There are not many rockhounding field trips which combine a history lesson with mineral collecting. This was one of them. Our group consisted of members from two Maryland rock clubs --- twelve (Rich, John S., Michelle and Jim K., Tim and Lorna S., Joyce and Pam. John M., Bernie, Renee, and Dave) from the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club plus another six from the Gem, Lapidary, and Mineral Society of Montgomery County. We all arrived between 7:30 and 8:00 am, signed the quarry waivers, posed for a group picture, and listened to the safety briefing by the Quarry Supervisor.

At the end of the safety briefing, Rich asked about the status of the Mason Dixon Line marker which is located on the quarry property. The quarry straddles the Mason Dixon Line --- which is the official boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania. One of the original Mason Dixon rock markers, which were placed every mile apart, is on this mine property. On our 2021 trip here --- we all drove right by it when we caravanned into the mine. At that time, it was protected by a vertical section of corrugated culvert pipe which was painted bright yellow. Now – a year and a half later --- they have almost completed the paperwork and received most of the various permissions to move the rock marker to mine under it. The marker will be donated to a historical group and displayed in a museum. The Quarry Supervisor said the marker was now uncovered and in the open. He said it is six (6) feet long and
buried except for about a foot above ground level. It had an “M” on one side and a “P” on the other. He offered to stop there and show us on the way into the quarry. Cool.

So, when our caravan of vehicles eventually headed into the quarry, we all parked near the top of the quarry and got out of our vehicles to view the marker. I removed my hard hat and put it next to the marker for a size comparison in the many photos that were taken. (In retrospect that was a bad idea because I had removed my hard hat in the quarry – not good – especially with multiple cameras to record my mistake. Lesson learned.) Anyway, seeing the Mason Dixon Line marker was neat.

We returned to our vehicles and followed the quarry supervisor down into the quarry – all driving on the left side of the road. Question: Why did we do this --- i.e., drive on the left side of the road in this quarry? (*see answer below)

There had been significant changes in the mine since our last visit. The lowest level (5) was still underwater. Level 4 was very small and looked to be where further expansion would take place. We were led to Level 3 which was large (at several acres) and spread out. All the berms were in good shape. Level 2 was closed off. We parked around the perimeter of level 3 and began our search for specimens. Since there had been no rain in several weeks, everything was covered in dust and colors were difficult to determine. My first adjustment was to put some water in an empty bucket and bring along a scrub brush so I could clean off likely looking rocks. This paid off and saved me from bringing home a lot of junk. Several others did the same with various methods including sprayers.
Anyway, we spread out and spent the rest of the morning searching for specimens likely to be found in this quarry which is in the “State Line Chromite Mining District”. A check online of Mindat for this quarry shows 15 valid minerals. The common thread in most of the rocks here is the color “green”. Serpentine is the rock they quarry and crush for road gravel.

The massive serpentine here is very good for lapidary projects and some variants of it are translucent and even transparent green. My favorite green specimens are antigorite and picrolite. Both can be very pretty when found in their purer form. A flashlight will shine through both. Picrolite is very columnar in appearance and makes very attractive specimens. Most of the picrolite here is opaque. Another variation of green is lizardite which generally is a yellowish green and opaque. Chromite tends to be black specks inside specimens of antigorite.

There are other more unusual minerals (not necessarily green) such are brucite which is a micaeous (flaky, mica like) mineral. Another is magnesite ---- a relatively soft whitish mineral somewhat like chalk. A closely related mineral is hydromagnesite which is an ivory-colored mineral usually with botryoidal formations on the surface. Mcginnessite is a very rare mineral elsewhere
but can be found in this quarry consistently. The bright turquoise color is easily seen as a surface coating on rocks. Quartz is uncommon but tiny crystals and massive quartz are found regularly.

During my walk around Level 3 of the quarry, I saw that our group had collected all the above minerals. Overall, many specimens of excellent material were collected and saved from the crusher. At 11:45 am, we all headed back up and out of the quarry. Another great trip.

*Answer = Fully loaded rock trucks are very heavy (100 tons or more) and are usually leaving the pit going up the haul road. Assuming a clockwise haul road going up and out, if a fully loaded rock truck loses its brakes or its engine stops running, the emergency procedure is to back into the berm on the highwall side of the road. Even if the berm doesn’t stop the loaded truck, the highwall will. Thus, all loaded rock trucks will stay closest to the highwall side of the haul road. In this quarry, that means that loaded trucks always drive on the left side of the haul road, so they are always closest to the highwall in case of an emergency. Conversely, an empty rock truck drives down into the quarry on the left side of the haul road because the berm on the side closest to the pit should be strong enough to stop an empty truck.