

Dixie Mine - Vesuvius, VA

by Rich Simcsak



Beautiful Weather, Good Company, and an Outstanding Guide/Leader

On January 28, 2012, our Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club was invited to enjoy a trip to the Kelly Bank and Dixie Mines near Vesuvius, VA located approximately 5 miles off exit 209 of Interstate 81. This year's freakish weather gave the group of over 20 rock hounds a cool morning and a very pleasant day to enjoy the hike to the base of the ridge where the Dixie mine was located. This hike to the mine was about one tenth the difficulty compared to the trek up Chestnut Ridge, but was a longer, fairly flat hike along a beautiful mountain stream that was only lacking some rainbow trout in its many pools.

The Shenandoah Valley club as well as the Lynchburg and Roanoke clubs were the main visitors for this day with myself as the lone Maryland club member. Dean Hostetter, as the trip guide, provided an outstanding description of the history of the area along with many stories about what the area may have looked like in its mining heyday and the people that worked the mines. This history lesson set the stage for the current situation and the efforts to maintain the beauty of the area. The day was spent in two locations due to the large size of the group and time available to explore. Dean's knowledge of the area

was emphasized with each question he was asked. His research of the history of the mine and the various types of minerals and specimens available was extraordinary. Without Dean at the lead, the trip would have not been as worthwhile to those first timers like myself

The large group met at the Burger King parking lot off I-81 and proceeded with a short ride through rural neighborhoods to the parking area by the Kelly Bank mine tailing piles now covered with many tall trees and small brush. Dean then gave his history lessons and safety briefs. All of what Dave Lines wrote for our last trip to Dixie Mine (March 11, 2011) was still applicable. All needed to be careful around the mine's entrance to prevent chances of falling into the abyss of the mine.

Throughout the hike, QUARTZITE in colors from pink to purple was abundant. The quartzite that many collected was that of a "bubble gum" color. The quartzite should take a good polish and cut well. One would need to show some constraint on the amount one would collect especially before climbing to the mine. Buckets are always heavier on the climb.

Since the trip uphill took less time than the climb to the Chestnut Ridge, we all had plenty of opportunity to sort through the hillside tailings of broken rock for the main prize - ROCKBRIDGEITE - a black matte color stone that when scratched with a pick or other steel implement showed a "pea green" color streak. Dean commented that the stone will leave a black mess during polishing but that you will be amazed at the beautiful black jade shine when completed. Many small pieces the size of dice to golf balls were found. Other stones that were collected were the BRECCIATED JASPER which I left behind and plan to collect on my next trip. I was lucky enough to find a sample of blonde JASPER the size of a deck of cards that was not brecciated. I am looking forward to polishing it.

At the lower elevations of the trip along the sides of the stream, there are hills --- to the untrained eye. These hills were tailing piles where Mother Nature had taken over after Kelly Bank Mine shut down. Near the parking area and across the cold stream was a hill like these and people were highly successful in just scraping the leaves off the surface and finding pieces of MANGANESE nodules. These were plentiful, but we were lucky it was a flat walk back to the cars, because the buckets were definitely heavier due to the dense material everyone fell in love with.

Overall --- the weather was just right for leaving a coat behind and wearing just a heavy sweater --- IN JANUARY in the Shenandoah's! Of the samples hunted, the rockbridgeite was the most elusive. The best part of the trip was the outstanding company of the other clubs and especially the leadership and history lessons given by Dean! My special thanks to Dean for making it more than a hike to a collecting site. The stories told gave each person a vision of how busy the site was at the turn of the 20th century.

Would I return? --- "h, e, double toothpicks yes" I would. But I would get a motel room at the I-81 and I-64 intersection in Staunton to avoid the eight hours of driving in one

day for my situation. Next time, I plan to get more quartzite and some of the brecciated jasper and try some tricky polishing of the mixed material.

For more details and pictures of the other Dixie Mine trips, re-read the previous trip report for March 11, 2011 on our club website www.SMRMC.org.