

Arizona Trip February 2025 by Dave Lines

After our flight to Phoenix and a 150-mile drive southeast to Sonoita, AZ, Ann and I arrived at our gracious friends' home just in time for supper.



The crystals (gems) in this display were priceless.

Fast forward 3 days --- I spent the day (Saturday) with my son Jeff at the Tucson Convention Center where he had driven from Denver and entered a competitive mineral display in the "70th Tucson Gem and Mineral Show" which is hosted by the Tucson Gem and Mineral Society. This show features a competitive exhibit section where participants can enter their displays for judging. Jeff was competing in the Masters Class for the Desautels Trophy which is awarded to the individual display of the finest crystallized mineral specimens entered in the competition, recognizing excellence in a specific category. In the mineral collecting world, this competition is a REALLY BIG deal.

This was the first time that Jeff had entered a full display (although he had entered a single crystal in the 2016 show which won the "Best Self Collected Specimen" award.) The results of the judging of the 2025 competition were not released until Saturday morning. I met Jeff at 9:00 am sharp at the convention center entrance and we anxiously headed toward his exhibit on the huge show floor. We arrived to see a First-Place blue ribbon in his display case, but no other awards. Jeff then spoke with several of the Show Committee folks, and they said the six (6) judge panel spent a "very long time" deciding whether Jeff's display, or the exhibit next to his, would be awarded the "Desautels Trophy". So, in essence, Jeff came in second in the

“Desautels Trophy” competition. Wow. Jeff spent the rest of the day talking with various knowledgeable people on the Tucson Show committee trying to figure out how he could improve his display the next time. The man who oversaw the judging (and had done so for the past 30 years) gave Jeff the detailed judging sheets for his display and discussed/encouraged Jeff to enter again, while emphasizing that Jeff had come very close to winning.

I spent the rest of the day looking at the many wonderful (non-competitive) displays, most of which had green mineral in accordance with this year’s show theme of “Shades of Green”.



The 75 carat "Hooker Emerald" was on loan from the Smithsonian especially for this show. It is easily worth millions.



There were well over 100 display cases showing rocks, minerals and gems under the show theme "Shades of Green".



More "Shades of Green" --- Morenci is a huge open pit copper mine which, when fully mined out, will be 5 miles in diameter.



Check out these green prehnite specimens from Massachusetts.

That evening, Ann joined Jeff and I for the Awards Reception, which was held for all those who had entered displays --- both competitive and informative. It was a very nice affair with small bite-size servings of beef wellington, and about 10 other tasty treats that I did not know the names of. Then we watched the various winners receive their plaques and trophies --- each with a few words of appreciation.



The awards banquet trophies and plaques ready to be handed out.



This group picture shows (L to R) Jeff Lines, Bill Stephens (recent past EFMLS President and our current Region IV VP), and one of Jeff's buddies Phil DeVries.

The next day, after church and lunch with our hosts, Ann and I headed north 150 miles to the town of Globe, AZ.



These signs were all over the windy road that we took through the mountains enroute to the petrified wood location.

Enroute to Globe, we passed through copper mining country in Mammoth where I checked the railroad bed for copper ore. But due to a new layer of rock which completely covered the old ballast, I only found 5 pieces of malachite which I later gave away. We had a great supper that evening in Globe at the "La Casita" family restaurant tucked away downtown, well off the beaten track.

The next morning, we drove north another 150 miles to a small ranch located immediately adjacent to the Petrified National Forest near Holbrook. We arrived about 11:00 am and pulled off the highway into the parking area of an old, abandoned roadside stand. A large sign proclaimed "Dobell". Another larger one said "RHONDA" with a big arrow pointing inland to the north.



Rhonda's sign.

Old trucks, cars, and rusty metal junk decorated the perimeter. The gate was locked --- but 2 vehicles were parked in front of it. I said hello to the fellow (named John) in a large van and then went to the truck in front and asked for Rhonda. The young woman (who later turned out to be Rhonda's granddaughter) said something into the truck and out popped Rhonda!



Rhonda's place was a sight to behold ---- petrified wood everywhere.



Red petrified wood and heavy equipment at Rhonda Dobell's Ranch.

I introduced myself and reminded her that I had called her a month before and said I would be here this morning. Rhonda welcomed me with a “Hello” and a big hug. She then explained that the key to the gate was in the house on the other side of the chain-link fence/gate.



Rhonda and her grand kids.

