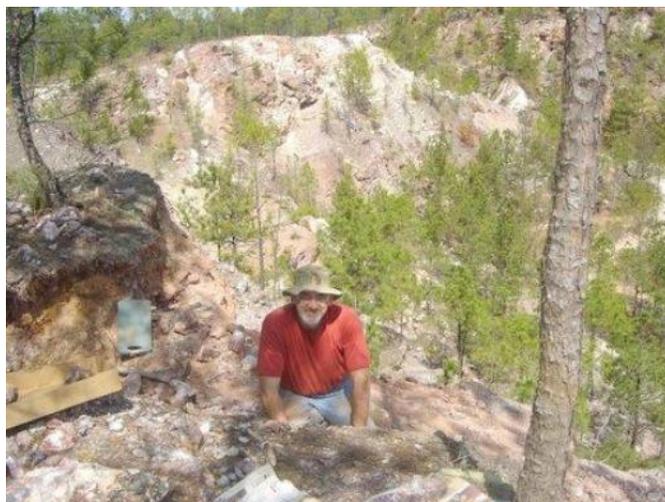


**Trip Report for Graves Mountain, Georgia --- Peacock Rocks and Scarce Rutile** By Dave Lines



“Hey Dave! Scott says you probably need to come over here and see this. Now!”

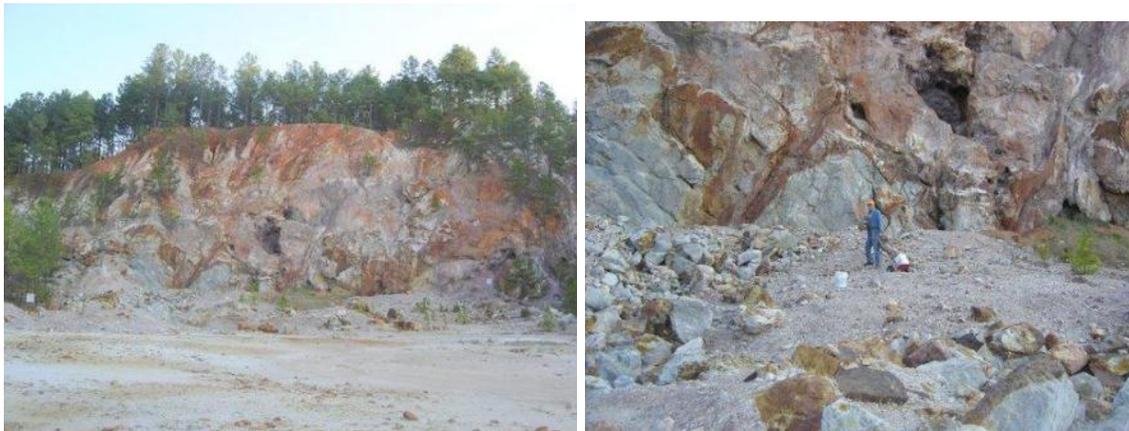
With those words, Bummer really had my attention. I immediately made my way down 30 feet of jumbled rocks and scrambled across and up another 200 feet of a gentle fairly open slope to where Scott and Bummer stood --- staring at a 6 inch diameter hole in the cliff. It was an intact pocket filled with quartz crystals --- all pointing inward like the spokes of a wheel toward the center and covered with beautiful multicolored iridescent hematite. It was exactly what we were looking for.



It had all started a month or so before with a phone call to Junior Norman, the official caretaker of Graves Mountain in eastern Georgia near the little town of Lincolnton. You see, Junior controls the key to the gate to this mountain --- a mountain that has become very famous in the world of rock collecting because it has yielded some of the finest mineral specimens in the United States. The rutile crystals alone from this former kyanite mining operation are the finest in the world in terms of luster, perfection and large size.



The iridescent hematite is spectacular and the better specimens are classic with sharp, brilliant colors painted in a kaleidoscope over every imaginable background shape. There are lazulite crystals --- singles of collectable sizes as well as small embedded ones in white quartz suitable for beautiful lapidary projects. There are 51 different minerals that have been found here. And despite years of intense commercial mining, Graves Mountain remains a wonderful place for rock hounds to find more great stuff.



