MINERALS

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Andrzej's Pocket – a great new find!

Tomasz PRASZKIER

Fluorite with albite, microcline and stilbite, 6.5 cm wide. Fisher/Kureczka collection.

INTRODUCTION

Strzegom (Lower Silesia, Poland) is a classic European locality famous for pegmatites, which host collector-quality crystals growing in miarolitic cavities. Pegmatites occur here in Carboniferous age granite intrusions. Pockets occur frequently, but the vast majority of them lack quality specimens. There are over 40 active quarries in the area, and with such a large amount of mining it is amazing that good pockets are found only once or twice a year. The pockets vary in size from a few centimeters to a few meters, and crystal size can vary correspondingly. Smoky quartz crystals can reach 1 m in length, and high quality fluorite crystals are known up to 20 cm!

In April 2009, one of the Spirifer Geological Society members who lives in Strzegom town noticed an interesting pegmatite body in one of the quarries (Wekom II, near Kostrza). Andrzej Korzekwa is a mineral fanatic, and immediately started exploring the pegmatite, finding several small cavities. He was able to collect 2 very good quality fluorites (see first photo on page 10) in addition to many feldspars, epidotes, stilbites, and quartz specimens. Unfortunately, this part of the quarry was abandoned soon after discovery of the

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Rogerley Mine, UK – mining for fluorites

Jesse FISHER

Fluorite, 7 cm high, from Blue Bell Pocket, Rogerley mine. Photographed in daylight. Spirifer collection.

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Pennine Orefield has been for many centuries an important source of lead, industrial fluorite, and, to a lesser extent, zinc, iron, and barium ores. The earliest records of mining date from the 12th century, with the high point of lead mining occurring in the 18th and 19th centuries, followed by a rise in fluorspar production during the late 19th through late 20th centuries. Mineral specimens have long been a byproduct of these mining operations. Known locally as "bonnie bits," they have been brought from the mines as curiosities by miners, and can stil be seen decorating some yards and walls in the dale.

The Weardale area is particularly noted for the production of many exquisite, well-crystallized specimens of fluorite which exhibit a strong daylight fluorescence. Fluorite specimens from Weardale mines now grace most major mineral collections world-wide.

By the early 1990s, large-scale commercial mining was in serious decline throughout the Weardale area along with the rest of the UK. As a result, the supply of crystallized mineral specimens for the collectors' market as a byproduct of mining has largely ceased. Those that do make it to market these days are for the most part recovered by weekend collectors using hand tools or recycled out of old collections. The one notable exception to this has been the Rogerley Mine. First discovered by local mineral collectors around 1970, the Rogerley Mine has produced a more-or-less steady stream of fluorite specimens over the past 40 years. To this day, the Rogerley is unique as it is the only mine in the UK that has been developed solely for the recovery of crystallized mineral specimens.

In this issue also:

Collector interview: Jolyon Ralph (UK)

This time our inteview is again with a very famous person – the creator of mindat.org – Jolyon Ralph from the UK. Jolyon is well known as a webmaster but not many people know that he is a long time collector who has done a lot of field collecting...

Tomasz Praszkier (Minerals): *Jolyon, as creator of the world's biggest mineral database - Mindat.org, you are very well known to most mineral collectors, mineralogists, and museum curators. However, I don't know how many people know that apart from being a computer "geek", you are also a mineral collector who spends his free time field collecting in mines and quarries. Tell us how your interest in minerals started?*

Jolyon Ralph: I was five years old, on a family holiday in Cornwall – the first holiday I can remember anything about. I was with my dad on the beach at Tintagel and we were picking up stones to skim across the waves, but there were few stones that were the right shape. I picked up one larger stone, and it had some ...

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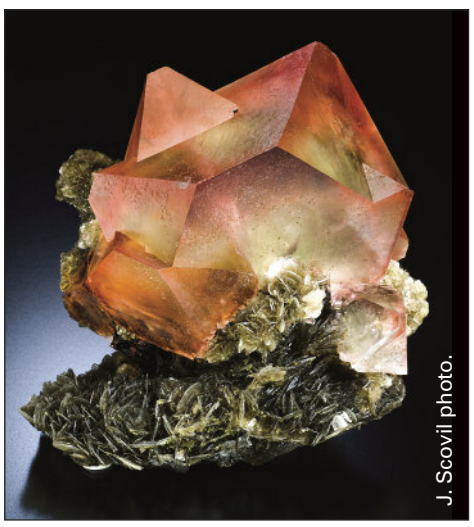

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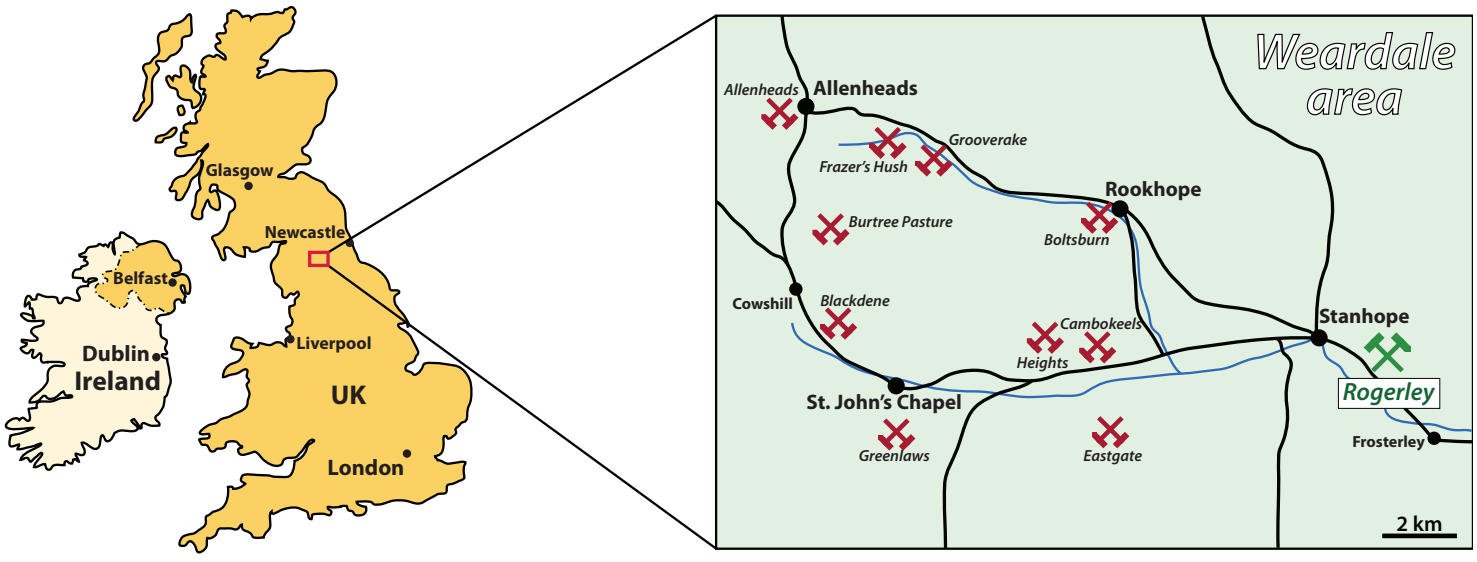
LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHY

The Rogerley Mine (54°44'16.75"N, 1°59'3.16"W) is located in the eastern portion of the Weardale district, County Durham, Northern England. Weardale ("dale" is the local name for a river valley) runs East-West, following the course of the River Wear, beginning at the border between the counties of Durham and Cumbria near Alston Moor and continuing eastward for more than 30 kilometers, past the town of Wolsingham. While the area was at one time heavily forested, much of this was cleared centuries ago, and the region is now predominantly open moorland divided by stone walls and the occasional stone cottage. Inhabited towns and villages, for the most part, occupy the valley floor, and Stanhope is the center of commercial activity for the valley. Located a few kilometers to the north of Stanhope is the picturesque village of Rookhope, which was formerly the center of much of the local mining activity.

The Rogerley Mine is situated within an abandoned quarry of the same name, just east of the town of Stanhope.



Map of UK with location of Weardale area, and inset showing the Rogerley and other important Weardale mines.

Weardale landscape. J. Fisher photo.

One of the many remains of mining activity in Weardale – ore carts in Allenheads, today used as decoration of garden. J. Gajowniczek photo.

Weardale landscape. J. Gajowniczek photo.

The quarry was originally operated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a source of limestone flux for local iron foundries that once operated in the area. There is no evidence that the quarry was ever worked for lead or fluorspar, which were considered impurities in the limestone. When encountered by the quarrymen, the galena and fluorite appear to have been discarded in a series of old waste piles which are now heavily overgrown on the south side of the quarry.

GEOLOGY AND MINERALIZATION

The mineral deposits of the North Pennine Orefield are hosted by the Carboniferous-age sedimentary rocks (limestones, sandstones, and shales) that make up the North Pennine Mountains in this part of northern England. Located near the top of the sequence of sedimentary rocks is a unit known as the "Great Limestone," which has been found to contain the majority of well-developed horizontal, metasomatic replacements, known locally as "flats" in the Weardale region. Found within the Great Limestone are three horizons at which the flats typically occur. These are known as the Low, Middle, and High Flats Horizons. The High Flats Horizon is usually most strongly mineralized of the three and has historically been the source of much of the high-quality fluorite specimens for which the Weardale area is known.

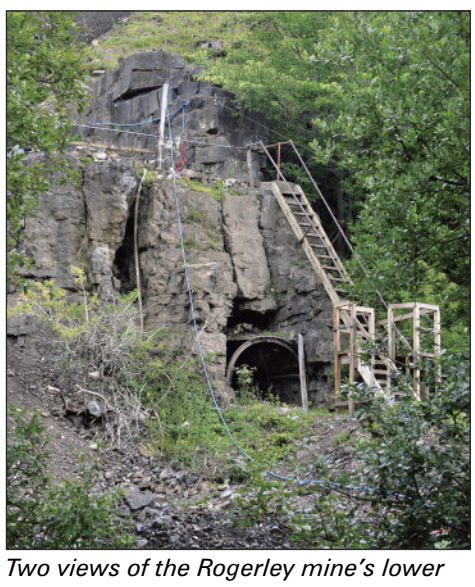
The Rogerley Mine follows a series of vertical fracture-filled vein and associated metasomatic flats. These mineralized zones are part of the North Pennines Orefield, which is a typical Mississippi Valley Type ore deposit. The Weardale area appears to have been the center of mineralization in the orefield, spreading out into the adjacent areas of Teesdale to the south, Allendale and Northumberland to the north, and the Alston Moor region of Cumbria to the west.

The majority of the workings at the Rogerley Mine are developed following the main vein, known as the Greenbank Vein, which trends northward from its exposure in the Rogerley Quarry. The main adit of the underground mine has been driven following the vein within the High Flats Horizon. While crystal-lined cavities occaisionally occur within the vein itself, the best quality specimens have been found in the flats that can occur on both the east and west sides of the vein at this horizon.

