



The **BACKBENDER'S GAZETTE**

**The Newsletter of the
Houston Gem & Mineral Society
Houston, TX**

Volume XXXVI - No. 12

December 2005

President's Message

November, 2005

by Norman Lenz

HGMS President, 2004-2005



Fellow HGMS Members,

Our Christmas party is scheduled for Saturday, December 10, 2005. See the party announcement in this issue for more details.

The Nominating Committee made great recommendations for Year 2006 HGMS elected officers. There were no nominations from the floor during the October General Meeting, so the vote in the November General Meeting will be a formality. I thank the Nominating Committee for their research. The nominees are:

- Scott Singleton: President
- Matt Dillon: Vice President
- Beverly Mace: Second Vice President
- Margaret Hardman-Muye: Secretary
- Paul McGarry: Treasurer (Lowell Stouder will serve as unofficial assistant to Paul)



President's Message continued on page 4

General Meeting Program

November

by Scott Singleton

HGMS 1st VP

The November presentation will be by Andy Mortimer. Andy is a geologist with ENI Petroleum which is the state oil company of Italy. He recently completed a multiyear posting in Jakarta, Indonesia, where he was able to search out and find the local sources of petrified wood



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Copy is due for the January issue by Sunday, December 8, 2005. (When the 8th falls on Saturday,I create the BBG that same weekend. When the 8th fall on Sunday, I create the BBG the following weekend.)

Purpose of HGMS

The objectives of this Society are to promote the advancement of the knowledge and practice of the arts and sciences associated with the collecting of rocks, minerals, fossils, artifacts, and their identification and classification; the general lapidary art; the collecting and identification of gemstones; the designing and execution of jewelry or metalcraft; and to provide the opportunity to obtain, exchange, and exhibit specimens and rough or finished materials.

Membership dues are \$30 for an adult membership, \$40 for a couple, \$50 for a family (including all children aged 5-18), and \$8 for a youth membership (ages 5-18).

Advertising rates: \$70 for 2 months, ¼ page; \$150 for 6 months, ¼ page.

MEMBER: American Federation of Mineralogical Societies & South Central Federation of Mineral Societies.

All meetings are held at the Clubhouse located at 10805 Brooklet near the intersection of Highway 59 (Southwest Freeway) and Sam Houston Parkway (Beltway 8). See the calendar inside the back page for when the different Sections meet. The General Meeting is the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:30. The HGMS Internet address is <http://www.hgms.org>.

*President's Message continued from page 1***Appointed Year 2006 Directors:**

- Paula Rutledge: Faceting Section
- Dave Hawkins: Lapidary Section
- Art Smith: Mineral Section
- Rick Rexroad: Paleontology Section
- Sunday Bennett: Day Light Section

One of our most significant HGMS accomplishments is our clubhouse. However, as our membership grows and our activities and programs increase, the clubhouse receives more use by more members. It has become obvious that it is increasingly difficult to keep it clean. We have tried several cleaning methods through the years, including scheduling Sections to take turns at cleaning. As I looked over the meeting room and kitchen during a recent Board meeting, there were small wads of paper scattered in the corners and along the walls, empty or half empty soda cans on tables or tucked beside chairs just waiting to be knocked over. Rocks were scattered here and there where they did not belong. We did a major cleaning in the spring, but now you would not know it.

No single individual or Section is at fault. Most of us are guilty of not picking up that paper or soda can. Maybe we forgot to wipe up what we unintentionally dropped, spilled, or tracked in. Perhaps it is time to consider hiring a professional service or individual to come in for a few hours every two weeks to do the cleaning and to arrange the furniture. They could also check on our inventory of paper towels, soap, etc. This is something for the new Board to consider in January when we begin thinking about the new budget. In the meantime, please do your part to keep our Clubhouse clean.

If you have a question, ask it! If you have a suggestion, make it! If you have a talent, share it!

Program Information continued from page 1

that recently have been coming out of Java. Being a geologist, he was able to trace down the geologic formation name and the mode of deposition of this wood. He then started acquiring large quantities of it. However, the petrified wood is not in the state that we are all used to seeing. The full-round and partial-round stumps and logs have had their exteriors completely polished without the use of saws or any modern rock polishing equipment. Andy will present this rather amazing story and show us examples of these polished Indonesian logs.

December: The Christmas party is at the Clubhouse Saturday, December 10. Social hour starts at 5:00 p.m., dinner is at 6:00 p.m., and the auction is at 7:00 p.m. As usual, the HGMS Board is sponsoring the party and providing the meat, beverage, paper plates, and plastic ware. Attendees are asked to bring everything else. Consider bringing a rock, mineral, fossil, jewelry, or a piece of equipment to contribute to the auction, and be prepared to have a great time!

Collection Catalogues

by Art Smith

Member of the Houston Gem & Mineral Society

Recently in the *Mineralogical Record*, volume 36, number 5, 2005, Wendell Wilson had an article entitled, The Mineralogical Record Label Archive. It illustrated many old specimen labels mostly from the 19th century. He also requested contemporary labels that readers had no use for. So I sent him a wad of extra labels, mostly from Houston and other Texas collectors and dealers. I had no use for the labels since I had traded or otherwise disposed of the specimen to which the label belonged. I also sent him brief paragraphs on some of the dealers and collectors involved that he might not know. He expressed his gratitude and actually contacted some of the individuals for further data. Eventually, if not already, this archive will be a valuable resource for data on specimens, dealers, and collectors and some of the minerals they have had.

Although most of the labels illustrated were quite ornate, the actual specimen data was hand written by the owner or maybe in a few cases by his curator or secretary. This also added interest to the label. They make you feel that maybe you know a little about the former owner by his style of writing. Although not as neat and precise as a typewritten or computer generated label, the hand writing makes the specimens even more personal and gives the label a personality that the more modern labels do not have. To me these labels generally make the specimen more valuable if they were once owned by a prominent collector, museum, dealer, or mineralogist who worked on the mineral or locality. I usually keep them but do not generally display them.

What really struck me in many cases was the brevity of the label and the general lack of locality information or who it came from. However, each label did have a specimen number which not only keys the label to the numbered specimen but in many cases keyed both to a collection catalogue that many of these old collections have.

Why should you have a catalog for your collection? There are several reasons. In many cases the labels are too small to record and preserve all the data you have. Also the label is usually kept with the specimen so its data is available to anyone viewing the specimen. Certain data you may wish to keep proprietary such as the cost or what you traded for the specimen, or the dealer and whether it was collected personally. There also may be some personal notes on the mineral or locality. Also the catalogue acts as a backup—if the label is separated from the numbered specimen, you still have the data. Also, data like analyses or references that give you more data on the specimen and on the locality from which it came can be stored in a catalogue more easily.

I originally cataloged my specimens in small loose leaf books, but in recent years I have switched to a card file that allows me to remove the cards of specimens that leave the collection for any reason or even to keep it if there is significant data to preserve. The disadvantage is that cards do get misfiled and lost, so at times the label becomes a backup for the card file. Whichever way works for you is generally good, but not

having a catalogue can make your collection less valuable. Actually I have three sources of data: the label, the card in the catalogue file, and the computer catalogue. At times I have used all of them for data, and I am glad I have them all.

Hunting Elephants from a Canoe on the Brazos River

by Neal Immega, Field Trip Leader

Member of the Houston Gem & Mineral Society

You could have shot a movie entitled “Pleistocene Park” on our Brazos River October canoe trip. Mammoths and mastodons, horses, deer, `gators, wolves, turtles, and lots of bison were seen. Well, we saw parts of them anyway.

For this trip, the Houston Gem and Mineral Society invited The Houston Geological Society. A good number of people took us up on the invitation, so we had quite a flotilla. Forty-five people in eighteen canoes and kayaks (and one lone rowboat) took a 7-mile trip from the San Felipe City Park to the I-10 bridge, collecting along the way from the gravel bars.



