

Bringing Back the President's Pen

When I first became president, I would write an article to include in the Trilobite. I will attempt to make this a monthly feature again. Here we go.

I love geology.

As a kid, my dad and I would break rocks apart to see what was inside, and I liked trying to put them back together. Playing in the sand, dirt, or gravel was “fun.” We didn’t have video games or smartphones. Dad had a quartz crystal and some petrified wood from somewhere on display on a windowsill, and these always fascinated me.

As a wedding photographer, Dad met a lot of interesting people, and one person I remember was Mr. Jenkins. He was a lapidary guy. Mr. Jenkins gave us some minerals to start my collection. There was a green, gemmy mineral and some Malachite, a garnet schist, some shorl on quartz, rutile quartz, and two large crystals of fluorite among other minerals.



I was hooked.

A year or so later, the fluorite caught my eye. Suspended inside were tiny specks of something golden. It would turn out to be pyrite, but I was too young to know that at the time. I just wanted to get at them. This specimen had clear cleavage planes, and as a young teen, I thought I could perhaps split the mineral to get at the shiny gold inside. Push, pull, tug, leverage—I tried everything, except wearing gloves. It ended up being too easy.

The mineral split cleanly along one of the cleavage planes and sliced deeply into my thumb. The timing wasn’t good either. We were just about to leave for a family trip. In hindsight, it should have been stitched. Being less-than-wise at the time and not wanting to cancel the trip, I cleaned and bandaged my thumb but didn’t tell Mom or Dad.

It hurt and left a permanent scar, but I learned. I used gloves to split the remaining pieces, ruining what was once a nicely cubed fluorite crystal.



I was bitten by the bug.

Growing up in Wisconsin, family trips consisted of outings to state parks. We visited Devil's Lake, Parfrey's Glen, Wyalusing, and Mill Bluff, to name a few. I loved seeing the rocky outcrops.

In the Boy Scouts, I took the geology merit badge and helped train younger scouts on rock identification. While in the Scouts, we took a trip to Philmont, New Mexico, and hiked through the southern Rocky Mountains. I found a rock with quartz and a metallic mineral, and everyone thought it was silver. We tried panning for gold but didn't strike it rich.



At some point in the 1980s, I attended a Wisconsin Geological Society gem and mineral show and purchased a specimen of ruby in zoisite that may have been passed on or is somewhere in my collection.

In 1984, during my senior year of high school, I took geology as my science elective. Jerome Stueber was a teacher at Muskego High School and had been named Teacher of the Year in 1978. I looked up to him, and he was very influential in fostering my love of geology.

He taught “Roadside Geology,” so we could understand the geologic processes that shaped the landscapes we could see from the car while traveling. I recall learning about anticlines, synclines, drumlins, eskers, and kames.

“Why is that there?” was the question we asked.

He identified my rutile quartz and called it a “Venus Hair Stone,” which I thought was really cool. We tried to identify my metallic mineral but were unsuccessful.

Geology classes always have the best field trips, and Mr. Stueber took us on a great one. We went to Black Earth, where I found some cool banded St. Peter Sandstone. We explored the Devil’s Lake area, where I found a talc-like mineral I now know to be phyllite.



At Ableman’s Gorge, we were specifically told not to climb the cliffs. But what do high school boys do? Once one kid found a small quartz crystal, we were all hungry to find one. I scrambled up and, in a small notch, found a chunk of Baraboo Quartzite with some neat quartz crystals on it.

This rock is still my most prized possession in my collection.



It's this passion for neat, shiny rocks, colorful minerals, fantastic crystals, and the geologic processes that form them that kept me interested through my adult years. I spent six years in the Marines, where I saw volcanoes and mountains and hiked through deserts, but did little collecting.

In the 1990s, now a family man, I still explored and took my kids to some of these neat places I loved as a child. Devil's Lake and Parfrey's Glen continued to be staples of summer and fall trips with Grandma and Grandpa.

In 1995, I heard about moonstone in the Wausau area. Specifically, someone mentioned the Wimmer Pits. While on a camping trip in Portage County, not knowing too much about where to go and armed with only a few bits of information, we parked on the side of the road and explored some local rocks.

