

Morefield Mine --- Trip #20
Report and Photos by Dave Lines



We always look forward to another opportunity to go to the Morefield in Amelia, VA. Our recent visit on Saturday October 16, 2010 was no exception as 23 (*) from the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club participated in a field trip to the world famous 81 year old gem mine. (* Dave - trip leader, Anna and her son Drew, Bob and Jan, Joe and Paula, Mike B. and his daughter and granddaughter, Gary and Cindy, Ralph and Mary, Steve and his son Christopher, Mike S. and his son Patrick, Polly, Ramon and Ann, and Robert and Stephanie)



Anticipation was high when we arrived at the locked gate at the front entrance to the property. Within a minute (literally!) of arrival, new member Christopher (age 8) began to find small pieces of amazonite in the gravel road and in no time he filled the bottom of a plastic bag with his finds. At 9:30 a.m., Sharon opened the gate for us and we headed to the Shop to purchase our admission tickets and begin searching the dumps.

A few of us (Joe, Paula, Robert and Stephanie) even elected to take the underground tour of the mine as well.

We took a group picture, then went to the mine dump area to orient the new folks and to find possible leftovers from previous days since the mine had been open 6 days a week since late September. Those searching the dumps found some interesting specimens including amazonite, tantalite and some mica crystals that others had missed. The second part of the dump area opened at 11:30 a.m. and results were similar.



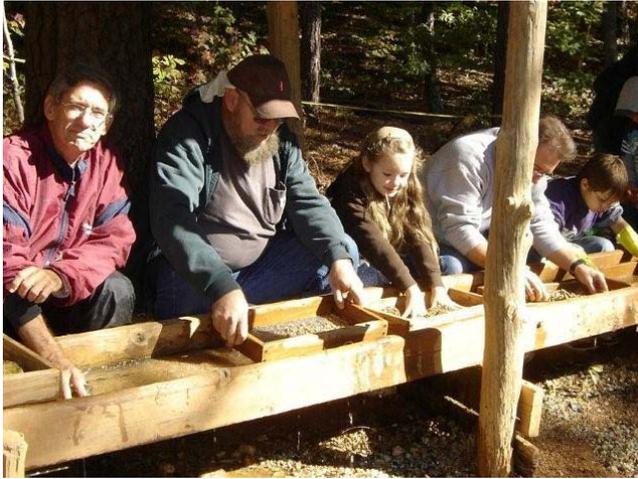
One of the best things at the Morefield Mine is what has been termed as “feeding the pigeons”. Imagine going to a city park and throwing out bird feed --- you are immediately surrounded by a multitude of pigeons which descend and pick up every piece of grain within seconds. It is much like this at the Morefield, when Sam (the owner) scoops up a front end loader full of material that he and his helpers have blasted, mucked out and hoisted to the surface. Sam

then spreads it for all the customers to pick up. It is a frenzy.

And to make it more exciting for everyone --- from beginner to seasoned rockhound --- virtually any of the 80 minerals from the Morefield’s complex pegmatite can be in that scoop. For example, last year, a little kid found a huge egg-sized perfect topaz crystal that came from the new 60 foot level. And later Sam’s wife, Sharon, found an even larger one that is now in one of the display cabinets in the Shop --- it probably weighs a pound! It is gorgeous!

So at 12:30, Sam started up the dozer --- the signal for everyone to get ready. Then his helper moved the crowd back well into the first area of the dumps. Sam then spread the mine material for the patiently waiting rock hounds and gave the signal that it was okay to jump in. And “jump in” is exactly what happens --- everyone leaps in to grab a pretty rock or two and within a few minutes the entire scoop disappears. In about 10 minutes,

the scene is repeated in the second half of the dump area.



The results at first seems to indicate that the beautiful, abundant, deep blue-green amazonite that we found last Spring was gone --- we found very little. We did find lots of pale green massive cleavelandite. And new member, Steve, found two huge mica crystals that weighed several pounds each. As we eventually screened some of the material at the sluice, we recovered some of the more interesting and rarer minerals such as tantalite. And, of course, the sluicers found some non-native

garnets, amethyst, unakite, gray flash moonstone, small clear quartz crystals and mustard colored jasper (or common opal).



At 1 p.m. or so , I took a break and ate lunch, then visited the Shop --- and did some serious purchasing. The rocks I bought were old stock from Bill Baltzley's days as owner of the Morefield --- some nice pink and yellow rhodonite (28 pounds) from Bill's Fluvanna County, VA, property and a great 20 pound chunk of bladed cleavelandite from the Rutherford Mine in Amelia when Bill owned that, too. I also bought a 15 pound chunk of galena (Sam said it could be massive sphalerite) which was interspersed with tiny pyrite crystals. This very heavy specimen came recently from the Cofer Mine near Contrary Creek in Mineral, VA.

Those that took the underground tour were very pleased and took lots of pictures. Maybe they will share some of these with us later.



The final series of spreading of the mine material occurred about 3:30 p.m. and contained more and better amazonite as well as several large pieces of pale green cleavelandite. I was able to grab one of these that weighed 17 pounds, then I re-positioned myself to get into the second spreading area when it was opened.

After the 3:30 spreading, I used a 5 gallon bucket of sluice water in the second dump area to carefully dip and scrub off with a brush, all the dirt covered rocks. After

cleaning it, I was very pleased to see that the large chunk of cleavelandite was really spectacular. In addition to being a translucent pale green, it had beautifully formed bladed cleavelandite crystals that were separated by air gaps. About then, Ralph showed me a smaller piece of massive cleavelandite that was covered with small dark metallic crystals. Gary arrived with a small portable Geiger counter and it ticked very rapidly when he moved it over Ralph's specimen. The dark crystals were "monazite" --- a rare earth phosphate mineral containing the elements thorium, lanthanum and cerium. Thorium is radioactive. I then asked Gary to check my large chunk of pale green cleavelandite because the back side was also spotted with the same small dark, metallic crystals. Again, the Geiger counter ticked madly. I had more monazite --- lots of it. Now, that specimen is *really special* --- but --- according to Wikipedia --- it should be kept away from other mineral specimens.

Under the ownership of Sam and Sharon Dunaway, the Morefield has never failed to please. We have always found something there that is *special* --- whether it is our very first --- or our 20th trip.