

DECEMBER BAM NEWSLETTER 12/5/2003

**Next meeting December 10th, 8:00pm
At Foothill College, Room P-24, Geology
Building, Los Altos Hills, California**

Welcome to the December issue of the Bay Area Mineralogists (BAM) newsletter. The purpose of our club is to further spread the knowledge and interest of mineralogy in our world today and to promote awareness and teaching in the field of natural sciences as they pertain to the geosciences.



UPCOMING EVENTS AND CLUB ACTIVITIES

The December BAM meeting will feature a talk and demonstration on "The Cleaning and Care of Benitoite Specimens" by President Rick Kennedy. He will discuss the various stages of specimen preparation from rough material trimming through final rinse and cleaning of finished specimens. You may want to try it yourself after seeing exactly how these specimens are professionally prepared. Bring in your specimens for evaluation. Benitoite and nepuntinite mine run raw material continues to be available from The Benitoite Gem Mine. Details at the meeting.

The January meeting will feature a guest speaker, Jeff Huber, discussing the history of mining in and around Butte, Montana, and the minerals that make it a famous locality. Bring in your Butte specimens for discussion and/or identification.

February usually finds BAM members holding an impromptu meeting at the Tucson show. Details of where and when to follow in January. No Foothill College meeting in February.

March is traditionally the Tucson Show discussion and review with members bringing in any acquisitions from the show.

MORE DECEMBER ACTIVITIES... CLUB FUND RAISING

Bring your unwanted, unusual, or just plain un-loved nice mineral specimens to the December meeting for donation to our annual silent auction. Bid sheets will be open at 8pm at the meeting. Close of the auction will begin at 9.45pm with payment due by close of the meeting at 10pm. Treasurer John Magnasco will collect any and all donation funds for benefit of the club. Remember, this is YOUR club, so bring nice specimens. Save the rest for web auction or yard-rock.

BAM NEWSLETTER CONTACTS and INFORMATION

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Meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month at Foothill College, Room P-24, Geology Building, Los Altos Hills, California. 8-10pm.

Take highway 280 North from San Jose toward San Francisco to the El Monte exit and head West.

NEW PUBLICATIONS AND ARTICLES

Just announced was the release of the long-awaited book "Minerals of Nevada", published by University of Nevada Press. If you are interested in a copy of this fine reference, you can let us know at the December meeting. BAM member Chuck Trantham will be able to provide copies for sale before Christmas if you contact him or myself. Call or send me an email or better yet, come to the next meeting and place your order.

FIELD TRIPS

The first annual "After Thanksgiving Day BAM Mineral Trek" was held November 28th thru 30th. We started with three members from San Jose at 6am Friday morning and headed for San Benito County. The final day found a total of eight members participating in this epic trip with many fine specimens being collected. Our fortitude and stamina was tested for two nights on the top of Red Rocks Road ridge with temperatures in the high thirties and a constant prevailing wind with gusts to 35mph most of the night. Come to the meeting this month to see the treasure. And yes, Bob Herold is still The King of "Oh Hell", the card game.

**A BAM HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:
THE FIRST OFFICIAL BAM FIELD TRIP-----FEBRUARY 1974
FIELD NOTES BY FEN COOPER**

February 15, 1974 – Friday

At the December Bay Area Mineralogists meeting Dick Erd, Dr. Richard C. Erd on all the articles he has written, announced that he had arranged a trip to the Death Valley borax deposits with Vince Morgan of Boron and that if anyone from our group would be interested in going he would be happy to include us. Man that was like throwing a chicken carcass into a lake full of alligators and before Dick could sit down he had a number of hungry mineralogists nibbling at his ankles. As a side issue Mo Leonardi has a way to get into the Tenneco Boraxo Pit, which has recently produced some really huge colemanite crystals, and Gail and I may be able to wiggle our way into that one too. All in all it should be a real humdinger of a trip as Dick and Vince are world-renowned borate mineral specialists and Mo is a well-known collector so we should have an extremely interesting time. This trip was organized as a club field trip in our usual manner and all we had for rules and an itinerary was "if you want to go, meet at Texas Springs Campground in Death Valley Friday night". I immediately got a couple of days vacation from my fearless leader and started getting ready.

Today after work I scampered over to Gail's in the blue Jeep and we headed for the Mojave Desert. We got as far as Red Rock Canyon and camped in the main amphitheatre.

