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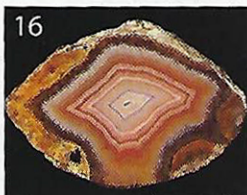
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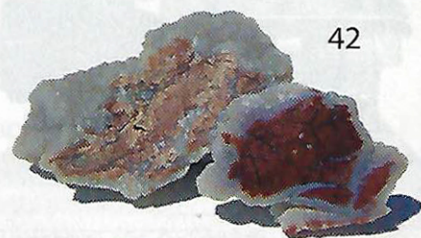
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MEDIA

ON THE COVER

Agate with a floater in the suspended center, from the Traditional Mine at Dishuiya, China (64 mm). (Joshua Ritter photo)



**The Goldfield Gemfield
Gem claims, outside Goldfield,
Nevada, are accessible without
four-wheel drive or a
high-clearance vehicle.**

FIELD TRIP

Goldfield's Gems

Collect Chalcedony at a Venerable Nevada Site

Story and Photos by Thomas Farley



The local stone is very hard and takes a brilliant polish.

A venerable Nevada collecting site has changed ownership and is now open under new management. The current operators wish to say you are welcome to visit. Very welcome, indeed.

Sharon Artlip and Nadiah Beekum now own and run the Goldfield Gemfield Gem claims outside Goldfield, Nevada. The site is about 25 miles south of Tonopah and 190 miles north of Las Vegas. Only four miles from U.S. Highway 95, the site is accessible without four-wheel drive or a high-clearance vehicle. Collecting is on the honor system, with rocks going for a dollar a pound.

Rock & Gem gives locality information for reference purposes only. Readers should never attempt to visit any of the sites described in this publication without first verifying that the location is open to collecting and obtaining the permission of the landowner and/or mineral rights holder.



ABOVE:The Gemfield information sign explains the rules for collecting and how to register, and provides brochures.
BELOW: Chalcedony and agate are nearly everywhere you step.

Five non-patented lode claims make up the site. Chalcedony (cal-sed-ə-nē), in many forms, is the main draw. Dendritic agate, bull’s-eye agate, and rainbow agate—all chalcedony variations—have been collected at Gemfield over the years. Many times, the chalcedony can’t be broken down into a category. It appears simply as rocks with tints of red, pink, yellow and lavender, often with bands and swirls of color.

Gemfield’s collecting history began in 1962, when Earl Nesser staked his first claim for gemstones, called the New Jerusalem. Goldfield residents thought his pursuit odd, as gold and silver were what local prospectors usually looked for. Although gold may be finely disseminated through the site, there was never enough to make the ground pay. Instead, gems were always the focus, particularly chalcedony. One claim followed after another until he had five.

Nesser opened the entire site to the public in 1966. Rockhounds flocked to collect its variegated stones. While entertaining visitors,



Nesser sold samples, sacks and truckloads of rocks to rock shops and private customers in the United States and abroad. Gemfield’s fame grew.

Gem Trails of Nevada, by James R. Mitchell (Gem Guides Book Co., 1991), and the *Western Gem Hunters Atlas*, by Cyril R. Johnson (Cy Johnson & Son, 2001), were just two guidebooks to include the Goldfield Gem Claims. In *Gem Trails*, Mitchell marveled, “It seems that the entire mountain is made of top quality,

immensely colorful cutting material. ... Some of the most interesting and colorful jasper and jasp-agate to be found anywhere is here, and most is solid and takes an excellent polish.”

The Bowman family, who were later owners of the claim, went farther. They wrote in visitor handouts that, “The Gemfield deposit is probably the largest mass of colored gemstone quality chalcedony in the United States.”

The zenith of Gemfield’s fame, though, was probably reached in October 1984. That’s when *Lapidary Journal* carried a lengthy article

about the site, written by Robert Ferguson. Entitled "A Visit to The Goldfield Gem Claim", Ferguson's article contained 21 photographs, many in color. The "tall, lean and desert tanned" Earl Nesser provided anecdote after anecdote. Notable among them was the account of chalcedony boulders, weighing tons, he sold to German clients who shipped them home and turned the material into tabletops. After slabbing, cracks and voids in the chalcedony were filled with gold-colored epoxy. The gaudy, but spectacular, end product can only be imagined.