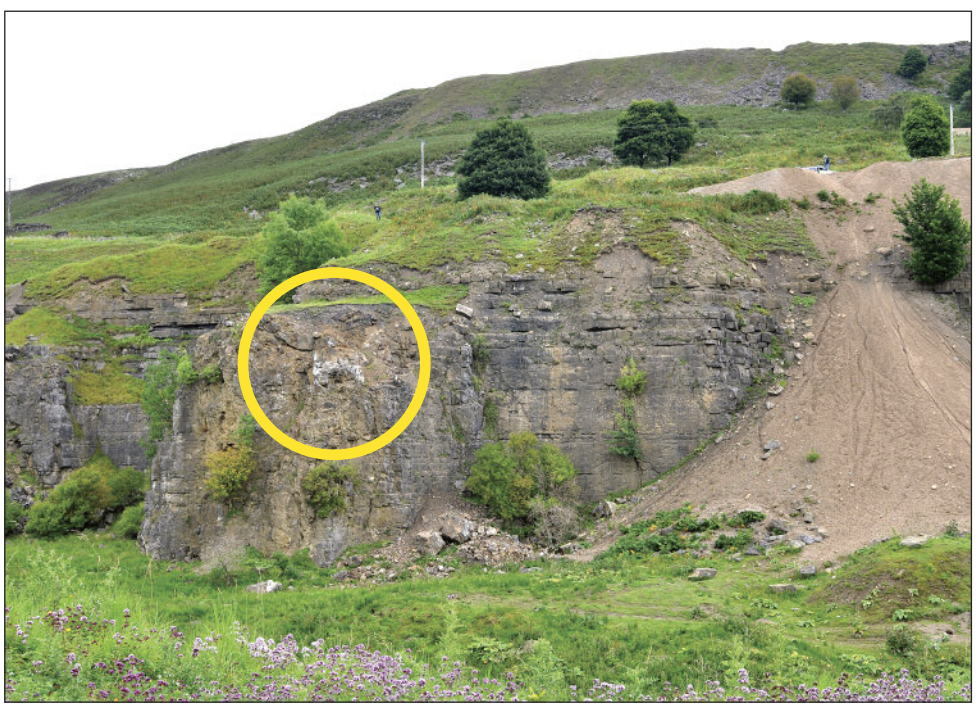
The mineralogy of both the flats and vein deposits is relatively simple, consisting of one or more generations of fluorite plus or minus quartz and galena. Carbonates including calcite and siderite are occasionally found. The host limestone in and around both the vein and flats is often strongly altered to an iron-rich gossan locally referred to as "ironstone." Pockets found in the vein are usually compact and discrete, where as pockets in the flats are actually an interconnected series of lens-like cavities lined with fluorite, quartz, and galena. Cavities in the flats are generally parallel to the bedding and often partially or completely collapsed and invariably filled with a very thick, sticky mud that has infiltrated the cavities, likely brought in by meteoric waters subsequent to formation of the flats.

Eastern Rogerley quarry, view from Rogerley mine. J. Gajowniczek photo.

The habit of Rogerley fluorite is always cubic, and crystals under 3 cm in size typically exhibit penetration twinning on [111], and are often quite transparent. Crystals larger than 3 cm are typically not twinned and are mostly opaque. Growth hillocks with four vicinal faces are common on the cube faces of twinned crystals and appear to emanate from the point where the



Two views of the Rogerley mine's lower adit. Upper photo circa 1970, Greenbank photo archive. Lower photo 2010, J. Gajowniczek photo.



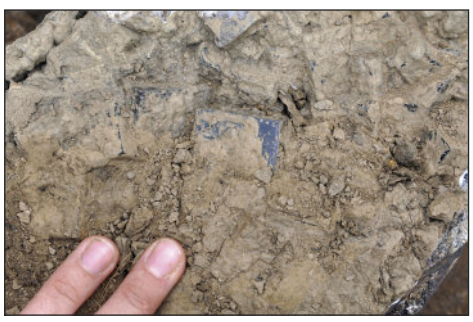
Western Rogerley Quarry. Sutcliff vein workings marked in yellow. J. Gajowniczek photo.

Chollar of Rogerley mine adit in 2001. UKMV crew from right to left, Byron (†) (right), Dave (middle) and Lofty (left) at mine entrance. J. Fisher photo.

Working in Sutcliff vein. J. Gajowniczek photo.

Early workings at the Rogerley mine – Mick Sutcliff working at the mine entrance in 1970's. Greenbank archives photo.

Inside the Rogerley mine maine adit. J. Gajowniczek photo.



Two photos of the same specimen from the Sutcliff vein. Freshly collected on left, and after washing on right. J. Gajowniczek photo.

Byron (†) trimming specimens at the mine. Only a miner would sit on a diamond chain saw to get the best angle for cutting! J. Fisher photo.

Cal Graeber (left) and Jesse Fisher (author) washing clay from one of the pockets. J. Gajowniczek photo.

Drilling and ready to blast! J. Fisher and R. Brandstetter photos.

Washing specimens. J. Fisher and J. Gajowniczek photos.

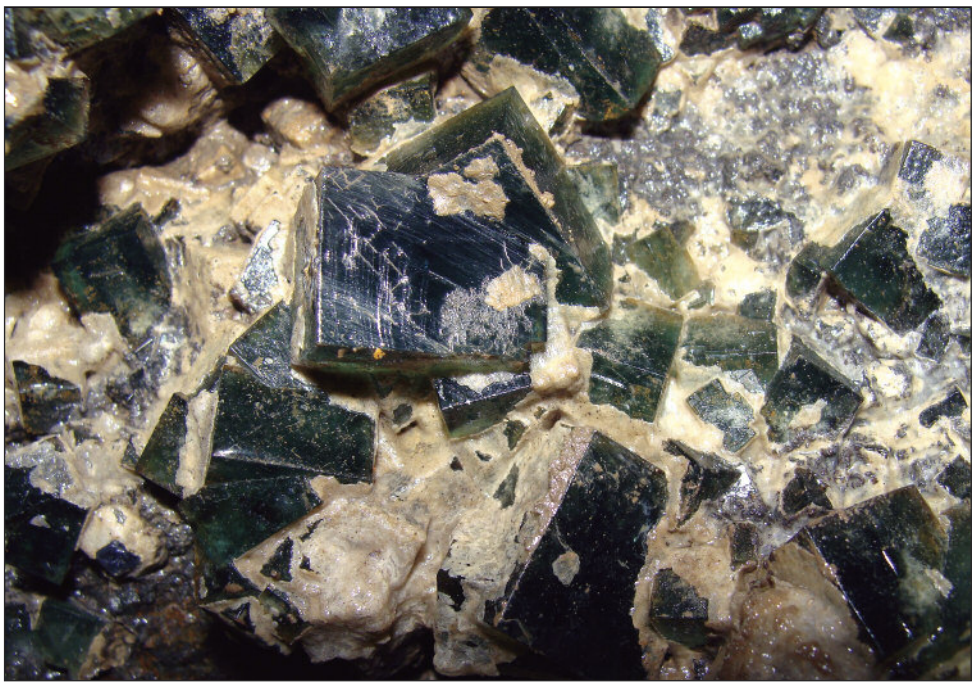
Black Sheep Pocket was named in honor of the local brewery. Photo curtisy of Black Sheep brewery.

Fluorites with galena from Black Sheep Pocket, left 12 cm high, right 7 cm high. UKMV specimens. J. Fisher photos.

Jesse and Jurgen working in the Black Sheep Pocket. R. Brandstetter photo.

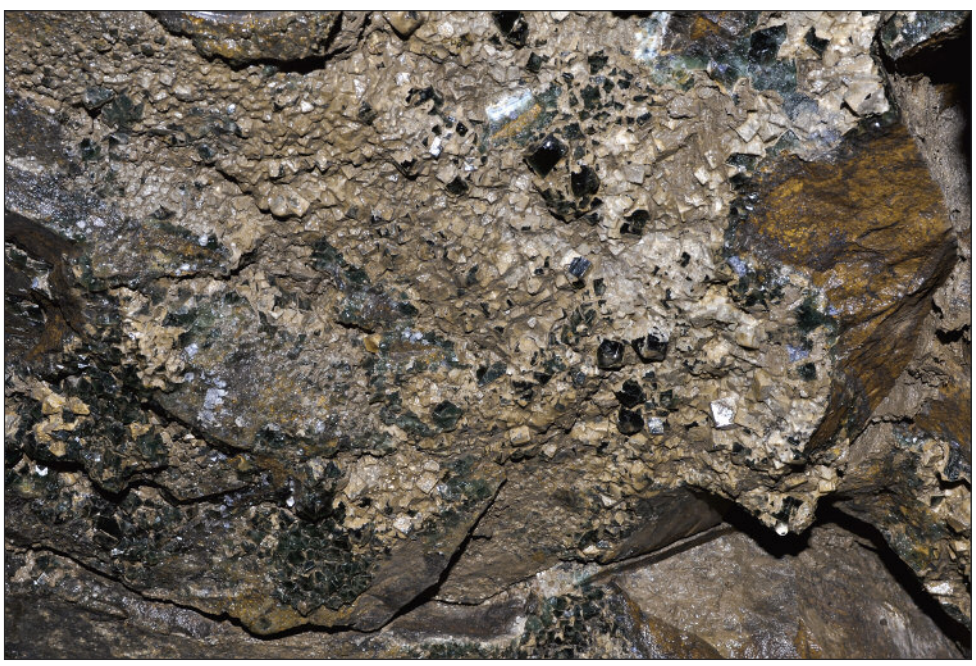
Early collecting in the Black Sheep Pocket, 1999. J. Fisher photo.

Collecting in Black Sheep Pocket in the 2010. J. Gajowniczek photo.



Fluorite crystals in situ *in the Black Sheep Pocket. R. Brandstteter photo.*

Close-up of fluorites in the Black Sheep Pocket. J. Gajowniczek photo.



Back of the Black Sheep Pocket. J. Gajowniczek photo.

One of East Crosscut pockets. R. Brandstetter photo.

twin penetrates the cube face. The most common color for Rogerley fluorite is a deep emerald green, and, to date, all the fluorite found in the flats has been of this color. Fluorite crystals from vein pockets are often a dark purple, though some pockets with various shades of green and yellow have been found. Internal color zoning is rare though occasional pale purple layers or core zones can be seen in crystals from the flats. Anomalous asymmetrical zones of pale yellow are sometimes seen in crystals from the flats.

Dipper Pocket. J. Fisher photo.

Group of fluorite crystals from Dipper pocket, field view 9 cm. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.

Fluorite crystals from vein pockets (and occasionally from the flats) often display an internal cloudiness known to local collectors as "white centers". As the name implies, these crystals are white and opaque in the center while having gemmy transparent edges and corners. It is not unusual to find specimens where one or several larger transparent fluorite crystals are surrounded by numerous smaller crystals, all with white centers. This internal cloudiness appears to be caused by numerous microscopic void spaces within the crystal, but it is unclear whether these are a growth feature or the result of a partial dissolution or etching of the fluorite.

