

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



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

The Panorama Prospector

July 2008

Minutes for the Meeting of July 15, 2008

by Johnie Pitman

On a rather pleasant evening there were 37 members and 3 visitors present. Refreshments for next meeting will be furnished by Scott and the Allens. VP Steve was absent but we will make him work extra hard as Johnie will be gone next meeting. After a treasurer's report the club gave a big hand and thank you to Rex and Mable Barrens for setting up and doing all the field trips, they have been going great and keeping anyone that is interested plenty busy.

Johnie gave a brief report on the federation show Ontario, OR as most had read the account in the newsletter. Next years show is July 30-Aug 2 at Billings, MT.

Rex gave a report on the outing to Metaline Falls to collect trilobites. It was hot but 8 people went.

Solo Creek crystals were on display from the 10 people who went on that field trip and even though Rex started in the wrong place there were crystals found there too.

July 26, a Sat, is our next trip to Horseshoe Mt. for quartz crystal clusters. Hammers, chisels and bars are the tools you'll need. Meet at the junction at the old Blue Cougar at Curlew at 10 AM. Be sure to check and see if you can carpool.

Emerald Creek is a chance to screen for garnets on July 27-29. There is a forest service campground and a short walk to the piles; our dates are Sun- Tues to miss the crowds. The daily dig fees are, adults \$10 and kids \$5, with a weight limit of what you can keep, that would be very hard to reach. The Roses have set up an opportunity to tour the commercial workings there on Wed, July 30 when the public dig is closed. Meet them at the forest service dig at 9 AM. if you do not have a hard hat you can buy one there for \$4.50, one is needed to do the tour. After a discussion and depending on how fast you drive etc. it is about a 4-5 hour drive to the site south of St Marys Idaho.

Hot Rocks

By Joe Barreca



[The High Noon, AKA The Rat Hole Mine]

There is good reason this old mine is sealed off. Not only is there water backed up in it and running out the front, it is a uranium mine with radioactive ore. Luckily it is probably considered a national mineral resource, or it would be closed entirely. From the look of an old piece of equipment rusting nearby, it has not run in almost 60 years, but there is a new claim stake just up the road dated 2001.

By now you are probably thinking "There goes Joe again with another whacked out exploration with no justifiable explanation." Okay, we don't normally explore old uranium mines. But they are not as deadly as you may have been led to believe, and this mine is in a kind of rock we don't normally associate with mines in the region. It is a white pegmatite with inclusions of big flakes of mica. The base rock is intrusive two-mica granite about 100 million years old. For comparison, the trilobite rocks we found at the Metaline Falls Lime Quarry were 515 million year old phyllite and the fossils at Stone Rose in Republic are 40 million year old volcanic ash sediment. So these are middle-aged rocks where you don't often find minerals and they glow under UV light..

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You can next join the trip on August 2 to Jim Creek for galena and pyrite. A car with good clearance and hammers and chisels are needed. Meet at the rail road station in Ione at 10 AM. Call other members to check on car pooling.

Rex made the announcement that the trip to Chief Joseph Mine is canceled because of: doubt of ownership and well not go unless he can get true permission.

Sat. August 23 is your chance to try your hand at learning how to pan for gold. A gold pan, if you have one; there will be a couple of extras; wading or water shoes, a small shovel and a way to save your tiny gold flakes are needed. Easy car access, meeting at Northport in the service station parking lot at 10AM. Sun screen, patience and a strong back also help when panning.