Brazos River Yacht Club

Our September trip was canceled because the river was too fast and too high. By October 30 though, we benefited from the previous high water because lots of new material was washed in. When we got there the river was way down, and apparently no one had been to the bars because there were only a few cow and deer tracks on them.

Why did we go and what did we see? I think that lots of people have a canoe that has been hung on the back fence too long, and this was a low-cost way to see some new sights. We also had eight canoe loads of people who used rentals arranged by HGMS from Whitewater Canoes. It did not hurt that the weather was just perfect, or that the



100-Yard Gravel Bars

water level very low (gage height at Richmond of 10 feet), which gave us a huge acreage of gravel bars to hunt. This was a real family activity.

How many places can you go to find mammoth and mastodon bones? Normally bison (not buffalo) is much more common, but not on this trip. We visited a gravel bar with

**Stump the Paleontologist**

the informal name of “Elephant Island”

where the collecting is always good because there is no road access. The group probably found 30 elephant parts there alone, and everyone had a lovely time playing “stump the paleontologist” by asking which part of what creature they had found. I fear that I disappointed lots of people by telling them that their prize pieces were all petrified wood, not some more animated critter.

We all went through a learning process that things that are heavy are likely to be chert or petrified wood, and things that are light deserve a much closer look. Old bones are usually brown in color and are not well mineralized. Some look so fresh that you wonder if someone has lost a very large cow or an escaped elephant in the recent past. There were also some diabolical test specimens found of chert that mimicked various animal parts. I do not know why people were not more excited by Cretaceous oysters or Paleozoic corals that must have come down the river from beyond Mineral Wells.

Most of the elephant bones were identified as just part of some much bigger bone, except for one right front foot, index finger, second digit toe bone!

**Elephant Toe****Wolf (?) Jaw**

On our previous trips we never found any carnivores, but this time something turned up that looks a lot like a wolf jaw. Also new to us is this alligator scute. In the Pleistocene there were armadillos the size of pigs, and they had scutes that look

**Alligator Scute****Armadillo Scute**

exactly like modern ones, only much bigger. Horse teeth are quite common as are turtle plates, only these turtle (land and soft shell) are from animals the size of wash tubs.

We had a great time and could even claim that we were furthering our education by spending time studying sedimentary structures—but the real draw was the vertebrate fossils. The nice part is that it is both legal and ethical to pick up specimens from the riverbank. If they are not collected, they wash on downriver and are destroyed.

Come on our next trip—you will have fun.



Horse Tooth



Soft Shell Turtle

Rockhounding 101® 2001

by Terrell William "Terry" Proctor, J.D.

Member of the Houston Gem & Mineral Society

This article is to assist the new guys and gals who want to be Rockhounds and to assist the "Pebble Puppy" and others who have little or no experience or training. Length allows only a brief coverage of some basics.

What KIND of Rockhound do you want to be?

What are your interests? Cutting precious stones (Faceting), fossils (Paleontology), cutting and polishing rocks and minerals (Lapidary), collecting and studying minerals, or other. The Houston Gem & Mineral Society (HGMS) has these and other sections for adults and children.

1 What, where, and when do you want to hunt?

Do NOT start hunting on your own. There are many million of square miles in the U.S. where you stand a good chance of finding nothing you would want to collect.

2 So where do you find places to collect?

- Determine what you are interested in. (see first note above)
- Determine where those things may be found. How do you find out where things may be found?
 - a You attend meetings and ask questions of the more knowledgeable Rockhounds at meetings.
 - b You read as much material on your area of interest as you can find. Go to: your club's own library and publication; the public library; book

stores; Gem, Mineral & Fossil shows; rock shops; and books that friends will loan you.

- c Purchase geological maps and books of maps to learn where every little waterway, hill, cut, and bluff is located in the State in which you want to hunt. You can get these from Universities, the U. S. Geodetic Survey (included in the footnotes), and State Geological Departments.
- d Subscribe to good magazines on the field (some are included in the footnotes).
- e One of the best places to dig, is a new road cut or railroad cut freshly made. Such cuts expose new fossils and minerals after rain washes away the initial construction dirt from the new cut.

3 Determine when the best time may be to look for specimens.

- a If you are searching in rivers for fossils, you do not want to go when the river is high. Do go after there has been flooding, but only after the river has gone back down. Flooding and high water wash out fossils and sometimes minerals. Then you wait for the river to go down and go pick up your prizes on sand bars and banks.
- b Consider climate conditions. Rivers can be dangerous during flooding. Deserts, plains, and other areas can be dangerous during high temperatures. River banks, cuts, and gullies can be dangerous when wet and slippery. Biting and stinging insects, poisonous snakes, toxic plants, and other things you encounter in the wild may be worse (or better) during certain seasons and weather conditions.
- c It is better to go on cool or warm days when the humidity is low and there is no holiday or weekend traffic to fight. However if you tough it, inclement weather and conditions may mean less competition.

4 What to wear and what personal items to take:

- a It depends a lot upon the weather and where you are going to be hunting.
- b If you are going to walk in a river bed, on river banks, cuts, gullies, or other slippery surfaces, you wear **tennis shoes** or other shoes that will grip well when wet.
- c If you are going to be climbing hills or mountains, wear **hiking boots** with good tread and ankle support. If there is danger of a mashed toe, wear steel toed boots if possible.
- d I recommend wearing **full length pants and shirt sleeves**. Limit your exposure to the sun, insect bites and stings, toxic plants, abrasions, and other mishaps. Wear something that is tough such as denim pants and shirts. Do not wear something that can be easily ruined—as it probably will be.
- e Always bring a **hat and a bandanna**. This will protect your face, ears, eyes, and neck from the sun, dust, and sometimes rain.
- f Carry a **canteen or pack with water and sport drinks** (to replace electrolytes in your system. Sweating (perspiring by ladies) is com-

mon on field trips, and you don't want to become dehydrated.

- g Carry the newer more powerful type of **insect repellent** and **sun protection cream** with a rating of at least SPF#15 or higher.

5 What to take for digging: This is much like asking how long is a piece of string. In many sites, you can just pick up minerals and fossils with virtually no tools. Other sites require specialized tools and equipment. Below are some samples to understand how much this can vary.

1] **Primary tools** at any site are the **containers** and **packaging materials** in which to remove the minerals or fossils from the site and to carry them safely to your home, lab, or clubhouse. You don't need to spend much (if any) money on containers. We all have lots of them around the house all the time. Some items are:

- a Plastic bottles for **water** (for washing specimens) and to carry such things as **Butvar glue*** to keep fossils together until you can get them home for preparation)
- b Soft drink "flats" (these are cardboard containers with canned drinks)
- c Styrofoam containers with lids (from fast food places with side orders)
- d Fishing tackle boxes or pencil boxes that can be purchased at chain stores, hobby centers etc. [these are great for small shells, pieces of bone and other smaller fossils and minerals]
- e Various-sizes of plastic storage boxes with lids (sold very reasonably)—good for bringing back larger specimens or clubs of dirt that you want to wash out for fossils or minerals when you get back
- f Always carry with you **toilet paper**, paper towels, and other packing material (bubble wrap, aluminum foil, and for large fossils, bring plaster of Paris, burlap, and water).

2] *Glue:

- a Butvar chips dissolved in acetone is used to stabilize fossil bones etc.
- b White glue like Elmer's is useful and can be thinned down with water
- c Super glue is fast drying and is useful in some limited capacities.

3] **Magnifying glass:** 3- to 6-power or a 10-power glass or **jeweler's loupe**. Of course, also bring your prescription eyeglasses so you can see your feet and the ground when you are looking.

4] For softer digging, such as in river banks, sand bars, spillways and other fairly soft ground, you may only need the following items:

- a Garden trowel
- b Tea spoon or table spoon
- c Garden tool (points on one side and hoe like edge on the other)
- d Kitchen knives and table knives
- e Mason's trowel

Many other simple digging tools.