In 1987, Nesser sold most of the interest in his claims to the Camaldolese Hermits of America, a Benedictine order of monks. He retained ownership of the original New Jerusalem Claim. The monks worked the chalcedony into religious items, such as small rocks inscribed with crosses. The monks never lived in Goldfield, instead relying on Nesser to ship them rocks. After a few short years, the monks sold their claims in 1989 to Arthur and Georgia Burton. The Burtons then acquired the New Jerusalem in 1999 from Nesser, who moved to Idaho. All five claims were once again under the ownership of a single person.

The Georgia Burton Bowman family continued operating the Goldfield Gemfield site under the honor system. A payment box on the property accepted money from rockhounds, and local residents forwarded these payments to the Bowmans, who did not live in Goldfield. Eventually, the payment box was stolen, claim markers were vandalized, and trash was dumped on the claims. In September 2015, Goldfield locals Artlip and Beekum approached the Bowman family about buying the claims. They felt that, as nearby residents, they could better manage the property.

Artlip had been familiar with the collecting site since the early 1980s, as her father, "Slim" Sirnes, would often visit it. She enjoyed the area as much for the serenity of rural Nevada as for the rocks themselves. After the details were worked out and the necessary paperwork filed, claim ownership transferred to Artlip and Beekum at the end of September 2015. A new life had begun for an old site.

The claim owners want you to visit, but they want you to sign in first. Doing so lets people know you are on the ground, and signing in is a release of liability. Four different

places in Goldfield keep visitor logs. These same stores will also accept your payments once you have collected your rocks:

GOLDFIELD ART & BUSINESS SERVICES

306 Crook Ave., P.O. Box 5
Goldfield, NV 89013
(775) 485-3789

HIDDEN TREASURES

489 Bellevue Ave.
Goldfield, NV 89013
(775) 485-3761

ELITE TRADING

430 Crook Ave.
Goldfield, NV 89013
(775) 485-3783

VANDERFORD'S GOLD STRIKE

U.S. Highway 95 and 4th Street

Gemfield is easy to get to. It's right off U.S. Highway 95, the main corridor between Las Vegas and Reno. Two miles north of Goldfield, you'll see a tall, green sign pointing to the west. The Gemfield claims are four miles down a fairly well-graded road, accessible for almost any vehicle with normal clearance. Four-wheel drive is not required; I would advise, though, against taking RVs, due to a lack of turnaround space.

Material collection is on the honor system. Collect as many specimens as you like, then estimate the weight to the nearest pound at \$1 per pound. Drop off cash or a check made payable to Goldfield Art & BS at one of the above locations. You can also PayPal the money to goldfieldart@yahoo.com.

Now back to the rocks. Take your time when driving along the dirt road to the claim that starts at U.S. Highway 95. You might see wild burros or perhaps an antelope. Colorful arrow signs point the way at each fork in the road. After four miles, you'll come to a small parking spot with an information board and brochures detailing the area (GPS coordinates: N 37°44.370' W 117°17.642').

The roads beyond the information sign are for high-clearance, and perhaps four-wheel-drive, vehicles, but you can park at the sign and hike to anywhere on the claim site. If you have time to explore, there are springs, petroglyphs, and old kilns nearby. Check the USGS

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Montezuma Peak 7.5 quadrangle and Stanley Paher's *Illustrated Nevada Ghost Towns & Desert Atlas* (Nevada Publications, 2012).

I visited the claim site on a mid-week day in late February. Sharon Artlip was kind enough to shut down her store (Goldfield Art & Business Services) to guide me and another party to the area. Following her vehicle wasn't really necessary because the road was so well marked. It was nice of her to do this, however, and I got a better idea of what to look for.

