

Willis Mountain and East Ridge Kyanite Mines --- A Field Trip Report
Text and Photos by Dave Lines



Perfect weather and fall colors made this trip to west central Virginia on Saturday October 23, 2010 truly spectacular. Our Southern Maryland club attendees included Dave, Harry and Tina, Paul and Linda, Sandy, and Robert and Stephanie.



Overall, it was a very large group of rock hounds --- most of the local Virginia and Maryland clubs as well as many from the southeast states were represented. Dave Callahan of the Lynchburg (VA) Club had organized the event and said there were about 70 vehicles and 130 people. Mike Morris of the Kyanite

Corporation greeted us and spelled out the safety rules, then led our giant caravan of cars and trucks to the East Ridge Mine.



East Ridge is actually not much of a ridge --- it is more like two long rock quarries where massive kyanite is actively mined. We had hoped to find some more of the rare rutile crystals from this mine, but alas --- the area we found them in had been mined out and the pit was a full 20 feet lower than the previous year. The place where we had parked our cars last fall was simply gone!! Massive gray and red kyanite --- much with visible pyrite --- was abundant in the “northern” portion of the quarry, but not much else.

Most of our club soon migrated to the southern portion of the quarry where Tina and Harry located blue kyanite crystals in some gray mud in the central portion of the pit. From there, we went to the southern-most portion to find some green mica --- or fuchsite. Within a few minutes, some very helpful rock hounds showed us where to look. Using a six foot pry bar and a large sledgehammer, we managed to move and break apart a large chunk of beautiful fuchsite and provide some nice specimens for everyone who wanted some.

Then Ted Carver (Northern Virginia Club) asked me to help him with a couple of very large boulders that showed nice radiating crystals of blue kyanite. Again, we were able to break apart those boulders and get some excellent specimens --- some of which were especially attractive --- thin, radiating crystals of blue kyanite in a matrix of light green fuchsite.



At 11:30 a.m., the entire group caravanned to Willis Mountain for lunch and the second portion of our trip. Upon arrival, the Lynchburg Club had set up a complete restaurant under a tent selling barbecue sandwiches, beans, chips, desserts, sodas and bottled water -- all for a reasonable price. Here, the views from the top of Willis Mountain were really worth taking some pictures --- we could see all the way to the distant Blue Ridge Mountains in the west.



After lunch, I located Dave Callahan and Mike Morris and received permission to lead a group of rock hounds to another area on the southern-most part of Willis Mountain to locate some blue kyanite crystals. So we (Paul, Linda, Ted, Pete McQuery [Richmond Club] and myself and a few others) drove to this new location and spread out to search. We quickly found two very large boulders of weathered blue kyanite

crystals which we began to carefully split apart using chisels and three pound hammers. We gathered several flats of nice specimens --- some of which contained blue kyanite crystals up to one inch wide and several inches in length. Single blue kyanite crystals could also be found loose on top the sandy soil.



By 2 p.m., we had found enough and drove back to the area near the food tent where we checked out with and thanked Dave Callahan and Mike Morris for all their efforts to make this a safe, productive and enjoyable field trip .