- 5] A **single-edged razor blade** to go around the edges to split the layers open to reveal the carbon remains of the fossil—for places like Florescent, Colorado where you find insects and leaves in layers of volcanic ash.
 - 6] A large **pry bar** and a **sledge hammer** and **chisel** in places like Kemmerer, Wyoming, and other similar places where there are fossil fish and other fossils in harder layers of rock.
 - 7] Probably the most common tool is the **rockhound hammer**. Some of these are actually **mason's hammers** which have a hammer on one side and a chisel edge on the other. Another is the **engineer's hammer** which has a point on one side and the hammer on the other. Another often used tool is the **baby sledge**, which is a very heavy solid steel head on about a 10" or shorter handle.
 - 8] You may also, on occasions, wish to bring a **pointed shovel, flat shovel, spading fork, sharp shooter shovel, pick axe, crow bar** or many other usual construction type hand tools.
 - 9] [Under some circumstances, bring **exercise mats** or **padded mats** to lie or lean upon when the site requires a lot of lying and digging.
 - 10] **Identification books**, manuals, and other material can be helpful to help identify what you are finding.
 - 11] **Tags and forms**. Use a Travel Log when you start on your trip and log in at each stop, things like odometer reading, time, temperature, and reason for the stop. Use a **location form** to log in information on the location. Use a **specimen tag** to write up at least minimal information for each specimen. At the location, I may only make up one specimen tag for the entire group of fossils or minerals from that location. However, later I will make up one tag for each significant fossil or mineral, as it is important to the value of your specimen to have detailed information.
 - 12] **Camera, Compass, Notebook, Pen, and Measuring tape**. Especially when finding a vertebrate fossil, you may wish to photograph it "in loco" (i.e. where found), to draw it and write down compass readings from a point of reference.
 - 13] **Water** and **Snacks** can be very important to avoiding heat prostration and hunger.
- 6 Rules, regulations and compliance:**
- Clubs have **Rules** which they expect you to follow. You should also expect to sign an **Assumption of Risk** form showing that you understand that you are participating in something which can be and sometimes is dangerous.
 - There are written and unwritten general rules, which you should understand and follow, such as:
 - 1] Don't go on land unless you do so legally. You may get yourself or your club into trouble OR you may get the Club barred in the future from a site. Be respectful of the land owner and your club.
 - 2] Follow the directions of the Club's trip leader.
 - 3] Always leave a site better than you found it. It is good for the reputation for your club, so you are welcomed back by the property owners.

- 4] Stay with the group. You may be asked to use the “buddy system” to ensure that everyone is accounted for and has someone to help in an emergency. Also don’t get too far ahead or behind the group.
- 5] For safety and coordination of the group outing, meet at the **designated place** at the **designated time** you are supposed to be there.
- 6] At a site, pick up what you need and want, but do not clean the site out just because there are more fossils or mineral specimens you could pick up. Leave some for those who come after you. Some excellent sites in the past are now devoid of all fossils and minerals. Most Rockhounds know what a leaverite is. It means, Leave ‘er right there where it is—you don’t need it, and it isn’t worth taking home.

Finally, there is much more to be learned, and this is only a thumbnail sketch. You will have a lot of friendly folks who will teach you. They will gladly show you and tell you what you want to know and what you need to know to become a first class rockhound.

Here is your “Rockhounding 101” Certificate of Completion.

ROCKHOUNDING 101 CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Name: _____ has completed the short course on beginning Rockhounding, having waded through the foregoing material with courage and diligence and is now ready to learn more about being a Rockhound or Pebble Puppy.

Date: _____

T. W. “Terry” Proctor, J.D.—Instructor

Footnote:

Gem, Mineral and Fossil clubs, publications & sources
(in alphabetical order after HGMS)

HOUSTON GEM & MINERAL SOCIETY [our club]
10805 BROOKLET
HOUSTON, TX 77099
281 530-0942
website: <http://www.hgms.org>

CENTRAL TEXAS PALEO SOCIETY
P. O. BOX 90791
AUSTIN, TX 78749
website: <http://www.texaspaleo.com>
[club in Austin, Texas]

EMERSON, JOHN H. & BOBBIE
2227 BRIARWEST BLVD.
HOUSTON, TX 77077-5636
website: <http://www.iftx.com>
[they have an online fossil of the month and have published an invertebrate book (and disk) on the Stone City formation at the Brazos River near Bryan, Texas—one of Texas' most hunted fossil locations]

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MINERALOGICAL RECORD, THE
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TUCSON, AZ 85750
website: <http://secure.formysite.com/minrec.org>
prices vary [society and publication]

NGS INFORMATION SERVICES
NOAA, N/NGS12
NATIONAL GEODETIC SURVEY
SSMC-3, #9202
1315 EAST-WEST HIGHWAY
SILVER SPRING, MD 20910-3282
website: <http://www.ngs.noaa.gov> (see directory thereafter)
prices vary [U.S. Govt. agency & publisher]

ROCK & GEM
4880 MARKET ST.
VENTURA, CA 93003-7783
805 644-3824
website: <http://www.rockngem.com>
\$24.00/year U.S. 12 issues [publication]

Photographs taken by Terry Proctor on field trips are on the next page.

Photos by Terry Proctor



Only a small white sliver of bone sticks out of an eroded cut. This is an indication that something more may be buried there.



Triceratops femur



Here is what was recovered after seeing only the tip of one rib—virtually an intact bison vertebral column with some attached ribs.

Adventures in Gravel

by Darwin “Matt” Dillon

Member of the Houston Gem & Mineral Society

When we are young, we are often fascinated by sparkling or shiny objects, particularly if they are part of our natural surroundings. Many times those things that spark our interest are dependent upon a set of circumstances that are not constant—such as the weather—and on opportunities to observe changes in the appearance of things we see every day.

I can't say I remember the first time it happened, but at some point in my young life I was at a swimming pool or on a friend or neighbor's patio, playing at whatever thing was going on at the time. Looking at the ground is something you do a lot when you are young and small, and sometimes having to pick yourself up off the ground after falling.

As I played around the pool or patio, the gravel coating the surface around the pool was mostly dry and rather dull, though I was no doubt aware of the different colors of

the small rocks and did not pay too much attention to them. At some point, water splashed up on the edge of the pool, wetting the surface around the edge—just enough to change the look of the pebbles, and I was quick to notice the change that brought out the brighter colors and caused some of the rocks to appear to be clear, or crystal-line.

As the hot day wore on, my attention to these changes in appearance gradually became more intense, as I would spend more time laying around on my beach towel, resting from the swimming and horseplay children invariably get involved in, while in a pool. I would lay there, watching and resting, as other kids splashed water upon the surfaces around where I lay, and every once in awhile, I spotted a small rock that looked very different from all the others.

I remembered from reading one of the many books my mother and father purchased for me about rocks that had banding of different colors, and at some point, learned they were called agates. It was one or more of those type rocks that I would occasionally spot among the pebbles that would really catch my attention and cause my young mind to wonder how they got there and where they came from.

As I grew older and became more interested in rocks and collecting them, I eventually learned where to go to find agates and petrified wood along with the arrow points and other artifacts I found on family fishing trips. I tried to find agates in the gravel deposits in central and east Texas as I grew up fishing and hunting around those areas. However, my efforts were not very rewarding as my expectations were greater than the quality of rocks I found.

After I grew up and began taking vacations, I was more excited about the exotic locations I read about in the *Lapidary Journal* and *Rock & Gem* magazines, and I spent most of my available time in west Texas at the Woodward Ranch and other locations between there and the Rio Grande River at Lajitas.

Still I wondered about other locations I read about, such as the area southwest of the Great Lakes and the Rio Grande River basin in south Texas. I knew from reading about those locations that beautiful agates have been found in those areas, but it seemed the stories were old and often too nonspecific as to location. I also talked with older collectors who frequently made comments dismissing the possibilities of finding good quality agate in those areas.

