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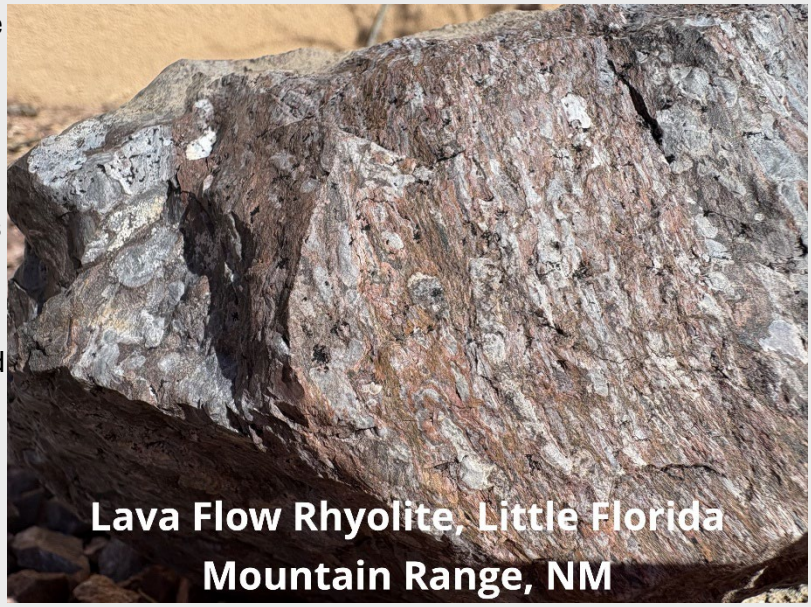
March 2026 Newsletter

Message from the President Cindy Pugsley



Happy March! Sunny warm days bring the itch to get outside for rockhounding and yard cleanup.

Trip Report. The last 2 weeks in February took me on an epic rockhounding adventure. Starting in southern New Mexico I saw the awesome interior of Carlsbad Cavern. The amount of underground caverns not open to the public is jaw dropping.

Then I headed across southern Arizona, stopping first just south of Deming,

to find slow flow lava rhyolite.

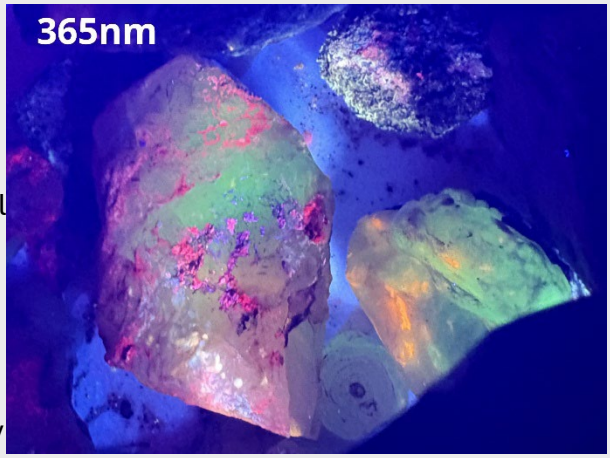
Next in California, I found kyanite crystals at the American Girl Mine.

Heading north I found red and white rhyolite in the Castle Dome Mountains.

Farther north I hunted around the bridge crossing Burro Creek looking for the pastel colored agate that is referred to as Burro Creek agate or Pastelite. Very elusive and I found none.

Heading east the next stop was Saddle Mountain to collect fire agate. Mostly it was white bubbly “chalcedony roses” as shown at left. They were everywhere. I did not find many dark amber in color. That night I rinsed my finds in the hotel shower and hit them with my UV light.

Holy orange, red and green!!!!!



Finally north to Payson. Found all the agate the Jeep could handle on an old fire control road and then last stop at Diamond Point. The double terminated quartz crystals did not jump out into my pocket. I found two the size of my pinky fingernail.

