

MONTANA ROCKHOONDING

By Patti Albrecht, Owner of Earth's Treasures

Bozeman is blessed with many wonderfully different ways to enjoy the outdoors; a typical Bozemanite exercises this privilege on a regular basis. Rockhounding is a fun and enjoyable way for the whole family to spend time together. Rockhounding is, by definition, the collecting of rocks and minerals from their natural environment. Thus, a rockhound can be born at any age by simply picking up an interesting stone. There is no educational level, dollar amount or age requirement to begin collecting. And the potential to find something of monetary value in our mountains has a definite appeal. After all, we're called the Treasure State for a reason.

There are a few things that make collecting easier, most of which can be found around a typical Montanan's home: a backpack, gloves, magnifying glass or loupe and a small (or foldable) shovel. One additional less common, but very valuable, tool for use in the field is a rock hammer. A rock hammer comes in two basic designs, the rock pick and the chisel-edge. Both have a square head on one end that can be used to break rocks. A rock pick has a pointy tip on the other end that can be used to separate minerals from hard rock or crystals and fossils from sandstone. The chisel-edge hammer can be used to split layers in soft rock, which is particularly ideal for fossil hunting.

Petrified wood can be found in the surrounding mountains and streams around Montana. It comes in many different colors and can be crystallized or agatized. A wonderful day trip to the Gallatin Petrified Forest, south of Livingston, can produce some remarkable finds. A permit is required to collect a sample here because it is on National Forest land, but it is FREE and available at the ranger stations in Bozeman, Livingston and Gardiner. There is also a free 1/2-mile interpretive trail that

highlights petrified wood stumps.

A beautiful translucent stone, valuable Montana Agates can be found in warm reds, browns and orange colors interspersed with clear/white. Most Montana Agate is found in Eastern Montana. Madison Blue Agate, a much less common agate that can be found in the Bozeman area near the Madison River, varies from cloudy milk-white to translucent deep blue. The deep blue is the most sought after and is quite breathtaking

Crystals can be found in various locations throughout Montana. Lolo Pass is known for its smoky crystals. Nearer to us, Crystal Park is located in the Pioneer Mountains, northwest of Dillon, near Polaris. Crystal Park is truly a Montana treasure, with approximately 30 acres of area open for crystal digging. This resource is open May 15th through October 15th and only a small fee of \$5 per vehicle is charged to maintain the facilities. Here, quartz crystals can be found clear, purple (amethyst) and brown/black (smoky) or as a tri-color with all three colors in one crystal. Some days, new visitors can be quite content finding crystals in their own holes, thinking they are the sole diggers only to find that, around lunchtime, many others will poke their heads out like gophers to eat their lunch on the banks.

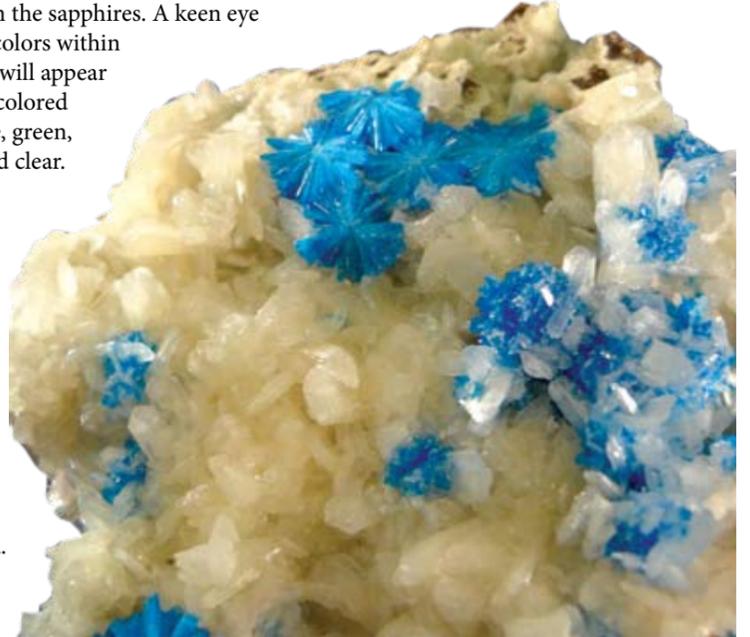
Garnets, beautiful cranberry-colored translucent gems, can be found at Ruby Reservoir above Ruby Dam near Virginia City. The best time to visit Ruby Dam is when the water in the Reservoir is low. Generally, this is in early spring, late summer or fall. Here a small mesh screen comes in handy to separate the garnets from the sand. However, a gold pan or pie plate can also be used. A leisurely way to find garnets is to slowly walk toward the sun with your eyes glued to the top of the sand. If the sun is positioned correctly, cranberry glints of light will catch your eye... behold, the garnet. Although not

as efficient as screens or pans, this can be breathtaking and memorable method. While visiting this area, you might pay a little money to pan for gold at several locations around Virginia City, as well.

Sapphires are arguably the most famous of the gems found in Montana. Yogo sapphires are the only commercially available, naturally colored sapphires in Montana. They are only found on private claims near Lewistown, MT. However, there are two wonderful places to go to mine for your own sapphires: one is near Philipsburg and the other is south of Helena, northwest of Canyon Ferry Lake. For a small fee, you're able to sort through actual sapphire gravel and have people help you discern the sapphires. A keen eye can spot many colors within the gravel; they will appear as mostly light-colored translucent blue, green, orange, pink and clear. When they're heat-treated, however, the colors are beautifully intensified.

Southwest Montana has many, many more rocks and minerals to find. Numerous books are

available outlining where to go and what to find in Montana. Gold, in particular, is very popular now as it hovers around \$1,600 per ounce. Although more rare, Hyalite Opal, Montana Moonstone and Dogtooth Calcite can also be found around Bozeman. Earth's Treasures has informational books, maps, supplies, free handouts, and rough and cleaned specimens displayed to further help you in your hounding. Most importantly, we have a knowledgeable staff that is waiting to help you initiate your rockhounding pedigree. Located at 25 N. Willson, just a half block north of downtown Bozeman, Earth's Treasures can be reached at (406) 586-3451 or via the website at www.EarthsTreasuresmt.com.



Experience...
Earth's Treasures

Mining Supplies
 Metal Detectors
 Butterfly Wing Jewelry

One-of-a-kind is what we do.
 406-586-3451 • 25 N. Willson • Bozeman, MT
EarthsTreasuresmt.com

**FRESH FISH • SEAFOOD • SUSHI • CAVIAR
 LOCAL MEAT & GAME • WAGYU BEEF
 FINE CUTLERY • ASIAN PRODUCTS**

119 East Main Street • Historic Downtown Bozeman
 p: 556.0200 • 7 days a week • public parking in back
 Monday-Saturday 10am-7pm • Sunday noon-5pm

WWW.MONTANAFISHCOMPANY.COM