Around 1993 I happened to meet some of the members of the Victoria Gem & Mineral Society on a rock collecting trip to the Walker Ranch, just south of the Woodward Ranch. I was very impressed with their openness, and they seemed to enjoy the group activities they were involved in. Most of them were anywhere from ten to twenty years older than I, and I quickly realized I could learn from their experiences.

We found a lot of great agates on the Walker Ranch and on other ranches and roadsides in the Brewster County area. I continued to collect there for several more years, often meeting my new friends from the Victoria club. I even joined their club the year after we first met. As I became more involved with that club and worked with them to

put on their annual gem and mineral show, I learned more and more about the types of rocks they had collected and the places they had gone.

On a visit to the home of two of the members, I saw some of the beautiful rocks in their collection—very nice specimens of the different types of agates found in the Rio Grande River gravels. I eventually met other collectors who also had found beautiful agate specimens from that area. The information they gave me and the experience of seeing their collections took me back to the days when I was much younger and fascinated with gravel and agates mixed in with other types of rock.

From what I had heard, I was convinced there must still be opportunities to collect in those types of deposits, if I took some time to look for them. I was particularly excited about the prospect of finding beautiful plume agates and green moss agate, which often dominated discussions I had with the older collectors. I was very aware that the plume agate beds of west-Texas were depleted to the point that it is difficult to find the stones, and many of the ranches in that area are closed to collecting and to the general public.

After I finished one of my trips to the Walker Ranch and was on my way back to Houston, I decided to take a side trip and head back through Eagle Pass to the Laredo area. I had been told the gravel road that runs between those two towns leads to good collecting areas, but was also warned that it is not very well maintained.

When I arrived in Eagle Pass, I found the farm to market road leading south out of town and paralleling the Rio Grande River. I followed it south and found it was paved for the first 15 to 20 miles. The ditches and road shoulders did not appear to offer any good collecting until I got to a point a few miles south of where the road changed to a gravel road. I stopped my Blazer about every half-mile to check the shoulders and ditches, and I began finding some small agates often coated with a creamy to white patina. After going another few miles and looking at many small agates, I eventually found one that looked like it had black plumes running through it. At that point, I became a little more excited and decided to continue south and attempt to finish the trip between Eagle Pass and Laredo. It must have been about 2:00 p.m. by then, and I was a little concerned about road conditions. Knowing I had four-wheel drive (and my companions, Smith & Weston) helped me make that decision.

As I approached a more hilly area, I also observed that the color of the roadbed seemed to be changing from a mixture of white and brown rocks to a more reddish color, with more sand and clay mixed in. I also observed many freshly dug holes in the road, which I later learned were badger diggings. I figure I was approximately 35-40 miles south of Eagle Pass when I started spotting larger rocks laying around the edges of the road shoulder and in the bar ditches (the ditches were not much in evidence by that time).

I examined several of the larger rocks—mostly flint and marble types—but after picking up several of those, I found one very large chunk of tumbled moss agate. A few rocks later, I found a nice green jasper. I continued to drive slowly down the gravel and dirt road, stopping long enough to cover about a hundred yards and then moving

on. As I drove past the higher elevations, I realized that fewer agates were mixed in with the other rocks. I eventually drove through some lower elevations with some water on the road and in the creeks I crossed, but the road was drivable, and I was able to make better time in the zones where there were no agates to be found.

By the time I noticed the road elevation was beginning to rise again, I had almost completely run out of storage space in my Blazer for rocks. I also realized that the sun had dropped almost to the horizon, and I decided to call it quits for collecting on that trip.

Over the next ten years or so, I returned to the Laredo and Eagle Pass area to collect along the roadside. I found many beautiful agates and nice pieces of colorful petrified wood. From my observations and from what some of my friends have told me, it appears that they had not driven as far north of Laredo or as far south of Eagle Pass as I did on that first trip. They were not aware of the amount of agate and jasper that could be found on that road.

Over the years I have learned much about the rocks around the Rio Grande River basin area. The rocks are often referred to as “Uvalde Gravel,” a term I spent a great deal of time researching in the public library and through the Bureau of Economic Geology of the University of Texas System.

I learned some of the landowners will permit collecting on their property. I also learned that some of the best collecting can be had in the Zapata to Roma area—south of Zapata, Texas and along the east shore of Falcon Lake on public land.

Here are a few photographs of some of my favorite finds from the Rio Grande/Uvalde Gravel material:



Clockwise from upper left: Agate half geode; banded agate slice, plume agate slices, and banded agate with white bands

Invitation To Wildacres

by Ron Carman

E-mail: rrcarman@centurytel.net

I had heard of Wildacres many times before, but didn't have the chance to go there until September of this year. Under a trial program proposed by former AFMS president Dee Holland, every year the AFMS sponsors a member from each regional federation to attend the Judging Seminar taught there—to share knowledge and to promote more consistency in judging throughout the AFMS. Persons who attend have their tuition and lodging paid but do provide their own transportation. Earlier this year I was asked if I wanted to go, and it was an offer I could *not* refuse!

For those of you who don't know what or where Wildacres is, it is a retreat located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, and the scenery there is spectacular! (Photos by the author)

Wildacres isn't a resort catering to the public, but instead it is dedicated to educational and cultural activities of nonprofit organizations like the AFMS. Each year both the Eastern and Southeast

Federations request weeks where they can conduct workshops and seminars on hobby-



related subjects like cabbing, faceting, wire-wrapping, and various others depending on interest. Classes offered may vary from one session to the next, but when I was there we had classes on silversmithing, soapstone carving, mineral identification, micromounting, and forging besides those mentioned above. Nearly every facet (the pun is intentional) of the hobby is covered at one time or another at Wildacres.

The first afternoon and evening are devoted to registration and orientation. Upon arrival, I found that I already knew almost half those present, and the others were old friends within a few minutes.

We get acquainted quickly at Wildacres! After settling in, we had our first meal, and I could see how everyone can gain several pounds during the week! The food is outstanding! That evening, all the class instructors were introduced at the second orientation session. After a good night's sleep, we began classes the following morning in earnest.

In the judging class (which would-be exhibitors can also attend) we thoroughly covered the Uniform Rules. Several persons in the class are members of the Rules Committees for their respective federations, and the group found a few misprints in the printed rules. These will be corrected in the next update.

Four of five class days are devoted to class work, but the middle day is "free" where we can sightsee, shop, or go on a field trip, which is what I opted for. Every afternoon after class and before supper is "social hour" where we can gather to talk about the day's activities or just tell stories and share experiences. On the next to last evening we had an auction, to which the attendees donate any "good stuff" they want to contribute to the cause. All proceeds go to buy extra equipment and supplies for future Wildacres sessions, and the auction during my week set a record for donations! Well done!

The last day of class ended with Show & Tell where all classes met in the auditorium and displayed the work they accomplished. I saw some very nice cabochons and fac-



eted stones as well as some fine looking jewelry—it's hard to tell that the folks who made it are novices. They really did a fine job! The judging and exhibiting class had nothing to show but comment sheets, but we did have some attractive displays set up for practice judging with some deliberate errors thrown in. Our instructor, Jay Bowman, presented us all with certificates of completion for the course.

We call the last night "Fun Night" since everyone gathers for an evening of all kinds of wild and not-so-wild entertainment, everything from singing hymns to jokes to funny skits. A sense of humor is a must at Wildacres, and everyone has a grand time with refreshments afterward.

Sound like a fun week? Well, it was! As I said, members from *all* federations are invited to apply for these sessions. If you are interested, you can find more information on the AFMS Web site or the Eastern Federation Web site. Go to <http://www.amfed.org> and select the Eastern Federation. Their Web site has an icon for Wildacres information; click on it, and you will find out all you ever wanted to know about Wildacres.