The granddaughter “Haley” then nimbly climbed over the fence, retrieved the key, and opened the gate. We followed (caravan style) on a dirt road that disappeared over a low hill through the tawny desert grass. Soon, there

came into view a hodgepodge collection of various junk and dilapidated buildings. This place was truly a "piece of work". We turned right toward an area which had been extensively dug up with an excavator. There were great mounds of red dirt and big, deep holes. We went through another gate and began to see a fenced field which was covered with petrified wood of all sizes both scattered and in piles. We parked and Rhonda asked if we preferred to dig or just collect the already dug stuff. Either way it would cost \$60 per 5-gallon bucket full. I chose to collect the already dug wood because I had only allowed 3 hours --- we had another 200-mile drive to our next hotel room. Rhonda suggested I check out the piles of smaller pieces. Since we were limited in how much we could carry back with us on the plane, I decided to select only the best quality pieces, even if we had less total poundage. Rhonda and Haley pointed out the remains of 2 large piles of petrified wood, which had already been picked through by 70 members of a large rock club just 2 days before.

My self-set goal was to find 3 kinds of wood:

- 1.Small pieces for tumble polishing
- 2.Small pieces that displayed well and set up straight to resell at our rock show
- 3.Medium sized pieces with good pattern and color for making cabochons

Then I settled down (sitting on a Dollar Store chair) and started scratching through the piles. I eliminated pieces that were heavily weathered or cracked. Using a plastic shoe box sized container, a small scrub brush, and a gallon of water from the Dollar Store, I chose, then cleaned wood in 4-to-5-pound batches, while weeding out the less desirable pieces. I then set the wet pieces of wood on big rounds of wood where they dried quickly --- think 5% humidity. I worked steadily for 3 straight hours. About 3 pm, I settled with Rhonda, my half bucket weighed 28 pounds and cost me \$30 --- a BARGAIN! All the wood had beautiful colors --- reds, blacks, grays, yellows - and some very nice patterns. The previous rock club had left many beauties behind. I began to wish I had a large truck to fill. So many beautiful pieces of petrified wood and so inexpensive compared to the prices at the stores in Holbrook. Rhonda showed me some of the newly dug wood piled in the back of her pickup truck. Absolutely exquisite patterns and color. When I asked, she said "yellow" had been the favorite color of the group the previous Saturday. I later regretted not buying more.



Wood at a gift shop in Holbrook.

At 3:30 pm. We said our goodbyes and drove away --- heading west. Our first stop was a large rock shop so we could use their restroom facilities. They had petrified wood laying everywhere - for BIG prices. \$500 to \$5,000 for large rounds.



It's \$5,500 for that one.

Inside the store, small tumbling polished pieces and partly polished pieces are sold for high prices. One such piece would typically be priced as much as my half bucket did at Rhonda's. But the folks who shopped there did not know about Rhonda Dobell and her ranch at 9274 Old US Hwy 180, Holbrook, AZ 86205, phones (928) 245-9010 // 524-2628 // 241-0260. Now you know, so you can go. Have fun, it is well worth the time and effort.

From Holbrook, we drove west on I-40 for 140 miles. Along the way we passed the Canyon Diablo meteor crater (best example in the world) just north of I-40 before you reach Flagstaff. I would have loved to go see it but not enough time. I have a great iron-nickel meteorite specimen from that very impact that I purchased at the Raleigh, NC Rock Show. It had been found on a nearby ranch. As we neared Flagstaff, we passed lots of snow (and large electronic signs warning: "Don't Park along the highway to play in the snow!"). To the north of I-40 we could see a big snow-covered mountain on the edge of Flagstaff. We continued west on I-40 and turned south at about sunset with another 50 miles to go.

We arrived in Prescott (pronounced "Pres- get" by the locals) at our 100-year-old historic hotel "The Hassayampa Inn" after dark.



The historic Hassayampa Inn in Prescott.



The view from our Parker AZ hotel room balcony ---- across the Colorado River into California.

Located downtown, it was step back in time. A huge lobby with a big stone fireplace, 20 or so stuffed chairs and couches, beautiful dark walnut wood with burgundy carpet and soft lighting. Display cases of antique memorabilia. The icing on the cake was the original Otis elevator which required one of the staff to operate. Complete with polished brass controls and a pull-to-close gate, it took us to our room on the fourth floor. Very nice --- queen bed, piles of pillows, a 4-foot TV, bath with shower and tub and all the extras --- and with my military discount, it cost us \$30 less than the Motel 6 in Globe.