Fluorite from the Rogerley (as well as most other mines in the North Pennines) exhibits a notable color change between artificial and daylight illumination, an effect known as *daylight fluorescence*. Both purple and green fluorite show pronounced blue overtones in direct or even indirect sunlight. This effect is likely caused by the ultra-violet (UV) component of the daylight spectrum, which is largely absent in artificial light. The UV fluorescence of North Pennines fluorite is also exceptionally strong, particularly under long-wave UV. It is said that studies of this material by Sir George Stokes in 1852 were the original source of the term *fluorescence*. It has been known for some time that fluorite from this region contains elevated levels of a number of rare-earth (Lanthanide-series) elements and it is likely that this is the cause of the intense UV and daylight fluorescence.

HISTORY OF THE ROGERLEY MINE

Cumbria Mining and Mineral Company

The Cumbria Mining and Mineral Company (CMaMC) was formed in 1972 by Lindsay and Patricia Greenbank, and Michael and Brenda Sutcliffe with the intention of mining mineral specimens on a commercial basis. The concept of operating a mine solely for specimens was quite novel in the UK at the time and was not taken seriously by governmental mineral agents. After unsuccessful attempts to obtain leases on properties in both Caldbeck Fells and Alston Moor, the partnership obtained permission to explore the previously unworked fluorite-bearing veins in the Rogerley Quarry.

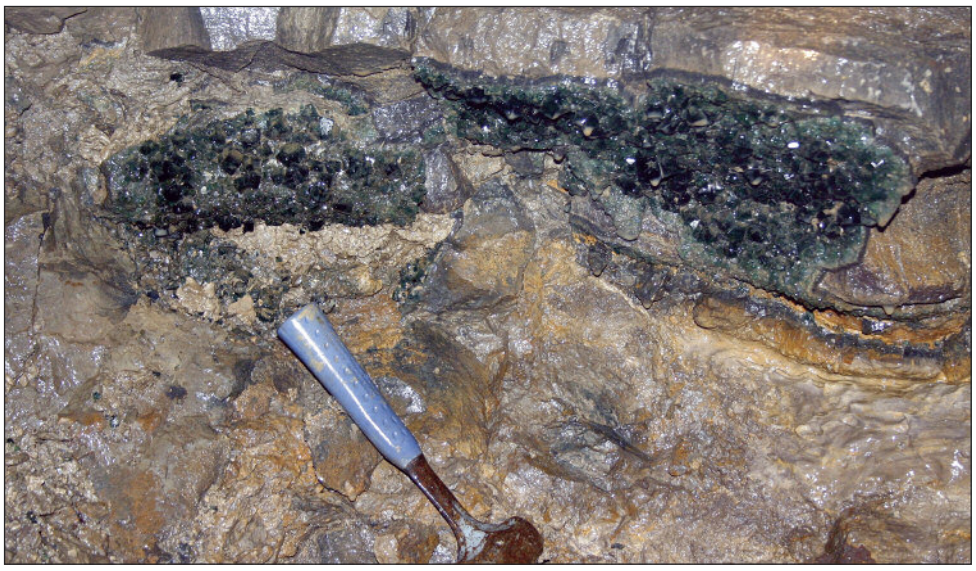
Fluorite specimens were originally discovered along the base of the quarry wall around 1970 by mineral collector Raymond Blackburn. He determined that the source of the specimens was a spot high up on the north face of the quarry, but, being somewhat adverse to high places, he did not attempt to collect at the actual source. Lindsay Greenbank, a well-known collector and dealer from Cumbria, was aware of the occurrence, having purchased specimens from Mr. Blackburn. As he did not share Mr. Blackburn's aversion to high places, he and partner Mick Sutcliffe began investigating the occurrence by roping down from the top of the quarry. The source of the fluorite specimens was found to be cavities in both a N-S trending vein exposed on the quarry wall and the flats extending latterly from it. This vein is split into two stringers separated by about one meter as exposed on the quarry face, and has been named the Greenbank vein by Sir Kingsley Dunham, a noted authority on the geology and mineralogy of the region.

Leases for mineral rights were obtained from the mineral agents for the Church Commissioners of England; tres-

Freshly collected specimens from East Crosscut. R. Brandstetter photo.

pass rights were arranged with the local landowner, and the mine was operated on weekends for specimens over the course of the next 25 years. Work initially focused on cavities that occur in the High Flats Horizon near the top of the Great Limestone, the rock unit that supports the walls of the quarry. During the early to mid 1970's a bench around 10 meters long was cut into the face approximately 20 meters above the floor of the quarry, and three fluorite-producing zones were encountered.

A second vein, named the Sutcliffe vein (54°44'27.06"N, 1°59'16.07"W), was discovered on the face of a western extension of the quarry 500 meters northwest of the Greenbank vein. A limited amount of surface work was done on the Sutcliffe vein during the mid 1970's and some good quality specimens of green and purple fluorite were found. Access to this outcrop was difficult to control, and high graders were a constant problem so work was soon shifted back to the original location.



One of West Crosscut pockets photographed in May 2004. J. Fisher photo.

Emerald green fluorite from the West Crosscut, photographed in artificial light. 10 cm wide. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.

During the late 1970's a cavity containing some exceptional bright green fluorite was discovered near the surface directly below the previously cut bench level on the Greenbank vein. Over the next 18 months of only weekend work, an adit was driven northward for a distance of about 20 meters in search of more fluorite at this level. Unfortunately, the adit proved barren for the rest of its length and no work has been done there since.

The focus of mining shifted back to the upper level, and during the 1980's an adit was driven northward into the quarry wall. Between 1982-1990, the partnership was also engaged in a zinc mining operation at Force Crag in Cumbria, so work at the Rogerley was limited to one or two weekends a month. During this time a series of cavities along the adit produced a high volume of material, resulting in a steady cash flow for the company. Most of the fluorite specimens found were large, opaque green crystals, some of which had smaller gemmy green crystals on the surface. To the east of this section of the adit the fluorite crystals tended to become smaller and more transparent, and some excellent quality specimens were recovered. By the early 1990's the adit had been extended to a length of about 35 meters, but during the winter of 1992-93 the area around the portal collapsed, requiring the better part of the next year to reopen.

UK Mining Ventures

Not long after reopening the upper adit, Lindsay contracted a serious illness. While recovering, he was forced to conclude that the rigors of hard rock mining were a thing of the past. He was in the process of closing the mine and selling off the equipment when the situation came to the attention of a group of American collectors and dealers. After successfully completing agreements to secure mineral and trespass rights with the various pertinent parties, equipment was purchased, and this group now known as UK Mining Ventures (UKMV) began mining for specimens in May of 1999. The people involved with the project have varied a bit since inception, but the core American crew of Cal and Kerith Graeber, Jesse Fisher (author) and Fisher's wife Joan Kureczka, and head miner Byron Weege, assisted by local miner Dave Beadle, have worked the mine each year, primarily during summer months.

Having been fallow for several years, the mine suffered natural deterioration along with occasional visits from high graders leaving it in need of considerable rehabilitation. This process involved mucking out and re-timbering portions of the workings, re-laying the track, re-building the stairs to the upper adit entrance, delivery of new equipment and hoisting to the mine site by crane, and installing a steel plate security door at the chollar. By mid-June,

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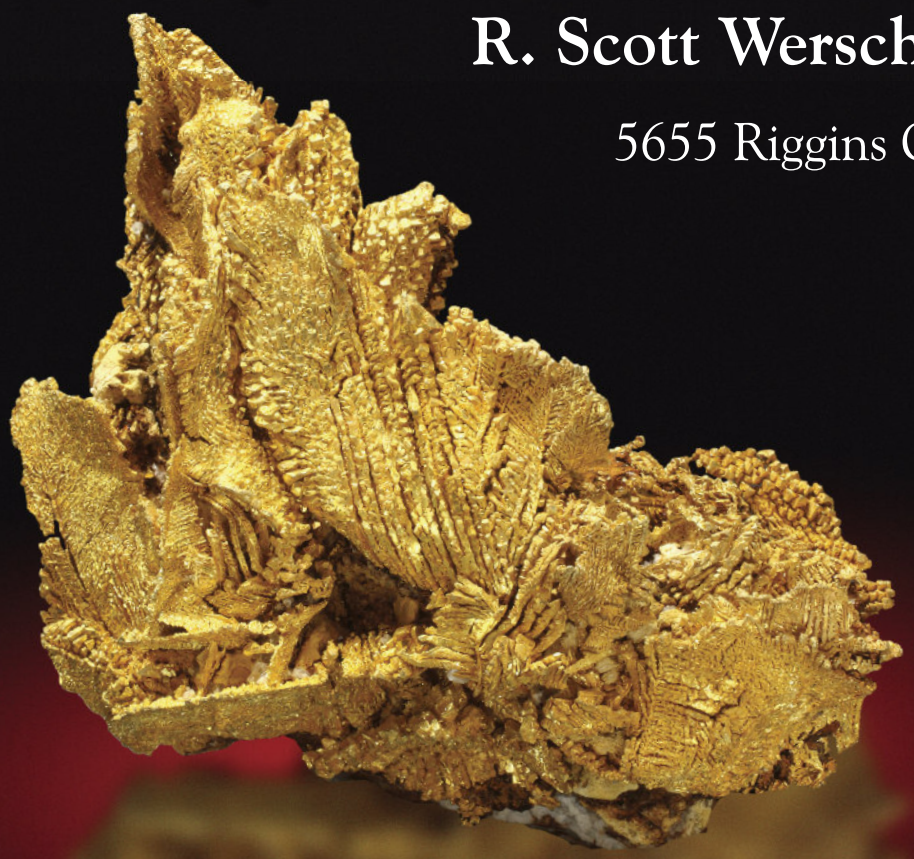
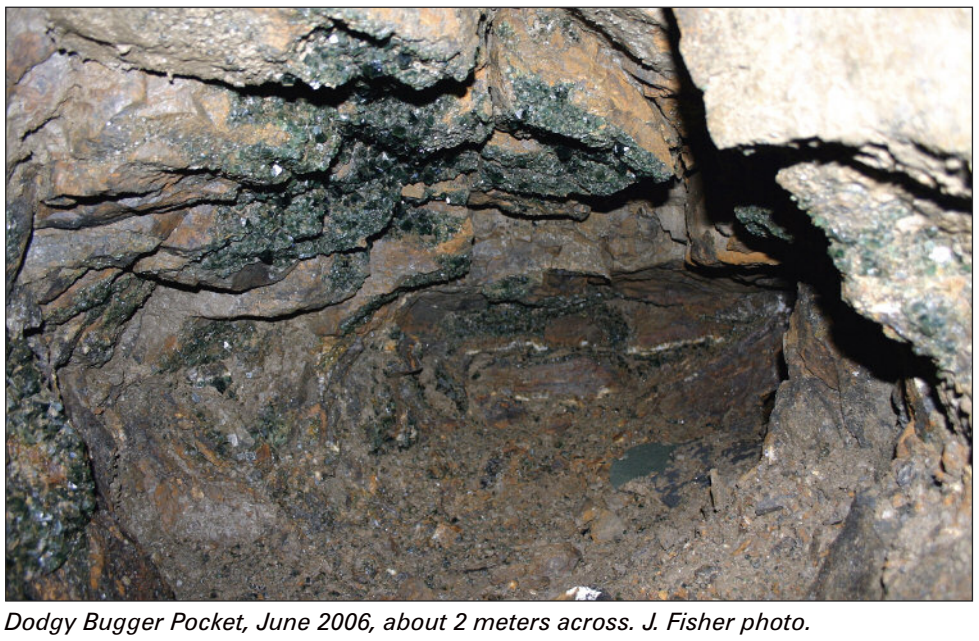


Crystallized gold from the Round Mountain mine, Nevada, USA. Size 5 cm. Miner's Lunchbox specimen. J. Callen photo.



