

# PLANNING A WESTERN ROCK HUNTING TRIP

*By Edwin Elam*

Every month the postman brings that wonderful *Lapidary Journal* and you spend several hours drooling over the articles about all those wonderful rock hunting places "out there." Do you suppose that couples really found all that good cutting material just lying on top of the ground out in .....? I think that I can safely assure you that they did and so can you. Don't you think it's about time that you took the big step and started making plans to go see for yourself? Someone once said that planning a trip is half the fun. Planning a trip can be fun and the purpose of this article is to get you started on that planning. We feel that once you reach this point, the culmination of your efforts may be a trip that could be the high point of your rock hunting experience. While this article is written for the relatively new rockhound who lives in the eastern one-half of the United States, we hope what we learned when we started planning a trip "out west" will be of value to rockhounds everywhere.

The most obvious first question is "where do we go?" We are not going to recommend any specific state or area. In fact, we recommend that you defer the decision about where to go until later in the planning stages. We say this because we do not want you to become "locked in" on one certain location, only to be disappointed to find that

that particular trip is beyond your capabilities or means. There are too many good trips you can make for you to postpone going because you cannot reach a specific area this year.

Start your trip planning with the *Lapidary Journal*. Study every issue that you have. If your back issue file is only one or two years old, try to find a fellow rockhound who has issues going back several years. After you have studied all the rock hunting articles you can find in the *Lapidary Journal* and have determined how much time and money is available to you for a trip, then you can begin to narrow your choice of areas for your trip. Even though the information in the older issues of the *Lapidary Journal* may be out of date, the more you know about a particular area, the more you will enjoy your trip. On our first "big" trip, we never did find certain locations which we had read about and planned to visit but in no case did we fail to find collectible material in the same general area. While we feel that good planning is vital to the success of your trip, it is also very important that you keep your plans flexible. There may be any number of reasons why you can fail to reach a location which you had planned to visit. If you have done a good job of planning, you will have selected possible alternate collecting areas. If your plans are flexible, you

will have time to visit areas which you learn about after you get into your selected area from other rockhounds or from local rock shops.

Once you have selected the general area which you want to visit, there are many other sources of information which you will want to use for further planning. One excellent source is the professionally written rock hunting guide book. Study the listing for the *Lapidary Journal Book Department* or visit your local rock shop's book rack. You may find several books which cover the area you plan to visit. We suggest that you try to find the newest editions of at least two guide books that cover the area you are interested in. Keep in mind that even in the best or newest guide book, the information about a specific collecting site could be obsolete. This can happen for many reasons and this is another good reason for the admonition, "keep your plans flexible."

One excellent source of information which may be overlooked by the rockhound planning a trip is the Bureau of Land Management. Many of our western states contain large portions of public land. This land is owned by the United States Government and is administered by the BLM under a multi-use concept. This land is usually open to recreational uses such as rock hunting and may also be leased for cattle grazing, mining or other economic uses. On our first trip west, we wrote to the state headquarters of BLM for the state where we planned to spend most of our time. We informed them that we planned to visit their state on a rock hunting trip and ask for any maps or other information which might be useful to us. In a short time we had a large package of material which proved to be invaluable to us on our trip. The package included a series of maps covering the entire state which showed where the

areas of public land were located. The backs of the maps had such things as pictures of native wildlife and plants, descriptions of any unique features of that area such as historic or scenic sites, and a list of BLM district offices and their locations. The package also included a list of BLM campsites, several pages of material on rock hunting in the area and other material. The BLM will also inform you as to any restrictions to rock collecting in their area and also of any areas which may be closed to rock collecting. At the end of this article you will find a list of the addresses of the state headquarters of BLM for all the states. We used the material sent to us by BLM so much on our trip that I still like to take out the package occasionally just to "remember" our trip!

