

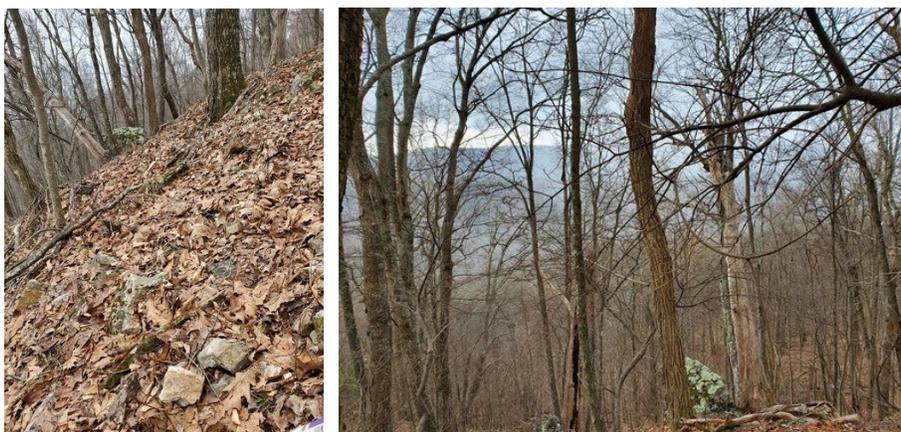
Crystals Galore --- Two Kinds --- Quartz and Ice by Dave Lines



It was the sixth day of Spring 2022, and it was SNOWING LIKE CRAZY! We were in a caravan of four vehicles driving on the narrow, paved country road about five miles from our destination IN A TOTAL WHITE-OUT! We were all starting to wonder whether this field trip was a good idea or not. Despite closely monitoring the forecasts all week, the weather was looking very grim at that moment. The snow-covered woods and fields on either side of the road already had an inch or two of snow and it was piling up fast. It may have been a beautiful winter wonderland scene to some, but we were planning a mile long hike up a steep mountain, and snow cover would be a trip killer. Most of us had already driven four hours at this point and quitting was not an option, so we pressed on.

Miraculously, within a couple of miles, the snow stopped as abruptly as it had started. In another mile, the pavement was almost dry. When we pulled into the farmyard at the foot of Chestnut Ridge, there was zero snow. Awesome! But it was COLD --- about 32 degrees with a steady wind from the west. Fortunately, we were going to remain on the east side of the mountain in the lee of the wind. After a quick brief and explanation of the plan and timeline, we (Orion, Sam, Aaron, Wendy, Rich and Dave) took a group selfie and headed up the mountain. I touched base with the new neighbor along the way and explained that we were members of the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club and had permission from the owner to park in the farmyard as well as written permission from the National Forest Service to collect quartz crystals from this location. They wished us luck and thanked me for letting them know.

By the time I reached the rest of our group, they had strung out up the mountain. I began marking a trail --- basically straight up --- with bright pink surveyor tape so everyone could ascend/descend at their own speed without getting lost.



Then the torture began for us all. It is impossible to explain --- you just need to experience it to appreciate the pain required to reach the top. The mountain seems too steep. The dead brown leaves covering the ground seem too slippery. The various obstacles like trees, loose rocks and fallen logs seem too hard to step over or around while keeping your balance. You realize that you are carrying too much weight. The air temperature is cold, but you are sweating. Your leg muscles start complaining. Your knees begin to let you know they are not happy. You want to slow down, but others are already ahead of you. Anyway, everyone eventually makes it far enough to find and collect some beautiful quartz crystals. This is a fine old mountain, and it keeps its treasures by not letting it be too easy.

When I reached the top at about 10:30 am (1-1/2 hours after I had started), the place looked totally undisturbed since we had been here in 2019. So that meant that the other folks who had collected here in the meantime had covered their holes and scattered some leaf litter over the area they had collected from. Well done and thank you to them. We want to be able to continue collecting and, if we take care of it, there are plenty of crystals for many more generations.

I picked a spot where a few crystals peeked up from the leaves and started searching for specimens. The crystals up here are both loose and attached to clusters of all sizes. It is also possible to open the larger rocks with a heavy hammer and chisel to find specimens. The quartz crystal seams in the rock are easy to see. Whenever we collect, we always keep in mind that our time on top is limited to a few hours because we need to allow for time to wrap our finds with old newspaper, pack up, descend and drive back home. Today, we would have additional challenges --- snow squalls.

In 15 or 20 minutes, Wendy arrived and immediately began to find crystals. In a few more minutes, Orion showed up and started his search. Then, the first of several snow squalls hit us. It was sunny one minute, and in the next, it was blasting us with “snow pellets” that looked like small pieces of white Styrofoam. Everything was covered with snow in seconds. We scrambled to cover ourselves and our stuff.



I took a picture of the snow dumping on Orion. With the strong wind and swirling snow, it looked like we were in a blizzard. Yet, within a few minutes it stopped (thankfully!). Then the warm spring sun came out and melted all the snow within ten minutes. Fascinating. This process repeated itself several more times throughout the afternoon. We stayed warm only by putting on every article of clothing we had including pulling our hoods over our heads. An amazing experience. Aaron came up over the edge of the cliff during one of those squalls --- I snapped a great picture of him. The “abominable snowman”. Funny.



Three of our group (Sam, Aaron and Rich) also collected specimens in the lower third of the mountain. They all found some good specimens there through a combination of breaking open rocks with visible seams and by finding them on or near the surface. The advantage of finding them inside of the rocks is that that are more likely to be perfect. The trade-off is that it takes more time.

At about 2 pm, two young grandsons of the new neighbor down below came up to the top to get my contact information. The neighbor wanted us to let them know whenever we planned to come back again so it would not be a surprise. The grandsons must have *run* up the mountain because they said it had taken much less than an hour to reach the top. As soon as we had traded phone numbers, they returned as quickly as they had appeared. Oh, to be so young again.

Before we knew it, it was time to leave and one at a time we began to tidy up our collecting areas by smoothing our diggings and covering them with old leaves and dead limbs so the area would have minimal erosion and blend into the forest. Then we wrapped our finds individually with old newspaper to prevent damage to the crystals on the way down the mountain and the trip home. As soon as we packed our backpacks and buckets with our few hand tools and our crystals, another snow squall hammered us. This time, it left enough snow to almost cover the ground. Nevertheless, we had to get off the mountain, so we started our descent. It was challenging --- and slippery. I heard later that folks experienced a few tumbles on the way down, but, fortunately there were no injuries. Going down is never easy because we are carrying more weight (our finds) and we are tired. We removed all of our surveyor tape along the way, and I picked up an old can and a piece of candy wrapper, so we left the mountain cleaner than we found it.

At the bottom, I changed out of my heavy clothing and coveralls and got inside Rich's truck which felt great because it was nice and warm inside --- thanks Rich! We waited until everyone had come down and had started their vehicles, before our remaining three vehicles pulled out and headed home. It had been another fun trip.





Dave's Notes:

I hope to clean all these further with "Iron Out", and if needed, oxalic acid (sold as "wood bleach" at hardware store).

Most of the singles will go into our backyard pea gravel driveway for kids to find. As soon as these "future rockhounds" get out the car, they start looking. One little guy just about cleaned us out recently because he stuck with it for several hours. Chestnut Ridge is a great place for finding lots of "replacement" quartz crystals!

This Chestnut Ridge twin xl was found as a floater. It is perfectly terminated all the way around. Sent a "thank you" email to the owner of the farm where we parked. Our group did a great job of cleaning up the area where we collected -- smoothed it over and scattered old leaves and dead limbs/sticks on top --- could not tell anyone had been there.

