

## Little Pine Garnet Mine in Marshal, North Carolina

By Dave Lines



On our "free day" during our time at Wildacres, we decided to drive 55 miles to collect red almandine garnets at Little Pine Garnet Mine. Back in Maryland, I had printed out the directions from Mapquest, so we knew how to get there. We left Wildacres before breakfast and stopped at a MacDonald's along the way.



The mine is owned by Mr. Jackie Ball who also runs a business called "Sandy Bottom Trail Rides". We arrived at the office for the trail rides about

9:00 a.m. and I went in to find Jackie. He is a very friendly man who is easy to talk with. We chatted for 15 minutes or so while I filled out and signed the waiver. He said his grandfather purchased the mine in 1913 and Jackie started the trail rides in 1998. They were saddling up some horses while I was there and Jackie said to expect some folks coming to the mine on horses around 11 am. I told him I had first visited the mine in 1996 when his father (Jack) had been charging \$10 per person per day to collect a 5-gallon bucket full. The fee to dig for garnets is now \$25 per person per day with a limit of ½ of a 5-gallon bucket. I had also come again in 1998 and remember meeting Jackie. Jackie mentioned it had rained over 3 inches the previous 24 hours, so I asked how deep the stream was where we had to drive across it with our car on the way to the mine. He asked what kind of vehicle we had - a Toyota Corolla --- and said that would do just fine. Then he gave us a map of how to get to the mine and off we went. Since my last visit the landmarks had not changed, so the gravel road to the mine parking area was easy to find. The stream presented no problem when we forded it --- the water was about 8 inches deep and about 15 feet across. Since Ann planned to explore the nearby town, she dropped me off about 9:30 am and agreed to pick me around 2 pm --- so I would have about 4 hours to dig.



The dirt road from the parking area to the mine was muddy with lots of puddles from the recent rain. Since the rain should have washed off and exposed some new material, I figured that my best chances of finding some garnets was to "surface collect" on the old mine tailing piles which were opposite the mine adit. I was surprised to see the tailing area had increased in size and was bulldozed off flat with a steep side going down to a small stream. I set down my lunch cooler and tools in front of the mine and walked about 30 yards over to the tailings area to search for treasure. The tailings (composed of red dirt, schist and --- yes --- garnets) were well washed off and there were many small gulleys down the steep portions.

I started spotting small garnets almost immediately and concentrated my efforts for the first hour exploring each of the small gulleys. I was rewarded with 20 to 30 garnets which were found both as loose singles and in a green chlorite schist matrix. Garnet sizes ranged from one half to an inch in diameter, although many were broken. Then I checked out the small stream which flowed along the base of the tailings. After some searching, I began to find some better garnets --- mostly embedded in pieces of schist. In the next 20 to 30 minutes, I collected another 15 or so garnets in matrix.

The folks on the horses arrived sometime while I was down in the stream with a 3 pound hammer and a chisel reducing the larger chunks of matrix which had visible garnets to more manageable sizes. They heard my hammering and "appeared" on the spoils pile above me. I spoke to them, but they were not talkative and seemed content to look around the flat portion of the spoil area where I could not see them. I saw nothing of them after that and when I took a break to eat lunch, they were gone. Strange.



After lunch, I went into the mine with my headlamp and tools and explored back to the end at least 100 feet. There had been lots and lots of chiseling into the schist digging for garnets and, judging from the many garnet "crystal impressions" remaining in the schist, people had found some nice ones. I elected not to dig into the wall of the mine as I thought that my efforts would be better spent in other ways. In one of the areas inside the mine, I decided to search through the chunks of schist on the mine floor. That paid off immediately when I turned over a hand-sized chunk that had attached a beautiful 1-1/2 inch unbroken garnet crystal with sharp edges and another smaller crystal penetrating the larger one. It was a very nice specimen which turned out to be my best find of the day.

For the final 30 minutes of my time, I returned to the stream where, for

some unknown reason, I happened to put my hand into a pool of water beneath one of the many tiny "waterfalls" in the stream. I brought up a handful of gravel --- and it contained several garnets. I repeated this numerous times as I explored further downstream. The result was at least another 30 garnets up to 2 inches long. Although most had been "rounded" by tumbling in the stream, it was fun to find so many so quickly.

I packed up about 1:45 and walked back to the parking area to meet Ann --- who arrived exactly on time. After safely crossing the stream on our way out, I called Jackie, thanked him and let him know we were leaving. Then we drove back to Wildacres in time for the "Tailgate Swap" at 4:00 pm. Little Pine Garnet Mine had been a good trip and is definitely worth doing again someday.