

Place: **Union Hall**  
Meyers Street  
Next to Campus Life  
In Kettle Falls



Time: 7:00 PM  
Third Tuesday  
Each Month  
(Jan.-Nov.)

Newsletter January 2005

## Christmas Party

Luci Bristow



What a Christmas Party! There were 28 of us present and a big array of food. Many thanks to those that contributed to this feast. We really ate! Johnie suggested that perhaps we could relate some of our rock hunting adventures and/or misadventures. There were 7 of us that told stories. Contributors were: Diane Lentz, Bob Bristow, Rex Barrans, Sylvia Allen, Luci Bristow, Johnie Pitman, and Steve White. There was a lot of laughter!

Angela Ward sent a message via Luci about our display case at the Colville Library. The case has 3 shelves. We could have a different "theme" for each shelf, or an overall theme for the case. We need to have this exhibit in place the last weekend in February.

Johnie passed out numbers so we could go up in order to pick out our Christmas gifts. Santa was good to all of us!

Johnie reminded us that our next meeting will be January 18, 2005 at the Union Hall in Kettle Falls. He would like us to be there by 6:00 PM to discuss and begin to organize our Rock Show in April. The regular meeting begins at 7:00 PM.

Have a Wonderful New Year! Resolutions, anyone?

Have a Wonderful New Year! Resolutions, anyone?

Luci

## Johnie Pitman All Round Rock Hound

*By Joseph Barreca*

Making stone spheres takes solid rocks, stone saws, diamond wheels, a sphere machine, lots of carbide grit and true grit. Johnie Pitman has all of these and more. Johnie's wife Ginger probably didn't suspect that she would be married to a rock hound when they started out together living in a trailer park in New Mexico, while Johnie worked at a cement plant. But Johnie caught the bug from a buddy who worked at the plant and took him on rock hunting expeditions. Now Ginger hunts with Johnie.



Johnie moved on to work at uranium processing and ultimately monitoring water quality

for Avista, but his love of rocks never left. As president of the *Panorama Gem and Mineral Club*, we can count on him to bring finely finished rocks of all kinds to any meeting and to keep the agenda on track. As a rock hound, he's paid his dues, from researching where high-quality rocks are and finding them in the field; to attending rock shows for knowledge and new specimens; to accumulating a lot of lapidary equipment and putting it to good use. His shop is a model of utility and his house is a museum of beautiful rocks.

Making spheres is the end of a natural progression from just polishing rocks in tumblers, to cutting slabs with a rock saw, to cutting and grinding cabochons and finally to grinding and polishing the spheres. It takes a well-rounded lapidary expert to make a well-rounded rock. Ironically, well-rounded rocks start as perfect cubes, or at least cubes with the right corners missing.

The first of 26 cuts used to preshape the



sphere give it the 6 sides of the cube. After marking the cube with a brass scribe, the next 4 cuts take away the corners of the square in one dimension, leaving a tall octagon. The next 4 cuts take away the corners from a second dimension leaving a 14 sided shape that is something like two flat-topped pyramids slapped on opposite sides of a low square box. (Middle of next picture.) Four more cuts in the third dimension give you a shape that is an octagon in every dimension and has 18 sides. (This stage is not shown in the picture.) On small spheres, this might be a good point to start grinding, on larger ones, 8 more cuts take away the points left when the corners of the pyramids were trimmed off. This leaves a 26-sided shape similar to the one on the far right of the picture.



After that comes the most labor-intensive part, grinding down the remaining corners on a diamond grit wheel. This can take 8 hours for a 4 inch sphere of obsidian, a relatively soft stone, or twice that for agate, quartz or jasper. You need to round the edges enough so that the sphere does not get hung up in one position while undergoing the grinds.

