

Chestnut Ridge Field Trip Report by Rebecca Henry



On Saturday, March 31, 2018, 14 members from the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club (SMRMC) and Delaware Mineralogical Society (DMS), 10 and 4 respectively, met up in Staunton, VA, to go on a crystal collecting trip at Chestnut Ridge.

We started out at 0800 from Burger King in nearby Staunton, VA, on the relatively brisk spring morning to begin our hour long caravan through the countryside to a farm at the base of Chestnut Ridge, where we had been given permission to park and cross the property into the collecting area. After arriving at the farm around 0900, Dave Lines gave us a safety briefing and outlined the plan for the day.

We had been advised that the trip would be somewhat strenuous and this advice was indeed accurate. We took a group photo at the farm to commemorate the event, and began the steep and steady climb through the woods. If you could imagine climbing on a Stairmaster or Jacob's Ladder machine that does not stop, covered in leaves whilst carrying your collecting equipment, snacks and water, and beginnings of your specimen collection for the day, you have a good idea of the experience of hiking up this ridge.

Fallen leaves and branches were abundant, and not long into the hike we began to see signs of beautiful shiny quartz crystals coating and filling crevices in rocks. We knew we were heading in the right direction!

The first collecting spot was about a 30 minute climb up the lower part of the ridge (about 1/4 mile).

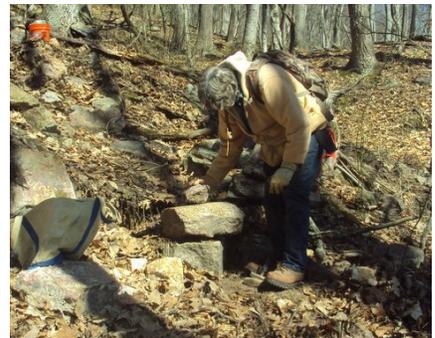


After the group arrived at the "lower" collecting area, which was the planned stop for the day, we spread out and began searching through the leaves and patches near downed trees for crystals and crystal covered boulders. It was quite soothing to hear the gentle, yet chilly breeze in the woods and the occasional sound of rock hammers trimming

specimens. We found clear and smoky single quartz crystals, most about ¼" - 1" in length, as well as the occasional spray. There were even a few double terminated crystals, similar to "Herkimer Diamonds".

Many clusters of crystals are found on boulders or smaller rocks formed of sandstone, some heavily iron stained, and some are covered in a black iron-oxide crust. It's my understanding that some of the inclusions in the crystals may be sphalerite.

Most of the larger rocks covered in crystals remain in their original location because there was no easy way to navigate them off the mountain.



Around noon, Dave advised the group he was going to blaze the trail up to the top of the ridge and spend some time collecting up there. Four members made the hike to the top, 2 from SMRMC (Dave and Wendy) and 2 from DMS (Russ and Rebecca (me!)). I must say, if this trip is held again in the future, I highly recommend making the trek to the top.





The hike to the top is about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the lower collecting location, and takes about 45 minutes to an hour from the lower site. Dave marked the path with flagging tape which we took down on our way back down the mountain.

In addition to the amazing view out across the Blue Ridge Mountains thanks to the lack of foliage on the trees, there are even more crystal covered rocks and as many float crystals as you care to collect. Many loose crystals were found simply by looking under leaves. We did dig a few small holes, sifted some dirt, and found even more loose crystals and some nice crystal sprays. We were careful to fill in our holes and brush the leaves back to as close to their original position as possible in order to leave no trace.

Around 1600 we decided to head back down the ridge towards the farm. Dave and Wendy stayed up top a little after us to gather a few more specimens. The trek down the mountain takes almost as long as the trek up because you are tired and now carrying the weight of your new found treasures. When we reached the parking area at the farm, we compared specimens and shared a few tales of other rock-hounding adventures.



I think I can speak for all 14 members on the trip that it was a memorable and fun day finding crystals and admiring the beauty of Mother Nature deep in the woods of VA.

I can barely wait to go back down to Chestnut Ridge for another day of collecting!

Respectfully submitted and KOR,

Rebecca Henry