

**100 Degrees Outside and No Trouble Staying Cool** by Dave Lines



Contrary Creek, reportedly so named because it flows northward, in an area where most streams flow south and east, is located near Mineral, Virginia. A month before we had planned this Field Trip for July 20, 2019. Little did we know that the week preceding this outing had day after day of record shattering high heat and that the day of the trip was predicted to be 100 degrees with a “heat index” of 118. The weather service warnings --- Beware of heatstroke! Stay inside an air conditioned building! Do not go outside in this oppressive heat! Avoid all vigorous activity outside! --- scared several people who had signed up away from even attempting the trip. So be it. Everyone has to decide for themselves. Eleven (11) hardy souls --- 8 from Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club (Rich, Tim S., Lorna S., Francesca, Pam Jim, John B. and Dave) and 3 from Shenandoah Valley Gem and Mineral Society (Wayne Lee and his sister and her husband) met at the prescribed time of 9:00 am at the small parking area near the U.S.

Route 522 bridge crossing the creek. The temperature was a balmy 85 degrees when we gathered for our safety brief.

I reminded everyone of some likely hazards --- bees, snakes, sunburn, acidic water (4.5 pH), a very steep and sometimes slippery entry trail, and lastly dehydration and overheating.



I also pointed out that the bridge itself provided a huge area of shade and that the creek water would keep us cool --- especially since we were going to be “in” water all morning. I restated the rules as I understood them regarding where we could search for specimens and where we could not. I told everyone to remain within the area from 100 feet downstream of the bridge to 50 feet upstream of the old concrete bridge abutments. This was a sufficient sized area for everyone to look. I reminded everyone to stay below the normal high water mark and to refill any holes they made.



Then I showed everyone a flat of Contrary Creek specimens that I had either found or purchased. The flat contained magnetite both in octahedral crystals and in massive chunks, actinolite, almandine garnet dodecahedral crystals, pyrite crystals in schist, massive pyrite, black slag glass, and antique purple glass. After a final reminder to drink plenty of water, we all went down to the creek and spread out to find some great specimens.

I noticed 3 men already gold dredging in the creek about 200 yards downstream. But first, I picked up several pieces of massive magnetite and gave them to several folks to get them started.

Then I walked downstream and introduced myself to the gold dredgers. It was a Dad (Jim) and his son and a nephew from Pennsylvania. They had been here numerous times and Jim was a current, card carrying member of the Central Virginia Gold Prospectors. They were cool. I explained that our group was from local rock clubs and would be looking up near the bridge. I returned to find everyone happily digging for specimens.

Several were gold panning. I started digging a hole on the gravel bar just upstream of the bridge (and beneath its shadow) and dug down about 2 feet looking for a layer containing garnets. I found lots of finely ground pyrite. So much that it clogged up my gold pan

half an inch deep. I found lots of slag glass, massive and crystal magnetite and some actinolite. But no garnets and no gold. I tried several other locations in the shade but found little to be excited about. Everyone else was having about the same amount of (poor) luck.



I moved to the center of the stream and things began to improve with some garnets in schist as well as some magnetite crystals. Finally I moved out into the sunshine. The temperature by then was in the mid-nineties, but I was very comfortable. Actually it honestly felt more like it was 80 degrees because I was constantly in and out of the water. I started a new hole in the gravel bar closer to its upper edge and dug down about 12 inches when I hit 2 large rocks. I eventually dug around to locate their edges and removed them from my hole. They both showed excellent mineralization with mica schist and quartz.



I kept digging and soon began finding mud. I panned some of it and immediately found several garnet crystals. Then I classified (removed larger rocks) each layer of the hole as I dug deeper with a 1/4 inch mesh classifier screen, and checked first the screen – which contained several pea sized garnets – and then panned the rest. I found about 10 garnets in each pan for at least the next 3 pans. Eureka! I also found 2 pieces of gold --- tiny, but still visible. I was happy. Unfortunately I lost both pieces somewhere between the stream and home.

Oh well. Maybe I will find more next time. Several others in our group saw what I was doing and I told them to dig out some of the mud and gravel from my hole and pan it. They too found garnets. Additionally, Wayne and his group dug another hole nearby and also found some decent garnets. I also found several nice specimens of garnets in schist with quartz.

At about 1 pm, the fellows from PA decided to leave because they had a 4 hour drive home. Unfortunately, we did not see what they found because they saved their consolidated dredge material for a cleanup back home. Overall, everyone found something worth keeping. And, most importantly, we all stayed cool.

