Gem and Mineral Show/ Mountain Mushroom Festival activities took place Friday thru Sunday.

Each morning a group of 40+ rockhounds gathered at the Board of Education Administration Building in Irvine, Kentucky for registration, instructions and organizing the caravan of vehicles to drive to the collecting site. Our guide and legendary Agate hunter Lamon brought samples each morning to be divvied out to the eager rockhounds. The people that drove the farthest to get to Kentucky got to pick their specimens first. There were rockhounds from all over the world for the hunt. Everyone got several specimens each day and were eager to get to the creeks to look for the elusive Kentucky Banded Agate which contains some of the most beautiful specimens in the world. Hip waders and rain boots were the order of the day due to the historic rains that had occurred in the area during the spring.



On the first day of the hunt in the countryside of Irvine "Where the Bluegrass Kisses the Mountains" the caravan of vehicles parked in the field adjacent to the logging roads that ran along the creek. The roads were in poor condition due to the lack of use during the past year and the overabundance of rain. We had to gather up our tools and buckets and hike the old logging roads, wading thru the overflowing creeks for a few miles to search for agate. Everyone spent the day digging along the side of the creek beds and scooping stones from the water. There were lots of broken pieces of agate in the creeks that displayed the intricate and colorful patterns of the banded agate. We found several "could be great" whole agates to take home and cut at a later date.



On the second day a few trucks were able to navigate some of the rough roads and provide a little relief from the long hike out. Tales were told and agate finds were plenty.

After agate hunting closed for the day, we decided to go to Danville and collect some Geodes before the sun set.

On day three, the water levels had receded enough that everyone got together and built a rock bridge for the caravan of trucks that volunteer rockhounds offered to give everyone a ride to the collecting areas. It was quite a ride! Trucks were packed to capacity (actually- over capacity) with people and equipment. The bumpy ride was almost as much fun as the collecting.

On Friday, we managed to get an invitation to go on a geode hunt at Kings Mountain with the BBGMC. We hunted for geodes along a railroad cut. The geodes were embedded in the walls of the cut and strewn along the ground from sections of the wall that had eroded away. They were formed in a very "soft" material that made them easy to break (a little too easy- many were destroyed). The geodes contained calcite, amethyst, celestine, and a variety of other minerals. Hard hats were a must due to the trains that rolled steadily by during the day shaking the ground and the loose rocks above our heads. We found some very nice specimens and enjoyed "working on the railroad all day"...



Saturday morning the rain made a reappearance just in time for the Mushroom Festival. It did not dampen the spirits of the local residents, and the festival went on as scheduled. We attended the

rock show and were impressed with the magnificent display that Lamon had of his agate collection. We enjoyed talking with the vendors and purchasing a few new specimens to take back home. We walked the streets of the town and visited the vendors at the Mushroom Festival tents. There were plenty of mushrooms to try and to buy and many other crafts and activities to watch. Fun was had by all. We said "goodbye and thank you" to eastern Kentucky and drove home to Maryland that afternoon.