

Chestnut Ridge --- Bountiful Crystals of Quartz

By Dave Lines



It seemed like just a few weeks ago that there was snow on the ground --- yet, here were thirteen (13)* rugged souls from the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club taking a one mile Springtime hike up our beloved Chestnut Ridge in Bath County, Virginia in search of quartz crystals. This site yields abundant quantities of small single and double terminated, clear and milky quartz crystals in singles and as clusters weighing as much as can be carried back down the mountain. The size of these beauties ranges from tiny to nearly four inches long --- though the average single crystal is about ½ inch diameter by an inch long and the average cluster weighs only a pound or so. The best crystals are found at or near the very top, although specimens of lesser size and quality (and quantity) can be found almost anywhere along the east side of the mountain.



The last Saturday of March was chosen for several good reasons --- first, the snow had finally melted; second, the pesky insects and snakes had not come out; third, this was the last weekend before Virginia's spring wild turkey gobbler season, which lasts to mid-May; and finally, it was still cool enough to enjoy the strenuous hike. And, anyway, we had historically had experienced successful trips about this same time frame to this location about 10 times in the past 11 years.



This trip was like most of the others to Chestnut Ridge in that the attendees had a broad range of experience --- from almost none to seasoned veterans. As trip leader, I explained in the safety brief that the rules were simple --- no rolling of rocks down on others and if a rock slipped and started rolling, you should holler and let those below you know; I would mark a trail with bright orange surveyor's tape straight up the mountain so each person could climb up and return at their own pace; dress lightly during the hike up and carry something like coveralls or a light windbreaker to put on at the top; take food and water with you; pack out all your trash; look out for each other. Overall, we had a safe trip --- just a couple of minor scrapes and small cuts (quartz is sharp), so the trip was another success from my viewpoint.





The trip up hill always seems so difficult that we all want to quit at some point along the way. The thought...“This is just not worth it” ...creeps into our brains. We sweat; our muscles ache; our feet hurt; our legs feel like rubber; we pant for breath; we want to go faster, but our bodies just won't respond. Never-the-less, everyone reached the top. Some did it in an hour and some took as long as 2 and ½ hours. And each person that did, felt a sense of accomplishment that only comes from achieving a difficult goal.

Once at the top --- quartz crystals seemed to be everywhere. We were elated.

The attendees all found quartz --- lots of quartz --- and many found much more than they could carry back down. Deciding what to keep was the hard part. All the specimens looked good at first, but as the day progressed, we all started to high grade our finds with a more critical eye.





Throughout the afternoon, participants wrapped and packed their specimens and departed at various times. The last die hard rock hounds left the top about 4 p.m. --- and reached the bottom of the mountain about an hour later. After saying goodbye to the neighbor who lived nearby the parking location, our final group of six decided to stop and eat somewhere together. We found an “all-you-could-eat” spaghetti benefit dinner at the Fire Department in Churchville on the way home. It was a great trip --- perfect weather, plenty of finds, full stomachs, and tired enough to sleep like a log when we returned home.

* Attendees included: Dave Lines (trip leader), David, Mike and Sami K., Lorna L., Harry and Tina L., Monty and Cheryl R., Mike and Pat S., John S., and Jessica T..