Or you can just ask me; I will be happy to share my information with anyone who wants to find out more. The South Central Federation is long overdue for a seminar for would-be exhibitors and judges, and I'm willing to help work one up so I can share what I learned with members of our federation. Anyone interested? Let me know! I'd like to hear from you!

Learning

by Mary Ann Mitscherling

November 1, 2005

Ping, ping, ping, ping. Ping, ping.
Grr..., grr..., grr..., grr... Rasp, rasp.
Gree..., gree.... Rasp, rasp. Ping, ping.

As sound assumes meaning,
Synapses form and link,
Shapes dissolve, new ones form.

Listening to the sounds
Consumes all our senses.
Time expands and contracts.

Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock.
Like the hands of a clock,
We form future from past.

Separating from sleep
Coaxes sound from silence,
Reforms the familiar.

Learning is a vigil,
A reawakening
Of knowing just asleep.

Ping, ping, ping, ping. Ping, ping.
Grr..., grr..., grr..., grr.... Rasp, rasp.
Gree..., gree.... Rasp, rasp. Ping, ping.

HGMS Party Animals

by Norman Lenz

Our Christmas party will be Saturday, December 10, 2005. Social hour will begin at 5:00 p.m., dinner at 6:00 p.m., and the auction at 7:00 p.m. Consider bringing a rock, mineral, fossil, jewelry, or piece of equipment to contribute to the auction. The Club will supply the meat, drinks, paper goods and plastic utensils. You will supply the best part of the dinner—the salad, side dishes, and desserts—potluck style.

Bring something to show the other members. This could be a ring, pendant, mineral, or fossil you collected. It could be something you made in one of our many classes. We are all interested in what is being done through our Society.

This is the one time of year us guys can wear bright red and green. Go shopping. Buy something festive. See you there!

Upcoming Christmas Party Auction

December 10, 2005

by Wayne S. Barnett

I have accepted the responsibility of coordinating the auction at our annual HGMS dinner being held December 10. In order to have a more successful auction for HGMS, it might be good to keep a few points in mind.

First: We as an organization concentrate on the earth sciences. As such, most of the auction items should relate to our HGMS interests. This would include specimens and equipment used in the hobby.

Second: To get the best value for the items, they should be labeled properly. It also helps if they are in their own presentation boxes. While the latter suggestion mainly is for items sold separately, it also enhances the value of material sold by the flat.

Third: The items should be cleaned. And if polishing one corner of the specimen would enhance its value by letting the bidders see inside, that should be done in advance of the auction.

We will accept any material that is donated for the auction, but do not expect it to go for its best value unless it is properly presented.

Because we usually have many items to auction, it is best to allow people to inspect the items before the auction itself. Each lot of material or piece of equipment will have

its own lot number. Keep track of the lot numbers in which you are interested. The lot numbers will be announced at the start of the bidding for each item.

Trying to promote your favorite piece during the auction disrupts the flow and slows down the process. Please promote your favorite items before bidding begins. I will try to get the best price for all material donated, so bring your wallet full. I will try to pry as much from it as I can. All proceeds will be going to the HGMS General Fund.

In Our Library

by Art Smith, Librarian

I am well along with getting the Dominican Sister's material and other auction material cleared from the library. Hopefully by the time you read this, it will be mostly done.

After twenty years of doing business with them, our book binder, A.V. Emmott and Sons, is closing. Originally they reported a box of our books missing, but I went there and retrieved all of them and settled our account. I found a new bindery closer to the club house, but they are \$11 per volume more expensive. We must have two volumes of the same publication to receive the price of \$48 per volume—otherwise it is \$78. I have two volumes there now to see how things work out. The turnaround time from them receiving the material to finishing the binding is much shorter than A. V. Emmott—about a week compared to eight months.

We have obtained several new books for the library. Two of them are on mineral inclusions. *The MicroWorld of Diamonds* by John I. Koivula is an exceptional book on diamond inclusions and is well written with many good photographs. *Wonder's Within Gemstones* by Anthony de Goutiere illustrates inclusions in all types of gemstones. It not only shows mineral inclusions but also fractures, bubbles, other open spaces, etc. These are more than just picture books. They may be valuable tools for identifying some of the unusual things you see when looking at mostly transparent gemstones and minerals through the microscope. Inclusions can identify specific sources for natural stone and confirm their identity plus help separate natural from synthetic.

The *Kerch Iron-Ore Basin* is volume 8 of the *Mineralogical Almanac*. It is located in Russia and is known for its vivianite and barite and calcite occurring inside of fossil clam shells. Many times these specimens are purchased, and finding their specific location and the geological history of the area is difficult to impossible. Also unidentified minerals on your specimen may be identifiable from data or pictures in the publication. Now we have a good source for information for at least this locality in Russia.

We need the following journals and magazines to make complete sets and have them bound. If you can spare yours, we would appreciate it:

Australian Journal of Mineralogy, 8(2), 2002

Lapidary Journal, October, 2001

Mineral News, 17:5 (May 2001)

Rock and Gem 2000: February, April, May July, August

2002: October

2003: January

UK Journal of Mines and Minerals, no. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. These were evidently borrowed and never returned, and they no longer are available for purchase.

The library is yours to use. Take advantage of it and learn more about your interests.

Report on October General Meeting Presentation

by Scott Singleton, 1st VP

and Beverly DeJarnett, Curator, HRC

October's General Meeting presentation was by Beverly DeJarnett, Curator of the Houston Research Center. This facility is the Bureau of Economic Geology's core repository in Houston. One of the HRC's missions is outreach to the community. As such, they share a common bond with the HGMS, and we should consider them as a willing partner in our own outreach activities. The following text was graciously provided by Beverly describing her presentation and the HRC.

The Bureau of Economic Geology (BEG), a research arm of the University of Texas at Austin, also acts as the Geological Survey of Texas. BEG has been curating cores and samples for over seventy years, and an integral part of BEG's mission is to preserve this invaluable geologic resource and to make it accessible for future research. BEG operates three repositories (Austin, Houston, and Midland), and together they hold nearly 1.8 million boxes of geologic material available for public use. The collection includes onshore and offshore rock material from domestic and international locations, and it is searchable online.

The newest of the BEG repositories is the Houston Research Center (HRC). BEG, building on a gift from BP and with the support of the Department of Energy (DOE), the National Research Council (NRC), the National Science Foundation (NSF) and other donors, has established HRC as the first regional core and sample research center in Houston.

HRC provides a well-lit core layout room, two fully equipped conference rooms, and a comprehensive technical library, all available for public use. Most of the cores, samples, and cuttings at HRC were acquired by private industry, but all are now available to the public. HRC expanded in 2004 to include an extensive technical library donated by Unocal Corporation. Valued at nearly \$5 million, the 80,000-volume collection is a research-quality library emphasizing geology, geophysics, and petroleum engineering. The library is open to the public and has a professional librarian onsite.

HRC's mission is:

- To curate and provide access to geologic materials in a setting conducive to research.
- To increase awareness of the value of rock materials through outreach pro-

grams.

- To enable academic and industry members to promote and defend the importance of geologic material in the financial decision-making process.
- To work with industry and government to build both our collection and endowment that will eventually cover all operating expenses and user fees, resulting in a true public geologic research center.

The number of patrons using the HRC, as well as the number of requests for cores and cuttings to be shipped to researchers off-site, has dramatically increased since the HRC's inception in early 2003. HRC now averages over 100 patrons per month and approximately 100 requests for materials per month. The HRC's business model includes donations of rock materials and cash, and these contributions are continuing. These cash contributions go directly into an endowment that BEG is building to operate the HRC in the future. Donors to date include BP, Oxy, Apache, Anadarko, Marathon, ConocoPhillips, XTO Energy, and Merit Oil and Gas.

Day Light Section

by Frances Arrighi

Seven members attended the 10 October, 2005 meeting of the Day Light Section. The program was making an article by silver fusion. Four members made articles, two are shown at the right. Charlie Fredregill made the cross, and Frances Arrighi made the modernistic looking pendent. Metal fusion is a very useful way of using scrap metal. Both the cross and pendent were made from scrap silver.



