

Opal Hill Field Trip Report

March 19-20, 2022

First, let me thank and pass ALL of the credit for leading this trip to Randy and Madeline Lafond. They visited the site earlier in the month, took several approaches to the site, then determined which was most suitable and safest for our club members. Completely beyond the call of duty and very much appreciated by all in attendance. But, especially by me as I was the last member to arrive at the locality (though I did have a good reason long with a few KILLER specimens to back up my story).

Speaking of attendance, we had several people participate in the trip and a few who, for various reasons, couldn't make it... and you were missed. Attendees included Randy and Madeline, Kim, Laura, Aleah, Tina and John, and me.

Opal Hill was the destination and while I only expected to find Fire Agate, it turns out that there actually is Opal on the hill. Everyone found plenty of Chalcedony, Jasper, Agate, some Common Opal and a little bit of Fire Agate. The rock is so hard that digging in the hillside is primarily done with power tools. And though Randy had a roto-hammer with him, he eventually shut it down and joined the rest of us in surface collecting. The material is plentiful once you wander a little bit from the primary mine site.

We also drove around in search of other interesting things/places. For example, there is an oasis, complete with several fully grown palm trees and a little pool to hold water from a spring. There's no telling when the spring springs forth, but it wasn't happening last weekend, that's for sure! The water couldn't have been too deep as the trees looked robust and healthy.

John led us up to a mine site near the camp area. It looked like a sand and gravel mine for aggregate. But nearby there was an old, dilapidated stone house. While the house looked to have been built many years ago, there were more recent workings dated 1981. It appeared as though they may have been mining copper and/or silver from the nearby mountains. Several adits and tailings piles were visible in the distance. Several members took a closer look at the mine operations on the hillsides and reported significant tunneling.

The weather was generally great. High clouds kept us protected from the true intensity of the sun during the day. The nearly full moon rose and provided plenty of light during the night. The wind did provide a bit of a challenge for Laura, Kim and Aleah as their tents were unceremoniously flattened... with authority. However, all three were able to find safe harbor, insulated comfortably in Tina and John's RV. The good news for all other members on the trip is that I was the only one sleeping outside in the wind (in the bed of my truck). Why is this good news, you may ask. Well, the only complaint about my incessant and deafening snoring came from a hypersensitive resident of Palo Verde... about 4 miles away. In my defense, a strong wind can carry sound quite a significant distance!

Following are several visual representations of the more enjoyable, tiring, delightful, embarrassing, silly, proud moments the team encountered along the way...



LEFT: Hard rock mining for Fire Agate at Opal Hill Mine brings Randy to his knees.

RIGHT: Chipping a piece of hard-earned Fire Agate from the mountain.



LEFT: Randy double-checking to be sure he didn't leave any Fire Agate for future collectors... HAHHAHA!

RIGHT: Kim did well surface collecting; as did many of the others in the group. As Tina mentioned, the entire hill is covered with Fire Agate for those willing to take a few steps off the beaten path.



CAPTION CONTEST...



Oasis... Well, at least the palm trees know where the water is hiding.



Kim doing a back flop into the oasis pool. Her hallucination was likely caused by the extreme giddiness of the day's earlier finds (this is a joke and to the best of our knowledge, Kim suffered no hallucinations or any other type of vision issues. Fortunately, she was not injured. Unfortunately, the rock she slipped on was not valuable at all).



LEFT: An unwelcome nighttime visitor in Kim and Aleah's tent (needless to say, they both slept in Tina and John's trailer. I wonder if scorpions feel all tingly when blasted with a fluorescent light!

RIGHT: On our way to collect at a secondary site on day 2 (unknown mine)



LEFT: Aleah grows tired of collecting tiny rocks.



RIGHT: John's Rockhound Limo Service.



Laura was combing the hillsides and collecting lots of colorful material.



A clean home is a happy home!



Our mottled, albeit cheerful, group.



It was a fantastic trip with beautiful memories found at every turn (except for the turn into the sandy wash where the 2WD vehicles almost got stuck).