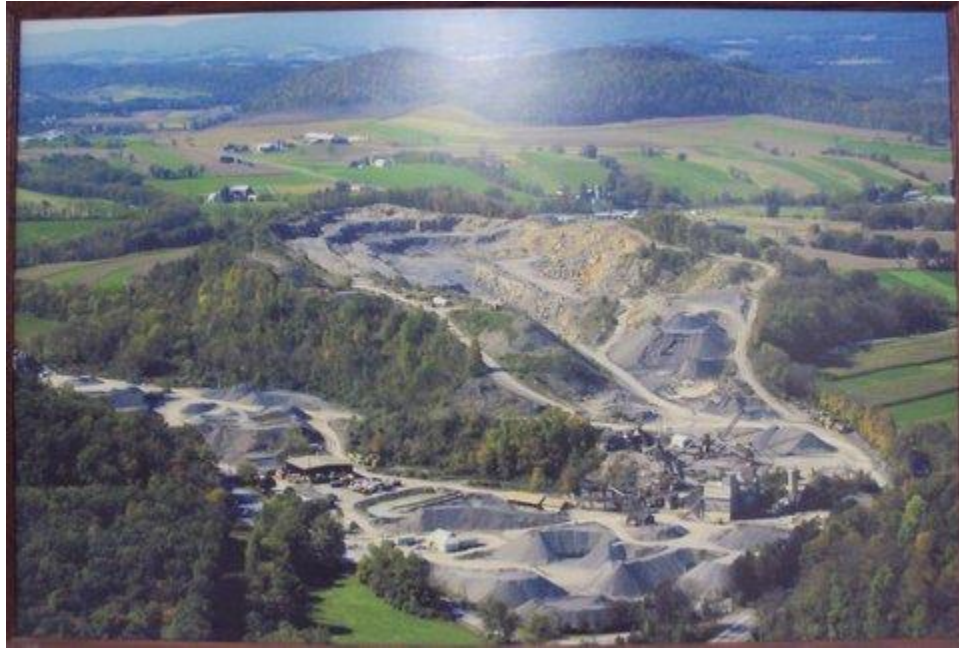


A Weekday Field Trip Yields New Experiences plus Calcite Crystals, Purple Fluorite, Honey Colored Flowstone and Black Onyx by Dave Lines



Wow! What a day we had! How about getting up early enough to avoid morning rush hour traffic around Washington, Baltimore and Harrisburg? And on the Friday before a 3 day holiday weekend!?! Rich left Lexington Park, Maryland at 2:45 am in order to meet me in La Plata at 3:45 am. We poured coffee into our bodies and kept going. The trip up to Pennsylvania was really strange --- like being the only vehicle except for 18 wheelers on the highway at times. Imagine the Baltimore beltway with just a few scattered vehicles on it. Almost surreal. North of Harrisburg, we stopped for some breakfast --- and more coffee. And all that was well before 7:00 am. Despite heavy fog the last 50 miles, we arrived at the National Limestone quarry in Middleburg, PA over an hour early.

Joe and Paula were already there. So was Cory. And Adrienne showed up a few minutes later. Rich and I went into the office and talked with Eric (the quarry owner) for a few minutes. Turns out that we were going to be the very last group of the season because the group planned for the next day (Saturday) called and cancelled. There was a lot of activity including several quarry personnel cleaning up the truck scales with shovels and water hoses --- preparations for the winter shutdown.

Everyone else arrived closer to the published meeting time of 8:45 am. This was a joint trip hosted by the Montgomery County club and attended by people from several local clubs including ours. We had ten (10) members ---- Tina and Harry, Joe and Paula, Wendy and Rick, Cory, Adrienne, Rich and Dave.



At the Safety Brief, the quarry owner Eric welcomed us and gave us his Christian testimony. One of the attendees presented Eric with a gift from his young daughter (who was in school since it was a Friday and thus a school day). Eric accepted the gift --- a small handmade ceramic cross to be worn around the neck --- with a big grin and immediately put it on. He was genuinely pleased. Eric pointed out that all quarry work had ceased for the year, reminded us to be safe and he wished us good success collecting.



