

“An Inside Field Trip to JMU” by Dave Lines

Despite a cold morning with ground already covered with snow, we were able to bring home some fantastic mineral specimens as well as books and equipment --- and we did not have to dig in the snow to find them!



Upon our arrival, Dr. Lance Kearns, of the James Madison University Geology Department, met us ten Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club members (Dave, Paul and Linda, Al and Carole, Polly, Mike B., Marco, Lorna and even Sandy) promptly at 8:30 a.m. with fresh coffee, donuts and cinnamon rolls.



Wow --- where else can a rockhound go on a field trip and receive the royal treatment from the host. Dr. Kearns is truly an asset to rockhounds everywhere in our area.

He had a huge selection of fabulous mineral specimens for sale at bargain prices. How can you complain when he asks for a donation of any amount for a rock?

Because all the money received goes directly to purchase specimens for the JMU Mineral museum, we were generous in our donations. Still we got some super deals.

Polly bought a stereoscope microscope for \$150 --- a \$600 value at least. Hard to find old copies of “Gem and Mineral” magazine were offered for \$10 per year for one full year --- 12 issues that individually sell for \$10 or more. Have you heard of the turquoise crystals from Lynch Station, Virginia? --- there were several specimens for sale of Bishop Mine turquoise crystals --- the only place in the world where they were found until recently --- still rare. There was visible gold in quartz in one hand sized specimen that I overlooked until

Mike snagged it. What a great specimen!! And Lorna picked out a dinner plate sized (that was ½ inch thick) sheet of native copper from Michigan for a fraction of its retail value. Everyone was extremely pleased with their finds and many specimens now have new owners who are proud and pleased.



At about 9:30, Dr. Kearns took us all over to the Mineral Museum. For those of you who haven't seen it, it is a real class act. Top quality, world class specimens.

The Virginia minerals collection is superb. Just picture a fist sized chunk of quartz completely covered in brilliant turquoise blue

crystals up to ¼ inch long. Every significant Virginia mineral in beautiful specimens was displayed there. Just spectacular. Another tower display has Virginia trap rock prehnite specimens with all the associated zeolites on brilliant display. Wonderful eye candy for rockhounds. The UV specimens are also super --- every color --- in bright variety. Especially noteworthy was the collection of specimens from the Tennessee Elmwood Mine, which is Dr. Kearns' specialty.



After an hour or so in the museum, we all went back to the Geology lab where Dr. Kearns patiently answered our many questions and spent the rest of the morning identifying our "unknown" minerals with a combination of specialized machines and his vast knowledge of minerals. I found that one of my Morefield Mine (Amelia, Virginia) finds was indeed topaz. But I also found that another Morefield specimen was actually quartz instead of phenakite. Dr. Kearns also confirmed some andalusite specimens for me. Mike B. found out that some of his faceted gems from the Far East were synthetic.

Another highlight of the visit was donating a 48 pound chunk of massive rutile from the U.S. Silica mine near Montpelier, Virginia to Dr. Kearns. About 3 or 4 years ago, Dr. Kearns confirmed the identity of a small piece of massive rutile that I had collected years ago from U.S. Silica. After Dr. Kearns identified the specimen he asked if he could have it as he had none from that location and had been unaware that it occurred there. I gladly gave it to him since I had other similar specimens. This past September while on a field trip to U.S. Silica, this huge specimen was found by Thomas (Tom) Leary of the Tidewater and Richmond clubs while he and I were right beside each other digging out 10 pound chunks of rutile from a small isolated lens in the quarry floor. I eventually traded Tom about 80 pounds of the smaller pieces of rutile for the single large chunk so I could donate it to Dr. Kearns.

Well, mining with a “silver pick” on a Field Trip certainly can be product and fun. Thanks, Dr. Kearns