The 14 November meeting will be our annual birthday luncheon. The Day Light Section was 12 years old on the second Monday in August. We are going into our 13th year of existence. The luncheon starts at noon instead of 1:00 pm.

Next year sometime we are going to make a bracelet via wire wrapping. For this, one needs a 22 x 30 mm cabochon plus the wire. I will have the wire, but everyone needs to have his or her own cabochon. We are also going to make earrings using wire wrapping and either 8 or 10 mm beads. This technique can also be used to make a necklace. The necklace will take about 20 to 25 beads. Again, I will have the wire, but each member needs to bring their own beads. We will probably start this in January.



Tom Wright has been the Board Representative from the Day Light Section since we became a Section. We certainly do thank Tom for his devoted service. Our representative for the next two years will be Sunday Bennett.

The Day Light Section does not meet in December, so have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and do not catch the flu. We will see you on 9 January, 2006.

Santa Is a Rockhound

*(or a Lapidarist's version of "The Night Before Christmas")
from The Chatbox 12/04, via Cedar Valley Gems 12/04 and others*

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house,
Not a ROCKHOUND was stirring—I felt like a louse!
For the lapidary gifts I was making this year,
Lay down on my bench, UNFINISHED, I fear!

The PENDANT my dear wife had wanted so much,
As I polished the cab, it fractured with a touch;
And the lovely JADE BROOCH for Grandma so sweet,
Just wouldn't polish—it looked terribly beat.

As for sister's new bracelet, with BAROQUES dangling lightly,
I ran out of bell caps after the stores were closed tightly.
Then the tie clasp for uncle that would make such a hit,
After I cut the cap, no mounting would fit!

And even Junior's new CRYSTAL-growing set
Though I'd sent for it months ago, had not arrived yet!
So I tossed and I turned as though caught in a trap.
I could not settle down for a "long winter's nap."

When all of a sudden I heard such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter;
I raced for the door, then saw with a flick,
A red-suited man I was sure was Saint Nick.

As I reached for my robe and was turning around,
Down the basement stairs, Santa went with a bound.
He went straight to my workbench to see what I lacked,
Then with a nod of his head, opened up his huge pack.

Out tumbled such MOUNTINGS and BELL CAPS without stop,
I was sure Santa MUST own a LAPIDARY SHOP!
He said not a word but went straight to his work,
And finished each piece, then grabbed his pack with a jerk.

And shaking his white-bearded face with much glee,
Took out some new SLABS I knew must be for me!
Then, laying his finger aside of his nose,
With a nod of satisfaction, up the stairway he rose.

Went straight to the door, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim 'ere he drove out of sight,
"MERRY CHRISTMAS, DEAR ROCKHOUNDS, and to you, a good night!"

Tips & Hints

Torch Safety Tips: *from Golden Spike News 6–7/2005, via SCFMS Newsletter 7–8/2005*

- Don't**—use oil on torch equipment.
- Don't**—leave the torch on if you leave the area, no matter for how short a time.
- Don't**—leave pressure on regulators when shutting down.
- Don't**—hesitate to ask for help or instructions if you are unsure about equipment or technique.
- Don't**—attempt to save money when buying hoses.
- Don't**—take chances—your life may depend on it.

Polishing Guide

by Carl Childers

Cerium Oxide on Felt: *from the Rockytier 6/2005, via SCFMS Newsletter 7–8/2005*

Use approximately 30 ml dry cerium with enough water to make a slurry. Stir with a stick, and apply to wet pad. Polish your stone. Try different speeds, but fast is not necessary. If the pad dries out, spritz with a water bottle so that the polish does not ball up on your stone. Two to four minutes should suffice.

Heat Treating Agates: *from Golden Spike News 7/2004, via Huntin' & Diggin' 7/2005 and SCFMS Newsletter 7–8/2005*

Some agates respond well to heat treating to restore colors. For example, many Lake Superior agates have lost their vivid reds and oranges. The structures are intact, but the color has faded to almost uniform light tans and browns. Heating them restores much of their original vibrancy.

Some other stones that especially benefit are the Brazilian agate and carnelian. To treat, place a layer of clean sand or kitty litter 1/2 inch deep in a Pyrex™ dish. Place a layer of rocks (slabs) in the dish. Cover thinly with sand or kitty litter. Repeat until all rocks are used. Place in oven at lowest setting (150 degrees) for two hours. This drives out the moisture that could cause the stones to explode. Then raise the temperature 50 degrees every 1/2 hour until 500 degrees is reached. Leave on for two hours at 500°, then turn off the oven to let cool—preferably overnight... NO PEEKING! Allow container to cool completely to room temperature before opening the oven door. This process takes approximately 10 hours.

Guatemala's New Blue Jade

from: Colored Stone, 1–2/2004 via Stoney Statements, 5/2005

Miners unearthed a large deposit of deep blue jade in the Motagua Valley of Guatemala, home to the historic jade mines of the ancient Mayan Indians.

The jade deposit has yielded mostly green stones and some green-blue stones. This mine now produces the first blue jade known in the world.

Ventana Mining owns the deposit that now produces a blue jade that compares in hue

to that of blue sapphire. The jade is translucent to opaque, and it is thought that titanium gives the jade its blue color.

You Might Be a Rockhound If...

forwarded to the BBG months ago by Don Graves with the note:

I got a chuckle out of this and thought other HGMS people might see themselves in there somewhere.

Editor's note: Sorry it took so long to put into the BBG—I just hadn't the space before.

You can pronounce the word "molybdenite" correctly on the first try.
 You think the primary function of road cuts is tourist attractions.
 You own more pieces of quartz than underwear.
 You associate the word "hard" with a value on the Mohs scale instead of with "work."
 The rock pile in your garage is taller than you are.
 You have a strong opinion as to whether pieces of concrete are properly called "rocks."
 The local university's geology department requests permission to hold field trips in your back yard.
 You associate the name "Franklin" with New Jersey instead of "Ben."
 There's amethyst in your aquarium.
 Your wife has ever had to ask you to move flats of rocks out of the tub so she could take a bath.
 Your spelling checker has a vocabulary that includes the words "polymorph" and "pseudomorph."
 Your children are named Rocky, Jewel, and Beryl.
 You were the only member of the group who spent their time looking at cathedral walls through a pocket magnifier during your trip to Europe.
 They won't give you time off from work to attend the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, and you go anyway.
 You begin fussing because the light strips you installed on your bookshelves aren't full spectrum.
 You've ever purchased an individual, unfaceted rock, regardless of the price.
 You've ever spent more than ten dollars for a book about rocks.
 You shouted "Obsidian!" to a theater full of movie-goers while watching "The Shawshank Redemption."
 The polished slab on your bola tie is six inches in diameter.
 You find yourself compelled to examine individual rocks in driveway gravel.
 The USGS identifies your collection as a major contributing factor to isostasy in your state.
 You know the location of every rock shop within a 100 mile radius of your home.
 When they haven't seen you for a week, the shop owners send you get well cards.
 You're retired and still thinking of adding another room to your house.

Your idea of a “quiet, romantic evening at home” involves blue mineral tack and thumbnail boxes.
You’re planning on using a pick and shovel while you’re on vacation.
You can point out where Tsumeb is on a world globe.
You think Franklin, New Jersey might be a cool place to go on a vacation.
You associate the word “saw” with diamonds instead of “wood.”
You begin wondering what a complete set of the Mineralogical Record is worth.
When you find out, you actually consider paying it.
You’ve fabricated a backpack for your dog.
You’ve installed more than one mineralogical database program on your computer.
The baggage handlers at the airport know you by name and refuse to help with your luggage.
You receive a letter from the county informing you that a landfill permit is required to put any more rocks on your property.
Your Internet home page has pictures of your rocks.
There’s a copy of Dana’s Manual next to your toilet.
You still think pet rocks are a pretty neat idea.
You get excited when you discover a hardware store that stocks 16-pound sledge hammers and 5-foot long pry bars.
You debate for months on the Internet concerning the relative advantages and drawbacks of vibratory verses drum tumblers.
Your employer has asked you not to bring any more rocks to the office until they have time to reinforce the floor.
You decide not to get married because you’d rather keep the rock.