Field Trips. Boy did that journey make me want to plan field trips for the Club! We have many great destinations in our region. If you would like to lead a rockhounding trip (we can provide you with planning documents), or if you would like the Club to organize a specific mineral hunt, please reply to this email. Look for our first field trip announcements in the April newsletter.

Gem Show. We now have a complete manual with month by month instruction on how to roll out our annual Four Corners Gem and Mineral Show, to be held this year on July 10, 11 and 12. Volunteers are busily taking care of the spring tasks. However we still need a Chair to lead meetings, steer the committee work and work with our Fairgrounds host. If bringing this popular event to our community matters to you, please get involved! The next planning meeting is **April 1, 5:15 PM** at the Clubhouse.

Building Committee will meet on Monday **April 13th, 6:00 PM** at the Clubhouse. In this meeting we will review the building planning work to date and consider some alternatives available in the commercial real estate market at this time.

For the makers among us, be sure to visit open shop. For everyone else, please just stop by to chat. Email me your interests, ideas and concerns. Take a class. Drop off a donation. There are many ways to help our Club prosper!

For the love of minerals and metal,

Cindy Pugsley

Note: Social Hour is cancelled this month.

Class Announcements
For registration details, view the
Club's CALENDAR at www.durangorocks.org/events). Here are upcoming classes.

Weekend Mar 28-29 - **Intro to Lost Cast Waxing**, with Jaymus Perry
Sun Apr 12 - **Cabochon Cutting and Polishing** with Joel Arnold
Fri Apr 17 to Mon Apr 20 - **Sterling & Moon Poison Ring**, with Shoshana Kaliski
Weekend Apr 25-26 - **Intro to Silversmithing Statement Ring**, with Carlos Manon
Weekend May 2-3 - **Intro to Silversmithing Statement Ring**, with Carlos Manon
Weekend May 9-10 - **Intro to Wax Casting Ring or Pendant**, with Charlotte Lenssen
Fri May 15 to Mon May 18 - **Sterling & Moon Poison Ring,** with Shosana Kaliski

Interview with Adam Parker

Adam Parker agreed to share some details about his life for this month's Gem Club newsletter. Adam and his wife Nicole own and operate Sun Sapphires, a fine jewelry and glass art studio in downtown Durango. He also helped the Club write a successful grant from the City of Durango for the same micro stone setting and engraving equipment he uses in his own jewelry art studio.

Tell us about your road to Durango

I grew up on the Front Range, in Louisville, Colorado, between Denver and Boulder. As a kid I liked to pick up rocks but was not really bitten by the geology bug until I attended Fort Lewis College. Geology was the first college class where I got an A, and I soon became fascinated with the field.

I met my future wife Nicole on my first day on campus. She was in the same dorm across the hall from me. We had a lot in common. Nicole was studying art and business as I was exploring the creative intersection of art and geology.

I aspired to be a jeweler early on. For most of my college years I sold wire-wrapped crystals and minerals to fellow students and concert patrons. I also discovered the Four Corners Gem and Mineral Club. My wire wraps mostly used rough crystals but sometimes I wanted to polish a stone's face in the lapidary studio.

After graduating from Fort Lewis in Geology, I pursued a Graduate

Gemologist certificate from GIA, the Gemological Institute of America, located in Carlsbad, California. This is a 7-month residency course, where I spent the mornings in class and lectures, and the afternoons in labs studying gemstones.

Where is that intersection between science and art today for you?

I still am very engaged with the science of gemology. This especially comes into play with understanding facets, and how to work with the stone's natural crystalline structure and refractive index to cut angles with the most reflected light - aka the "sparkle" - for which gemstones are prized. I occasionally do my own faceting - it is very time intensive - when a specific shape or color is needed for a custom project or jewelry repair.

Understanding geology also informs stone selection. It rarely makes sense to set an opal into a ring where it can be easily chipped, but a sapphire can stand up to daily wear.

Although I have taken several skill building classes, I am largely self-taught as a jeweler. I rely on an extraordinarily talented community of jewelers from across the US and around the world. I have trusted colleagues in Kenya, UK, and Sri Lanka. We share ideas and help each other.

