

## Neither Snow nor Freezing Cold Could Keep Us Away from JMU

by Dave Lines (Pictures by Dave Lines and Bill Curtin)



Dateline: “James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, Saturday, January 7, 2017 at 8:30 a.m. Eastern Standard time --- It is snowing to beat the band! Already 2 inches on the ground and the temperature is 14 degrees Fahrenheit.”

Yet, it did not stop us from trekking the 170 miles from Southern Maryland. Were we crazy? No way!! Because we knew in our Rock Hound hearts that today was going to be “very special”. Every year for the past 10 or so, our club (along with many others) has been most fortunate to be hosted by one of the region’s greatest rock hound supporters ---Geology Professor Lance Kearns. He is an extraordinary mineralogist who has had lots of scientific papers published. Due to his particular passion for Virginia minerals, he has assembled a collection of Virginia mineral specimens that is unsurpassed anywhere locally --- perhaps the world. The high quality and aesthetic beauty of these sometimes one-of-a-kind Virginia minerals is the centerpiece of an excellent mineral museum that he established at JMU. And best part is that Professor Kearns (who is very comfortable with us calling him Lance) *loves* to share his expertise and enthusiasm.



At 8:15 a.m., I was the first to arrive – albeit about a half hour early --- and meet Lance at the outside door of the geology department where he was checking on

the snow conditions. Immediately, he invited me in for some hot coffee and pastries. What great hospitality! We soon started talking about what he was going to do after his impending retirement this year. He is going to be the curator (at least initially) of the *NEW* Mineral Museum --- new? --- Yes, because the current one is much too small. Why? Because the University just received a \$20 million mineral collection from a very wealthy Virginia donor --- Mr. Peter Via of Roanoke. Whoa. This is HUGE! [Aside: When I later told my son Jeff, he knew all about Peter Via's rock collection --- one of the best in the world.] Lance has also agreed to be in charge of moving the museum as well as the geology department to their new location across campus. He is going to be a very busy retiree for the next few years.



And how does all this fit in with our visit to JMU? Well, Lance decided to start downsizing some of the incredible inventory of geology related “extras” that have accumulated over the years. As in every visit in the past, he generously puts out un-needed specimens as well as books and magazines from various donated collections for us rock hounds to “buy” --- some items are pre-priced and some can be taken for whatever we want to give. It is an extremely good opportunity to pick up some excellent specimens and related material that will improve our collections. And this year, in addition to many flats of minerals, he had put out a large selection of publications including some hard to find books.



But first back to our arrival --- by 8:55 a.m., eleven (11) of our Southern Maryland Club members (Paul and Linda, Bill and Debbie, Tim, Lorna, Emily and Francesca, Robin, Rich and me) had arrived along with nine (9) folks from the Montgomery County (MD) club. Lance welcomed us and explained that all the money we donated for specimens would go toward upgrading the mineral museum. Then we took a group picture and, about 9:10 a.m., Lance uncovered the flats of minerals and the “feeding frenzy” began with happy rock hounds selecting bargains of their choice. There was little time to decide – if you wanted

something, you had better make up your mind quickly or someone else would take it. But even after the initial mild chaos, there were many unnoticed, but very good specimens, remaining – if you looked closely. This time, I chose only a few minerals and elected to purchase some of the hardcover books. If I had been better prepared, I would have brought a desired list of Rocks and Minerals magazines which were very reasonable at only \$5 for a full year (6 issues). My choices were a couple of pre-priced books --- the first was a rare copy of “Mineral Resources of Virginia” by Dr. Thomas Leonard Watson, U. VA. Geology Professor, published in 1907 by the Virginia Jamestown Exposition Commission, 618 pages --- truly a treasure. The second was “Gem and Crystal Treasures” by Dr. Peter Bancroft, a table top 488 page volume published in 1984 of beautiful pictures with text about the world’s 100 best locations to collect crystals --- another treasure.



About 10:00 a.m., Lance took us all (we left our stuff safely locked in the Geology Lab) to visit the Mineral Museum. Even though I have visited it many times, this relatively small museum is always fun to peruse. And each time, I see something that I had not seen previously. It is really neat to see people studying the superb specimens in this spectacular mineral collection. Their “intentness” tells me they really appreciate these special crystals and minerals.



After about thirty minutes in the museum, Lance invited us back to the Geology lab where he continued identifying our unknown specimens and answering our queries.

Unfortunately, since I had to leave by 10:45 to attend our son's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday party back in Maryland (a three hour drive away), I missed a full hour of "shopping" back in the Geology lab. Still I very much enjoyed our "Annual Winter Field Trip". This was a particularly momentous occasion as it was our last such trip due to Lance's impending retirement.

I should add that throughout our morning with Dr. Kearns, he spent a lot of time patiently providing thoughtful answers to our many "rock" questions. And through it all, he made each of us feel special and comfortable with him. We could easily tell that he loves his profession. His replacement at JMU will have a hard act to follow. And we will truly miss our annual visit with rock hound's favorite university professor.