

The Go-To Guy: A Visit with Rex Barrans

by Joseph Barreca

On my first rock hounding trip with the Panorama Gem and Mineral Club, Rex Barrans led us up to the dig. After we got there, people kept bringing their finds over to Rex to identify metals, minerals and crystals. It was soon clear who the go-to guy was on that trip, and as it turns out on just about any trip in Stevens County.

I visited Rex and Mable Barrans at their home in Chewelah recently and got to see their private collection. It reinforced my impression that we live in an area rich with earthly treasures.



Rex got the rock picking bug early on. He helped his uncle prospecting at age 14. After he came back from the war in 1946. He got a job at the Allen Magnesite Quarry up Browns' Quarry Rd, south of Chewelah. He started out drilling and blasting. It didn't take him long to move up to company electrician. The main shovel for the quarry ran on electricity and Rex was an electrician in the Service. It also didn't take him long to find Mabel (or maybe she found him.) Her uncle worked at Allen Quarry.

Besides magnesite, Allen Quarry had pyrite crystals and probably several other interesting ores. Even after all these years Rex still has the enthusiasm of a youngster for new minerals no matter what their size or dollar value. His microscope is just as important as his line of tumblers and he can pick up almost any rock of the hundreds in his collection and tell you what it is and where it came from.

Early on he found the book "[Mineral Resources of Stevens County](#)" by the Washington Geological Survey, 1920. More recently Bob Bristow

borrowed a copy from Walter Goodman and made a copy for Rex. It had 65 minerals of economic significance listed and Rex has pretty much found every one.

We were moving fast, so I am not going to detail everything in Rex's collection. But I do want to mention a few and include a crude map of where they are so we can find some of these ourselves.

The name that keeps coming up for the best overall variety is the Jim McGraff Mine. Rex has a piece of brown ophiolite with what looks to be cubic inclusions in green and other colors that is unlike any I've ever seen. The mine also had asbestos. It is privately owned and not available for "landscape rocks". But rock pickers can get in with a trusted chaperone such as Rex.

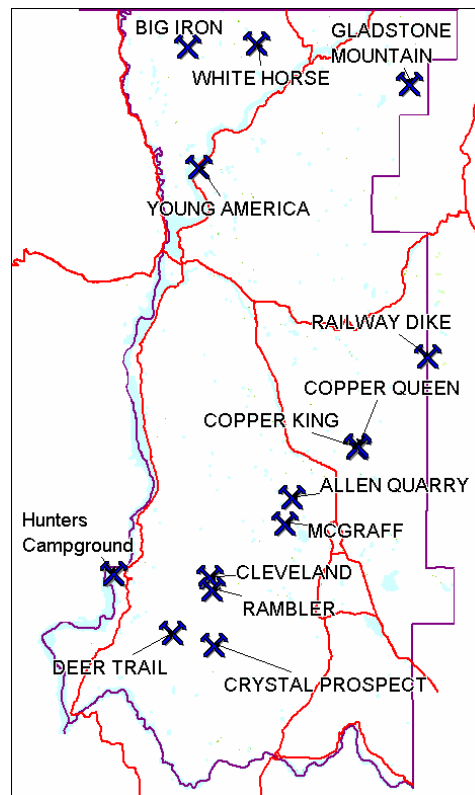
Rex found some crystals of Black Tourmaline in the granites up on Calispell Mt. The granites themselves are reportedly beautiful, but probably not easily turned into counter tops. Nearby at the Railway Dike or Merikay Mine the government supported the production of uranium fuel rods during the WWII that used beryllium. It is also used in copper conducting springs for electrical relays.

Pyrite is common in many ore tailings, the Allen Quarry, the Deer Trail and the Copper Queen to name a few. Massive pyrite from the Big Iron Mine can be tumbled and polished. Arsenopyrite can be found at the Cleveland Mine, our first scheduled

expedition this coming year. It is the principle ore of arsenic, so we will have to be careful.

The Crystal Prospect up off the Springdale – Hunters Road was once a great place for smoky quartz.

It costs \$12 per day now to dig there and is fairly played out. Smokey quartz will clear when exposed to heat. But it will turn dark again when exposed to radioactivity. Some smoky



quartz lies in veins under the whiter kind near the Deer Trail Monitor Mine. (See the October 2004 newsletter.)

Rhyolite can be found in one of Ernie Smith's Quarries near Chewelah. It takes a polish and looks almost like picture jasper.

Rex found flowstones, evidently from an ancient hot spring flow, up near the Gladstone Mine, east of Deep Lake.

Argyrite, a silver mineral was found in the Young America mine near Evans.

There is malachite around the Copper King, Edna and Keystone mines northeast of Chewelah and gold-colored chalcopyrite at the Copper Queen nearby.

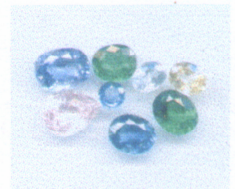
Rex has some native copper from the Rambler Mine East of Hunters.

Psilomelane is a black manganese oxide that can be found near the Hunters Campground in an area where you can also see the tracks of the glaciers etched into the rock.

I didn't catch the locations of the hollow mudstones, fossils, fluorites, muscovite, feldspar, beryl, barite and many more minerals Rex has from Stevens County. He has many more from Ferry County and neighboring states. There are a lot of treasures in the ground of Stevens County, but none more valuable to our club than the go-to guy, Rex Barrans.

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