February 16, 1974 – Saturday

Gail and I were up before dawn and headed for Trona. We called Mo and he said to meet him at Furnace Creek Ranch at eleven. He had a letter of introduction to the mine manager and today Gail was Al McGuinness and I was Jack Parnau. I considered my self flattered as Jack is a very knowledgeable collector and I would be proud to be mistaken for him.

We had a long way to go so we gassed up and headed east. We were a few minutes early but when we got there Mo was waiting for us. Mo had to go to Ryan to get the final O.K. and we tagged along. Ryan is an interesting place clinging to the side of the mountain on the northwestern end of the Greenwater Range. If you could put a mining camp into suspended animation Ryan would be my choice. The offices, magazines, bunkhouses, miners cabins and all the other buildings and equipment needed to operate the place are all there, intact and ready to roll. The mines it services are all owned by U.S. Borax and when the Kern County deposits were found the Ryan mines were closed. There are still enormous reserves of colemanite in the hills that Ryan sits on so Ryan is preserved by a caretaker, isolation and the desert.

Mo got his permission and we headed for the Tenneco Boraxo Pit. We met the mine manager and he showed us around. Unfortunately the area that produced the large colemanite crystals was inaccessible as the portion on this bench was mined out and it wouldn't be accessible until the next level hit it.

Even though the layer we wanted to collect in was gone we had a number of cavities to explore and found several pockets containing colemanite. Most of the crystals we found were in the one to two inch size and were well formed blocky crystals and somewhat resembled those coming from borate.

I did find one interesting crystal though. It is in the form of a pentagon and is transparent pale brown. Everybody agrees that is some type of multiple twin but no one has ever seen anything like it and it is most unusual. It was a floater and occurred in a gray mud at the bottom of a pocket.

We collected till about three and then we had to hit the trail. Mr. "McGuinness" and Mr. "Parnau" thanked everybody profusely and then Gail and I morphed back into our other persona. When we left the Tenneco Boraxo Pit we headed for the Texas Springs Campground near Furnace Creek Ranch. When we got there we met Dick Erd, Gary Moss, Craig Stolburg, Chuck Trantham, Len Piscewicz and Jerry and Venice Jungles. Gail and I grabbed an adjoining campsite and made our selves at home. Vince Morgan and his wife showed up at dusk and we all sat around and talked minerals till dark. Gail and I did a little trading with Mo and Vince, mostly in Potter-Cramer Prospect chromates and the New Idria crystallized cinnabar. We talked till about nine then the meeting broke up and we all went to bed. Hopefully tomorrow will be a long day.

P.S. Shortly after we were there on a subsequent exposure of this zone a single rhombohedral doubly terminated colemanite crystal a foot across was found. As far as is known it is the largest colemanite crystal ever found.

February 17, 1974 – Sunday

We were up at dawn and after breakfast and got the car ready to go. This involved leaving the chuck box and other odds and ends to hold "our" campsite while we, and the food, went out in the car to explore more boraxy pastures.

Our first stop was the Corkscrew Mine and Corkscrew Canyon. In 1958 Gail and I had driven up to the gate and, without a clue as to what was behind it turned around and headed back. This time we drove up to the gate, Vince got out with the key and opened the lock and we were in, legally even. We, including Vince Morgan who was riding with us, were able to get the Jeep almost all the way up to the Corkscrew Mine and as the road was petering out I found a flat spot to park the Jeep. It was just a short distance up the trail; it really wasn't a road now, to the Corkscrew Mine. On the way up to the mine portal I picked up a colemanite crystal about six inches across and a piece

of celestite containing several one inch crystals so I was ahead of the game before it even started.

When we were all assembled around the portal of the Corkscrew Mine Vince gave us a "what's where" talk. He didn't mention nobelite and when we were entering the mine I asked him about it. By this time we were standing in a room about fifteen feet high, twenty feet wide and thirty feet long. He said the original nobelite had come from a single pocket in the middle of the colemanite that was mined out years ago. He also said that it was possible more might be found but he doubted we would do it. We spent about fifteen minutes looking, concluded he was right and then went hunting the colemanite pseudomorphs after inyoite that the mine is famous for. These were relatively common in one section of the mine and the only difficult thing was removing them without damaging the surface. These pseudomorphs ranged in size up to about two inches across but Gary Moss found one that is a full four inches. Gail and I cleaned out a couple of pockets and had put a bunch of old hand towels in our bags to wrap specimens. These took up more room but we were able to save a higher percentage of specimens than most people. The crystals have a brown to black coating on them and Vince explained that the color was due to a thin coating of todrokite. At any rate we had a bag apiece of some very nice samples of colemanite. We finally realized we were hungry and headed out to get some lunch. On the way out we had to pass through the large room. With no one in it our flashlights hit the walls fully and the light was reflected by thousands of small colemanite crystal faces. The walls sparkled like they were covered with diamonds and the room truly looked like a fairy-like underground grotto.

