

Trip Report for US Silica Mine June 1, 2024 by Dave Lines



The Mine Supervisor took a photo of our fine-looking bunch!

Even though this was June 1st, the morning was very pleasant --- we had an early start with a 7:30 am safety brief with the Mine Manager. There were ten of us (Rich, Tim and Lorna S., Bernie, Gary, Dianne, Renee, Kate, John W., and me) who had driven down from Southern Maryland. Normally, it is an easy 2-hour trip, but this morning, I-95 had been a parking lot --- Rich and I took 40 minutes to go just two miles to our exit. Anyway, we all managed to get there in time for the brief.



Kate, Dianne, and Rich search for first location



Gary, Renee, and Kate collect plentiful moonstone

Beautiful lapidary grade gray and silver flash moonstone was laying everywhere on the ground. When you looked toward the early morning sun, you could easily spot the many shiny pieces of moonstone (otherwise known as “andesine”) by the dozen. Incredibly plentiful and high quality --- and this was just the first area we searched. There was also enstatite (known as “bronzite”) hiding in plain sight in the same area. Bronzite has a wonderful internal phenomenon that, when polished, looks like pieces of brass-colored foil shimmering in a background of handsome brown. It makes excellent cabochons and spheres. We also found other interesting minerals such as massive ilmenite and massive rutile, though the rutile was generally mixed with aplite and moonstone as matrix.

The Mine Manager had led our caravan of vehicles to the gray flash moonstone location at about 8 am where we remained for about an hour. Then he suggested we move to the bench directly above the moonstone area where they had done some recent blasting. So around 9:30 we all followed him the new area. Believe it or not, in this new area, the moonstone and bronzeite were even more plentiful. One could literally fill a 5-gallon bucket in 5 minutes. Astonishing!



Rich at our second location

We then moved to another area where, on a previous trip, we had found garnets in a roadbed plus some promising seams of quartz in the adjacent soil. As promised, we all found garnets ranging from marble to golf ball sized. Although they were not pretty because they had formed in a black biotite matrix which had become part of the crystals, some were very gemmy. Rich followed one of the thin quartz seams and found massive quartz that was very clear --- but no crystals.



Recent blasting at our second location left huge amounts of pure moonstone



The gray rock in the foreground as well as the gigantic boulder to the right of Kate is all andesine (gray flash moonstone)

After an hour here we moved across the mine (which is a very large open pit quarry with about 3 levels) to our final location that the Mine Manager had scouted out for us --- he guaranteed we would find garnets.

Indeed, he was right on target. The garnets were plentiful and laying both loose and embedded in the biotite matrix. Nothing aesthetically beautiful, yet many of these almandine garnets were very gemmy and would take a nice polish. Also, the large pieces of biotite matrix with the embedded garnets were great “garden rock” for the flower bed border back home.

As previously agreed, we all drove out of the mine a few minutes before noon. We all thanked the Mine Manager, who is a great “people person” with a friendly and helpful personality. Another excellent field trip for the Southern Maryland Rock and Mineral Club!