When I asked Junior if we could reserve the mountain for the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club, he said "Sure! Come on down and enjoy yourselves. Just give me a call a few days before you arrive and we will set up a time for you to sign the waivers and open the gate." That is Junior's typical great southern hospitality.

Then I prepared a detailed Trip Info sheet and sent it out to our club members as well as to about ten other clubs in our area. Eight people signed up from several clubs, but due to various circumstances, only three people actually made the trip

--- Bummer and me from the Southern Maryland club and Scott from the Northern Virginia club.



Following a 600 mile drive that seemed to go by fairly quickly, Bummer and I arrived in Lincolnton in mid-afternoon on Wednesday March 16<sup>th</sup> and went straight to Junior's business office --- "C. E. Norman Wrecking Company", which specializes in auto salvage. As he had told me in a recent phone call, Junior was not there due to being with his wife who was undergoing surgery in Augusta. But one of his men was there, so we introduced ourselves and signed the waivers (I had brought copies which I had found online) and made plans for them to open the gate and get a signed waiver from Scott first thing the next morning.

That evening we rendezvoused with Scott and ate supper together at the local pizza place. We also took home some sub sandwiches to take to the mine the next day. Then we headed back to our motels and got a good night's sleep. Bummer and I stayed at the Cullars Inn which seemed to be the better of the two motels in town. There seemed to be 4 distinct types of clientele staying there --- contractors with pickup trucks full of tools, bass fisherman with big pickup trucks hauling bass boats, high end bird dog owners with pickup trucks which had large stainless steel dog compartments instead of a truck bed --- and regular folks like us.

The next morning we all met at the Hardees next to our motel for breakfast --- but it was well before daylight -- we had forgotten about being further west and the resulting later sunrise. Anyway, we met Junior's man at the gate at 7:30 a.m. and he got Scott's waiver and "donation", then opened the gate for us. We started with a group photo -- 3 guys --- all clean and neat and eager to go digging. We loaded our stuff in backpacks, a wagon and a dolly. We definitely had taken too much stuff --- like a 100 pounds too much. Then I walked to the top of the first road and decided that the steep descent from the road to the floor of the main pit was too hairy. I turned around and went the long way (over a mile) along the lower road to the far entrance to the main pit. It was longer, but safer. An hour later, I finally reached my destination.



The first thing I noticed in the main pit were big changes since my previous visit 8 years ago. Lots of pine trees had grown in the pit near the front highwall. Someone had been using heavy equipment to dig near the left side of the front highwall and had heaped up a huge pile of dirt and big rocks back over their work area. There were at least 15 feet deep of “too big to move” rocks on the pile. No one was going to dig in that spot. And it was right where I had been thinking I would dig this time. No way.

So, like all good rockhounds, we started surface collecting. Right away I found a large chunk of white quartz with the impression of a one inch rutile crystal. I showed everyone what to keep an eye out for. I broke apart the quartz, but no more rutile inside that I could find. In a few more minutes Scott found his first rutile crystal --- laying loose on the surface --- about 1-1/4 inches across and well formed. We kept at it for several hours. Bummer found a couple of 1/2 inch rutiles by screening the soil in front of the highwall. They were decent crystals. Scott found another rutile about the same size as his first one --- it had been inside a hunk of white quartz. I found some nice blue lazulite crystals embedded in gray kyanite-quartz boulders. It was tough material, but I managed to get a few pieces large enough to cab.

After lunch, we spread out to prospect the edges of the main pit. As none of us were having any particular luck, I suggested to Scott that we explore the secondary pit on the backside of the highwall. We left my wagon and used the steep goat trail in the left corner of the pit to climb up to the road along the rim. From there I lead the way to the where we had found iridescent hematite on our previous trip. The spot where I had found quartz crystals covered with iridescent hematite had been enlarged but still looked inviting. We did some test digging and found some broken pieces of quartz crystals and iridescent hematite. I went back to get Bummer from the main pit. And we spent the rest of the afternoon digging in the fairly loose material. Scott found a quartz point about one inch in diameter but neither Bummer nor I found much of anything. We quit about 5 p.m. – thoroughly tired and dirty --- and headed back to our motels to wash up and meet for supper.