After we had lunch and packed our specimens we got ready to go over to the Mount Blanco Mine. The Mount Blanco Mine is one of the older borax prospects in the area and is principally known for the presence of the fine meyerhofferite specimens that are found there. The mine consists of a tunnel about one hundred feet long and a small dump. The meyerhofferite is associated with small colemanite crystals and the mine follows a pockety seam of meyerhofferite into the mountain. The method that we used was everybody that wanted to go into the tunnel went, picked an area in the wall that looked interesting and started digging. Gail and I picked a likely looking spot in the tunnel wall and started digging. We hit a crystal-lined cavity almost immediately and started filling our beer flats with treasures. All the specimens are well crystallized and consist of three basic things. The first are meyerhofferite pseudomorphs after inyoite. These crystals can be as much as an inch across and are sharp pseudomorphs after the original mineral. A second generation of meyerhofferite often fills voids in the pseudomorphic meyerhofferite specimens. While this material is meyerhofferite it is not a pseudomorph but occurs as well formed lath shaped transparent crystals. Small prismatic to bipyramidal colemanite crystals are often found around the margins of these pockets and also occur in association with the other minerals. Almost every time you broke a chunk off the wall you found a very nice specimen and I filled my two beer flats to overflowing very quickly. I even found a couple of specimens of meyerhofferite specimens with an unaltered core of inyoite.

Venice Jungles, (I love that name, Venice Jungles) is a typical little old lady who looks like everybody's grandmother, is about five feet tall and may weigh a hundred pounds soaking wet with an anvil under her arm. She has the tenacity of a pit bull when she is after a specimen, is a micromounter and the Mount Blanco Mine had to be her idea of heaven. She was happily filling egg cartons with treasures and had her husband Jerry shuttling back and forth between the mine and their car taking full ones down and bring empties back. When Jerry got tired they switched and then Venice was the pack mule for the outfit. She and Jerry must have made a dozen trips up and down the trail between the mine and the place we parked the cars and by the time we were finished collecting at the Mount Blanco Mine they were just about out of egg cartons and toilet paper to wrap things.

About three we started to wind down and people began to wander back to their cars with their treasures. Gail and I hung on till the bitter end and when we left all our boxes, bags and pockets were full. We headed back to Texas Springs and reoccupied our campsite. We re established our kitchen and I got dinner started. When we were coming out of Corkscrew Canyon Gary Moss was riding with us. We had boxes and flats of specimens stacked up almost to the top of the seat and Gary promptly christened the Jeep the "Blue Ore Wagon". It sure did yeoman service today.

After dinner Vince Morgan produced enough wood for a fire tonight and after everyone had eaten we had a campfire and sat around it till about ten. I tried to keep my ears open and my mouth shut so I actually learned something. Eventually I got Vince Morgan and Dick Erd in conversation about the Hardscramble Claim. and before I was through I got Vince to take us over to the place tomorrow morning before our group left. Dick told us what to look for and we know what to look for now. Dick also said if we found seams of borates to keep anything that looked "different" as there were several other minerals that were still unidentified from this locality.

The day has been windy and cool but since a good part of our day was spent underground it really didn't matter much. The wind died down around sunset and while the night is cool everyone has a jacket and between this and Vince's campfire everyone is comfortable. Venice has a blue jacket on and she looks like a frozen polar bear but she says she's "toasty warm" inside. She should be, all you can see is two eyes, a nose and the tips of her fingers.

February 18, 1974 – Monday

Most of our group split for home but Venice and Jerry Jungles, Gail and I and Vince Morgan and his wife are all that are left. Vince got us our permission to go onto the Hardscramble Claim and then we drove out to the place with him. He showed us the place, told us the dumps were the place to look then he and his wife headed for home.

