

Arizona is the Place to Be (In January!) --- Part 2

By Dave Lines

Friday January 29th --- After an all-too-short night's sleep, my son Jeff and I were up early and off to Tucson by 7 a.m.. Along the way, we topped off with gas and made our first trip to the ATM. We arrived early enough to find a place to park on Congress Street west of I-10. Jeff and I visited several shows along I-10 looking for good deals.



Let me say that from the beginning, I was very impressed with the great improvement in the presentation of specimens by dealers everywhere. There were many superb specimens displayed in well lighted and aesthetically pleasing professional glass cabinets. Lots of "eye candy" at every show and we were visiting at the very beginning of the Tucson shows when the quantity of excellent rocks was at its peak. That said, Tucson is a place where "sensory overload" can quickly become a factor. You see so-o-o much in such a short time that you have difficulty deciding when to buy a specimen because there can easily be a better one at a lower price in the next room --- literally! And the dilemma is that there are thousands of other buyers and collectors eager and willing to buy the same specimens. Also, despite trying to charge items on a credit card (when the dealers were set up for it), running out of cash is a real problem. When I reached my limit at the ATM, I had to go to my bank to withdraw more. But overall, it was a real joy to see so many beautiful rocks in a few days.





About mid-morning, Jeff and I drove to the area near the Executive Inn where Jeff introduced me to several vendors that he knew. They had lots of nice quality U.S. specimens, which I especially like because I primarily collect U.S. minerals, fossils and lapidary material. Very quickly, I ran into a friend that I see every year at the Richmond Swap. He is a dealer from North Carolina who was in Tucson to stock up for the coming year. During our chatting with each other, I noticed some nice older turquoise and silver jewelry. After my friend left, I examined some of those pieces and I ended up making one significant deal plus asked the dealer to put another piece on hold.



Interestingly, during the time while I was dickering with the vendor, another of Jeff's rock friends named Tom came by. It just so happened that Tom was a top notch turquoise expert. He examined the piece and declared it was an excellent value. Further, Tom said it was probably made in New Mexico by Navajo Native Americans in the 1950's or early 1960's --- and he verified that the turquoise in the design was from the Blue Gem Mine in Nevada. It's amazing what people know.

(That evening back in Sonoita, I consulted with our host Larry and recommended that he purchase the piece on hold for his wife for her upcoming 70th birthday the following week. He did. And later he emailed me that the turquoise and silver necklace was a big hit --- his wife loved it! So we were able to help him get something very special for her.)

Next, we went inside the Executive Inn and, after scouting the few dealers there, Jeff bought some HF – 40% hydrofluoric acid --- from a German dealer – to clean specimens. Provided that you follow the safety precautions (because it is a very dangerous chemical), it is really great for removing quartz from certain minerals. Next, we checked out a group of about 30 dealers from Morocco who were set up in a warehouse area behind the Executive Inn. I did find a few good deals there before we drove north several miles to the new location for the “Miners Co-op Show”. There we saw everything from fossils to lapidary to mineral specimens and prices ran the gamut from cheap to ridiculously high. Nevertheless, we found some nice things --- Jeff a 5 pound chunk of African banded malachite and me a nice specimen of California jade.



At 3:30 we drove to the “Tucson Hotel City Center” (the old “Inn Suites Show”), where we knew the best mineral and fossil specimens were to be found. Although the parking lot had a “Full” sign, we drove around behind the hotel and found a single space just being vacated --- thank you Lord! Then we started perusing the 400 vendors on 2 floors of the very spread out several wings of the hotel. Sensory overload at its highest! We first visited a California friend and mineral dealer, John Seibel, where we made plans for supper together for later that evening. Then Jeff and I split up because Jeff was trying to negotiate a turquoise deal with a wealthy Chinese gentleman --- I say wealthy because the fellow drove a Bentley. I next checked out some of the many higher end dealers there --- “Collector’s Edge” was the first, with several splendid display cases of spectacular mineral specimens with price tags up to 6 figures. Whoa!



After about 10 more of these high end guys, I stopped at Joe Dorris' (of "Prospectors" TV show fame) room where I met Joe and his lovely daughter Crystal who is the current reigning "Mrs. Colorado". I purchased two specimens of Crystal Peak, Colorado goethite (pronounced "ger-tite") from Joe and promised to return the next day to see their other showroom on the second floor. By now, it was approaching suppertime, so we rendezvoused at John Seibel's room, then headed out to a local Chinese restaurant with John, Jeff, Rick Perry (another rock friend of Jeff's) and me. After an enjoyable and relaxed meal, Jeff and I finally headed back to Sonoita, arriving around 9 p.m. Following "show and tell" with everyone about our adventures, we played more Rummikub before hitting the sack around 10:30 p.m.



Saturday January 30th was more of the same, but with a slower start due. We arrived in Tucson about 9 a.m. and completed the turquoise necklace deal for our host Larry. Then we returned to "Hotel Tucson City Center", or Inn Suites, as everyone calls it. Jeff and I split up again to check out more vendors --- and I took lots of pictures along the way. I stopped in at Joe Dorris' again and looked at their second floor room --- and wow --- found a much nicer and larger Colorado goethite specimen attached to a large smoky quartz crystal --- and priced about half of what I paid for the other two. I discussed it with Jeff and decided to ask Joe Dorris if I could bring back the other two goethites and buy this one. Joe is really a nice fellow and, true to his character, he said yes. We spent the rest of the morning searching the many rooms of vendors --- which truthfully were all brimming with great material of high quality. After lunch together at the food tent in the courtyard, Jeff and I returned separately to shopping.



I bought a large fossil megalodon shark's tooth South Carolina that measured 5-3/4" along one edge. Then I ventured into a room that had lots of specimens of gold --- much of it found in the United States. I purchased a nice showy piece from Nevada priced very close to the current "spot price" of bullion --- usually gold specimens are priced 3 to 5 times higher than the bullion value.

I decided to visit the nearby location for "Fine Minerals International" --- it was mind boggling to see so many stellar specimens in one location. The owner was obviously very savvy --- reportedly, he had purchased a run-down old house adjacent to the front entrance to the Inn

Suites (think "location, location, location") and had completely gutted and remodeled it into a multi-room showcase of expensive display cabinets filled with exquisite mineral specimens of all sizes. According to rumor, the owner's father owns all the taxi cabs in New York City --- so he had plenty of capital to pull this off. Anyway, I purchased a gorgeous specimen of Illinois fluorite --- two colors --- purple over blue with nice color zoning --- completely double terminated with zero chips, dings or bruises. Wow.
(To be continued....)