Montana Rockhounding

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 Montana’s own backyard: a backpack, gloves, magnifying glass or loupe and a small (or foldable) shovel. A more 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 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 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.

Bozeman and Gardiner. There is also at the ranger stations in Bozeman, Forest land, but it is FREE and available...