The Hardscramble Claim consists of a collapsed short adit and a dump about twenty-five feet long and fifteen feet wide. There are also several small pits in the area but none of them appear to have produced anything of interest. Judging from the material on the dump the Hardscramble Claim tunnel followed a colemanite seam in a completely weathered basalt. The basalt has been almost entirely reduced to a fine brown gritty soil and the only solid "rock" in the mine is the colemanite in the seam. The weathering of the colemanite has produced a number of new borate minerals most of which were described by Dr. Richard C. Erd.

While Jerry, Venice, Gail and I are the only ones left of our group we are determined to collect as much as the whole group could. We all started digging in the dump but we soon hit a layer that was rich in borate minerals. I was smart enough to give Gail his head, and an army entrenching shovel, and allow his gopher blood to come to a simmer. Pretty soon he was sending out a shower of borate minerals. As Venice and Jerry were mostly interested in micromounts I called them over and we all started picking specimens out of the flying dirt. Gail's "hole" was producing some very nice specimens of nobelite, ginorite and gowerite along with several other rare borates. We were determined to fill the few beer flats we have left and soon we had a number of well-crystallized specimens of nobelite that consisted of small hexagonal platy crystals covering brecciated colemanite. We didn't get as much ginorite and gowerite as the nobelite but Gail got into an area that produced a few very nice pieces. The stuff makes really nice specimens but is really delicate. I don't see how we can wrap them safely so I suspect they will go home sitting on top of our mattress. We also found specimens containing colemanite crystals, ulexite and a number of "things" that Dick Erd said could be the new or unreported mineral.

We kept at it till almost noon and then we realized what time it was. Gail and I have an awful long way to go so we have to quit and head for home quick! Venice still has two egg cartons left and since she and Jerry are both retired they don't have to be anywhere tomorrow and she vows to fill them before she leaves. We said goodbye to Jerry and Venice and hit the road.

This has been an extremely productive trip. The back of the "Blue Ore Wagon" is loaded to the window ledges and above with boxes, camping gear and all the other paraphernalia we require for a trip like this. When I look out the rear view mirror I can see piles of "stuff" sticking up. Another nice thing was that we had a number of very interesting people in our group to talk to. Talking with Mo Leonardi, Dick Erd and Vince Morgan was a real pleasure and I learned a great deal about borate minerals. The campfire chat was a lot of fun and this trip was a great success and made really super first BAM field trip.

Fen Cooper

ACADEMY MOVE: GET THE FACTS

Notice from Jean DeMouthe
Senior Collections Manager for Geology
California Academy of Sciences,
Golden Gate Park, SF 94118

The California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park is closing to the public on 31 December 2003. After that date, we will be removing the specimens from the exhibits, and continuing with our ongoing preparation for the move to a temporary facility on Howard Street. The collections will probably begin moving in April, and it will take several months to get everything safely stowed in our "transition" facility. The minerals and fossils will be moved in the drawers in which they are normally housed. We have been going through and stabilizing each specimen so that nothing will roll around or bounce when the drawers are placed in the rolling cabinets being built for the move. This has been going on for over a year, and will go on non-stop until we move (there are about 1,600 mineral drawers and 5,000 fossil). Some of the larger specimens, like the jade boulders and the *Tyrannosaurus*, will be going on exhibit somewhere else during our transitional period (no room for them on Howard Street). Almost all specimens in the collections will continue to be accessible during the Academy's time downtown, which is estimated at about four years. Large exhibitions of fossils (next summer) and minerals (Jan 2005) are planned for the SF airport. Other exhibits are planned for UCSF library (Apr - Nov 2004), UC Davis geology dept, and Sierra College, as well as the usual displays at the big minerals shows.

What can BAM members do? Come visit the old building in December and take a last look at Mineral Hall, Life Thru Time, and the other geologic exhibits (you can look at the other stuff, too). The last 3 days of December will be free, 12-hour days. Anyone with some free time is welcome to become a volunteer to help get the collections ready to move. The exhibits for the new building in GG Park, which is scheduled to open in 2008, have not yet been decided upon. So you can write a letter to the administration in support of mineral and geologic displays (there is currently no plan for a new mineral hall, gem room, or comprehensive fossil-rich exhibit other than one on "Astrobiology"). There is information about the move and the new building on the Academy's web site at: www.calacademy.org.

Anyone can contact me directly with questions, suggestions, encouragement, etc. I wish you all a joyous and peaceful holiday season!

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