

## **California Rockhound Adventures June 21-23, 2019**

by Dave Lines

We flew to California for a wedding in San Francisco and a birthday celebration 200 miles south in San Luis Obispo. In between the two main events, Ann visited with her sister Kit and I went rock hunting for three days.

Previously, I had emailed my rock hound buddy Wes Lingerfelt, so the day after our arrival in San Luis, I drove to his house in Nipomo. His wife Jeannie greeted me with a hug and directed me around back where I found Wes polishing an inch thick round of Arizona petrified wood. Wes warmly greeted me and showed me his work. From my perspective, it looked great, but Wes spotted a scratch and said he needed to start over. But first he led me out to the front porch where he presented me with a beautiful 5 inch sphere of black and white striped granite with ½ inch splashes of pink feldspar. The material for the sphere came from a dry creek wash in the desert about 80 miles to the east where Wes planned to take me rockhounding the next day.

Wes also gave some large cut-offs of "Gary green" (also called larsonite) scenic rhyolite from eastern Oregon. Then it was my turn --- I presented Wes with two large pieces of primo quality Rose River unakite that totalled 24 pounds. Then Jeannie surprised me with an offer of a gift of one of her gorgeous creations for Ann. Jeannie cabs and wirewraps (with gold fill) likely scraps left from Wes' sphere making. From a tray of a dozen or more beauties, I selected a simple, but elegant, carved leaf of green jade. Wow! Ann would love it. While I was admiring my choice, Jeannie insisted that I pick another piece for Ann's sister Kit for her upcoming 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Very generous. I chose a handsome blue, green, white and black cab made of gem silica from the Planet Mine in Arizona -- north of Quartzsite where I had rock hounded with Wes in 2011. (The piece was a big hit with Kit when she opened Jeannie's present a few days later.) After catching up with Wes since my previous visit in late January, we worked out the plans for our rock trip the next day. I had called Ralph Bishop earlier and I would pick him up at 8 am the next morning. But first, I wanted to look for some Nipomo agate. Wes suggested I start my search along the edges of the road right-of-way (r.o.w.) on the nearby Diana Foothills Road that ran through the ranches in the foothills just above Nipomo. I bid Wes and Jeannie goodbye and headed to Foothills Road. For the most part, the right-of-way was almost completely covered with grass and weeds, but I managed to find a few small pieces of translucent white agate in about one mile of road. Both edges of the road r.o.w. were fenced with 5 strands of tight barbed wire and posted with numerous "No Trespassing" signs. The ranches meant business and there was no way that I was going to cross that barrier.

Near the end of the Foothills Road, there was another "dead end" public road that turned off at right angles and headed downhill. Here the ground on both sides was completely bare and the looking improved greatly. In about 400 yards

I found enough agate to fill a zip lock sandwich bag. Nearly all of the agate was the plain white translucent variety, although a few showed fortification stripes. Later that afternoon when I had just arrived back in San Luis Obispo, I had a serendipity moment when Kit flagged down a passing neighbor who was driving by Kit's house. He was a retired dentist and, in the ensuing conversation, I showed him Wes' sphere and the agates I had found earlier. That started his remembrance of another friend who lived nearby --- and collected rocks. "Ah ha" thought Kit. "Another potential rock hound buddy for Dave." So -- unbeknownst to me --- she tracked down this rock guy, drove there, introduced herself and told him about me. So-o-o when she came back and told me, I decided to go see him after supper. Armed with a map that Kit drew on the back of an envelope, I took my sphere and my agates finds and drove over to this fellow's house and knocked on his front door. An energetic white haired man enthusiastically greeted me as I introduced myself. Ray Brooks was a finder, collector and lapidariast of local rocks --- who specialized in --- of all things --- Nipomo agate. Perhaps it was "meant to be". What are the odds of the chance meeting of such a person? Anyway, I showed him the little bag of agates I had found and, to my surprise, he was impressed and said I had done well. After 5 minutes chatting on his front porch, Ray invited me in to see some of his collection. Nipomo agates were indeed his passion. He had boxes (ornate wooden and brass cigar sized boxes) full of carefully polished slabs of agates and many other types of rocks --- he "rescued collections". He was currently enthralled with "peacock obsidian" --- a variation of rainbow obsidian, except when cut at the proper angle and polished, it shimmered like that of a wild turkey gobbler's breast feathers. It was dazzling. Another neat thing was his "agate spinners" --- tumble polished pieces of Nipomo agate in various random shapes that had a natural centered high point on which they rested and around which they would spin like a top when twirled. Different. And fun.