Dodgy Bugger Pocket, June 2006, about 2 meters across. J. Fisher photo.

Fluorite on quartz from Dodgy Bugger Pocket, 9 cm wide. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.

most of this had been accomplished and the UKMV crew could begin mining for specimens.

The finds of the first year far surpassed expectations of everyone involved. What was initially expected to be a short collecting adventure quickly became a full-scale business of mining and selling specimens. Although production has varied a good bit from year to year during this time, it has been enough to keep us coming back each year for more.

POCKETS

The Black Sheep Pocket Zone

Collecting during our first year focused on an area of mineralization that was found half way between the mine entrance and the end of the original adit, in the area that was successfully worked during the 1980's by CMaMC. In an alcove on the east side of the adit, green fluorite was exposed in numerous stringers and pocket remnants. In early June while stabilizing a promising section of the adit with some new timbering, we noticed a mud seam on the face of the alcove. As the mud was washed away and a few slabs of rock were removed from the face, it became apparent that this was the opening of a fairly large cavity completely lined with green fluorite crystals. The pocket proved to be an interconnected series of fluorite-lined solution cavities in the flats to the east of the vein, and extraction lasted through the better part of our first two years at the mine. By the end of the first summer this area, named the **"Black Sheep Pocket"** in honor of a local ale popular with the crew, had been opened up to a length of approximately 5 meters, yielding many more specimens than anyone could have hoped for. The wallrock surrounding the cavities in this area of the mine was highly silicified and collecting specimens of any size was virtually impossible without using a hydraulic-powered diamond chain saw to cut them out.

The Dodgy Bugger "potato" in the mine, and after extraction. Not all specimens get glamorous names! J. Fisher photos.

While the finds of the first summer had been largely a matter of "dumb luck", the strategy for our second year (2000) was to access the mineralized flats of the Black Sheep area by driving a new drift branching to the northeast from the main adit near the mine entrance. This drift would theoretically intersect the flats near the rear of the first year's productive zone and provide better access to the mineralized area. Tunneling began in early June and the mineralized area was reached in early July after driving approximately 15 meters of new drift. Collecting in this area continued through the summer, and in late August the miners broke into the far end of the previous summer's workings. Mineralization was highly developed in this area, and fluorite-bearing cavities were often encountered at three or more levels on the working face. During the course of the summer, many well crystallized specimens were collected, some having glassy, lustrous penetration twins of green fluorite over 3 cm on edge.

During the third summer (2001), work was left off in the Black Sheep Pocket zone in favor of driving forward on both the east and main adits. After driving the new east adit through a highly brecciated zone, an area of flats to the northeast of the Black Sheep, now know as the **"Birthday Pocket"**, was encountered. This area of flats produced some very nice, and often large plates covered with twinned green fluorite crystals. Unfortunately, many of the fluorite crystals from this area also showed patches of incipient alteration. At about the same time, an eastward extension of the Birthday Pocket was found as tunneling continued northward. This area was called **"The Dipper"** because the mineralized flats appeared

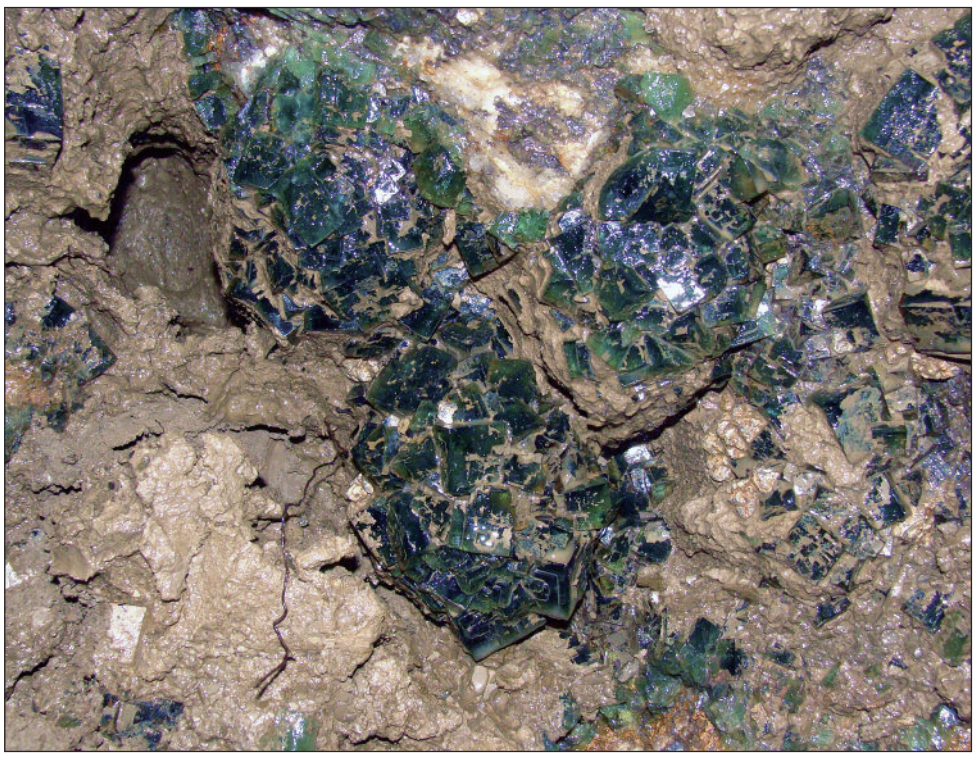
Quartz pseudostalactite with fluorite and galena from Dodgy Bugger Pocket, 10 cm high. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.

Fluorite from the Dodgy Bugger Pocket. Same specimen photographed in artificial light (left) and daylight (right). J. Fisher photos.

Rat Hole Pocket. J. Fisher photo.

Fluorites in situ *in the Rat Hole Pocket. R. Brandstetter photo.*

Big fluorite crystals in situ in the Rat Tail Pocket. R. Brandstetter photo.



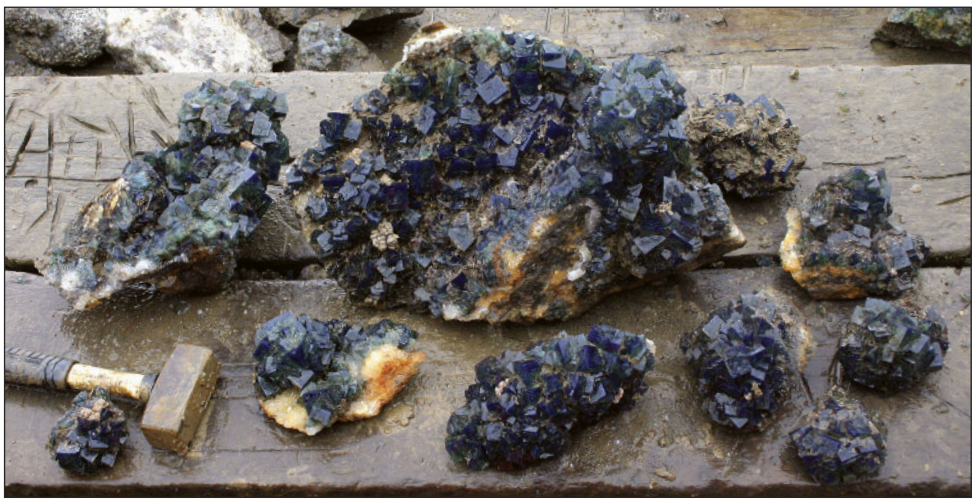
Fluorites in situ *in the Rat Hole Pocket, note pocket clay. R. Brandstetter photo.*

Freshly collected fluorite from the Rat Hole Pocket with very strong blue daylight fluorescence, 12.5 cm wide. R. Brandstetter collection and photo.

Freshly collected specimen from the Rat Hole Pocket. R. Brandstetter photo.

Fluorite on quartz from the Rat Hole Pocket, photographed in artificial light (upper photo) and daylight, size of specimen 12 cm. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.

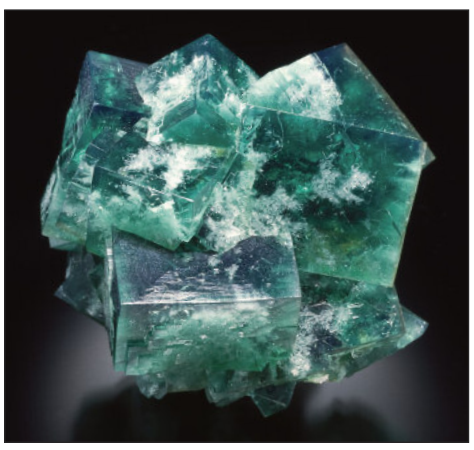
Rat Tail Pocket. J. Fisher photo.



Freshly collected specimens from Rat Tail Pocket. J. Fisher photo.

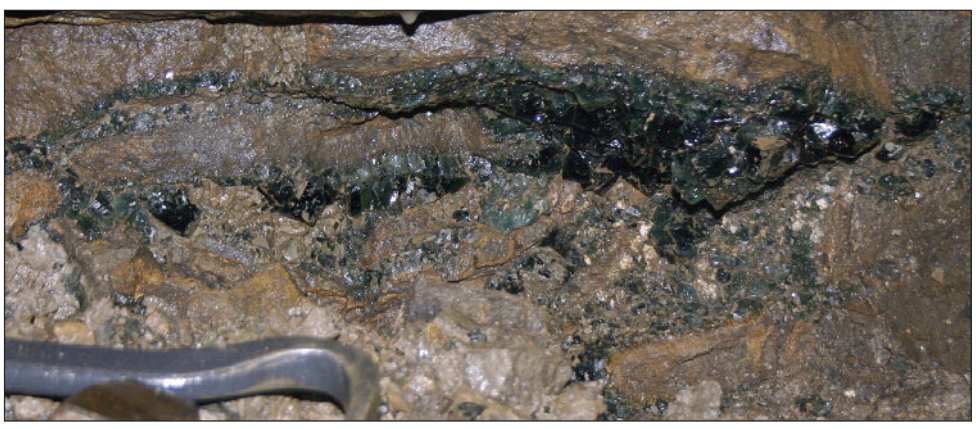
Close-up of Rat Tail Pocket. J. Fisher photo.

