

Hunt for Rock in October
By Mickey Cecil

Every spring and fall, Junior Norman has an open house at Graves Mountain in Lincoln County, Georgia. This fall, Barbara and I decided to attend and spend a few days camping at Elijah Clark State Park. While Junior always plans the open house as a 3 day event, we decided to spend Friday at Graves, Saturday at the Diamond Hill Mine in Antreville, SC., and then return home on Sunday.

We packed the car early Thursday morning trying not to forget any of the important items that we may need in a 3-day camping, 2-day rock digging excursion. It was raining when we left because tropical cyclone Nicole was just offshore but luckily heading to the northeast. I was assured by all the weather forecasters that there was a 0% chance of rain on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. As we



headed north, the rain continued until we neared Augusta. As I started to worry, the clouds began to clear and by the time we had reached our campsite on the lake, the skies were only partly cloudy, and we found the ground to be dry. We first got the tent and the inflatable bed set up. I've now gotten too old to sleep on the ground in a sleeping bag. With the bedroom ready, the next step was getting the kitchen ready. We opened up our newly purchased canopy and set up the picnic table with a lamp and our kitchen gear and food. Nearby was the grill that we would use to cook and have our campfire. Barbara likes camping at this site because each campsite is equipped with electricity and water, and we picked a campsite that was near the bathroom and showers. I have to agree that a nice warm shower after a day of collecting sure does feel good. Since we had a long day packing, driving and setting up camp, we decided to make an easy dinner of hamburger/macaroni that we had brought as leftovers. The fresh loaf of bread with butter and sliced apples made nice additions to the meal. I brought our recycle bin full of aged firewood, so we could have a nice fire every night while we camped.



Barb and I woke up early on Friday and headed toward Graves Mountain. Richard and Janine Wells arrived early and were eager to start their day. We got signed in at Graves where I got to meet Collin Smith, Richard and Janine's grandson, a fine young man who would be digging with us the next couple of days. Upon signing in, I showed Junior a Graves Mountain intarsia piece that I had made and put in a silver setting. He jokingly said, "Thank you" and I replied

you're welcome. He was surprised at first but I had every intention of giving Junior the piece because he has worked so hard at keeping Graves open to collectors for as many years as I can remember. I'm glad to know that it has found a good home. After talking with Richard about our plan, we decided to take his cart and walk in rather than wait on the golf carts that ran regularly taking people in and out of the pit. When we walked around and into the pit, we made a few stops along the way to look for rocks especially lazulite that you can still find at the south end of the main pit. As we got into the main pit, we walked the area looking for rocks to collect and a place to dig. As we walked, I showed Richard and Collin some of the kyanite that Combustion Engineering had mined at Graves Mountain. We finally settled into a place to dig and went to work. It was soon lunch time and we decided to ride the cart out so we could get the full view of the mountain and surrounding area as well as getting the amusement park ride when the carts go up and down the steep inclines. We ate lunch at the rock swap area and afterward made a trip by the vendors to see what was available. Junior Norman and Charlie Padgett had their collection of Graves Mountain minerals for sale. Charlie had a blue iridescent hematite with rutile that was stunning. Vendors had rocks and slabs of all types of material available. Ron Seaver had recently acquired a collection of thumbnails and micros that was especially nice. Rick Jacquot from MAGMA was also set up next to Junior with his assortment of beautiful specimens from the southeast. After lunch, we worked the area again for a couple of hours and luck that day would only supply us with one decent rutile specimens with 3 small crystals but several other different specimens were found that can be used as lapidary rough. When Barb and I returned to the campsite, the warm shower was welcomed and followed by a meal of rib eye steaks on the grill with baked potatoes. After dinner, Rick Jacquot returned from his evening with Junior and the gang to enjoy our campfire for a while.





We got to sleep in a little later on Saturday before we had to meet at Crawford's Store in Antreville. This is generally the meeting place when groups gather to head to the Diamond Hill Mine. After Richard, Janine and Collin arrived, we took the 5 minute drive to the mine. I instructed the Wells to use the first hour to walk the pits and dumps to see if any material could be found on the surface. Again luck did not favor us, but in our walk I found a place in

the skeletal pit where someone had been working and left several nice piece of skeletal crystals. After seeing this, I was convinced that this was our place to dig. As we started digging, Janine tried her luck in the amethyst pit. It took a while to relocate the vein of material that was being dug but we managed to dig into the vein. Again lunch quickly arrived and afterward, Richard and I took the opportunity to find a couple of yard rocks for him to bring home. With a little effort, we managed to find two milky quartz crystal beauties- one from the amethyst pit and one from the smoky pit. With those loaded, we went back to our spot in the skeletal pit to work the vein for a while longer. After finally pulling out several more reasonably nice specimens, we decided to pack it in for the day. It's always amazing to work a vein and pull out a specimen that has never seen the light of day, much less being seen by another person. As we got packed up, changed and ready to leave, I thought that Richard may have to leave Collin behind because he had his truck so loaded with equipment, baggage and rocks. With some effort, we managed to open up a spot for Collin to sit. Janine didn't think that his mother would have been happy if we had left him. We soon parted ways as the Wells headed for Jax and we headed back to the campsite for the evening.



On the way back, Barb and I decided to stop in downtown Abbeville to eat dinner in a Mexican restaurant that we have always enjoyed and thus saving us the hassle of cooking for the night. Anyway, I was tired after a long day of digging, so I loved the idea. On the way, Randy and Debbie Ritter called from the Open House at Graves (their side trip on the way back from William Holland) and decided to join us around the campfire later. Enjoying the fire later after a warm shower, a full belly and good friends was truly enjoyable. I already look forward to my next trip to hunt for that ever elusive prized specimen while totally enjoying myself with friends in the great outdoors. All club members are invited to join us on these outings.