Meet the New Team.....

*by President Jim Robinson
from AFMS Newsletter 11/2005*

At this writing the committee assignments for 2006 are 98% complete, and all should be in place by November 1. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those committee people who have pledged their support and have agreed to continue in their present role in the day-to-day operation of the AFMS. I consider myself fortunate indeed to have so many experienced people on my team: they are the ones who will make this one of the best years ever for the AFMS. I am truly looking forward to my role as President. I am also keenly aware that it’s the hard working committee people who will make the role a success.



In 2007 the AFMS will be celebrating its 60th Anniversary. I’ve appointed Shirley Leeson as chairperson of an ad hoc committee to plan how we’re going to celebrate this momentous occasion in our history. Our annual meetings will be held in Roswell,

New Mexico in 2007, and we know that along with the Roswell show organizers, Shirley and her committee will plan something “out of this world” for us. Stay tuned.

I had the pleasure of attending the AFMS Judging Seminar held at Wildacres during the week of September 12 through 17. The weather was great, the hospitality excellent, and the group was the finest. I met and talked with many of the instructors in the other classes, as fine a well informed and devoted group as you could ever hope to find anywhere. The EFMLS should feel proud of Wayne Sukow and the others who made this workshop such a pleasure. I especially enjoyed the judging class taught by Jay Bowman. I can make only one comment on this one —when you think you have learned all there is to know about judging., just spend a few hours with Jay!

It is my understanding that the Paleo Bill has been passed by the Senate (by acclimation) and has been sent on to the House. As of this writing no number has been assigned, but it will most likely be in the “Resources” committee. We need to pay close attention to this bill as we did with the Baucus Bill of a few years back.

Remember, it’s your voice that will make the difference. I urge all to write your representatives and to make our voice heard again.

Having Fun—Junior Activities

Earth In Space

*by Jim Brace-Thompson, Jr. Activities Chair
from AFMS Newsletter 11/2005*

While we now have a merit badge program up-and-running for kids and junior members, I want to make sure that it doesn’t become static and stale but rather grows and continually offers youth leaders and the kids they mentor something fresh and new. With this in mind, over the course of the coming months I’ll be describing ideas for additional merit badges to consider, along with activities to try. And I encourage one and all to pepper me with even more to consider. (E-mail ideas to <jbraceth@adelphia.net> or call 805-659-3577.)

The first one is out of this world: extraterrestrial geology! Kids should learn that geology isn’t only underfoot. The earth is a little blue marble floating among other little marbles and big gassy balls and little metallic BB’s that occasionally make a splash. Long past are the glory days of the Apollo program, when human heroes reached out and physically brought extraterrestrial rock samples down to earth. But our exploration of the solar system—and even planets within solar systems far from our own—has entered a new glory day. With the Hubble space telescope, new imaging techniques, and remarkable robots journeying across the solar system, geologists no longer find themselves earthbound, and fascinating discoveries seem to be announced with each new issue of a scientific magazine or journal. While the typical rockhound pose has eyes glued to the ground, encourage kids to look up to the sky to join a generation that may be collecting from Mars, exploring the surface of asteroids, and analyzing the pixie dust of comets.

Activity 1: The Solar System. Using materials such as marbles, rubber balls, and similar items, help kids make a model of our solar system. To illustrate one effect of

the sun on planets, you might use an electric light bulb as the star at the center of your solar system and have kids feel the heat of the light when close to the sun. Then imagine the cold of deep space among the planets far across the room from the “sun.”

Activity 2: Visitors from Space. Discuss how our solar system is filled with “cosmic debris” in such areas as the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter and the Oort cloud that sends comets hurtling our way in cycles that can extend to hundreds of years. In many clubs, at least one member seems to have a collection of meteorites and tektites. (Meteorites are stony or iron rocks that fall to earth from space; tektites are glassy “buttons” created when rock is ejected and melted by a meteorite strike and cools quickly as it plummets back to earth.) Invite that person to show off his or her collection with your kids and to talk about why some meteorites are stony and some are iron and how tektites form. It’s a real thrill for a child to hold a heavy iron meteorite and feel the weight of a visitor from space!

Activity 3: Effects of Meteorites. One fun activity is making meteorite craters by dropping a marble into a pan of wet sand. Have kids toss a marble from different angles and different velocities. Drop the marble onto different surfaces: dry sand, wet sand, clay, mud, topsoil, etc. You can also talk about the effects of a truly massive meteorite or asteroid hit on earth by talking about the theory of how the Age of Dinosaurs came crashing to an end. A neat Web site from the University of Arizona lets you determine the destructive power of a meteor or asteroid hit by changing variables such as the size of the object, its composition, and your distance from ground zero. The site is at <www.lpl.arizona.edu/impacteffects>. A follow-up homework assignment might have kids researching to name and learn about a prominent crater on earth left by an extraterrestrial impact, such as Arizona’s Meteor Crater, Canada’s Manicouagan Crater, or West Australia’s Wolf Creek Crater.

Activity 4: Collecting Meteorites. A meteorite isn’t your everyday garden rock, so going into the field to find one is perhaps unrealistic unless you happen to live near a known meteorite field and have a buddy with a metal detector who can help unearth fragments. Also, dealers tend to sell meteorites by the gram, so they’re beyond the budget of most kids I know, although you can sometimes find tektites being sold at gem shows at reasonable rates. I’ve heard about one intriguing project but have been unable to track down a source to get specifics. If it works, it sounds like a truly nifty way for kids to get their own meteorites! Essentially, we’re constantly being bombarded by meteors, but most burn up in the atmosphere, and all that gets to earth is a fine dust. I’ve been told that by passing a magnet over dust that collects in places like sidewalk cracks or gutters along a roof, you can actually capture some of this extraterrestrial dust to examine under a microscope.

That last activity sounds great in theory. So let’s all get out our magnets, hit those sidewalk cracks, and see if there’s anything to it while—as always—having fun.

SCFMS President's Message*Words from William**by William Medford**SCFMS President**from the SCFMS Newsletter 9-10/2005*

With the first signs of fall now occurring, it is time for the Federation and its membership to turn their attention to preparations for the forthcoming annual meeting to be held in Austin, Texas. Our annual meetings are always such an enjoyable experience with the renewing of old acquaintances, making new friends, and discovering what is new in the field of earth science.

I look forward each year to attending the convention and seeing all my friends. Further, with each new show comes new faces, new people, and new ideas. It is simply amazing how the host organization can bring together such a fascinating collection of dealers, speakers, and exhibits. The social activities associated with the show and the meeting also are a special time for recognizing people from throughout the Federation. Each year the annual meetings seem to get better and better. Let's hope we can continue to have such wonderful meetings.

So start now to plan who and how many from your organization will be attending the meeting in Austin. I ask that each of the member organizations plan to send at least one representative to the meeting. This is your organization that represents you regionally and nationally in a multitude of areas relating to earth sciences. Keeping you informed is one of our primary functions, and we ask that you attend the conference to receive up-to-date information to take back to your organization's membership.

The Federation did itself proud at the recent meeting of the American Federation of Mineral Societies in Saint Louis. We received numerous awards for various activities, and some individuals were recognized for special achievements. More information will be announced at the awards banquet. It is really special that our Federation continues to demonstrate the ability of its membership to produce award winning entries in a host of categories. That ability is great for a Federation that is so small in comparison to the other regional Federations.