As I got out of my truck, I tried to remember what little I knew about chalcedony. Most often, I thought of it as a pale, milky or opaque stone used for carving Victorian-era cameos. Mitchell, in *Gem Trails of Northern California* (Gem Guides Book Co., 2005), defined it as a "Clear and colorless agate without patterns or inclusions. A translucent or micro-crystalline form of quartz that is often pale blue or gray with a nearly wax-like luster". Yet, all the rocks I had seen at Artlip's store were a riot of color and patterns.

Minerals.net describes the word this way: "Chalcedony is often used specifically to describe the white, gray, or blue translucent type of Chalcedony, but its technical term includes all additional varieties." Those varieties include agate, bloodstone, carnelian, chrysoprase and jasper. And, of course, varieties such as agate can take many forms, such as fire agate, eye agate, snakeskin agate, and moss agate, all of them exhibiting banding or different colors.

The *Henry Holt Guide to Minerals, Rocks, and Fossils* (Hamilton, Wooley and Bishop, The Hamlyn Publishing Co., 1974), reconciles the colored and colorless face of chalcedony. "Chalcedony (SiO₂) is the name given to compact varieties of silica which compromise minute quartz crystals with sub-microscopic pores," it says. "There are two main varieties: chalcedony, which is uniformly coloured, and agate, which is characterized by curved bands or zones of differing colour [sic]."

Leaving taxonomy to others, I walked about the low hills of the site. The ground was literally covered in places with broken chalcedony. Artlip pointed to different areas in which different colors of stones could be found. The brochure she has developed was handy, outlining the many areas of the claim. Wanting only a few hand samples, I left my



ABOVE: Bull's-eye agate coloring ranges from the faded pastels in this specimen to vibrant reds and yellows.

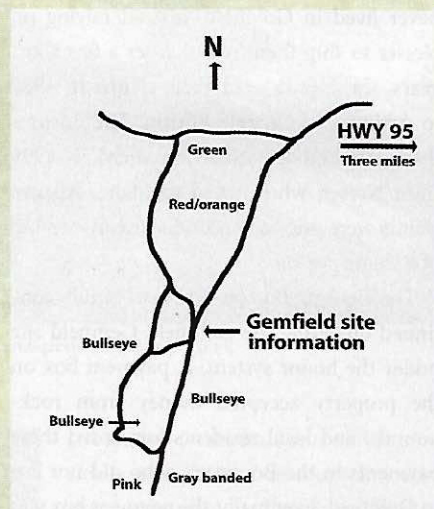
RIGHT: The approximate locations of various colored and banded rocks are marked on this map of the Gemfield claims.

rock hammer and digging bar at the truck. It was apparent that I could get what I wanted simply by picking it off the ground.

A chalcedony boulder presented itself near the top of the claim territory. It was over a yard wide and high, a confusion of swirls and patterns. I thought about how Nesser sold these boulders, most of them probably even larger, and how much they might weigh. A dollar a pound? I'd need a bigger pickup—and a bigger checkbook. Speaking of which, Sharon and Nadia will negotiate a discount for larger rocks.

While hand-size pieces were numerous, it was obvious that garden-size pieces were much fewer, and they would require work to extract. At many places, you could see where others had labored. One chalcedony pit stood out; people had apparently displayed a tremendous interest in a light-blue outcrop, judging by past efforts. I was simply interested in a piece that wasn't too vuggy, something I could slab at my gem and mineral club. After gathering a few pieces, I contented myself with touring the grounds and taking in the high-desert scenery.

Rural Nevada's tranquility is always captivating. As open BLM country, one could



camp here amongst the Joshua trees. Make sure, though, to keep a clean camp and be aware this is desert. Rattlesnakes, tarantulas, lizards, and other creatures call the area home. Remember, too, that no mechanical equipment is allowed—picks, shovels, and hand tools only.

I noticed that Artlip took the other party aside to show them the basics of gold panning. She had previously told me there was black sand on the property, and I was now intrigued. I got out my White's GMT and detected on the area she collected dirt from. The black sand readings weren't that high, but I looked over only a few feet of ground. As she panned the material out, I could see there was *some* black sand. Since the Gemfield claims are between two gold districts, perhaps some flour gold could be found on these hills.