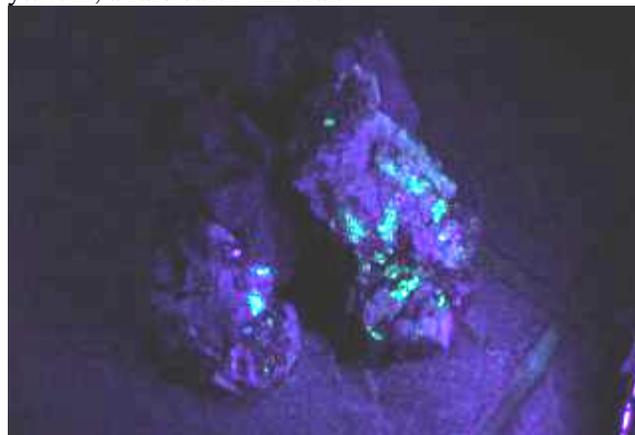
John and Gloria Squires are two of our newest members and also part of a group printing a new small newspaper for Kettle Falls called the Focus. They announced that they, with help from the Kettle Falls Library, on Aug 15th are going to have a demonstration of gold panning geared for kids. Their limit will be 15 kids but others can watch and learn. They asked the club to help sponsor this event and with some discussion the club voted to donate \$100 to this event. Two of our younger club members signed up already. It will be held at 10 AM and there will be talks on the regulations and a hands-on workshop. If you have time stop by and watch.

The North Idaho Mineral Club has purchased a rather large and good rock collection from an estate to use at their show and silent auctions. Roses brought petrified wood, small geodes, Montana agates, and obsidian. The club voted to buy the MT agates for \$1.50/lb and the small geodes @ \$1.00/lb for a total of \$67.50.

After our break Bob Bristow gave our program. It fit very well with last meetings Hawaii's Volcanoes given by the Allens. Bob and Lucie's trip was in the 80 and his adventures were interesting and funny but I doubt you can do some of those things now. He showed samples of the lava and sulfur and we were well entertained. Thanks to Bob and we hope Lucie will be feeling better next time.

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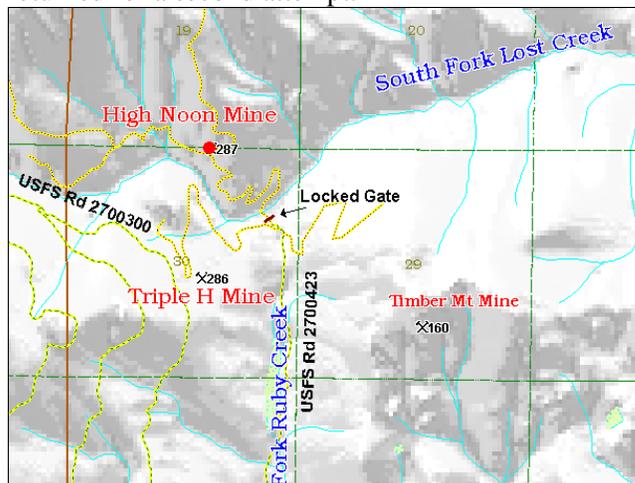
Well, they don't all glow, but the autunite does, and it is a principle ore of uranium. This mine also contains: Beryl, Garnet, Limonite, Meta-autunite, Monzanite, Thorianite, Thorite and Xenotime-(Y). Hey, you can't make this stuff up. Xenotime-(Y) contains yttrium, a rare earth mineral.



[Fluorescent minerals under UV light]

Most of the limestone around here glows orange and red under UV, so I was glad to find these green-glowing rocks to fill out my collection.

Getting there was more than half the fun. On my first attempt, I found a locked gate a mile from the mine and had to back off. There is also a rickety foot bridge and more of a trail than a road. On my way home I ended up in "Lost Meadows" and also lost my prescription sunglasses. Other than that, the roads are two-wheel-drive accessible and the forest is pleasant. It is a steady climb and gets to be hot on a hot day. The Air Force survival school trains in this area of the woods. They put porta-potties in many places along Ruby Creek Road (go figure) and were flying helicopters above us when my wife, Cheryl, and I returned for a second attempt.



