

The Future and Availability of Rockhounding in Oregon

by Gary Buss#

Over the past number of years all of us have watched more and more of our natural resources disappear and areas we have taken for granted as always being there, going away. As an example, a number of years ago in Crook County, the Prineville Chamber of Commerce maintained some 15-20 claims that were open to rockhounds most of the year and were opened up prior to the Prineville Rockhound Pow Wow once a year. As liability insurance climbed in price and some other resources were absorbed into wilderness areas, more and more of these memories have been lost.

Over the past year, members of the Prineville Rockhound Pow Wow have elected to be a little more pro-active to assure everyone that some sites will be held and maintained for the future. This was done in two ways. Looking into some old dig sites, we have chosen to put claims on two sites that have been real producers for material over the years. One site was the tube agate bed on the south side of the Ochoco and the other was the outright purchase of the White Fir Egg site “the agate egg site”. A field trip this year during the Pow Wow was very productive. It came with the joint effort of the Forest Service and the rockhound community working together. We will have a great deal of restoration to do on both sites, and with the joint effort with the Forest Service, it can be a win, win for them and for us all.

Just a word about both sites, the tube agate is closed to digging because a rare plant and bulb exist there. However, it will change as soon as they do their environmental impact study and they will find an area we can work above the meadow. The White Fir agate area will be under constant restoration with the cooperation of the Forest Service and we will keep all informed as that progresses. Both sites are under claim by the Prineville Rockhound Pow Wow.

Secondly, and this is where all of you come in—we are looking at an opportunity that has been around for a while, but most of us have never looked at it as an option. There are many old sites that have been worked over the years and just sit there. The Forest Service has a plan called “adoption”. The Forest Service has neither the man power nor the money to restore these old digs and are looking to partner with groups that care about restoring and maintaining some of these areas. This is not a “name it and claim it” game for these areas, it is a joint venture with the Forest Service and BLM to keep these areas open to the future of rockhounds. They do care about the future

of rock hounding in Oregon. How would it look? It can be as simple as a rock club that has a once a year field trip to a site they choose to adopt and have its own field day. Half the group digs and produces material, while the others refill old dig sites and sack trash. After a few hours your people shift roles. In the mean time, maybe the barbeque is smelling pretty good for all at the end of the day. Adoption means that you as a club don't have to jump through all the hoops and rules and regulations of going the claim route—yet you maintain the site for your organization. There will always be old sites for you to look at and see if there is value for the future, or new areas that you would like to see as a future opportunity for your club. I believe that adoption is the easiest and quickest way to maintain our past and to become a part of our future. It is a unique way for your club to look at the future and what you want to be a part of.

How do we start? If you have some area you have identified as a local club that you would like to preserve for the future, I suggest a set down visit with your BLM or Forest Service geologist and begin a cooperative effort to hold these dig sites for the future. I know we have built a very good relationship with the Crook County office and will continue to look for more opportunities to save lands and dig sites for all our future. Personally, I believe this is a very good start and a very different way to look at how we maintain our past and future in this hobby. Your children and theirs will be the beneficiary of what we do now. I believe it should be looked at very closely by all of us. It is there for all of us—right now.

Editor's Note: *Gary Buss is Field Trip Chairperson of the Prineville Rockhound Pow Wow, which is affiliated with the All Rockhounds Pow-Wow Club of America, Inc. For more information about these organizations, see <http://prinevillerockhoundpowwow.com/> , and <http://www.allrockhoundspowwowclubofamerica.com/> . Gary may be contacted at sageniteman@gmail.com*