My brother and I stumbled on a large smoky, hematite-stained quartz crystal compacted in the ground in the fossilized tread of a bulldozer. Large chunks of feldspar and quartz also came home with me.



A few years later, my brother and I were camping at Copper Falls State Park, and the Mellen Black Granite (anorthosite) and the Mellen Breccia made it home with me.

I knew I needed more.



Fast forward to the 2010s. After my job moved to Florida in 2009, I decided to go back to college. I needed a degree to help land a job, and I also wanted to take as many geology courses as possible.

Geology offered two main options: go where the jobs are, which was the Dakotas at that time, or go into teaching. I thought about how much I loved learning

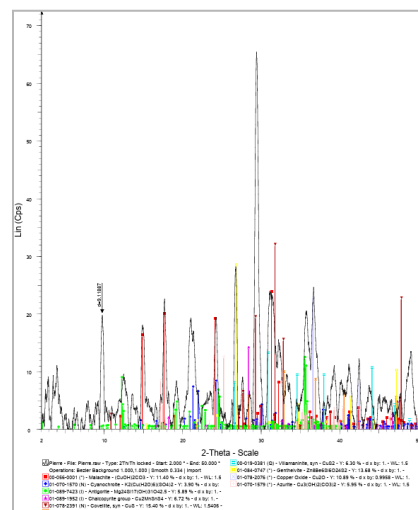
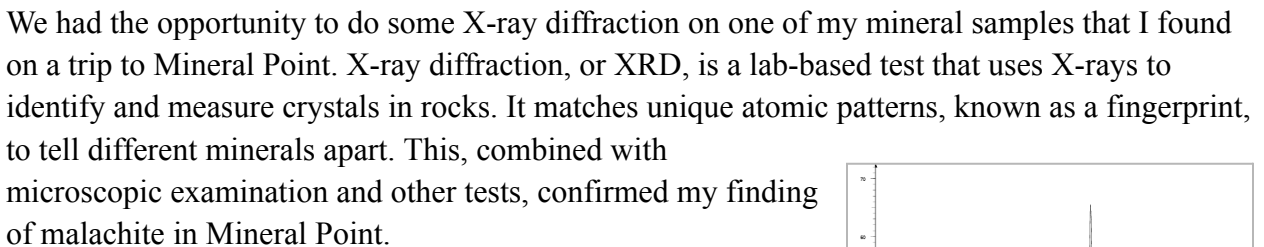
about the land and explaining it to others. All of my family was in Wisconsin, so I pursued that route.

UW-Milwaukee's geoscience department is top-notch. The professors, teachers, labs, and equipment were just what I needed. The classes also had the best field trips.

The introductory geology course took us to Parfrey's Glen, Devil's Lake, and Ableman's Gorge. These were old hats to me, though I did learn a few new things.



Mineralogy had us looking at thin sections under a petrographic microscope and we explored banded iron formations in Iron Mountain, Michigan, and we examined tourmaline crystals in Florence County.



Petrology took us to the Keweenaw as we explored the volcanic landscapes. I fell in love with this area and have been back many times collecting rocks and copper.



While in school, I took up tutoring the introductory geoscience course. It was great practice for a future teacher.

My academic writing final project was a paper called The Earth Science Discourse: Challenges of Geological Literacy. The best praise I received was when my English professor said my paper made him interested in geology.

How about that?

He even nominated me for an award. I didn't win.

It was around this time that I attended the Hart Park show of the Wisconsin Geological Society and decided to become a member in 2013. After a year or so in the club, and perhaps some arm twisting, I was asked to run for club president. I have continued in that role, on and off, ever since.

I continue to love sharing my passion with our club, other clubs, and the public. Several times a year, I engage with the public in addition to my displays at several rock shows. The kids love being able to touch and examine the rocks.



I hope to inspire another young mind to find the same love and passion for the Earth sciences.

I continue exploring Wisconsin, looking for minerals and rock outcrops. This summer, I found an outcrop of Flambeau Quartzite in Chippewa County, some quartzite in Jackson County, anorthosite in Ashland County, and explored gneissic and granitic outcrops around several dams on the Chippewa River.



So, to conclude this lengthy President's Pen article, I hope to share some of my knowledge of Wisconsin's geology with you over the coming year.

And maybe share a few stories along the way.

Here's to bringing back the President's Pen.