

Reflections on Summer Collecting at Charles Davis Mine

by Bob Wilken

Charles Davis Mine is a short jaunt north of its more famous neighbor, Palermo, in Groton, NH. According to Pegmatite Investigations 1942-45 New England by Eugene Cameron, mining started some time prior to 1920. Apparently, as with many of the pegmatite mines, work proceeded in fits and spurts spanning several decades. Just as Cameron was compiling his survey, a significant effort was being made with work beginning in December of 1943 continuing into July of 1944. It seems the winter season was no deterrent to work. I have no information that would indicate the final year of mining operations at Charles Davis.

Muscovite mica was the principal resource (and most likely the only one) mined at Charles Davis. The mining was all open pit with "waste rock.... removed by way of an aerial tramway." The mica often "contained numerous inclusions of magnetite (?) or pyrite (?) and small tourmaline crystals." But, because of these defects the mine could only produce small-sized sheet mica.

Most all of you who have collected microminerals, especially in NH, probably know this location well because of the occurrence of euhedral scorzalite crystals. Perhaps many of you collected here long before Anna and I had the opportunity. The scorzalite, originally reported as lazulite, may actually contain both end members even within a single crystal. The crystals range in color from an irresistible green to a deep royal blue. And, to make the site all the more interesting, brazilianite and goyazite are also reported to be present. Anyone perusing Philip Morrill's old New Hampshire collecting booklet or checking out the listing of mineral occurrences on Mindat must admit, it is a very alluring collecting site.

Charles Davis (for us) is only a twenty-five minute drive and, during a year of three dollar per gallon gasoline, it was an ideal time to explore it. Even better, the walk in is at best a five to ten minute walk over an old, obvious mine road. Throughout the month of August the only thing that made the walk longer was stopping along the way to snack on abundant blackberries.

The search for scorzalite (let alone the many other listed minerals) has been extremely difficult. Spots of blue occur readily throughout the pegmatite but, **microcrystals** are elusive. My wife, Anna, and I soon learned that most of the blue was deteriorated material. Childrenite occurs in vugs or voids in albite in relatively close proximity to deteriorated scorzalite. Frequently it fills out voids which when broken through appear as radial, bronzy and fan-like. Other times it appears as masses of extremely thin crystalline laminae; more often than not, heavily oxidized and also deteriorated. Rarely the masses are intact and fresh.

In spite of the difficulty and perhaps because of it, Anna and I have gone back to Charles Davis over and over often being "skunked" totally. But, how can this be? Many beautiful specimens were found no more than ten years or so ago...by some of YOU! Did you get it ALL? Well, you did a good job but, not quite. I have since found some modest specimens. Anna has yet to find her first. On the other hand, on two occasions Anna has found gorgeous, deep emerald green, chunky, cough drop-shaped crystals of torbernite that I have yet to find. In addition, we have found a total of less than five unaesthetic specimens of strunzite and a couple of specimens containing tiny paravauxite. No, no brazilianite or goyazite! But, lo and behold I have found one small specimen containing beraunite and rockbridgeite with paravauxite. And neither of these has been reported in any of the lists that I mentioned earlier. Anna discovered an old iron bolt. Jokingly I told her to check it for micros. She did! In a concave area of the bolt are sharp, grayish, platy hexagonal microcrystals! What are they?

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My experience at Charles Davis this summer causes me to question at least two things.

The first is the validity of mineral listings, especially on Mindat. There is no way to determine the history behind them let alone the source of the information. And indeed, they may be incorrect, incomplete, in question (souzalite?), or one-time finds. If I were to submit rockbridgeite and beraunite to the Mindat list my ego might soar. But, how realistic would it be for anyone else (or myself for that matter) to ever find it again?

The second issue that I question pertains to the wisdom of “where the good stuff occurs”.

At Charles Davis the “good stuff” is reportedly on the dumps to the left and downhill of the quarry opening. It’s at the bottom of the dump. Well, we have dug bomb-crater-deep and made mini adits into the sides of the dump. I have come across masses of muscovite where workmen apparently were cobbing the material out of the rock. I have found scorzalite on top, scorzalite on the bottom and everywhere in between. There is no rhyme or reason to where it is which of course can be maddening. Just when you think you are going to hit the mother load, like the mirage on the road ahead of you, it disappears. The only conclusion is that it is where it is! In short we have moved mountains and been rewarded to a minor degree. And yet, how addictive is “the hunt”!