

Garnets, Schorl, Sheetz, Blue Quartz, Arrowheads and Calico Rock --- All in One Day

By Dave Lines

“It was a dark and stormy night....” begin the words of this story. During one night in the week preceding our August trip, our initial destination in Silver Spring, MD had experienced massive and destructive thunderstorms. The first evidence to us were downed trees and a “missing footbridge” --- which had been 40 feet long and built of strong steel and heavy planks. It was GONE! Pushed aside and smashed like toy. Whoa. Mother Nature can be a powerful force.



Eighteen club members (Dave K and his wife Jennifer, son Mike and daughter; James, Joe, Mike and son Pat; LaRonda; Cheryl; Ralph; Robert and Stephanie; Arnold; Linda, Laurel and Kai; and myself) showed up at the appointed time of 9 a.m.. After a safety brief by the Trip Leader, we posed for a group photo and started down the trail into the woods.



Our goal that morning was to search a tiny feeder stream which had previously been a tranquil brook, trickling over interesting rocks. Alas --- it had been transformed into a scoured ditch of mud and sand. It took us a while to figure out that we needed to shift our prospecting further upstream. When we did take, we quickly found garnets just about everywhere we looked. Granted, they were not pretty --- in fact, they were almandine dodecahedron garnet crystals that had weathered to iron pseudomorphs of garnets. Sizes ranged from tiny to nickel and even quarter sized. Plentiful and fun to find --- especially for the 2 kids and our three new rockhounds. We also found lots of small schorl (black tourmaline) crystals in mica schist, which was also the source of the garnets. The hills around the creek contain almost unlimited quantities of this material --- and it all eventually washes into the creek.

By 11 a.m., we were ready to caravan for an hour to Frederick where we ate lunch at a Sheetz station. After a relaxing lunch and sharing rockhound stories, we again caravanned to our next location --- Point of Rocks, MD.



Here is where my “small world” story begins. The evening before, my wife and I attended an outdoor concert at the La Plata Town Hall in Charles County where we were entertained by the U.S Navy Band group --- “The Country Currents”. During introductions of the various band members, one of them was from --- Point of Rocks!!! Wow! I figured this had to be *divine providence*. So after the show, I introduced myself to that band member --- Chief Petty Officer White --- and explained that our rock and mineral club was going to his hometown the very next morning to look for rocks. He asked “Where?” and I explained that we were going to start on a gravel bar under the Potomac River bridge and then look for a place to collect the famous “Potomac Marble”. Then he suggested we go see a farmer friend of his. Which is exactly what we did after I lead the group to the parking area at the boat access ramp on the Virginia side of the river. After I got everyone else looking for blue quartz, metabasalt and jasper under the bridge, Joe and I went to see Chief White’s farmer friend. And as it turned out, this farmer was *someone who I had previously met* through the Maryland Farm Bureau --- in fact, he had been our guest speaker at our Charles County Farm Bureau Banquet just last Fall. He was not only a genuinely nice fellow, he hated the stuff which he said the locals called “Calico Rock” because it damaged his farm equipment. His farm had *tons* of Potomac marble in the fields and woods and he invited us to take away as much as we could haul! Now is that divine providence or what!?! Thank you Lord!



Beaming with our good fortune, Joe and I headed back to do some collecting of our own at the River. Joe was really anxious to get there because he had found a beautiful triangular flint Indian arrowhead in

the brief five minutes before we went to get permission from the farmer. Back under the bridge, everyone had found plenty of blue quartz as well as other interesting rocks. Our group headed to the farm about 3 p.m., and within 15 minutes, everyone had picked so much Potomac marble, that we spend the next 30 minutes hauling it back to the vehicles. By 4 p.m., we completed our field trip and, after everyone left, I re-located our generous farmer friend and thanked him profusely. Another great field trip!