

A Quick Trip to the Leadville Mine

By Joe Barreca

The trouble with picking rocks in the winter is that – at least in places like Onion Creek – there is snow on the ground. The work-around is to explore an old mine, one that is easy to get to. The Leadville is right off Onion Creek Rd.



Mike Latapie and Grandson Ryan at the Leadville

Just inside the entrance is a fairly large chamber, 15 feet high and 15 feet wide. You can follow the slant of the ore body along the right hand wall. There is a cave-in about 50 feet back that left a mixture of soft rock and clay on the floor. It blocks enough of the adit going back into the hill so that one or two feet of water fill the tunnel. The timbers are rotten from there on in so we would not have wanted to go much further anyway. But this pile gets you close to some interesting stuff, and made a dry warm spot for a couple of packrats to build their nests.



Cotton Candy fibers on a muck pile.

On the left side at the back was a slide of sparkling black clay with a crystalline fuzz growing out of it. It was too soft to move, pretty much like cotton candy.

It must have formed fairly quickly because the mine has been worked in the last few years by a friend of Mike's. I tried putting a little in the bottom of a bucket (a bag would have crushed it). But it dissolved in the slight bit of water in the bottom of the bucket. It would be beautiful in a micro mount if you could find a way to save it.

We scanned the area with the UV light. The walls glowed light blue with a surface deposit. Also glowing with the same blue were the bodies of daddy long-leg spiders clustered there for the winter. (picture in normal light).



Spiders clustered on the mine walls.

(One thing we missed in this impromptu visit was that there are graptolite fossils in the mine. Find almost any spot with thin shale and pull the layers apart. There are rust-colored lines on them from graptolites that date back 500 million years.)