
Bay Area Mineralogists

January 2008

Happy New Year!

Next meeting: January 9, 2008

Foothill College

<http://www.baymin.org>



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BAM January Program: Rick Kennedy Museum Travelogue

Rick Kennedy has been out and about again and offered to give a brief slide show on two Oregon museums he visited in October: the Crater Rock museum in Central Point, (<http://www.craterrock.com/>) and the Rice Northwest Museum in Hillsboro (<http://www.ricenwmuseum.org/>).

Oregon: it's not just about agates and zeolites!



*Rhodochrosite, Colorado
Rick Kennedy photo*

As always, start time is in the vicinity of 7:45pm. We meet in the Geology Lab at Foothill College. See <http://www.baymin.org/Meet/FoothillMap.gif> for a campus map. Bring \$2 for parking.

Notes from President Spence

As noted in last month's newsletter, Bill has put a couple of housekeeping items of the agenda: the meeting start time and what to do with our treasury funds.

It has been proposed to start meetings at 7 or 7:30 so people can get home earlier, thereby increasing attendance. With respect to the treasury, it keeps growing, but there's little that BAM spends money on other than the website and annual picnic. Bill is looking for a consensus on what to do with the balance; whether or not we still need to collect dues; etc.

This notice is so all members will know in advance that these items are going to be discussed, so nobody can complain later – mark your calendars!

Tucson Time-Out: No February Meeting

As per tradition, there will be no BAM meeting in February so folks can make the annual pilgrimage to the Tucson show. We'll resume on March 12 with stories, show & tell of pretty rocks, and the probable reappearance of a certain battered trophy...

For those attending Tucson, we'll circulate any proposed times for a BAM get-together.

München 2007, part II

Claus Hedegaard

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Taking respite in the special exhibit from the part of the show making claims on my wallet, I enjoyed the superb specimens from "the Top of the World" brought to München by Johannes Keilmann, who claims this is the last time he is organising the special exhibit and all will now be in the capable hands of his son, Christof. Specimens from the Herb Obodda collection figured prominently but it must have been difficult to decide what not to include in the display – there was not a single specimen, I would not have been pleased to own.

Prominent treasures included the 25 cm (?) crystal of Beryllonite on matrix from Paprok (Nuristan, Afghanistan) in the collection of Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris) in a case with maybe a dozen superb specimens from that museum. The museum also brought what might seem as an inconspicuous Lapis Lazuli cup, produced in the 16th century Florence workshop Officina delle Pietre dure from Lapis collected in Sar-e-Sang in Afghanistan. It is from the cabinet of King Louis XIV of France. The English label read "Given to the MNHN in 1972" but the German (in my translation): "This cup was given to the MNHN in 1791." I suspect the latter to be true.



*Lapis lazuli cup,
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle collection*

The French state and its museums took over many royal and noble knick-knacks in the years following the French revolution – that is an affirmative acquisition policy. The revolution took place under Louis XVI, great grandchild of Louis XIV but Louis XIV had centralised power, reigned in the nobility, reducing feudalism, while engaging nobility in what we today would see as a farcical system of favour, opulence and pretence – this resembles in no way to the modern political system. It was a necessity to Louis XIV, effectively turning France into a modern state, but despised by his successors, who had neither the competence nor the determination to change it. Louis XIV's system centralised power and reduced the impact of nobility, but also promoted the growth of the educated class, which would promote the revolution, the terror and abuse it brought and the ultimate transfer of the precious Lapis Lazuli cup to MNHN. Today we see Lapis Lazuli at all mineral shows as tumble-polished stones, necklaces, pendants and what not. This obscures the fact that Lapis was exceedingly rare and valuable in the days of Louis (XIV and XVI) and this cup was not a trivial trinket but a valuable object ... supporting the view of an infinitely wealthy, absolute monarch.

The cases from Herb Obodda's collection contained treasures like a specimen labelled "Adularia with Chlorite" from Tormiq (near Skardu, Pakistan), a neat, colourless Adularia crystal – probably 8 cm or so – where the edges were studded by smaller Adularia crystals of a different habit and coloured green by chlorite inclusions.



*Adularia with chlorite, Pakistan
Herb Obodda specimen*

I also liked the 2 cm or so, sharp crystals of Microlite on matrix of Adularia (well, Microcline var. Adularia!) from Shigar Valley (N of Skardu, Pakistan). The Xenotime-(Y) with two, sharp, greyish brown, 6 cm crystals on matrix from Zargi Mountain (NW Frontier Province, Pakistan) was adorable ... but I can't help wonder whether the -(Y) is a backbone reflex because Xenotime-(Y) is the only described Xenotime or whether the specimen has actually been analysed?

Among the classic Afghan & Pakistani gem minerals, I fell for the 30 cm or so, sharp, purplish pink Spodumene var. Kunzite from Laghman (Nuristan, Afghanistan) from an uncredited collection. Gem Kunzite is "a dime a dozen," figuratively at least, and Pakistani dealers practically throw crystals at you but sharp crystals? When was the last time you saw a well-shaped, gemmy Kunzite?



*Kunzite, Afghanistan
Uncredited specimen at the Mineralientage
München 2007 special exhibit*

The true gem of the show was a dull, black crystal. The 17 cm, sharp Viitaniemiite from Paprok (Nuristan, Afghanistan) is one of a kind. It was touted as "the World's largest" and indeed it is but the point is, number two is far off and practically all Viitaniemiite, including the type

material is inconspicuous. To put things in perspective: Viitaniemiite from Viitaniemi (Eräjärvi, Tampere, Finland) is described as to 0.2 mm inclusions in Eosphorite.