Another coincidence --- Ray's former (now deceased) rock hound buddy had been a high school friend of one of the ranch owners who owned land along that same road (Foothills Road) where I had found my agates that very afternoon. So, at one time (but no longer), Ray and his buddy had been able to access that entire huge ranch and had been given permission to look wherever they wanted. High up in the hills above Nipomo, they found the source of these wonderful agate treasures. Wow!! He had some real beauties. We talked rocks until dark and then I went to get some sleep before my upcoming adventure with Wes and Ralph the next day.

At 8 am the next morning, I pulled up in Ralph's driveway and Ralph came out ready to go with his miner's pick and collecting bag. After a short catchup, we piled into my rental car and headed to Wes' place. Once there, we transferred our stuff to Wes' SUV and pulled out shortly after 9 am. As we traveled east, the clouds disappeared and the outside temperature rose from the low 60's to the high 90's.

About 2 hours later, we arrived at Reyes Creek (pronounced "ray-ess") --- a now dry, sandy, rocky stream bed with scrubby bushes about 200 yards across that ran from the mountains into flat open desert. It was a hot 97 degrees when we opened the car doors. But the humidity was very low. We lathered up with sun lotion and headed out to find some rocks suitable for Wes to make spheres. The sun was brutal. We probably should have started 5 hours (or months) earlier. I found several likely pieces and returned to the SUV to unload and then went back out again. In another hour, the 3 of us gathered with our finds --- we had about 10 nice pieces up to 20 pounds each. Ralph had the find-of-the-day --- a native American stone mortar (or bowl) with a great concave basin that had been ground out (from use) in a 25 pound rock. A super find. Then we drove to a nearby, truly off the beaten path little bar/grill for lunch --- but it (sadly) was closed.

Still hungry for some lunch, we traveled back west about 20 miles to the only other restaurant in the area ---- "The Buck Horn". Service was terrible, the food only marginally better and way too expensive (\$17 for a burger with fries). Continuing our drive home, we reached Nipomo about 4 pm and then (after we checked Wes' shop --- a combination store/showroom), I took Ralph back to his house. True to form, Ralph generously gave me a cigar box of neat fossils, most of which he had found in CA. Fossil sea cow molars, fossil agatized brachiopods, fossil murex shells similar to our own ephora, whole fossil sand dollars and some fossil insect cocoons from Australia. Plus, best of all, he gave me several really cool pieces of cut and polished Nipomo sagenite (internal sage-like crystals embedded inside clear agate). These are highly prized specimens -- not even counting the time to properly orient, then cut and then polish each one. Real treasures for sure. Thanks Ralph!

The third day, I coordinated my ventures with the time of low tide which I needed on the coast to maximize my access to beach rocks. On this trip, taking the advice of "Ray", I went to Pico Creek just north of the town of San Simeon near Hearst Castle. [Pico is about 5 miles north of the San Simeon Creek that I wrote about this past January 2019 and previously in July 2017.] Reaching the designated parking area about 7 am, I grabbed my collecting bag and a walking stick and headed north along the beach to where the creek entered the ocean. The weather was perfect --- heavy overcast (think "even lighting with no shadows") with a cool on-shore breeze. I found thousands of rocks piled in long drifts left from winter storms. I decided to collect some green chert and jasper for tumble polishing because we don't have anything like that on the East coast. I also gathered a few pieces of brecciated yellow jasper, but the pickings were slim. At least until I jumped across the stream draining across the beach from Pico Creek. It was a different world on the north side with very large outcrops of bedrock and vertical formations with very little sand. And the best part was relatively narrow bands of beach rocks at the upper edge of the beach next to the cliffs. In those small patches of rocks, I found some specimens with real potential. Especially brecciated jaspers with red, yellow, green and white all in

the same specimen. I also found some very solid maroon colored jasper that I tested for flint knapping. I think the flint knappers in our club will like it. I also found many small colorful and patterned rocks that Ann really likes. I also found a very smooth, hand-sized black rock – which I first thought was jade, but is not. It just feels good to hold. Anyway, I quit collecting about 11 am and headed back south to San Luis Obispo with a full bag. It had been a great 3 days of rock hounding in California.