

Field Trip "SAFETY FIRST"

by Gary Buhr

Rockhounds go on field trips to have fun, enjoy the outdoors and Rock Club prospectors, discover new specimens or dig sites and return with a greater sense of wellbeing, regardless of how stiff and sore we may be the next day! The education and benefits of a field trip cannot be found anywhere else. To help your success, simply remember "ABC", **Always Be Careful** and employ the following generalized Safety Tips:

- (1.) **PLAN AHEAD** and consider where you are going. Communicate your plans to someone and when you expect to return. Drive a dependable vehicle with plenty fuel. Is your field trip during bird or animal hunting season?
- (2.) **BE SURE** you know where you are going or have a guide that does so you will not become lost. Go with a group like the WSMC who publishes a schedule annually in February. Maps or a compass help if you know how to use them.
- (3.) **MEDICAL** --Known issues such as diabetes, heart or vascular conditions, high BP and seizure potential should have medications available. First Aid Kits should always be present. Cell phones should not be depended on for emergency communication unless they are satellite phones. Take work gloves and extra dry socks to prevent blisters. Bug & insect repellent is helpful if you can tolerate it on your skin. Can you cope with the degree of difficulty the trip may present?
- (4.) **WEAR PROTECTIVE CLOTHING** suitable for the weather. Long denim pants are most appropriate unless summer wading in shorts & tennis shoes. Long sleeved shirts are best. Sturdy footwear to protect ankles or rubber boots for creeks and standing water. Hard hat or bicycle helmet if danger of small falling rocks. Safety goggles if flying rock chips from chisel & hammer. Rain gear is popular to keep dry, but difficult to work in. Sun protection like a wide brim straw/ventilated hat, long sleeves & pants and sunscreen. Dry pair(s) of socks prevent blisters and always feel good. Work gloves help prevent blisters, pinching & cuts from flying rock chips. Warm jacket is useful for rest periods or hiking in and out if the season is cool.
- (5.) **ACCESS**--Be sure you have 100% permission for ingress & egress of private property and always close any gates you open. Be a good steward of the environment and NEVER damage public or private property. Learn and practice the AFMS Code of Ethics.
- (6.) **NEVER ENTER** old mining shafts. Unstable trails on ridges or ledges may require roping together or a "buddy" system with hands; these are very risky. AVOID shear or undercut cliffs, unstable soils around an excavated hole, known "falling rock" areas, ice bridges and swift or engorged rivers that look like chocolate milk. Tree roots or branches are always risky to depend on if climbing, better to depend on nylon rope which is light & durable. Always consider how you will pack the treasures out. Leaverite?
- (7.) **BE ALERT** if anyone is working above you on a steep hill or below you that may be hit by rolling rocks, falling rocks or a tool that slips away.
- (8.) **WALK** carefully NEVER run with excitement at a dig site. You may fall on a sharp rock, trip into a hole or trip on a tool or root or injure someone else if running.
- (9.) **FILL HOLES** you dig so that other prospectors, hoofed wild animals or cattle cannot fall into them and break their leg!

- (10.) **NEVER** "move in" on another prospector's dig site unless you are invited or they depart without a claim. Serious source of conflict that could end in injury.
- (11.) **TOOLS** --When using a pick, shovel, hammer or metal bar always be aware of who may be close to you or behind you, so you do not hit them accidentally with a tool, rocks or dirt.
- (12.) **FOOD** --Pack enough food to supply your entire time on the field trip. Snack type carbohydrates are good muscle "fuel". Heavy protein or fat foods will slow your productivity when digging for treasures. **NEVER** eat berries, roots, leaves, mushrooms or wild vegetation unless you are absolutely sure of what you are eating. **NEVER** directly lick a rock because of contamination or poison mineral content.
- (13.) **WATER** --Be careful of dehydration in a desert climate or if doing hard work you are not used to. Bring enough bottled water to replenish from sweating, especially in dry hot areas or summer seasons. If there is a breeze blowing you may not realize how much you are sweating and losing water from perspiration that evaporates. **NEVER** drink from creeks, lakes, ponds or eat snow because of abundant contamination from animal wastes or pollutants in the ecosystem that may be airborne as well as terrestrial.
- (14.) **FIRE & LITTER** --Do you know the fire conditions posted by the Forest Service? Use extra care if smoking or building a campfire only in a safe fire pit with no tree branches overhead and be sure there is water to put it out completely after spreading the ashes. Remove any unburned material or litter that you bring or create on the trail or at the dig site.
- (15.) **JUNIORS** and young children need to have a parent, guardian or advisor in constant sight to help them "be careful" and learn about the outdoor environment and what kind of treasures they are finding or looking for.
- (16.) **BEST SECURITY** is when you go in a group because the noise and sight of a group is prone to discouraging an encounter with untamed creatures such as bears, coyotes, cougars, rattlesnakes or human predators. We need to be ever vigilant these days and hot pepper-mace or a "peacemaker" may be indicated for maximum security, especially if prospecting solo. Regardless of how exciting your discoveries on the field trip are, "**Always Be Careful**" and your results will be more positive. Have fun, learn, enjoy and write an article about your adventure!

Also see: **NFMS Slide Program Library #S198 ("Doggone Safety's Important")**
www.canadianrockhound.com (Marilyn Fraser, 1998) **NFMS Website or Northwest Newsletter (AFMS Code of Ethics)**