Superb specimen of fluorite with galena on white quartz from the Rat Tail Pocket, size 17 cm. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.



Fluorite from the Rat Tail Pocket, 5 cm wide. Rock Positive spec. J. Scovil photo.

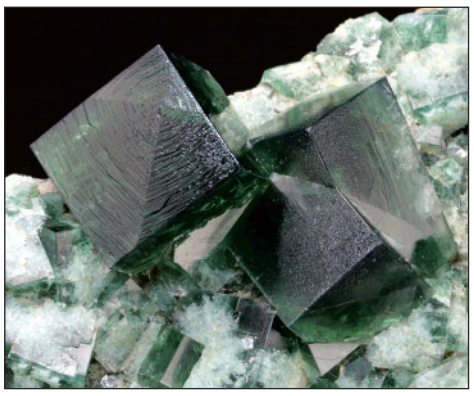
Fluorite from the Rat Tail Pocket, 10 cm wide. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.



Close-up of Jewell Box Pocket. J. Fisher photo.

Specimens from the Jewell Box Pocket with local beers for scale. J. Fisher photo.

Freshly collected specimens from the Jewell Box Pocket. J. Fisher photo.



Group of clean, emerald green (in artificial light) crystals from the Jewell Box Pocket, field of view 6 cm. Note growth hillock on main crystal. J. Fisher photo.

to dip into the floor of the adit. Though the Dipper area was fairly well brecciated, only a small number of good-quality specimens were collected between 2001-2003.

During the summer of 2002 we began another crosscut on the east side of the adit to the north of the Black Sheep Pocket. This drift, known as the **"East Crosscut",** intersected the northern edge of the Black Sheep zone of flats. A few good specimens were found in this crosscut, but generally the quality did not justify spending much time and money on expanding the drift. Digging eventually intersected the northern edge of the Black Sheep Pocket, but due to the dangerous and unstable nature of the back (roof) in this area, little mining has been done since.

Simultaneous with driving the new east adit, work was continued at the face of the original adit driven by CMaMC. On mid-summer's day (2001) a cavity in

Superb specimen from the Jewell Box Pocket, size of specimen 15 cm. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.

The same specimen from the Jewell Box Pocket on painting and photo, both in daylight. Painting: Water-colors and coloured pencils on paper, 2009, painted in natural size (1:1), © copyright by Hildegard Könighofer. R. Brandstetter collection and photo.

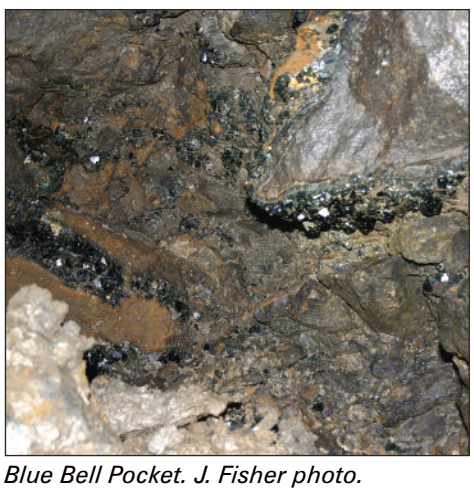
one of the flats was discovered along the main adit, about 10 meters north of the original Black Sheep Pocket opening. Specimens from this area, appropriately named the **"Solstice Pocket"**, though not numerous were of very high quality, showing very little delustering or corrosion sometimes typical of fluorite from other areas of the mine. This pocket was essentially worked out by the end of the 2001 season, and now marks the point where the east adit loops back and rejoins the main adit.

The West Crosscut Pocket Zone

Late in the 2001 season an exploratory drift heading west from the main adit opposite the Black Sheep Pocket was started to see if flats existed to the west of the main vein as well as to the east. After a couple of blasts, green fluorite specimens were found here as well. This area is now known as the **"West Crosscut"** has proven to be the most productive area of flats yet found in the mine. Unlike the Black Sheep zone to the east, the area around the West Crosscut has undergone extensive replacement by iron carbonates rather than silica. These have oxidized creating a heavily iron stained gossan-like matrix for the fluorite in much of the area. Specimens from the West Crosscut are generally of a higher quality than those from the Black Sheep zone, and the matrix is more broken up, allowing easier extraction by hand. Void spaces in the flats were filled with a very sticky and tenacious mud that required removal, and made collecting a slow and very messy job.

In the summer of 2002, a second entrance to the West Crosscut area was

Blue Bell Pub from which the name was given to one of the best pockets. J. Gajowniczek photo.



Blue Bell Pocket. J. Fisher photo.

Blue Bell Pocket – note mud in the middle of pocket. J. Fisher photo.

driven, just north of the 2001 adit. Collecting was done from both drifts and during 2003 the two areas joined up, eventually forming a fairly large chamber that required timber support to keep the roof in place. Production of specimens from the center of the West Crosscut zone continued through the summer of 2004, and during that year a pocket, known as the **"Corner Pocket",** was discovered at the northern edge of this zone. The Corner Pocket, though not large, produced a number of unique specimens for the mine. Most of the fluorite crystals were small and fairly light green color, but the specimens had a late-stage coating of fine-grained quartz that looked like a sparkling sugar crust on the fluorite.

Specimen from the Blue Bell Pocket photographed in the front of Rogerley Mine, size of main crystal 3 cm. R. Brandstetter collection and photo.

The years 2005 and 2006 were relatively poor years for specimen production in the West Crosscut, and most of the material found was only of average quality. During 2006 work focused on the southern area of the zone and one pocket, named the **"Dodgy Bugger",** was encountered. The name comes from the fact that most of the good specimens in the pocket were on large, loose rocks in the roof of the pocket, making them difficult and dangerous to collect. One remarkable specimen recovered from the Dodgy Bugger was a large block of limestone, overgrown with white quartz and green fluorite crystals. The specimen weighed over 100 kg, but rather than break it up we decided to get it out in one piece. Our head miner Byron succeeded in wrapping it first in plastic bubble-wrap and then sealing it with silver duct tape. He also gave it a rope cradle with handles, allowing us to carry it out of the mine without damage. The final wrapped specimen resembles a giant aluminum foil-wrapped baked potato, and the unfortunate specimen (still in the company's possession) has been referred to by the rather unglamorous name "The Potato" ever since.

Jurgen Margraf with specimens from the Jewell Box Pocket. R. Brandstetter photo.

After two years of poor production (and low sales), we expected that 2007 might be our last at the mine. Things changed fairly quickly, however. While digging at what looked like the back end of the Dodgy Bugger Pocket, we broke into another pocket zone, which quickly produced a literal flood of specimens. The fluorite from this new pocket was different in habit than much of what we had found previously in the West Crosscut. Whereas small gemmy twinned fluorite crystals were the norm elsewhere,

Specimens collected during a single day from the Blue Bell Pocket in June 2009. J. Fisher photo.

Specimen from Blue Bell Pocket, photographed in artificial light (upper photo) and daylight, size of specimen 15 cm. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.

the new pocket contained clusters of larger, untwinned crystals, often on a layer of white quartz. Galena, common elsewhere, was almost totally absent here. After a few days of collecting, it became obvious that this pocket was actually a long, narrow tube, lined with fluorite. Only one person could collect at a time and though the space was rather confined, an unstable roof was no longer a problem. Over the next few months, this pocket, now named the **"Rat Hole"**, produced hundreds of good-quality specimens.

By the end of the 2007 collecting season, the pocket had become too long and narrow to effectively work. It was decided that we would need to drive a drift along one side of the pocket the following year in order to collect any further in the zone. Fortunately, at the end of 2007 another zone of flats was discovered at the head of the main adit, now about 200 meters in. This allowed us to continue collecting specimens in a new area while driving a drift to reach the back of the Rat Hole. This drift was completed in July 2009, and shortly afterward an eastward extension of the Rat Hole was discovered. This pocket, known as the **"Rat Tail"** was collected in August 2009 and again in June 2010. Though smaller than the Rat Hole, the fluorite from this pocket was generally much more gemmy and lustrous, and of a deeper, more saturated color. Unfortunately, the Rat Tail Pocket was very near surface at the face of the quarry and by July of 2010 it began to collapse and had to be back-filled for safety.

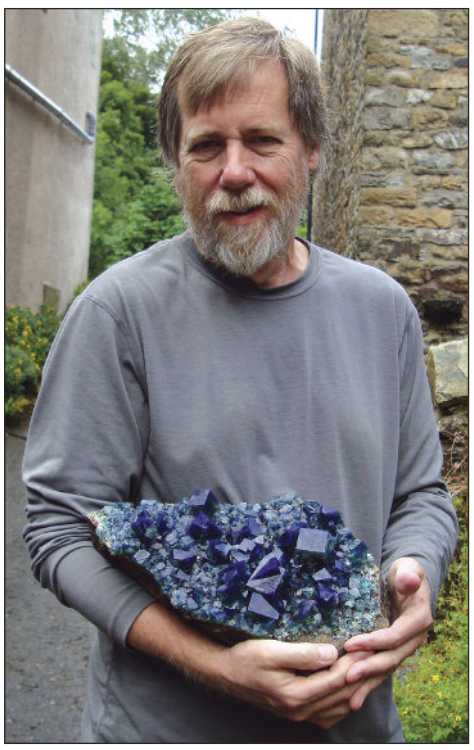
The Jewel Box – Blue Bell Pocket Zone

While collecting in the West Crosscut, we were also driving adit northward along the main vein in search of a new area of mineralized flats. Over the first several years we encountered a few interesting pockets along the main vein, but never anything that gave up much in the way of quality specimens. In mid-July 2007, after mucking out the debris from yet another blast at the main face, we discovered a clay-filled pocket zone trending eastward from the vein. The pocket was pretty much collapsed and brecciated, but produced some very nice specimens of flawless, deep green twinned fluorite crystals. Many were damaged due to pocket collapse, and the ground was difficult to work owing to roof problems, but a few of the specimens collected here are perhaps the finest yet found in the mine. In recognition of this, the pocket was named **"The Jewel Box"**.

Byron (†) collecting in the Crushed Zone. J. Fisher photo.

Specimen from the Blue Bell Pocket, 18 cm wide. I. Jones collection. J. Fisher photo.

On what was literally the last day of operation before closing the mine for the season, a specimen was collected from the Jewel Box Pocket that is undoubtedly the best specimen – a 15 cm plate of deep green, transparent twinned crystals up to 4 cm in size (see photo on page 10) – we had ever recovered from the mine in nine years of operation. Sadly, there was no time left to work the pocket in search of more as pick-up of our summer's produce for shipping back to California was scheduled, and other commitments back home were at hand. Given the potential



Jesse Fisher (author) holding a High Pocket fluorite which is one of the best known specimens from the Rogerley mine. See photo at right for detail. M. Alferova photo.

of the pocket, we quickly decided that a return trip sometime during the fall was in order. On the third weekend in November the entire crew returned to our rental cottage in upper Weardale in hopes of collecting more of the pocket prior to the Tucson show. Winter was closing in quickly, and the weather had turned rainy and cold, but in four days we were able to excavate as much of the pocket as we could reach with hand tools. All told, somewhere around 30 high quality specimens came out, along with a fair amount of wholesale quality material. Needless to say, between this and the tremendous output from the Rat Hole the previous summer, the 2008 Tucson show was one of our best!