(Hot Rocks Continued from page 2) For people with GPS units, the mine is at 48° 36' 0" North and -117° 25' 18" West. Taking Ruby Creek Rd off Hwy 20 just south of Blueslide Resort is the easiest route. About 3.5 miles up the road, turn North on USFS Rd 423. It is marked "HHH" Rd for some reason by the survival school, but you can read the number from the first fiberglass stake as you go up. Another three miles up the 423 Rd you will come to a little camping area and see the steel-pipe gate. There is also a steep road to the left of the gated road that eventually goes to the Triple H Mine, another uranium mine, but that road is blocked a little ways up. To the southeast there is a mine in my data called the Timber Mt gemstone mine. That sounds interesting too, but there is no clear road to it.



[Ore Bin at the High Noon Mine]

When we did finally hike all the way to the mine, the rocks there looked about the same as many on the way up, white pegmatite with large mica inclusions. I climbed up near the mine entrance and gathered samples on the way back. Only one showed green under the UV light.(lower wavelengths only). Cheryl however just picked up a few around this ore bin and all showed green ☺. They also have a purple cast that doesn't show well in the picture.

So will I surely die turning into a green cancerous slime after being exposed to these rocks! I consulted a couple of experts in the club. First our esteemed president, Johnie Pitman sent this message: "Uranium ore is not dangerous as long as it is in the open air so that the radon gas can disperse. Radon gas is most dangerous when the uranium has been in an ore body and the gas has built up then the ore body is broken into by underground miners, the gas is released and there isn't enough ventilation to carry the radon away from the miners and they breath it. Radon has a short half life so it turns back into a solid fairly quickly and if this happens while in the lungs then there is a radioactive solid in the lungs and causes problems. Most of the radiation given off by uranium is alpha radiation and does not penetrate anything, and the small amount of beta radiation is nothing to worry about."

Bill Allen, who worked in a uranium processing plant related that they wore radiation-detecting badges. The badges would not show much exposure after being near raw ore. Concentrated ore was more dangerous. But leaving the badge near a color TV for a day would register dangerous levels of radiation. Everyone however cautioned against carrying samples around in your pockets for any length of time.



[Pegmatite Uranium Ore with Mica Crystals]

Evidently the large crystals found in pegmatites are attributed to a long slow cooling process. I had saved a piece on the first trip that I found away from the mines because of the unusual crystal growth. It also glowed under UV. I think we might want to explore this area more thoroughly.

Solo Creek Quartz Crystals

By Joseph Barreca

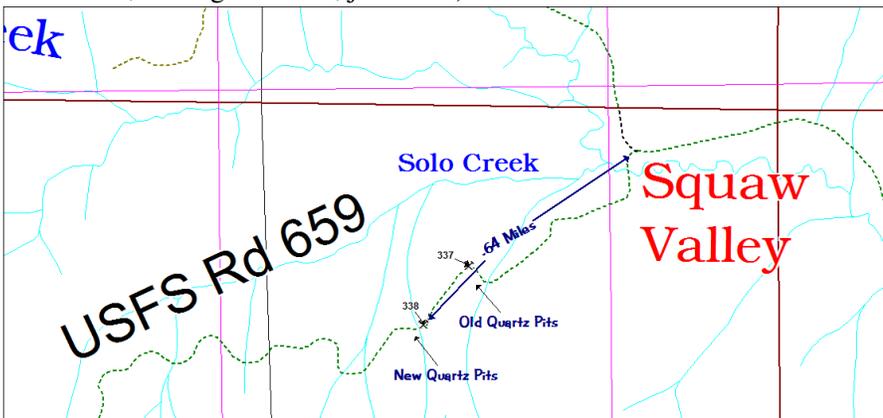


[Rock Hounds and 1 regular dog arrive at Solo Creek]

It was a long trip on a hot day fraught with misdirection, yet in the end, the misguided did pretty well for themselves. That was the pithy synopsis, now for what really happened...