What is your typical day like?

I spend time each day at the computer, preparing cost estimates and handling various details of owning our own business. I also do my CAD designs on a computer. When my desk work is finished I am usually at my bench working on custom jewelry, usually engagement rings, and on jewelry repairs. Throughout the day I am up and down to talk with customers. Once in a while I have an appraisal or a stone identification task.

What was your most curious appraisal assignment?

That would be working with a SW Colorado court system as an expert witness for a case involving a major jewel theft. A year after the gems were first reported stolen, a portion of the collection was recovered. My job was to identify, evaluate and appraise nearly 1000 gemstones. These were mostly commercial grade stones, but about 6% of the recovered stones were very rare, very high end stones.

Speaking of nice gemstones, what's your favorite North American

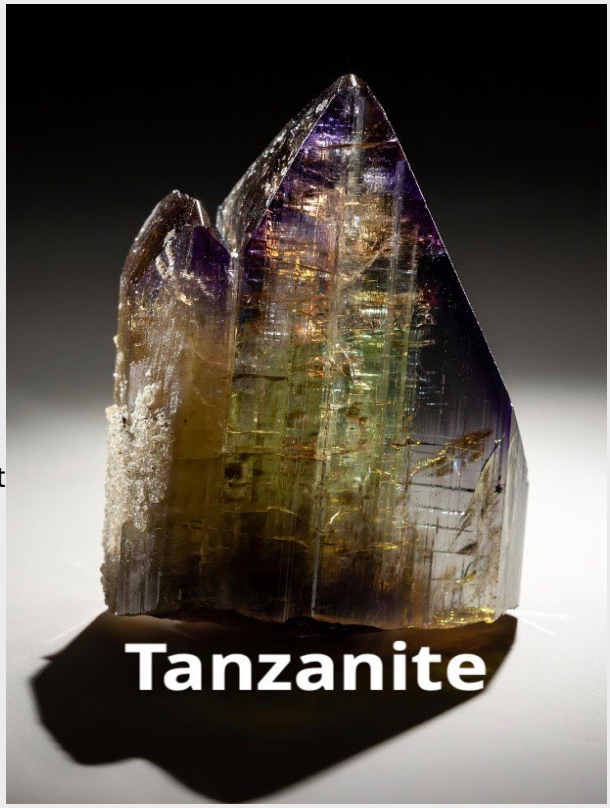
gemstone?

The Montana sapphire is my favorite. I love all sapphires, they are beautiful and durable. But I especially love Montana sapphires for their unique color palette, from pink to yellow to blue to green. Sapphires have a hardness of 9 so they can withstand more force during stone setting.

What gemstone would you invest in?

Tanzanite will become increasingly valuable as these mines are depleted, which will happen in our lifetimes. Precious stones tend to hold their value with inflation, but the growing scarcity of tanzanite will cause it to outperform other gemstones.

Does heat treating reduce the value of tanzanite?



Not at all. Many gemstones undergo treatments after they are mined. Tanzanite comes out of the ground a brownish green, and heat treatment turns it the desired blue *(tanzanite image courtesy of Smithsonian Open Access)*. A large majority of sapphires on the market are heat treated too. Emeralds are oiled with cedar oil or resin to hide fractures. These types of treatments are accepted by gemologists as standard practice for those stone types, and the treatments do not diminish the stone's value.

Tell us about your new facility.

We are currently in an upstairs retail space at 640 Main in downtown Durango, but will move down to the street level this spring. The new space will have classrooms for glass art taught by Nicole, my jewelry studio, and retail space. In addition to custom jewelry and repairs, I will continue to provide appraisals, stone identification and occasional private lessons in micro stone settings and engraving.

What work do you enjoy the most?

My passion is to make engagement rings. I love designing a ring that will be worn daily, and is an enduring symbol of the love between two people. Each ring challenges and expands my skill set.

Adam, thank you for sharing your beautiful work with us!

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