

Chestnut Ridge, VA Trip Report
March 26, 2023 by Dave Lines



This Field Trip was originally planned for Saturday March 25th, but due to rain, it was moved to Sunday March 26th. The 26th turned out to be a good call because the weather was gorgeous --- cool in the morning in the 40's in the valley and warm and sunny in the afternoon in the high 60's on top of the mountain.

We (Rich, Bernie, Mike S., Ray, Orion and I) all initially met in Staunton at the Burger King at 8:00 am and caravanned to the private farm at the foot of Chestnut Ridge where we had been generously given permission to park. I had also secured written (email) permission to collect mineral specimens on the National Forest land where we were headed. We arrived about 9:00 am.

After carefully parking all our vehicles into the limited space available, we changed into our hiking boots and packed our tools, water, and food for the challenging climb to the top. Remember --- we had to hike from about 2,000 feet elevation to about 3,200 feet in about a mile of travel. That figures out to an average grade of 23%. Of course, there are some flatter areas, but those flat areas just meant the rest of the mountain is steeper to average 23%.

I suggested that some should reduce their gear and heavy clothing because they would be too hot. Even though it was only 42 degrees, I only wore a light shirt. I packed my tools in my backpack and carried a set of coveralls in a 5-gallon bucket. After a safety brief about pacing ourselves and not over-doing it on both the hike up as well as back down while following the trail I would mark with bright surveyor's tape --- and some reminders to fill in all our holes and cover them back with old leaves --- we started up the mountain.

Within the first ten minutes, I found myself marking the trail ahead of most of our group which had thinned out to a long line with lots of space between each person. Nevertheless, I was feeling the steepness of the ascent just as much as the rest --- I just tried not to show it. I used to be able to make the hike in under an hour. This time, it took an hour and a half. My shirt was wringing wet. Sweat equity. I took off my wet shirt and hung it on a tree branch to dry and put on my coveralls which were all I needed to wear for the rest of the day. It was already in the upper 50's at the top. Funny thing about the hike up --- about 10 minutes after you reach the top, you feel great and forget about the climb.

I looked around and everything was about the same as when we left it last year. There were many sparkling crystals winking at me from a few bare places in the bright sunshine. The crystals all look fantastic from a few feet away and your first impulse is a desire to take them all home. But reality is that you can only carry a very limited amount. So, by necessity, you examine every cluster with a very critical eye. I have learned that most of what I find is less than perfect and, even after brushing away the dirt and clay and carefully examining each piece, I still bring home specimens that I should have left up there.

I picked a spot to dig and raked aside the old leaves for later use. Then I started carefully digging with a small shovel and dumping each shovel full into a small wire sifter with half inch mesh. After sifting, there were quartz crystals in

every batch. About 15 minutes after I had reached the top, Ray arrived --- and was immediately amazed at the quantity of quartz crystal singles and plates just laying everywhere.

He quickly started making piles of the clusters. And he soon declared he was satisfied and had collected enough. Wow.

I would take the next 4 hours to collect a half bucket, but I rejected about 90% of what I found. The most unusual thing I found was a large black salamander with bright yellow spots. It was about 7 or 8 inches long and very lethargic. I covered it back up with dirt and old moist leaves under a log. Later, I looked it up on Google – it was called a mole salamander, is relatively common and had poisonous skin (at least poisonous to animals that tried to eat it). I had never seen a salamander anywhere near that large. Very interesting.

One of my goals each year is to collect enough quartz crystals to replenish my driveway for kids to find when they visit. Although our farm driveway is made of bank run gravel, the parking area behind our house is covered with washed pea gravel. That is where I put the crystals. Every time someone with kids visits us, we show them how to find the crystals. Yes, it is a bit hokie, but the kids love it and some of them may become rockhounds one day.

Mike S. soon joined us on top. He had taken a different way up (which was much steeper near the end) so he could prospect the various root balls (which were basically dirt piles) where trees had uprooted during storms. He checked quite a few, but said he had not found any crystals until he reached almost the very top. Good info to remember.

When he reached the edge of where the mountain dropped off steeply, he found a large, downed tree with a root ball that was full of single crystals and small clusters. For the most part, the small crystals were perfect and very clear. And some of the clusters had no attached sandstone matrix which made them much more attractive. Mike generously came over and invited us to join him recovering the crystals, but I passed and stayed in my hole.



The last person to reach the top was Orion who had taken his time and seemed relatively rested. He asked where to dig and I suggested he look for an area where the ground had not been disturbed. He chose an area close to me and started finding crystals right away.

Bernie and Rich did not join us because they decided to stop at a lower elevation to collect specimens. I did not see what Bernie collected because he left before I did. Rich had some nice singles and small clusters, so he had had good luck.



Probably the best find of the day was found by Mike. It was a large plate weighing about 10 pounds which was covered in mostly clear crystals ranging in size from druzi to one inch long by 3/4 inch diameter. And the individual crystals in the cluster were clean and sharp. Nice job Mike.

Ray and Mike departed the top about 1:30 pm. Orion stayed until about 2:30 pm. And I stayed until about 3:00 pm. Before I left, I checked the areas where everyone had been collecting and they had filled in all their holes and covered them with old leaves and brush. To the casual observer, the area looked undisturbed. Great job guys.

I then began my descent back down the mountain, removing the remaining surveyor's tape as I went. Orion had removed every other one, so my job was easier. Although the downhill trip is faster, the footing becomes more of a challenge since you are tired and are carrying more weight. About 1/4 way from the bottom, I caught up with Orion and we hiked the remainder together.

Rich was patiently waiting for us in the farmyard and filled us in on when everyone else had departed. We all left around 5 pm and headed back home.



The warm sunshine kept the temperature very pleasant in the high 60's. Everyone found crystals. It had been a good trip --- everyone found crystals and everyone stayed safe.