The Jewel Box Pocket turned out to be fairly small and was mostly finished by July 2008. Right next to it we found the **Blue Bell Pocket** (named in honor of our favorite local pub), which was quite similar to the Jewel Box, but a bit larger. Specimens were collected from the Blue Bell Pocket in July and August 2008 and again in June 2009, and many high-quality specimens were recovered. Unfortunately, by July 2009 the Blue Bell Pocket was largely finished as well. In late July we found a final small pocket at the north end of The Jewel Box – Blue Bell Pocket Zone. This became known as the "**High Pocket"** because we needed a ladder to collect it, and, though small, it produced one of the top specimens yet found in the mine.

While this area of flats produced some of the finest fluorite specimens yet found at the Rogerley, it turned out to be much smaller than the West Crosscut. The final excavations of all these pockets measured no more than 30x5 meters.

While tunneling north along the vein past the Blue Bell Pocket in August 2009, we found that the mineralized flats shifted from the east to the west side of the vein. Unfortunately, a fault zone also parallels the west side of the vein in this area of the mine. Movement along the fault caused quite a bit of disruption to the flats, and very few undamaged specimens were recovered. This area, known as **"The Crushed Zone"**, contained fluorite of a similar character to what was found in the Blue Bell Pocket, and was collected during the summer of 2010. Unfortunately, almost everything found in this pocket zone was badly damaged, and very few top-quality specimens were recovered.

Perfect specimen from Blue Bell Pocket, 7 cm high. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.

Vein Pockets

While most of the fluorite specimens found at the Rogerley have come from the metasomatic flats found on either side of the main vein, some pockets do occur in the vein itself. Fluorite in the vien pockets is markedly different than what has been found in the flats. Crystals are mostly untwinned and opaque but much larger in size, ranging up to 8 cm on edge. Dark purple is the most common color though some pockets containing green fluorite have been found as well. The pockets are usually small, iso-

One of the best specimens collected from the Rogerley mine. It came from the High Pocket, size of the biggest twins about 4 cm wide. R. Brandstetter photo.

One of small unnamed pockets. Field of view about 15 cm wide. J. Gajowniczek photo.

Aragonite/calcite in Weasel Pocket. R. Brandstetter photo.

lated in occurrence, and difficult to collect. The rock surrounding vein pockets is a hard, dense ironstone and is usually much less broken up than wall-rock in the flats. As a result, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to extract the crystals on matrix without using explosives to fracture the rock. Explosives are rarely kind to fluorite so the recovery rate of specimens from these pockets is usually low.

The largest vein pocket so far discovered was the **"Weasel Pocket"**, named for a former inhabitant (actually a stoat) who was forced to vacate on very short notice. This pocket was collected in 1999 and 2000 and produced a number of large clusters of untwinned purple fluorite crystals, some coated with white finely crystalline quartz. Unfortunately, the fluorite crystals were opaque and slightly corroded, except around the edges. Some of those coated with quartz were fairly attractive, however.

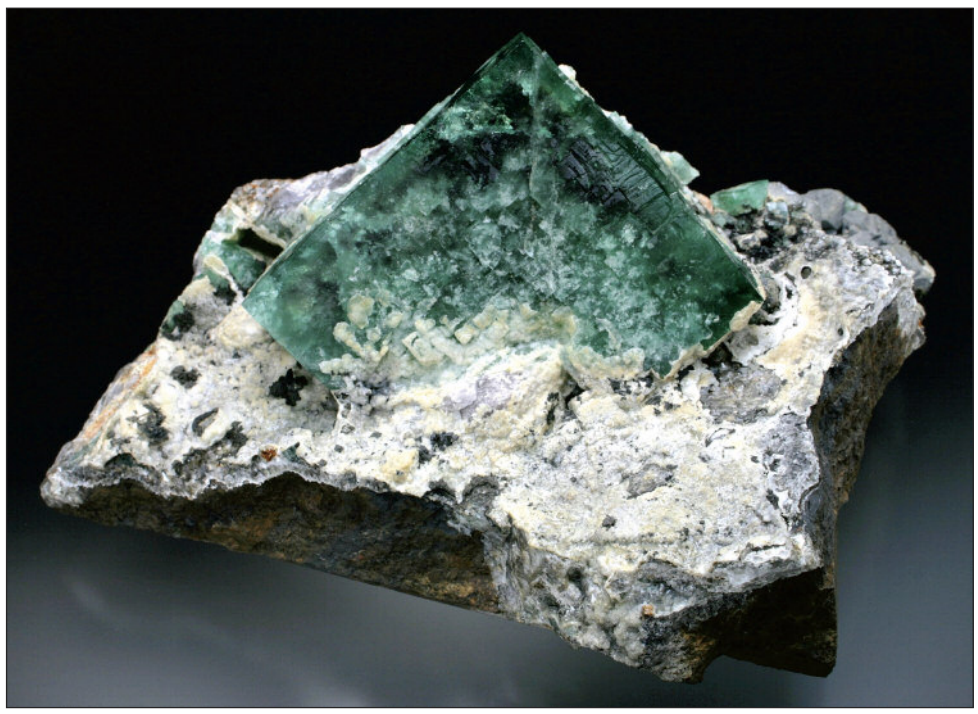
During 2003 and 2004 a number of vein pockets containing large, untwinned green fluorite crystals were encountered while driving drift. The pockets were generally small and tight, and only a few decent specimens were recovered. In 2006, while driving an exploratory crosscut eastward from the main adit, a long, narrow, tube-like pocket, appropriately known as **"The Tube"**, was found. Much of the pocket was lined with massive galena, and several large, crudely formed cuboctahedral galena crystals were found. Several fluorite clusters of an unusual pale green color with internal purple layers associated with quartz were also recovered from this pocket.

In July 2010 a fairly large pocket containing purple fluorite was found near the Crushed Zone flats. This pocket, simply referred to as **"The Purple Pocket"**, was easier to collect than many of this type as the pocket floor was detached from the surrounding rock. A large plate of fluorite crystals was recovered, which is possibly the best purple fluorite specimen yet found at the mine.

Big fluorite crystals in situ *in one of the vein pockets. R. Brandstetter photo.*

Huge fluorite crystals, freshly collected-from one of the vein pockets. R. Brandstetter photo.

Fluorite crystals coated by quartz from a vein pocket, 5 cm high. UKMV specimen. J. Fisher photo.



Huge fluorite crystal from a vein pocket, specimen 18 cm wide. UKMV specimen J. Fisher photo.

CONCLUSIONS

It is fortunate for us mineral collectors that occasionally some folks like Lindsay and Mick are adventurous enough to put their time and money into something no one has done before – developing a mine solely for mineral specimens rather than ore. It was also fortunate for us in UKMV to have been in the right place at the right time to take over when they decided it was time to retire. During the past 12 years at the Rogerley, we have driven over 200 meters of drift, found three sections of productive flats that yielded numerous individual pockets, and collected a great number of specimens. At the end of each summer we have sent home to California between 2000-3000 kilograms of material that is then cleaned, trimmed, and made ready for sale in hopes of raising enough money to do it all again the next year. As with any mine, the top quality specimens have been relatively few, and the vast majority of what has been found is of wholesale quality. The few best pieces, however, have been truly marvelous. It's nice to think that given enough time, energy, and money, these things can still be recovered from the earth.

Mining is a lot like gambling – it's a great way to lose money. Fortunately (at least for some of us), it is also a lot more enjoyable than hanging out in casinos. Production from any mine is bound to be episodic, and the Rogerley has been no exception. Some years we find enough fluorite to pay our expenses and some years we do not. On a couple occasions we actually showed a profit (thanks to the Blue Bell and Jewel Box pockets). This, of course, pleased the various tax collectors to no end; they responded to our good fortune by demanding their share.

The summer of 2010 was not one of our best. On top of a relatively poor harvest from the mine, we lost our long-time partner and head miner, Byron, to cancer. When we packed up to go home at the end of the summer, there was very little collectable fluorite showing in the mine so we are now faced with need to drive more drift in hopes of finding a new zone of flats. Hopefully, this will happen before we run out of money.

For additional information and updates on mining activities at the Rogerley, please visit the UK Mining Ventures web site at: *www.ukminingventures.com*

Jesse FISHER
UK Mining Ventures, USA
e-mail: jfish@ukminingventures.com

UKMV team with two visitors after hard day of work. Beck row from left – Byron Weege (†), Jesse Fisher, Cal Graeber, Joe and Dave Beadle. Front from left Jurgen Margraf and Robert Brandstetter (author of many photos in this article).

Andrzej's Pocket
– a great new find at Strzegom

Tomasz PRASZKIER

Fluorite crystal from Andrzej's Pocket collected during original discovery in 2009, 5.5 cm wide. Spirifer collection. J. Scovil photo.

Continiued from page 1

pegmatite, ending the chance to collect more crystals. Andrzej was very, very patient and waited for over a year until mining operations resumed in the area of the pegmatite. His patience was rewarded with the discovery of a fantastic pocket.

POCKETS

As is common in the Strzegom area, pockets in pegmatite bodies are frequently connected, or occur very close to one another. This is exactly the situation for what we call **"Andrzej's Pocket"**. Including the miarolitic cavity discovered in 2009, Andrzej's Pocket is actually a series of pockets within a 3 meter long zone occurring in a single pegmatite body.

Quarry mining in the area of Andrzej's Pocket encountered the second cavity during the first week of September 2010. The pocket was almost completely destroyed by miners during the process of extracting granite blocks. Miners extract blocks in this quarry by a process of cutting the granite with high temperature burners. The miners cut right through the pocket, and the majority of the crystals were destroyed by thermal shock when fire entered the pocket. When Andrzej came to the quarry, not much left from that cavity. The cavity was in one of the big blocks mined for tiles. The blocks are 2 x 2 x 4 meters, and obviously impossible to work without proper equipment. Andrzej made a deal with quarrymen working on the hydraulic guillotine, which is used for breaking granite into uniform blocks. The quarrymen moved the block, and split it open for Andrzej. Price for that service was… two cheap fruit wines.

Upon splitting the big block, Andrzej found pieces of stilbite, feldspars, calcite, pink and violet fluorite, chlorite and smoky quartz up to 10 cm. Overall size of the pocket was about 80 x 20 x 60 cm, which turned out to be the largest cavity in the find! During careful removal of the burned leftovers, Andrzej extracted two good quality specimens including a 4 cm octahedral violet fluorite in association with quartz, calcite and stilbite.