The next morning, we had a fancy breakfast at the hotel, then checked out and went to the nearest thrift shop a few blocks away. Thrift shop? Yes, I bought a large roller suitcase and a backpack for \$10. I figured that since we only brought two small suitcases with us and since Southwest Airlines allowed each passenger 2 suitcases of 50 pounds each for free, that we could carry a LOT of rocks home for free. (I remember last year when I shipped 5 flat rate boxes of California rocks and 2 of them arrived 4 months late with half the contents missing.) Anyway, by 10:00 am, we headed 140 miles southwest toward our next hotel in Parker, AZ. Enroute, we stopped at the small town of Bouse where I attempted to locate the Planet Mine to collect copper minerals. Bottomline --- despite driving 50 miles on desert dirt roads --- I never found it. Things had changed since 2011 when I had previously collected there --- new roads and new situations --- a mining company had claimed the Planet Mine and planned to open pit mine it for copper. Also, I learned that we had stumbled into 3 days of the "Parker 400" off-road desert races, which started the next morning. Too many people, RV's and vehicles were converging on this same area, so I did not have time for an alternate plan. That night we stayed in the "Blue Water Resort and Casino" - a large hotel and casino complex situated on Lake Havasu which was the Colorado River dammed up by the Parker dam. A stunningly beautiful setting, we had a room overlooking the resort marina with the lake and rugged mountains of California beyond.

The next day we headed south to visit Quartzsite --- the winter home of perhaps a million "snowbirds" who were people avoiding the cold and snow back home wherever they came from.



Welcome to Quartzsite AZ.

If you have never been, it is truly a sight to behold. RV's and camping trailers parked in the desert roughly in a 20-mile diameter circle around Quartzsite. With so many people with nothing to do, Quartzsite has become a shopping mecca. One can find and buy just about anything made in this world.

And there are several Rock Shows from January to the end of February --- some are open year around despite the summer heat. Tyson Wells is a mixed show --- 90% stuff and 10% rocks. For example, we stopped to look for AZ postcards and found a shop that sold nice ones for 3 for \$1. The QIA (Quartzsite Improvement Association) Pow Wow in late January with 100% rocks plus free field trips. The Desert Gardens Show is mostly rocks but has its share of other stuff.



Desert Gardens Rock show in Quartzsite.



Our reunion with Amy and David Walker at the Desert Gardens show. David was the World Championship Quartz Crystal Digger 5 times!!

We headed over to Desert Gardens looking for old friends who had been vendors there. I asked the first person I saw if they knew "Amy and David" (because I could not remember their last name of Walker). Their reply was "Yes, they are right over there across the way." Ann and I walked 50 yards, and Amy was outside with a customer. When she finished, I caught her eye, and she immediately brightened with a big smile (she always had a big smile) and then she called inside their trailer for David. It was a great reunion. Big hugs all around. I had seen them about 10 years ago in Quartzsite where they had become vendors at the Desert Gardens --- in fact, David had taken over the maintenance of the facilities there and oversaw the whole show. I first met them in Mount Ida, Arkansas at the 2005 World Championship Crystal Digging Contest where we dug crystals together at Fiddler's Ridge. Again, at the 2008 Crystal Digging Contest at Arrowhead Mine and again at the 2011 Contest at Bear Mountain Mine. In 2017, they did not show up for the Contest and their crystal digger friend Dale Almond told me that David did not come because he had been having seizures. David was a superb crystal digger --- he reminded me that he was the World Champion 5 times. We spent half an hour catching up with each other. We could have spent the rest of the day talking. According to David and Amy, things had changed in

Mount Ida, too. Dale Almond (often the World Champion himself --- he sold his digging bars to me at the end of the 2017 Contest figuring it was his last time) had died. Jim Fecho (owner of the Fiddlers Ridge rock shop) had passed away, too. His widow Kathy was still running the business. Their son Bobby Fecho (owner of the Twin Creek Mine) was separated from Dixie. Depressing news. All of which points to the truism that the only thing that doesn't change is "change itself".



Rocks for sale at Desert Gardens.



There were about 30% of the vendors remaining at Desert Gardens when we were there.



Some Desert Garden vendors were less tidy than others.



More Desert Garden rocks --- by the thousands.



Thousands and thousands of rocks of all description.



This Desert Garden vendor sold used rock saws and similar equipment.

Soon after our visit with Amy and David, we headed east for 130 miles to our last motel room in Phoenix. We flew out the next day --- leaving 78 degrees in Phoenix and arriving at BWI shivering at 25 degrees. No wonder people move to Quartzsite in the winter. All our rocks arrived fully intact. It was a great trip.