

Gold Panning at Tongue Quarter Creek by Dave Lines



It was a beautiful morning --- sunny and warm --- a perfect day to go gold panning in a stream. We all met at the designated rendezvous at 8:30 a.m. at the MacDonald's restaurant in Dillwyn, Virginia. There were 11 of us (Rich, Tim S., Katie, Joe, Ralph, Mike, Asher, Emily, Noah, Isaac and Dave) from the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club and we were welcomed by several members of the CVGP (Central Virginia Gold Prospectors). After brief introductions, we all caravanned south down U.S. Route 15 to the CVGP #1 claim located about 2 miles off the highway in a pine plantation.

After we all stopped our vehicles at a wide grassy place in the red dirt road, I gave all of our signed waivers and "Guest Fees" to our host David Shaw (CVGP Vice President). He then explained the general plan for the day --- we would break up into 3 groups and go to preselected sites along Tongue Creek Quarter Creek which ran through the center of this claim. They had several claims in the area, but this one was special because in it they only allowed non-mechanical means to get the gold --- no dredges were allowed --- only gold pans, sluice boxes and shovels. So this meant that many parts of the creek had NEVER been panned (at least in modern times) for gold. And the claim is right in the middle of the gold bearing belt that stretches from Maryland in the northeast to Georgia in the southwest. This stream has been productive for over 150 years. Their website at "CVGP.net" refers to previous finds there of nuggets ranging from an ounce up to 9 pounds! We split up and followed our guides and spread out for quite a ways along the creek so that we would have less mud in the water and have more room between gold panners.

After backtracking and driving about another mile or so, we arrived at the stream and parked along the road. Tongue Quarter Creek is a picturesque stream about 10 to 15 feet wide with plenty of water flow over a rocky bottom through a valley which is amply shaded with hardwood trees. The group that I was with was accompanied by two experienced CVGP members --- Graham and Tim --- who quickly became our mentors as they taught us how to do the simple,

yet very necessary, steps to successfully pan for gold --- how to set up a sluice box, how to pan efficiently and effectively, how to use a “snuffer bottle”



to suck up and keep the gold we found, where to dig and what to look for. They were absolutely great teachers! In fact, Graham had scouted our location a week earlier and had had good luck finding both gold and even some garnet crystals. He was incredibly patient and generous with his time and energy. He literally shoveled all day for us --- bringing up decomposed mica schist and gravel from the bottom of a hole about 2 feet under water and placing it into a 5 gallon bucket. Then, in turn, the other CVGP member Tim put all this material through a classifier (which removes all rocks larger than ½ inch diameter) --- one trowel full at a time. It was unbelievable what these two hard working gentlemen did for us for 5 or 6 hours straight. And they stayed cheerful and eager for us to find gold the whole time. No kidding --- we were treated like royalty.



We had great luck --- at least with our group. Altogether, I panned about 20 pans – not a large number considering that some people in contests can pan out a pan in less than a minute. Amazingly, I found some clearly visible gold in every pan except one. “Eureka” (which means “I found it!”)!!! Granted, some were very small pieces, but I was quite pleased. Additionally, the decomposed schist contained lots of dodecahedral almandine garnet crystals --- some as large as marbles and very pretty.

I believe that every one of us found some gold. Tim S. spent his entire day feeding material to his homemade sluice box and it paid off handsomely when he cleaned up and he panned out a

wonderful pan of gold. Dozens of pieces of gold in one pan – it really was amazing. And Katie, Rich, Tim S. and I all found some nice garnets in addition to the gold. Near the end of our visit, several others in our club joined us by walking down the creek or driving to our location. Our two youngest members --- Noah and Isaac (as well as their Mom, Emily) --- particularly loved the garnets and did well in just a few minutes of looking.



I cannot say enough great things about the CVGP members that hosted us --- these guys were super --- they gave up their Saturday just to make sure that we were successful and that we had a fun field trip. For example, I witnessed Graham several times panning out a pan and then dumping the gold he found into one of our pans while we were gold panning. Very generous folks. It makes me think of the saying: "We met as strangers and left as friends". We really did.

It was an excellent trip. A field trip that gets one to think seriously about also joining the CVGP group.