A second cavity was discovered about one week later, and this time Andrzej was in the right place at the right moment. After the bad experience with last pocket, he spent all of his free time in the quarry trying to control the situation. Unfortunately, during opening of the second cavity which was not visible from the outside, miners destroyed one nice specimen with feldspars, smoky quartz, and fluorite. The pocket was a little smaller than the previous one – about 70 x 40 x 30 cm – but it produced 6 very good specimens with fluorites on matrix. Andrzej extracted them himself so they were in good shape. The best of them contained bluish albite, cream colored microcline, and a bit of stilbite, with violet fluorites perched on top giving great color contrast and aesthetics. The shape of the fluorite crystals was distinctive (and rare for Strzegom) – resembling the so called "Aztec Pyramids" (due to complex parallel growth of second generation fluorite on the earlier crystals). Fortunately workers did not price these specimens too high (because they were small pieces). The total "payment" was two bottles of vodka and about $100!

About 30 cm farther into the pegmatite, another cavity was hit. It was only 20 cm across, and mostly filled by stilbite. At first glance it didn't look very interesting, but after careful examination Andrzej found a very well formed, gem-clear, yellow-greenish beryl crystal with perfect termination. While only about 2 cm long, it can be stated that this is the best heliodor, and maybe even the best beryl crystal in general, known from Poland.

In the next days, three more cavities were opened with sizes from 20 to 40 cm. They contained quartz, feldspar, stilbite and fluorite, and produced 2 more good quality specimens in addition to several lesser specimens. Miners asked in payment for all of them a few beers and bottle of vodka… simple pleasures!

Soon after mining the last 3 pockets, quarrying operations moved to another area in the mine. The pegmatite body was left still continuing in the wall. Hopefully, miners will get back to this area sometime in the future – another test of Andrzej's patience!

Wekom II Quarry with giant crane used for transport of granite blocks and machinery. T. Praszkier photo.

SUMMARY

Overall, 6 cavities were discovered and mined during a 10 day period. 11 really good specimens of fluorite and other minerals were collected along with a number of middle quality specimens. All of them together were purchased from the miners for a grand total of 2 bottles of fruit wine, 2 bottles of good vodka, a few beers, one local vodka, and about $100 – you might call it good Slavic deal!

The exceptional thing about this find is the fluorites. The "Aztec Pyramid" form is very unusual, and the fact that the fluorites occur on matrix is really special. Matrix specimens with fluorite are extremely rare in Strzegom. It is also unusual to find so many fluorites in such a small area. The best pockets in the history of the mine, even those as large as a few meters, usually only produce one or two good fluorites! Andrzej's Pocket was truly fantastic!

Tomasz PRASZKIER
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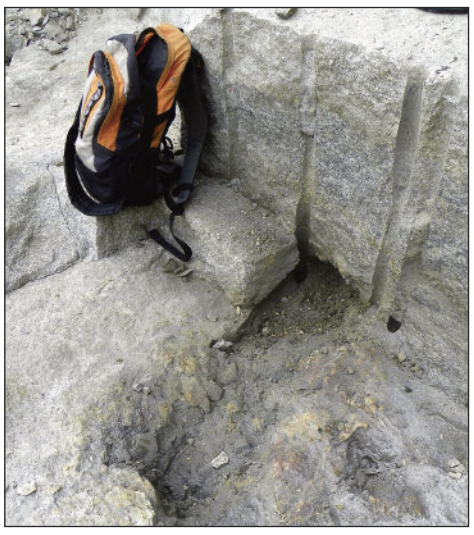
In situ *open cavity with orange stilbite covering purple fluorites. Pocket is about 10 cm wide. K. Pietras photo.*

Probably the best known beryl crystal from Poland, 2 cm high. Andrzej's Pocket. Spirifer collection. G. Bijak photo.



One of cavities from described zone. A. Korzekwa photo.

Fluorite with albite and microcline, 8.2 cm wide. Spirifer collection. J. Scovil photo.

Classic Strezgom paragensis – smoky quartz, albite and microcline, 4 cm high. Andrzej's Pocket. J. Gajowniczek collection. J. Scovil photo.

Fluorite with albite and microcline from Andrzej's Pocket, 12.5 cm wide. S. Werschky collection. J. Scovil photo.

Quarry worker preparing to split one of the granite blocks in which pockets were found (pocket visible between backpack and miner's boot). A. Korzekwa photo.

Photo of Wekom II Quarry. Andzrej's Pocket cavities are located right above the excavator as marked by the yellow arrow. A. Korzekwa photo.

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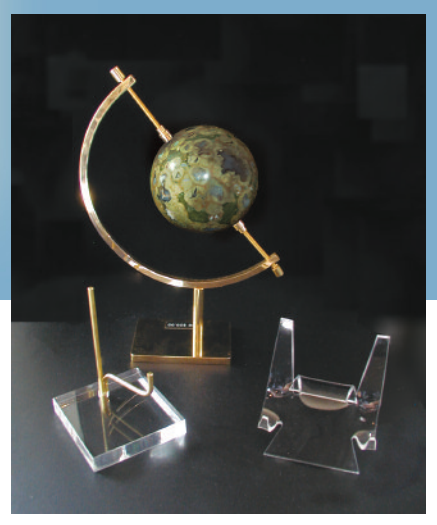

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Collector interview: Jolyon Ralph (UK)

Jolyon Ralph – "father" of mindat.org and mineral collector. K. Davydenko photo.

This time our inteview is again with a very famous person – the creator of mindat.org – Jolyon Ralph from the UK. Jolyon is well known as a webmaster but not many people know that he is a long time collector who has done a lot of field collecting...

Tomasz Praszkier (Minerals): *Jolyon, as creator of the world's biggest mineral database - Mindat.org, you are very well known to most mineral collectors, mineralogists, and museum curators. However, I don't know how many people know that apart from being a computer "geek", you are also a mineral collector who spends his free time field collecting in mines and quarries. Tell us how your interest in minerals started?*

Jolyon Ralph: I was five years old, on a family holiday in Cornwall – the first holiday I can remember anything about. I was with my dad on the beach at Tintagel and we were picking up stones to skim across the waves, but there were few stones that were the right shape. I picked up one larger stone, and it had some crystals in it – and from then I was hooked.

TP: *Can you tell us about your first specimen?*

JR: This first specimen, of iron-stained quartz in slate, is poor by anyone's standards, but it's important to me, and I'm delighted that I still have it (specimen 00001 in my collection). I re-examined it recently, and it is full of tiny micro anatase crystals as well!

TP: *I know that the "old style" museums were places you spent a lot of time in as a kid - which of those museums were most important to you?*

JR: The two museums in London, next to each other, the Geological Museum and the Natural History Museum, were my two favourite places in the world. I was fortunate to grow up in Wimbledon, which was a simple underground train ride from South Kensington where the museums are, so often as a teenager I'd head up to the museums on a saturday morning and spend the whole day roaming around.

It's a terrible shame what has happened to the old Geological Museum. It was taken over by the Natural History Museum in the 1990s and converted into this dark and uninspiring building which is a terrible step backwards from how it used to be.

My favourite part of the collections was of course the systematic gallery in the Natural History Museum. But I also had a particular fondness for the Ludlam collection, a collection of British minerals arranged by region, displayed in the Geological Museum. This collection is no longer on display.

Jolyon in the famous locality Roughton Gill, Caldbeck Fells, UK. J. Gajowniczek photo.

My other favourite place was the gift shop in the Geological Museum. As well as the typical bulk minerals they had for sale, they had a whole selection of minerals in small plastic boxes, most were common, but there were always interesting things to be found by hunting through – and my favourite find there was a small legrandite from Mapimi, Mexico, on botryoidal mimetite, which cost me around 50 pence.

TP: *What kind of specimens do you collect now? Which minerals are your favorite? Do you still have a favorite locality?*

JR: I collect all specimens from around the world. I prefer small cabinet sized pieces, but I have pieces ranging from microscopic grains to a large calcite group that takes two of us to lift, currently hidden out of view behind the sofa. I have of course a particular passion for British minerals, especially Cornish, and especially copper secondary minerals. But that is a terribly expensive passion, so I don't get to add to my classic Cornish collection frequently – although I do have some very nice pieces.

My favourite locality is probably Wheal Gorland in Cornwall – for the amazing liroconite and clinoclase specimens you know about, but also for my favourite UK fluorite specimens, which most people have not seen.

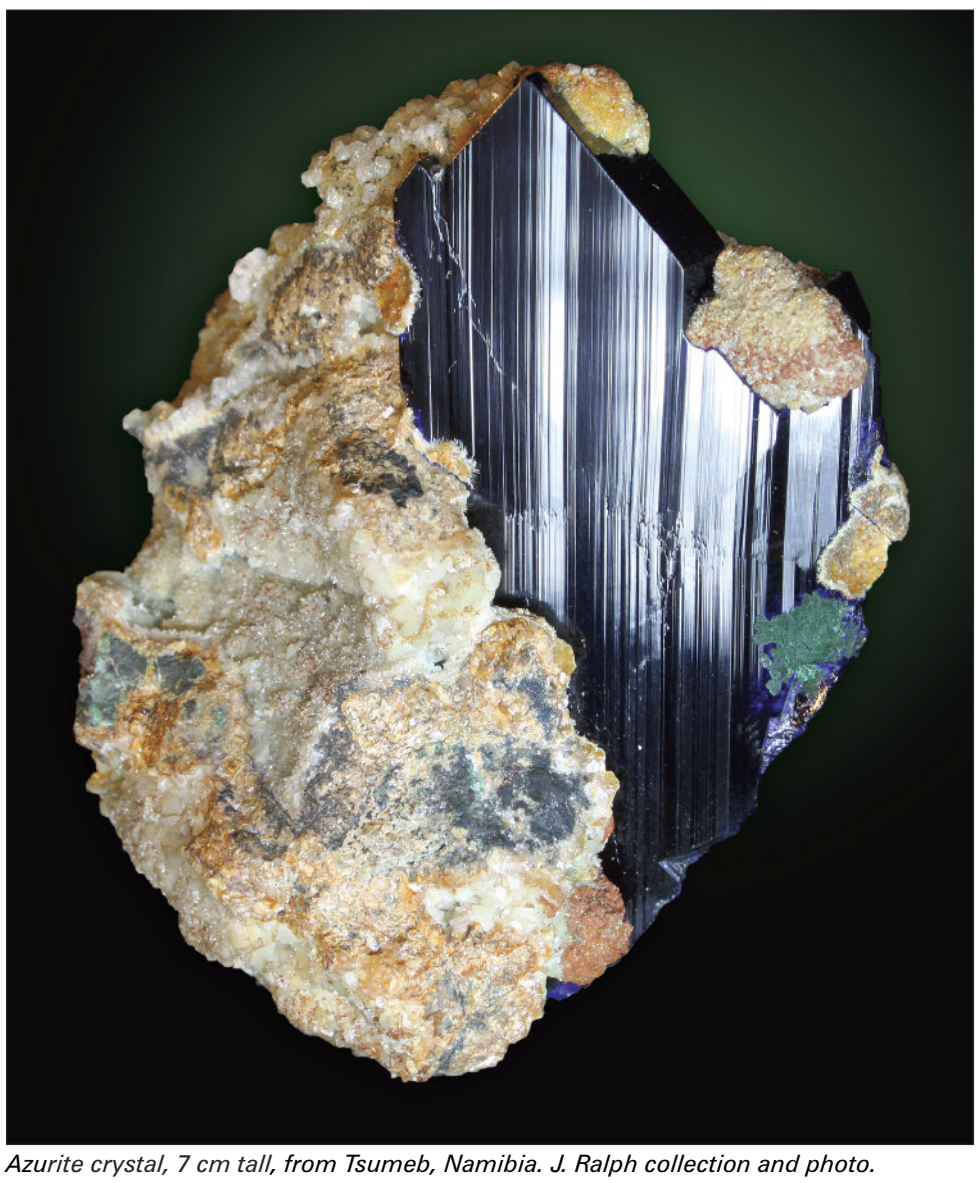
TP: *How many specimens do you have in your collection?*

JR: I have probably around 3000-4000 specimens (not everything is yet catalogued), of which probably ½ are self collected, in all size ranges. About 60% are British, the rest worldwide.