The final grinds are done on a sphere grinding machine. You can buy one for a mere \$750 from Richardson's Rock Ranch, (contact info at end of article). Or you can do what Johnie and his son did, take a look at one and build it yourself out of surplus industrial motors for \$100. Johnie will admit that it is a Rube Goldberg kind of contraption. The three slow (150 rpm) motors have plumbing pipes attached to their shafts with bell couplings on the end that hold and rotate the sphere. Above this triangle of cups are two small very slow motors turning deck screws inside soda straws that tap a jar of grit. This feeds a trickle of grit onto the grinding jig. Another flexible tube with an adjusting clamp drips water siphoned from a jug on the wall. The motors are mounted on hinges attaching them to chunks of 2x8 boards clamped to the base. A couple loops of surgical tubing provide flexible tension above the hinged motors, while the clamps provide an adjustable angle for two of the three rotating shafts. This machine has put in hundreds, if not thousands of hours of work. All of it overseen by Johnie or his son to keep everything adjusted. (Picture on Page 1.)

It takes a couple hours of grinding using 220 mesh carbide grit, 2 more with 600 grit and another 30 minutes of polish with aluminum oxide to finish an obsidian sphere, double that for harder stones. To summarize, you start with \$10 or more of good

quality stone, work with it steadily for a week or so and get a shiny rock ball that is not good for baseball, croquet or bocce ball and can be bought for as little as \$64. Making rock spheres as a commodity was outsourced a long time ago. Still if you have a really nice rock and have some emotional attachment to it, here is a way to bring out it's unique beauty that goes as far back as the crystal ball.

Richardson's Rock Ranch

Gateway Rt. Box 440

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(541) 475-2680

<http://richardsonrockranch.com>



**Figure 1. The Gold Prospecting Area**


## A Real Gold Mine Part 1 – The Search

*by Bob Bristow*

The Government had fixed the price of gold up to then and most mines had shut down because of the artificially low price. The government had required that all gold be sold to them only and at their price. A few miners were making money by digging gold and then selling on the black market. When the lid on the price of gold was lifted, everything changed. The amount you could get for an ounce of gold jumped to 1000% of the fixed price and then to nearly 2000%. Mining companies began springing up all over and people were buying gold bullion like it was going out of style. I decided this was a good time to get serious about mineral hunting.


My first step was to spend a number of hours at the library poring over old maps and records of mining claims. The results were plotted and a target area for prospecting established. The idea was to find where gold and other mineable minerals had been found in the highest quantity and work out from the middle looking for missed deposits or finding deposits that had become uncovered since the previous big wave of prospectors. The location I selected was in the vicinity of Silver Creek, a tributary to the North Fork of the Skykomish River in the North Cascades of Washington. Figure 1 shows the area. The original road over the Cascade Mountains went up the North Fork of the Skykomish and over a pass used by Indians. It left the town of Index and was built on the west side of the river. When the modern paved road was built, it followed the east side. The old road was let go and all bridges

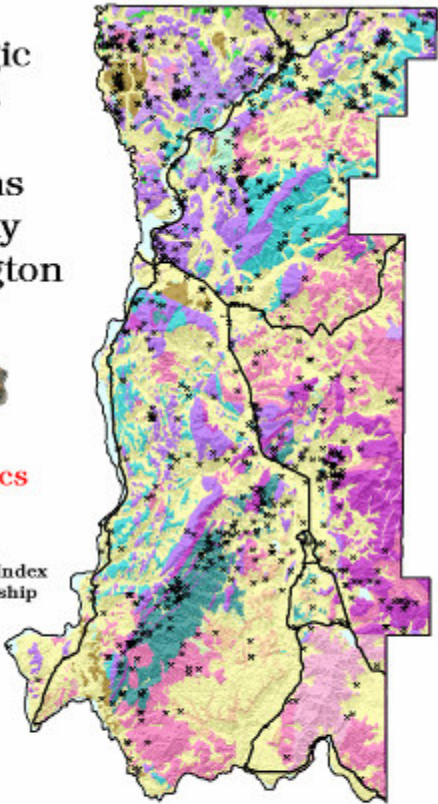
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**Figure 2. Carl Climbing Rocks in**

are now out. Several cabins and mines were built along the original west side and are now isolated. My first trip into the region was not for gold but for fishing. It was prompted by a State of Washington report that there was a lake up Excelsior Creek that had been planted with cutthroat trout but was not shown on conventional maps. I looked at a topographic map and, sure enough, no lake was shown. This sounded like another adventure and so I planned a trip with my friend Carl Hosevar.

