



by Alexandra Edwards

There are Gems in them there Mountains

experience in the search for some of nature's most wonderful gems.

Rockhounding has been the hobby of Wayne and Patty Brantley of Cleveland, Tennessee, for over 25 years. The Brantley's first became interested in rocks and minerals after a visit to an old mine near Franklin,

North Carolina National Forest.

Rockhounding is not an expensive hobby, most of the tools needed can be found in your back yard shed; shovel, pick, crowbar, chisels, rock hammer and some sifting screens. Being a metal craftsman by trade, Wayne has made his own titanium hand tools for rockhounding, the years of digging experience have helped determine the correct design of the tools he needed.

Asked if he had any rare finds, Brantley told of a Trapiche Sapphire. So named because of the pattern in the rock that resembles a wagon wheel, with spokes emerging from the center. (Trapiche being a

Spanish word for wagon wheel.) He added, "not all sapphires are blue, they can be any color from clear to black, but not red... then they are a ruby."

As with most hobbies, clubs and websites have formed across the globe so that members can exchange information on their finds. Obviously, with thousands of different types of rocks and minerals around the world, there is always something new or rare to be found. The internet enables

North Carolina. For a fee, visitors were permitted to dig for Corundum, the mineral that produces the gems we know as rubies or sapphires. Since that time the Brantley's decided to spend their free time researching and studying old mine sites in books and geological maps, to discover the best locations to dig for the mineral Corundum. Most of their rockhounding trips are spent in the southern Appalachian mountains and various parts of the western

After a hard week at work, many people prefer to spend their weekend unwinding with a favorite pastime or hobby. We in the southeast are fortunate enough to be surrounded by some of the world's most famous national forests, enabling ample opportunity to enjoy nature's true wonders. Whether your hobby be fishing, hunting, shooting, hiking, horse riding, whitewater rafting, swimming or just plain picnicking, numerous outdoor activities are right here on our door step.

One particular hobby enjoyed in this area as well as in various other locations across the globe is rockhounding. Just like many during the gold rush panned for silver and gold, some enjoy digging for precious gems and minerals today. Unlike the get rich quick attitude of the gold rush, rockhounding is considered more an enjoyable learning



Raw corundum rock
Inset: Polished blue corundum (Star Sapphire)



Rockhounders - Wayne and Patty Brantley

much easier access to information of various rocks, minerals and gems found across the United States as

held where people with the same interests can come together to tell stories, and do a little rockhounding. Hav-

decided to organize an annual Cookout-Rock Swap. The event is usually held in Spruce Pine, North Carolina around the fourth of July and has been a huge success.

Some of the more popular rocks and minerals found in North Carolina national forest region include; amazonite, apatite, aquamarine, aragonite, beryl, calcite, corundum, emerald, epidote, feldspar, garnet, granite, kyanite, marble, muscovite, pyrite, quartz, sapphire and tourmaline and travertine.

The fun and excitement of rockhounding, is not so much in the digging, but in the research that follows afterward, finding out the name of the mineral or rock and whether you have found yourself a real gem. Though they may not be worth a fortune, they certainly make for the most fascinating ornaments of nature.

The hobby of rockhounding seems to be an outdoor activity with many benefits, good exercise, educational, social and in our area, what could be better than spending the weekend in the tranquility of the mountains of the national forests.

As Wayne Brantley summed it up "Rockhounding is like a big Easter egg hunt, only the Lord hid all the eggs."

For more information on rockhounding, go to McRocks.com.



The Brantley's rare find - Trapiche sapphire

well as from other countries such as England, Australia and Japan.

Annual "Rock Swaps" are

ing made the acquaintance of numerous rockhounding enthusiasts in this area over the past several years, Patty

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