TP: *Have you ever shown your collection to the public? Are your specimens on display in cabinets at home, or hidden away in boxes?*

JR: I do not often have visitors to see my collection at home (very, very rarely!) because my place is quite small – but I do have cabinets, I have one large display cabinet that I've had since I was a teenager, and more recently I added five of the Ikea 'Bertby' DVD wall cabinets, which are now fitted with LED lighting strips, they are great.

The only real public display of my minerals was when I competed in the Cornish mineral competition at the Haywards Heath Mineral show in 2007. I did not win (nor was I expecting to), but it was nice to be able to put on a display with my collection.



Azurite crystal, 7 cm tall, from Tsumeb, Namibia. J. Ralph collection and photo.

Jolyon working a pegmatite pocket at Strzegom, Poland. J. Gajowniczek photo.

Shell of bivalve with rhodochrosite, 3.5 cm tall. Kerch, Ukraine. J. Ralph collection and photo.

TP: *When you have free time, where do you go for mineral collecting? Do you have a favorite site? Most people have a favorite self-collected specimen. What is your favorite?*

JR: I go wherever I can to collect! There are not many places within easy reach of London, but one of my favourites is the marcasite and pyrite locality at Dover – it's a easy place to collect and somewhere I often take friends and guests if they are in the UK and want to collect.

But for pure joy, I can't beat collecting in Scotland, some of the places I have collected at are simply stunning, you sit back, look around at the glorious scenery (and hardly another person in sight), and collect fine minerals at the same time.

I have several specimens that are very special to me. I have a wonderful millerite from Wales, a very attractive wolframite with turquoise from the Gunheath pit in Cornwall, and a beautiful fluorite group from West Pastures mine in County Durham, all collected in the 1990s. More recently, some beautiful sapphires in matrix from Scotland, from another wonderful collecting trip.

Jolyon in front of mineral cabinets in his flat. J. Ralph photo.

TP: *Can you tell us more about the sapphire collecting trip to Scotland?*

JR: Sapphires are found in several places in Scotland, in different geological environments too. The famous large sapphires are from the Isle of Lewis, but collecting there now is prohibited. An older locality for sapphire is the Isle of Mull, along with the type locality of the pink mineral mullite. In 2007 I went with members of my local mineral club, the Sussex Mineral and Lapidary Society, to the Mull to collect. The first few days were spent collecting rather uninspiring zeolite minerals (nowhere near as interesting as the items we had previously collected on trips to the Isle of Skye), but on the last day I wanted to go looking for sapphires on the southern side of the island.

Jolyon in the mindat.org booth in Tucson 2011. J. Simonoff photo.

No-one in the group had any idea where the locality was. The only information we had was from mindat, which only gave a vague region rather than a specific place.

We drove to the area, parked, walked down to the beach where there was plenty of rock exposure, and started walking. Some of us walked one direction, others walked the opposite way. We were walking for some time, maybe an hour, without any sign of mineralization, it was basalt with very tiny vesicles, with white flakes in them. Nothing that looked different.

So, we decided to give up and go somewhere else. At this point the path to the road was not obvious, so we walked further to try and find a gap through the vegetation to get a route back to the cars. And then, one of our group noticed one small outcrop of rock that looked different. He went to examine it, and soon after. "This looks different, it's got blue bits in it!"

We then spent another hour breaking apart this exposure, producing some fine specimens of matrix with flattened but deeply coloured sapphire crystals. They are too thin to facet but some areas of them are very gemmy.

Prestigious medal of Mineralogical Society of America given to Jolyon Ralph in 2011.

Eventually, one by one, the other members of the group, fearing we had got lost, found us. Those sent by the rest of the group to retrieve us themselves were seduced by the sapphires and stayed to collect without returning back to tell the others where we were, until finally the last of them realised what must have happened and came looking for us all. Luckily there was enough sapphire for us all.

TP: *You travel around the world quite a lot, usually because of promoting mindat. Where are you planning to go in the next years for collecting?*

JR: Sadly most of the places I visit I have no opportunity to go collecting. This year I have already been to Austria and Arizona, and have not collected at either place. However, I have had some good opportunities for example collecting red corundum north of Los Angeles last year. And this year I will of course be in Poland for the Mindat.org Conference, and we will be collecting some excellent minerals in Strzegom and other localities there. I will also try to find some time to do some collecting in the UK as well.

TP: *What is your "dream collecting trip" which you would like to make some day?*

JR: For a long time I have dreamt of collecting at the Rapid Creek locality in the Yukon, Canada. However, I'm told that the nasty biting insects and the nastier biting grizzly bears can make it an unpleasant place to be. But still, I'd jump at the chance to go if I can.

TP: *You live in London and belong to the local mineral clubs. Mineral collectors from the UK are known to have a slightly different "style of collecting" than other collectors – can you tell us something about that?*

Cuprite crystals, 2.5 cm tall. Rubtsovskoe, Russia. Collection and photo J. Ralph.

JR: A large number of UK collectors only collect self-collected material, or only buy a tiny percentage of minerals compared to those they have collected themselves – maybe to buy a better piece from

Self collected millerite crystals up to 2.5 cm long. Markham Colliery, UK. J. Ralph collection and photo.

Crystallized native gold on quartz, 5 cm tall. Eagle Nest mine USA. J. Ralph collection and photo.

a locality they have also collected from. But as with most countries there are a wide range of collectors with different interests and styles. The UK has a very active micromineral and micromounting community, for example.

TP: *I know that you frequently travel to Hong Kong - can you tell us a little about collectors, collections and mineral shows there?*

JR: The Hong Kong Mineralogy Society formed only a few years ago, and now holds regular meetings and an annual mineral show. It's still small compared to other countries, but it has enthusiastic members who arrange field trips both inside Hong Kong and within mainland China. A new museum opened recently, the Steven Hui Geological Museum, part of Hong Kong University, entrance is free and a visit is highly recommended for visitors to the island.

TP: *Coming back to mindat - not long ago, mindat.org had its 10th birthday. Can you describe the history of the "birth" of mindat? I know that in fact this project is almost 20 years old...*

JR: Yes, just like the British Queen, mindat has two birthdays! I started the mindat database on Christmas Day – December 25th 1993 (the official birthday of the mindat project!) – I wanted a database for my own use, and found none of the commercial database systems available at the time would support displaying chemical formulas properly, so I wrote my own database system from scratch in C code, and started entering data from my own collection, books and magazines. In 1995 I created a new version for Windows 95 – but it still only had data in it that I had entered myself. I distributed early versions of this on the internet, but this was discontinued in 1999. During late 2000, I converted some of the original mindat code from C into PHP to turn it into a website, with the major advantage that people could add their own information into the database. This was launched on October 10th 2000 (the official birthday of the mindat.org website)

Jolyon looking for fluorites in the Rogerly mine, UK. B. Jackson photo.

TP: *Can you give some numbers showing the size of mindat for people who do not know it yet?*

JR: We currently have over 218,000 localities (with 668,000 mineral entries listed in them), over 350,000 photos, over 38,000 mineral names (4,500 are valid minerals, the rest are varietal names, synonyms, etc). We currently have over 20,000 registered users and about 280,000 unique visitors each month, viewing around 7 million pages a month. It's a very busy web site!

Front page of mindat.org – famous "child" of Jolyon.

TP: *Mindat is growing constantly, with more and more new features all the time. Can you tell us what new features we can expect in the near future?*

JR: Well, I like to keep improving and extending mindat – there are many things I am working on, and some of them may already be launched by the time this article is printed – so instead I will mention some of the more important areas I am working on. Firstly, we already have a test version of the mindat catalogue system that allows you to catalogue your personal collection within mindat. The advantages to this are that you can access your personal catalogue anywere. At a show wanting to know if you have a species in your collection or not? Simply log into mindat on your cellphone and search your catalogue. You will of course be able to export it for use on your own computer without needing permanent internet access. By default all catalogues are private – they're only available to you. But this is also being expanded to allow public catalogue options – and this has been requested by museums who want to make their catalogues browseable online within mindat.

A major plan for the future is to make mindat multilingual, so that whatever language you want to use, you can access mindat. You would still need to contribute data in English (such as mine descriptions) but you would be able to search, read about mineral properties, etc, in your native language.

Jolyon (center), Rainer Bode (left) and Christina Bode (right) celebrating 10 years of Mindat at the Munich show October, 2010. S. Hamann/MINERALIEN-Welt photo.

TP: *Can you tell us about any other mineral projects you working on?*

JR: Minfind.com is another project I started because it was something I wanted for my own use – it's a search engine that indexes major mineral dealer websites and allows you to compare products from different dealers. I'm also working on a similar project for cut gemstones called collectorgems.com – but this isn't live yet! And on the subject of gemstones, look out for an important announcement at the Mindat Conference about work that I have been doing recently regarding gemmological databases.

TP: *Very soon we will meet in Lwówek Śląski with the First International Mindat.org Conference - what are your expectations for this event and future plans for face-to-face meetings of mindaters (not on-line meetings)?*

JR: I'm very excited about the conference. Not only is it a great sign that mindat is "growing up" and able to organize serious and popular events, it's simply going to be a fantastic time. We will probably not make any money from it, because we are spending so much to do it right! We want this to be a memorable event, and we wanted it to be affordable. The most important thing about our hobby is the community of people involved, and this is a chance to celebrate this, for people to spend time together to enjoy each other's company, to enjoy collecting great rocks, and to hopefully learn some new things about mineralogy too!

TP: *Thank you very much for the interview and good luck to you and mindat!*

Interview: April 2011

Self collected fluorite from the Rogerley mine, UK. Size of specimen 8 cm tall. J. Ralph collection and photo.

We joined forces to bring you more great specimens directly from the mines !

J. Scovil photo.

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Find us at the mineral shows, on the internet, or in the field!