There are several other sources of information that can be helpful during your trip planning. We always inquire among our rockhound friends for someone who has been to the area we plan to visit. Firsthand information can be very valuable; however, we should add a word of caution here. Try to determine if you can, that the person to whom you are talking uses the same criteria in judging a collecting site that you would use. An area which would have little or no interest to some rockhounds may be a fine collecting area to others. Keep in mind the type and quality of material that you want to collect and compare this with what your friend was looking for when he visited the area.

Don't overlook the rock shops in the area you are visiting as a source of information. Most rock shop owners are very helpful with information about local collecting places. Lest we forget however, the rock shop's primary reason for being there is a business one. Take time to look over the shop and do a little "silver picking" while you are there. We recently spent most of a day digging at a well known fee area with good results.

That afternoon after a good bath and a short rest at the motel, we decided to visit a local rock shop. The shop owner told us about a free digging location which we tried the next day. We had good luck collecting the same material that we had dug at the fee area! Perhaps the reason this rock shop owner was so helpful was that we had taken time to select and purchase several slabs and some rough rock while we were in his shop.

Two other sources we have used for information when planning a trip are club members in the area and the local Chamber of Commerce. The local Chamber of Commerce will provide you with lists of available accommodations and other tourist information. Club members in popular collecting areas often receive many requests for information so you should send a stamped, self-addressed envelope along with your request for information. You can find the address for local clubs in the *April "Buyers Guide"* issue of the *Lapidary Journal*.

Some rockhounds are hesitant about going on rock hunting trips far away from home because of a fear of some unknown danger they might encounter. We suggest that if you will study carefully the articles that have been published recently in the *Lapidary Journal* on field trip safety and exercise your own good common sense, you can have a safe and enjoyable trip.

Collecting in our western states can properly be described as fabulous from the viewpoint of an eastern rockhound. We would caution you, however, not to set your sights too high in regard to the kind of material which you want to collect. If the success of your trip depends on whether or not you find one particular kind of material, you may be disappointed. Good quality cutting material is available in many places in the west.

It might not be quite the quality of material that you have seen in the magazines or at the Gem and Mineral shows but it will have its own special value to you because "you" found it!

Sure, we made some mistakes on our first trip "out west" but overall, it was a successful trip. If you plan carefully, you can have a good trip too. Since most of us use our vacation time for rock hunting trips, don't forget that you are on vacation. Don't rush too much. Take time to see the country. Visit some historic or purely scenic locations. If some members of the family are not quite as enthusiastic as others about rock hunting, plan some activities for the whole family.

If you can plan your trip to include a visit to a Federation Gem and Mineral show, or better yet, a visit to the American Federation Gem and Mineral show, then by all means, do so. Every rockhound should have an opportunity to go rock hunting in our western states and every rockhound should have an opportunity to visit an American Federation Show. Start planning now and if you can't make it this summer, then next summer for sure!

### **Bureau of Land Management State Offices**

Alaska  
555 Cordova Street  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Arizona  
2400 Valley Bank Center  
Phoenix, Arizona 85205

California  
2800 Cottage Way  
Room E-2841  
Sacramento, California 95825

Colorado  
1600 Broadway  
Room 700  
Denver, Colorado 80202

Idaho  
Federal Building  
Room 398  
550 West Fort Street  
Boise, Idaho 83724

Montana (North Dakota, South Dakota)  
Federal Building  
316 North 26th Street  
P. O. Box 30157  
Billings, Montana 59101

Nevada  
Federal Building  
300 Booth Street  
Reno, Nevada 89502

New Mexico (Oklahoma)  
Federal Building  
P. O. Box 1449  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Oregon (Washington)  
729 Northeast Oregon Street  
P. O. Box 2965  
Portland, Oregon 97208

Utah  
Federal Building  
125 South State Street  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

Wyoming (Nebraska, Kansas)  
2120 Capital Avenue  
P. O. Box 1828  
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82001

Eastern States Office  
Robin Building  
7981 Eastern Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910 ⊕

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