Artlip pointed out a gully she thought was underlain by hardpan. We ruminated that a false bedrock could result, which might be worthy of prospecting. People are welcome, she said, to try for gold if they like.

After an hour or two, I decided to go back to Goldfield. I wanted to look up Bryan Smalley at Hidden Treasures, the local rock shop. He has a Facebook page, but no Web site. I was very interested in what his store might contain.

I returned to Sharon Artlip's store for directions to Hidden Treasures. Goldfield Art & Business Services is right on U.S. Highway 95 at Fifth Avenue. You'll see a large wooden sign out front that proclaims "Official Gemfield Headquarters".

Outside, Artlip has plenty of rock from the claims. Inside, if you ask, she'll pull out a tray of polished stones that have been worked up from Gemfield rocks. She now directed me to Bryan's shop, which is several blocks off U.S. Highway 95, at 489 Bellvue. Pick up a map at the city's Chamber of Commerce to guide you, or just ask someone walking around. Goldfield's 200 souls all know each other.

Goldfield is a sprawling ramshackle of a town, its size befitting a place that once claimed 20,000 citizens. Grand stone buildings remain, along with rough-hewn houses, traditional homes, and singlewide trailers. Slow down and look around; you'll find something interesting at every corner. Art cars worthy of Burning Man, an aluminum giraffe named Cosmo—it's all in Gemfield.

Bryan's corner store occupies two buildings and has a little bit of everything: rocks from the area, agates, fossils, collector minerals, and more. He thought it was great that Artlip was resurrecting the claims. "It's good rock, it's good material, it's been used off and on, but the claim has never seriously been developed. Now, Artlip has the claims, she's here in Goldfield, and there's now a chance to get things going."

Bryan showed me carvings he had made, noting the hardness of the local stone. He said Gemfield's chalcedony, when properly heated, made great strikers for flintlock rifles. All manner of knapping can be done with the rock, from creating arrowheads to producing stone knives. Bryan knew Earl Nesser, the first claim owner, and can tell you stories about him. He can also comment on your

finds, advising on what you might make out of them.

Artlip says there are plenty of things to do in Goldfield besides looking for chalcedony. "We have over a thousand miles of roads in Esmeralda County that people can go rock-hounding on. There's plenty of off-road activities, as well as the tremendous historical sites in town. There are hot springs, antelope, wild horses, wild donkeys, and plenty of things to do. Goldfield Days are the first week in August. It's not that hot in the summer, so if you are in Vegas, come on up. We're generally 15 to 20 degrees cooler."

A new heap leach gold mine may be opening near Goldfield. It's in the planning stage, and is called the Gemfield mine. An open-pit operation, it will have nothing to do with the Gemfield Gem claims.

The Gemfield claims are on open ground with little shade. Bring a hat, a long-sleeved shirt, gloves, and plenty of water. At 5,000 feet in elevation, it is dry. Take extra water and food so you don't have to come back to town before you're ready. Include a handkerchief, goggles, and a spray bottle with all your regular rockhounding tools.

As to facilities, there's one small hotel in town, connected with the Santa Fe Saloon. More lodging is in Tonopah, 26 miles away. The Dinky Diner is the one restaurant in town and there is one general store. There is no gas station in town, so fuel up before you hit Goldfield. Expect some places to be closed when they should be open. Keep a list of phone numbers for all the places you wish to visit. Many times, you can call the owner and they will open their shop for you. Find contact information for the Dinky Diner and The Santa Fe Motel on the Goldfield Chamber of Commerce Web site, <http://goldfieldnevada.org/information.html>. Don't be afraid, too, to ask the townsfolk for directions and information.

Contact Artlip to arrange a rock club field trip, and members will get a discount, along with a portion going back to the sponsoring club. She welcomes your e-mails at goldfieldart@yahoo.com, and every business in Goldfield says that you are welcome. Very welcome, indeed. 💎

Thomas Farley is a freelance writer living in Las Vegas. He is an ardent gold prospector and has a strong interest in exploring rural Nevada.

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