We parked across the river opposite Excelsior Creek and looked for a place to ford the North Fork. We were lucky in that the water was down and we found a crossing only about 30-inches deep. After the river, there was a two hundred-yard swamp and then the old road. There was an old adit right there in the side of the road but we didn't have a light to explore it. We passed another adit further up the ridge that looked highly mineralized. Finally we could see into Excelsior Creek canyon and discovered that we had started up the wrong ridge. Going through the swamp had thrown us off. There was nothing to do but climb back down to the creek and follow it up to where we could climb the ridge to the lake. Figure 2 shows Carl climbing one of the many rocks in the stream bottom. We started climbing at a point that was reasonably clear of brush at the stream and then up a talus slope. Unfortunately, the talus was from a 100-foot vertical cliff. We had climbing gear and made it up the cliff all right but it certainly slowed us down. The crest of the ridge was open under old growth firs and we only had a couple of small cliffs to climb. On the way up, I noticed a notch in one of the small cliffs with a small depression above it. This certainly looked like

it could be a vein that had rotted down and partially filled in. I planned to go back and dig into it but never found the time. Near the top of the ridge was dirty quartz float that indicated that another vein was probably nearby. That ridge was steep! It rose 4000 feet in less than 3000 feet. Once on top of the ridge, we entered alpine country. There were clumps of trees with heather and small bodies of water.

Hiking about a mile through the beautiful alpine country we came to the lake. It was a small lake, about five acres in size, in a cirque. A small



**Figure 3. Author with Fish from Excelsior**

stream ran from it and dropped almost vertically to Excelsior Creek 4000 feet below. We could see the fish jumping and immediately put our gear together. The fish had been planted from the air and had never been fished. At least, we could see no signs of anyone having been there. In half an hour we had our limits of 12 fish each. Figure 3 shows them on a log waiting to be cleaned. While I was fishing, something happened that I hesitate to describe for fear no one will believe it. When I would throw the lure out, a group of fish would swim in a circle around it. Suddenly, one fish would dash in and grab the bait. The other fish would then attack the hooked fish and follow it all the way to shore. After bringing one fish in, I stuck the pole between my legs, unhooked the fish, and let the lure drop away and swing over the edge of the lake. One of the fish that had followed the hooked one in rushed over and jumped out of the water to grab it! Honest!

Above Excelsior Creek is Salmon Creek and above that is Silver Creek. Silver Creek has over a hundred mines on it and has such a rich mining history that books have been written about it. When I first went up Silver Creek, you could drive part way up because loggers had opened the old mining road. The next winter, a slide blocked the lower end but a few four-wheelers made it over the debris. The road itself washed out the following winter. Walking up Silver Creek is a beautiful experience. Miners built a town (Mineral City) before the road was built. There was only a narrow trail along the cliffs directly over the water. Eventually, the miners built the current road by blasting the rock into the stream. You can still see the small 3/4-inch holes used by the miners. One miner would hold the star-drill bit while a

second miner hit it with a sledgehammer. (This is called “double jack.” Single jack” is when a miner would hold the drill bit in one hand and hit it with a hammer in the other.)

One year, after looking for mineral specimens up Silver Creek, I came across a lone miner with a wheelbarrow of water on the slide mentioned above.

He was using the water for panning gold. He excitedly showed me his gold and pointed out the soft dirt-like vein with a black streak in it that contained about one ounce per ton of free gold. He said he was going to start digging out that vein and would follow it all the way through the earth if it kept going! He had filed a claim but I suspected he was on someone else’s claim because of all the claim markers I had seen. Whether he was or not became a moot point since the next winter the whole side of the hill slid into Silver Creek and washed downstream.