We then returned to our vehicles and followed Sam Linton (the overall trip leader) into the quarry. The quarry was neat and tidy with berms all around the highwalls. After we parked near the center of the quarry, I spent about 15 or 20 minutes just walking around the perimeter looking for a concentration of calcite crystals. I finally found just such an area where limestone had been stockpiled on the lowest level about 200 yards north (?) of where we had parked. I gathered a few clusters of crystals into a pile, put my bright safety vest on top and hurried back to gather up the folks from our club. Within 10 minutes, we had 7 or 8 of us busily collecting excellent calcite crystal specimens from all over that large stockpile of rocks.

The calcite crystals were in cavities inside the limestone. The cavities seemed to be lined up in layers which were several inches thick. If we saw a rock with some crystals along one end, we split open the rock with a chisel and, more often than

not, we found many more crystals inside. For the most part, these crystals were very clean and sparkly --- especially so in the bright fall sunshine.

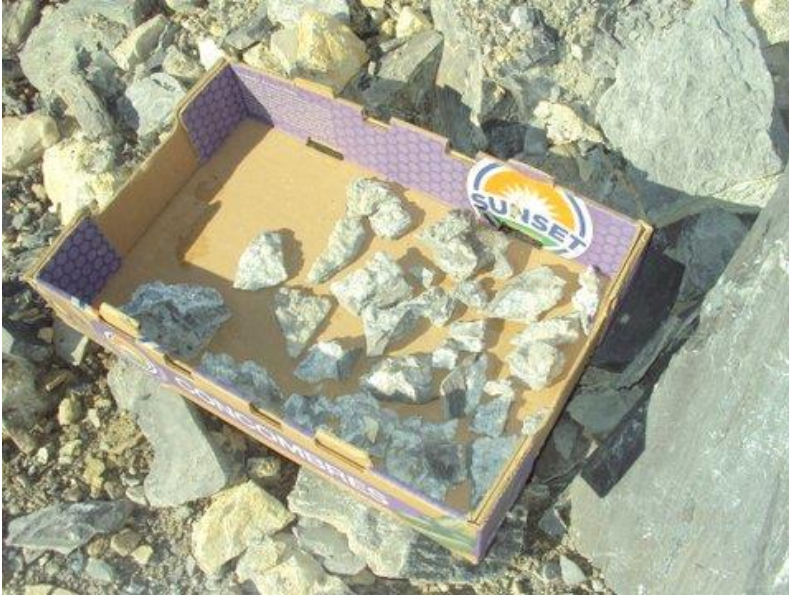


Several of us found purple fluorite embedded in seams of massive white calcite in the same area. Rich was particularly successful and found a full flat of fluorite. In one particular rock I had split open, I found a one (1) inch thick seam of a solid black material that looked like flint. I kept some because I was unsure what it was. Later, I found out from Sam that it was “black onyx” --- a first for me.

We collected in Middleburg for about 2 hours and then some of the folks wanted to move to the other National Limestone quarry at Mount Pleasant Mills. I told people that it was not a good idea to move because the specimens were easier to find and more plentiful at Middleburg. Nevertheless, about half of the overall group left and went to Mount Pleasant Mills.



A remnant of about 8 of us stayed at Middleburg and continued collecting until 12:45 pm since we had to be out of the quarry by 1 pm.



Near the end of our visit, we gathered to compare notes and Cory showed us a specimen of "flowstone" which was honey colored travertine (stalagmites and stalagmites) from the inside of an ancient cave which had been excavated during quarry operations. I remembered where we had collected this same material several years ago, so Rich and I went to this area of the quarry and collected several chunks of flowstone just before we left the quarry.

Our drive back to Southern Maryland was awful. It took us over 5 hours with lots of slow stop-and-go traffic and several traffic accidents along the entire route --- especially from Harrisburg to Waldorf. All in all, we had a good trip --- although it had been a very long day and we were super tired when we got home.