Rex Barrans, Greg Van, Bill and Sylvia Allen (at last free to go on a field trip because it was a Sunday) and their son and family, myself and a guy named Larry left the Safeway Parking lot in Chewelah at 8:30 or so on July 13th. Rex and Greg led in the trusty Sidekick. We went up and over Flowery Trail to Usk, where we turned south on Hwy 20 and East on Hwy 2 into Idaho. We met another rock hound in Priest River and were soon headed north on Hwy 57 to the Squaw Creek Road where we turned West and went about 6.5 miles. Luckily the road turned from gravel to pavement after a couple of miles, because the dust was thick.

Finally we arrived at the junction of Squaw Creek and Solo Creek roads – both Forest Service at this point – and turned left onto Forest Service Road 659. (You are thinking this is way too much instruction, but it gets worse, just wait.)



Almost a half mile up Road 659 we rounded a couple of 90 degree curves and parked. This is where Rex said we could go back to the first curve, hike up a small creek and find some old pits where we could find big quartz crystals. We could see a couple of other cars parked ahead of us but Rex dismissed that site as having only small crystals in old granite.

The woods were shady and had not been disturbed in years, there was no real trail to follow. We all looked for fresh digs but only found places that may have been old digs. Almost everyone started digging. I explored up hill a little and found a newer dig on an old road but no crystals in the tailings. When I got back to the group, they were gone, so I headed back down to the road and up to the other cars.

Steve, the guy who joined us at Priest River was talking to Yence (I'm not sure of the spelling) who was a regular at this spot. Yence had a pretty nice collection of quartz crystals in the back of his car, and evidently a much better one at home. He came there as soon as the snow melted and didn't try any other places. This was his spot and he was glad to show us how it was done.

This was definitely the regular place. There was a little log bridge over a creek, a well-worn trail and a camping spot on the way up to the digs. For those with a GPS, 48° 28.696', -117° 03.479' is the spot on the road. As we picked our way between dug out holes and over downed trees, Yence pointed here and there saying things like "They got a 150 pound crystal out of that hole," and "I found a 7 pound crystal over there." The place looks like a war zone.

[Here is Yence digging away in the hole of the day with his dog nearby]



Yence set us up with a couple holes of our own, that luckily were mostly in the shade, and had been abandoned earlier in the day. We could tell already that getting to the dig around noon and taking a while to get going, was not the way to go. Camp overnight or start out at dawn so you can dig while it is still somewhat cool.

The rest of the group was almost all there already picking away at likely spots. Sylvia found a nice clear little crystal and Bill had a partial one from the first site. It's a good idea to have a little spray bottle to wash off the rocks you find. The ground is wet and clay tends to stick to anything you find making it hard to tell how good it is until you can clean it off.

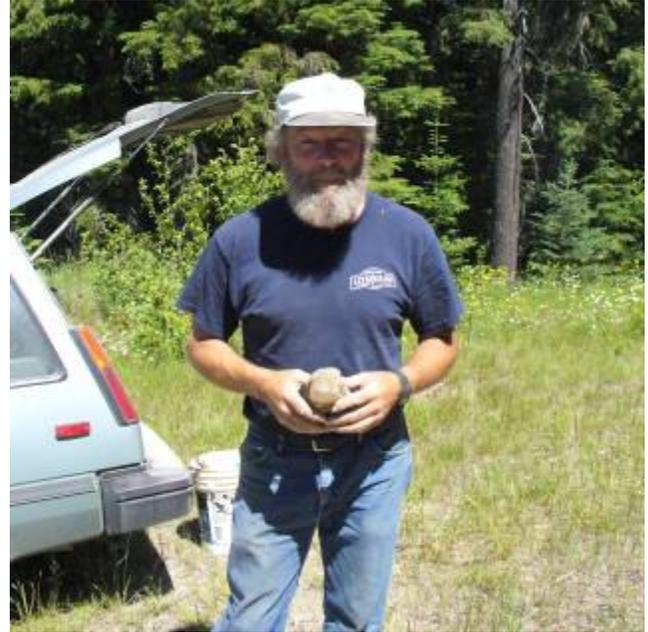
There are layers of granite sand, clay and some broken quartz. It also a good idea to throw the tailings as far as you can if you are doing serious digging, because it takes a lot of digging to get good specimens. You can see from the size of the hole Yence is working on in the previous picture that this can be serious work. He also recommends not starting to drink any beer until the end of the day if you intend to get any digging done.

