

THOUGHTS OF A NEW MICROMOUNTER

Patricia Barker

I have always been rather smug about the fact that I have been a mineral collector from childhood. Often people say to me, "I was stationed in good collecting areas during my military service, but I wasn't interested in minerals then, unfortunately." Or, "In my childhood I lived in such and such a place but never knew anything about the minerals found there." Happily, I have always been interested in minerals and have missed very few opportunities to collect.

But, in another way, I have been missing the boat. In 1948, 1949, and the early '50's when, as a member of the Boston Mineral Club, I went on field trips to Ruggles, Palermo, Newry, etc., in kid-like fashion, I was only interested in big showy specimens. I recall how Gunnar Bjareby used to try to encourage me to collect the choice and rare micros available in New England. How I wish I had listened!

In college I became especially interested in chemical and optical mineralogy. It would have been a good opportunity then to pick up a secondhand scope, but I was collecting more and more hand-sized specimens, and there never seemed to be time enough to get them incorporated into my elaborate cataloging system. And it was easy, if trite, to say, "I only like specimens I can see."

All my married life I have had a steady selection of world-wide collecting areas available. I thought I had all I could handle to keep up with macro-specimens, let alone worrying about micros. But later I had several opportunities in England and Germany to become friendly with micromounters and learn the advantages of collecting minute specimens from traditionally "all-worked-out" areas. Now, at a rather belated hour, I have seen the handwriting on the wall.

After a lifetime of collecting minerals, It took a certain amount of courage on my part to admit that I didn't know the least thing about this new facet of mineral collecting. Micro-minerals seemed as strange and unidentifiable as if I had suddenly taken up fossil collecting and tried to learn all about paleontology in one crash program!

Thanks to John and Margaret Stewart, Steve and Janet Cares, John Reiner and others in the New England Micromounters, I am slowly learning, by studying their give-aways, to recognize more and more minerals.

What a struggle I'm having, learning to recognize old familiar minerals in new and strange guises. What a problem mounting the wretched little objects! All the wonder glues known to modern science can't seem to help me. No sooner do I get a tiny crystal gloriously oriented and seemingly set

on its cork stand, when over it slides, a hideous mess of semi-wet glue. All my efforts at trimming specimens seem to lead to disaster, too, and the precious crystals fly off into space, never to be seen again.

But I'm going to stick with micro-mineral collecting, despite the frustrations. As more and more mines are closing, as costs of traveling to collecting areas mount, and as space in my home diminishes, I really am committed to this hobby! For as long as there is a road-cut somewhere or an old quarry dump, there will be tiny crystals waiting to be collected.

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