When I got serious about finding gold or some other mineable mineral, I chose Salmon Creek rather than Silver Creek because there had been less prospecting and there were logging roads that gave me an advantage over the old miners. The first day of prospecting, I followed several new logging roads up Salmon Creek toward the top of Mineral Butte and took samples of several veins that crossed the road. There was an interesting logging cut at one point. The rock was a fine-grained granite that was a tan color as though it had been baked. This rock had numerous holes that were reddish in color. This outcrop would later play an important part in my life. Above this outcrop was a large vein of red quartz. The quartz was in nodules and looked like it had been forced into the vein rather than having formed there. Another vein looked especially good. It was in a shear zone about 50-feet wide with streaks of red, white, yellow and green. The white material had many small cubes of bright pyrite. I sampled many locations along each vein, mixed them well and took them to a large Seattle laboratory that specialized in doing assay work for the government. They reported that the large shear zone contained about 1/10-ounce of gold per ton and the large red vein about 0.04

### Panorama Gem and Mineral Club: Organizational Chart

<b>Officers:</b>			
President:	Johnie Pitman	640 Williams Lake Rd, Colville, 99114	684-8887
Vice-President:	Steve White	1337 Boise Rd, Kettle Falls, 99141	738-2195
Secretary:	Luci Bristow	PO Box 1165, Chewelah, 99109	935-4375
Treasurer:	Larry Price	PO Box 77, Laurier, 99146	684-2857
Trustee 1:	Bill Allen	2633 Highline Rd, Chewelah, 99109	935-8779
Trustee 2:	Bob Bockman	1750 N Havichur Loop, Post Falls, ID 83854	208-773-5384
Trustee 3:	Bob Bristow	PO Box 1165, Chewelah, 99109	935-4375
<b>Committee Chairs</b>			
Program Coordinator:	Bev Bockman	1750 N Havichur Loop, Post Falls, ID 83854	208-773-5384
Hospitality:	Mabel Barrans	PO Box 348, Chewelah, 99109	935-8461
Field Trips:	Dianne Lentz	556 Douglas Falls Rd., Colville, 99114	684-4925
	Rex Barrans	PO Box 348, Chewelah, 99109	935-8461
Librarian:	Ruth Ross	750 N Lincoln, # 6, Colville, WA 99114	
Public Relations:	Angela Ward	193 Duboise Rd, Colville, 99114	
Historian:	Carol Price	PO Box 77, Laurier, 99146	684-2857
Newsletter:	Joseph Barreca	2109 Hwy 25 South, Kettle Falls, 99141	738-6155
	Steve White	1337 Boise Rd, Kettle Falls, 99141	738-2195

ounce per ton.. Since most samples that went into the mix they assayed were probably barren, at least one of the samples must have been quite rich. I immediately filed claims on both veins. I was now the proud owner of at least one gold mine and with a little effort should soon be getting rich!

Next month - Discovering Rich Pockets

**Membership Dues:**

\$15.00 per **household** per year due to the club Treasurer on the third Tuesday of November for regular members.

We, **The Panorama Gem and Mineral Club**, are a multi-faceted group of mineral-minded people. Our proud members include some real gems, a few fossils, and even some diamonds in the rough. A few have lost some of their marbles, but they know where to get more! A few need to polish their coordination because they are always tumbling! And some are miners who use the "silver pick" as their tool of choice! It should be crystal clear, that we all enjoy this unique conglomeration and above all else we strive to **HAVE FUN**. And we never throw stones (away).

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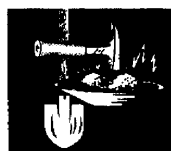


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Irv's will release a new DVD **The Ancient Art of Gem Cutting** during the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of January. List price is \$59.95. The club can get a 30% discount on orders over 5 copies.