You also need to watch that you don't undercut the bank very much. It can and does fall down and can easily trap someone. There does not seem to be any hard and fast rule as to where the crystals are. They can be at any level. The layers in the soil are from multiple episodes of debris washing down and building up over time. The general rule is to keep digging down as much as 10 feet.

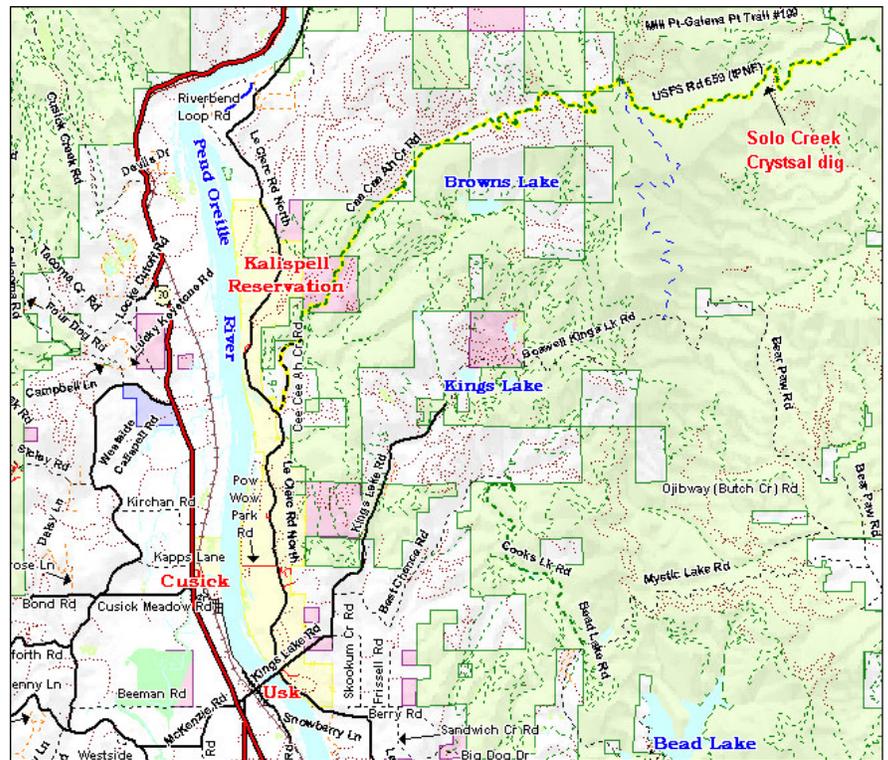
Truthfully, Steve and I didn't find much. Yence found several small crystals that he gave to Steve for the kids back home. I called it off around 2 PM since I knew it would take at least 3 hours to drive home. When I got back to my car, still parked at the first spot, Larry was coming out of the woods from the area of the old digs. I asked him if he had found anything and he brought out this really big crystal, maybe a foot long and 40 or 5 inches thick with a couple of nice points clustered at the top.

While I had been gallivanting around looking for a better spot, he had dug not 10 feet from where I almost started to dig. He came up with this trophy before I had gotten back from exploring and went down to ask Sylvia if it was any good! Well at least someone had beginners luck.

And Rex was not so far off in the first place when he told us the big ones were down on that part of the hill. So I can't say that you will have any better luck with the in-crowd up in the war zone than you might come up with in the shady woods down at the bend in the road.



[Larry with the find of the day]



The road highlighted in yellow is the route Larry and I took back in our old beater cars. It is slow, 25 mph mostly, but only 25 miles to Flowery Trail & Hwy 20 vs. 54 miles through Priest River, so same time, less gas.