Please keep in mind that one of this year's goals for the Federation is recruitment of new members. We want each organization to find ways to increase its membership and especially to find ways to enlarge the junior membership. Several things are happening in the junior program with the Junior Rockhound of the Year award now being available. It is not too late to submit a name for this award from your organization.

I will be looking forward to meeting each of you at the annual meeting, so please make it a point to stop me and tell me who you are and of what organization you are a member. See you at the meeting and show in December.

Safety Report

Safe Safety SAFETY

by George Browne

SCFMS Safety Chair

from SCFMS Newsletter 7–8/2005

Causes: What causes us to do the often dumb and sometimes stupid things that may result in property damage, injury and “heaven forbid” fatalities? Well, unfortunately there is no single cause because if there were, we could correct it and we would all be safe. In the real world, there are numerous causes which singularly or collectively contribute to our problem. Perhaps if we can identify some of them, we can eliminate them and increase our chances of being safe.

The following is not a complete list. I’m sure you can think of additional items—and that is good. The purpose of this article is to make you think—**safety–Safety–SAFETY**.

Knowledge: I think most rockhounds know how to be safe. It is your responsibility to be aware of the hazards associated with your equipment and the materials you handle. It’s just dumb to get hurt because you didn’t read the instructions.

Apathy, Arrogance: Why do you think you are immune from injury? Perhaps if you thought about the bad consequence you would change your attitude. To become blind or lose a hand because you didn’t care or because you wanted to show how daring you are is absolutely stupid.

Carelessness, Inattention: These are the most common causes of injury. You must be aware of what you are doing and how you are doing it. Pay attention, be aware, use caution. Keep your head in the game. A little carelessness can result in a lifetime of permanent disability.

Awareness: Know your surroundings, avoid dangerous areas, be alert for danger. You must admit it’s just dumb to pick up a piece of metal that you just heated with a torch.

These are just a few of the causes. The important thing is to constantly think about safety. Most injuries are caused by dumb acts. Before you do anything, determine if it is safe. Be sure you have the proper equipment. Develop a safety attitude, keep alert, and practice safety until it becomes routine. Our hobby is much more enjoyable when it doesn’t hurt!

Safety is your job—do it! Be safe, and develop a safety attitude!

Future Rockhounds Forum

by David and Carol Abbott

SCFMS Juniors program Co-Chairs

from SCFMS Newsletter 7–8/2005

Hopefully, everyone reading this newsletter has printed a copy of the Future Rockhounds of America Merit Badge Program. If not, please check the AFMS Web site: www.amfed.org.

Part of what we hope to do through this newsletter message is to give some additional hints or suggestions on how to implement the merit-badge program. Now a normal, rational person would start with item #1. But at the Texas School of Earth Sciences, we are still trying to assemble a collection of pocket-sized containers and specimens, so we jumped into #2; Earth Resources.

Gypsum is one of the very common minerals used in the construction of our homes. Three of the common forms are alabaster, satin spar, and selenite. Massive amounts are ground and heated to remove “waters of hydration.” Then they are used to make wallboard, plaster-of-Paris, and other products that are probably less familiar to students.

We try to have a “hands on” session planned for every gathering of the juniors. We think that Bill Cosby had the right attitude with the original “Fat Albert” show in which was included the phrase “if you’re not careful you might learn something.” To introduce gypsum to our juniors, we had a carving program. Alabaster makes an excellent first carving project due to being workable with readily-available tools (hack-saw, common files, and sandpaper). Also, alabaster may be ordered online for less than a dollar per pound.

A graphite-pencil is great for drawing a pattern. Alabaster is porous, so pens can leave long-term stains. As previously mentioned, alabaster can be cut with a common hack-saw, coping-saw, or even a crosscut saw if you’re not afraid of having to sharpen it. Gross shaping may be performed with a saw, rasp, or mill file (keep a file-card or wire brush handy to clean-out the dust). Conceptually, finishing the carving works just like polishing a stone but uses sandpaper. We used papers from 220 to 1200 grit. Furniture wax and a soft cloth gives a soft, pleasant polish on an alabaster carving.

In our effort to not limit or dissuade students, we pretty much gave them free rein on their design. That is, they were not limited in size or in the subject of their sculpture (other than the size of our pieces), and several students were unable to finish their projects in the time available. Next time, we intend to have a limited selection of patterns and to have the stone precut to approximate sizes.

On a lighter note, we are trying to assemble a rockhound mascot for the juniors. We obtained a large stuffed (aka “plush”) dog. It’s about three feet tall, sitting on its haunches. The plan is to make a vest for it with samples of the AFMS merit badges and club pins. Our goal would be to get one pin from each club, society, and school in the South Central Federation. If you can help us, please e-mail abbottfamily@earthlink.net.



ShowTime 2005

November 19-20	Mesquite, TX	Dallas Gem & Mineral Society Resistol Arena Exhibition Hall Rick Ramsey, 972-998-3929 rick.r.1@juno.com
November 25-27	Mobile, AL	Mobile Rock & Gem Society Greater Gulf State Fairgrounds, Zeigler & Cody Ed Harris, 251- 865-9157 ed_harris_jr@hotmail.com
December 2-4	Austin, TX	SCFMS Conv. and Austin G&M Society Show Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Rd. Laura Dow, 512-458-9546 gemcapers@austin.rr.com
December 2-4	El Paso, TX	El Paso Mineral & Gem Society El Maida Auditorium, 6331 Alabama Jeanette, 877-533-7153; gemcenter@aol.com
December 2-4	Montgomery, AL	Montgomery Gem & Mineral Society Garrett Coliseum, Federal Dr. Jane Barkley, 334-277-2722

ShowTime 2006

January 20-22	Largo, FL	Pinellas Geological Society The Tumblers; Largo Cultural Center Parkside Room, 105 Central Park Dr. Hugh Sheffield, 727-894-2440
January 21-22	Fredericksburg, TX	Fredericksburg Rockhounds Club Lady Bird Johnson Park, Pioneer Pavilion Hwy. 16, 3 miles south of Fredericksburg John Crone, 830-669-2639; jjcrone@hctc.net
January 25-29	Quartzsite, AZ	Quartzsite Improvement Association 235 E. Ironwood Dr.; Diane Abbott 928-927-6325; qia@redrivenet.com
January 28-29	Tyler, TX	East Texas Gem & Mineral Society Tyler Rose Garden Center 420 S. Rose Park Dr. & Front St. (Hwy. 31) Charles Creekmur; calcite65@earthlink.net
Jan. 28-Feb. 11	Tucson, AZ	Tucson 2006, Arizona Mineral & Fossil Show Multiple locations within Tucson

2005 DECEMBER 2005						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3 10-12 Youth Section 11-5 Shop Open
4	5	6 7:30 Board Meeting	7 7:30 Mineral Section	8	9	10 11-5 Shop Open 5:00 Xmas Party
11	12 No Day Light	13 7:30 Show Comm	14 No Faceting Section	15	16	17 No Youth Section 11-5 Shop Open
18	19 No Lapidary	20 No Paleo Section	21 No Mineral Section	22	23	24 11-5 Shop Open Christmas Eve
25 Xmas	26 Hanukkah	27 No General Meeting	28	29	30	31 11-5 Shop Open New Year's Eve

2006 JANUARY 2006						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 New Year's Day	2	3 7:30 Board Meeting	4 7:30 Mineral Section	5	6	7 10-12 Youth Section 11-5 Shop Open
8	9 1:00 Day Light Section	10 7:30 Show Comm	11 7:30 Faceting Section	12	13	14 11-5 Shop Open
15	16 7:00 Lapidary Section	17 7:30 Paleo Section	18 7:30 Mineral Section	19	20	21 10-12 Youth Section 11-5 Shop Open
22	23	24 7:30 General Meeting	25	26	27	28 11-5 Shop Open
29	30	31				

***The* BACKBENDER'S GAZETTE**

***The Newsletter of the Houston
Gem & Mineral Society***

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