That evening we feasted on Mexican food. After our meal, when visited the grocery store and bought stuff for lunch the next day. We hit the sack early and met again for breakfast at Hardees. A lot of the same people were at Hardees who had been there the day before for breakfast. We got out to Graves Mountain by around 8:00 a.m. for a long day of prospecting and digging --- mostly in the

secondary pit. I found a lot of very weathered hematite and one nice pocket with hematite that looked like it had been “dripped into place” in a nice, frozen waterfall pattern. About mid-day, I returned to the main pit to retrieve my wagon and pull it out the long way around to the secondary pit. Bummer went with me because he needed to get his large dolly. It was an arduous pull. We decided to pull only part way to the secondary pit. We were just too tired. One definitely needs to be in good shape to do this trip.



About 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon is when Scott found his quartz crystal pocket. It was a good one for sure. He spent the rest of the afternoon retrieving the contents. He worked much faster than me --- I would have taken a full day to get it out. He did a great job. As it turned out, one of the largest crystals had come loose and fallen to the floor of the pocket.

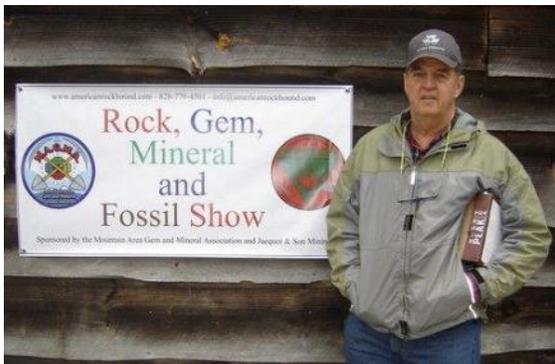
I continued to work the area of hematite pockets and started wrapping the specimens in newspaper about 4 p.m. --- it took me over an hour to wrap the stuff. Meanwhile, Scott felt sorry for me and went out and brought back my wagon to help me carry everything back to the truck. Thanks Scott. That was a lifesaver.

We left the mine about 6 p.m.. After some showers to clean up, we all meet for supper again at the pizza place. We discussed our plans for the next day, but were undecided because of a forecast of heavy rain. We had hoped to visit Junior at his home to see his collection that evening and maybe purchase some specimens, but his wife, who had just completed surgery, was just too tired for company. We understood.

The next morning, we studied the radar and the forecast and determined that the rain would probably hold off until that afternoon. So, with high hopes, we headed back to Graves Mountain for our final day. We decided to remove the shelf above Scott's crystal pocket, but after 3 hours of hard digging and hard rocks, we had found very little to justify continuing. Again we spread out and started looking again in the back pit. After lunch, I decided to collect some "leaverites" of iridescent hematite that were scattered throughout the general area. Surprisingly, I found quite a few good pieces --- nothing spectacular, but with trimming and cleaning, some should be pretty nice. The rain finally came, but it did not amount to much more than sprinkles. Thank you Big Guy in the sky!!

We called Junior later that afternoon and locked the gate when we left. We were some pretty dirty hombres --- Bummer and I had a lady take our picture to prove it.

That evening was our last in Lincolnton, so back to the pizza place for supper. Delicious as before. Over our meal, I suggested returning to Maryland a different way --- via Asheville, NC --- so we could visit the MAGMA rock show there. And that is exactly what we did the next morning. We left early Sunday morning in time to spend a couple of hours at the show before noon. Scott showed up just after we did and only stayed a few minutes, before continuing his drive to Illinois to stop at his parents' house enroute to relocating in Colorado



We found lots of local specimens from North Carolina and the surrounding area. I purchased some nice amethyst from the Reel Mine as well as from Jackson Crossroads. Also various specimens like NC emerald in quartz for cabbing. Saw (but did not buy) some really nice specimens there --- like the \$2,000 deep purple amethyst from Jackson Crossroads offered by Rick Jacquot. The size of a soccer ball with perfect points. Saw another smoky which was larger that had just been sold for \$500. I dickered with a fellow over a North Carolina emerald crystal from the closed Crabtree Mine --- I almost bought it, but after consulting with my son Jeff by cell phone, I decided no because it did not having good terminations on its ends and it did not have a bright luster --- otherwise, it was a dark emerald green-colored crystal about the size of my little finger. I found several other bargains and left happy.

We were home in Maryland by suppertime. It had been a fun and rewarding adventure to a classic location. We were glad we did it.