Special exhibits like those at Mineralientage München are a rare treat – we can admire fantastic specimens from private collections, generally unavailable – and they are extremely costly to organise. That said, I can not help being a bit disappointed about two issues. The most important is that many specimens were unlabelled and particularly there were no explanatory texts. It is a privilege to be able to enjoy the magnificence of a 17 cm black crystal, but if you never heard of Viitaniemiite? The exhibit "preaches to the choir" but leaves the general audience a bit lost. Why are these blue and pink crystals really magnificent? Why do they occur there and not elsewhere? How are they formed? My other, minor, issue is the emphasis on nations. True, Pakistan and Afghanistan dominate the Himalayan mineral deposits but the single showcase of specimens from Nepal was a superficial treatment of the mineral deposits of the remaining Himalayan nations, including Bhutan, India, and evidently Tibet. Given the show's increased emphasis on healing and wellness, it would have been obvious to include Himalayan salt and maybe Tibetan Turquoise.



*Viitaniemiite, Afghanistan (17 cm crystal!)
Naturhistorisches Museum sample*

Many mineral collectors and dealers shake their heads in disbelief over the healy-feely crowd with all their incantations and extraordinary application of minerals. Christmas Mass in Basilica San Pietro in the Vatican is bland in comparison! But please let me challenge your

predisposition. Next time you go to a mineral show, take a good look at the show for that is all it is. Take away the show and you have a stack of rock, irrespective of whether the dealers are healy-feelies or purveyors of select specimens. Regrettably, many mineral dealers still live 30 years ago and mentally deal out of the trunk of their car. Look at their display, often with little or no organization, no prices on the specimens and they hide behind the table, maybe even behind a showcase. Most healy-feelies are very communicating, telling you about the rocks – remember the haemorrhoids? – giving free sample gemstone massages, etc. Mostly their booths are well-organized, eccentric but well-organized, with plenty light, and bright colours. A select few mineral dealers make attractive displays, but many sit in a pile of rubbish and with most you have to be a member to see the good stuff and to really understand what they offer.

Imagine you come to your first mineral show ever. Are you going to rummage through a lot of rubbish to find an unpriced rock, for which no appreciable information is offered? Or will you return home with a piece of Smoky Quartz with magic properties? I know I generalise and that I likely offend many, but grant me there is some element of truth to what I say. The healy-feelies offer customer care, whereas many hard-core mineral dealers could double as a Bavarian waitress.

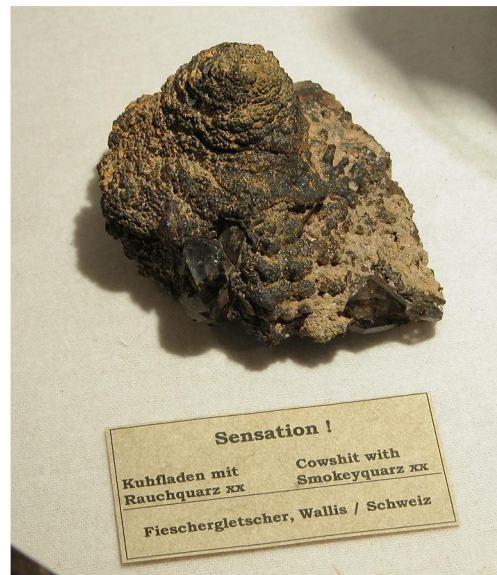
I always spend time in the area with collectors' showcases. Each shows something, a collector, a museum or maybe a group believes is interesting. This is also an excellent opportunity to see magnificent and astonishing specimens, normally outside the public view ... or sometimes just something weird.

Karlheinz Gert, Hans-Dieter Götter and Bernhard Sick made an interesting case, telling the story of Charles Ottley-Groom-Napier (1839-1894), Prince of Mantua and Montserrat, who was actually a fraudster with simple background. Few if any of the specimens reach beyond what is best characterised as average, yet it is an interesting collection – and person. In the good old days – before TV, radio, Internet, and all that – a gentleman had to have a mineral collection, a shell collection, a library, a selection of gems, paintings, antiques (Greek marble, not Grandma's pottery), etc. or at least some of that. These trinkets were educational, they were the TV, etc. of that day and age. They were expensive but not prestigious specimens as

such. They were a symbol of status and breed, not unlike Louis XIV's Lapis cup, not unlike modern collectors' "My Aqua is bigger than your Aqua" specimens.

I was thrilled to see the display from the recently refurbished collection of the Melk Monastery, presented by Pater Petrus. This is an antique collection, salvaged from oblivion, substantially better than the Ottley-Groom-Napier collection but based on the same philosophy: It is a window to the World, an educational tool, and evidently a symbol of status. They showed an excellent specimen of leaf-Gold on Quartz from Rosia Montana (Romania).

In a case entitled Alpine Treasures Gerd M. Wiedenbeck & Jutta Pillath showed among other specimens a piece of cow dung with an imbedded Smoky Quartz crystal collected at Fieschergletscher (Wallis, Switzerland). That is the true beauty of the auxiliary displays at Mineralientage München: You see things, you would have sworn didn't exist and occasionally a glimpse of an answer eluding you for ages.



*Smoky quartz in stinky matrix
Wiedenbeck & Pillath sample*

Letters to the BAM Editor

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