



GATOR GIRL ROCKS

THE BEST EVER ROCKHOUNDING GEAR GUIDE

www.GatorGirlRocks.com

Fall 2012

Rockhounding is fun. A lot of fun. Accordingly, it takes a great deal of self control and personal responsibility not to go rock collecting until you are ready to do so. And, most importantly, to do so safely.

There will always be rocks. But, there is, of course, only one of you. If you're not careful and well prepared, you can get hurt or endanger the people who are with you.

This Guide - although useful - is not a substitute for personal responsibility. Rather, it is a collection of tips from one small family. Although we have collected minerals, gems, fossils, and rocks on multiple continents and have been rockhounding in more than half of the states, we're constantly discovering new situations and ideas.

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✧ ✧ ✧ FALL 2012 ✧ ✧ ✧
WASHINGTON

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ROCKHOUNDING EQUIPMENT & GEAR

Rockhounds really don't need much. They can, of course, buy a lot of gear (which also can be fun). You'd be surprised how much gear you can buy. But, beginning rockhounds don't need much gear. In fact, if you have a young rockhouser in your family, they probably already have come home with their pockets bulging with rocks without the benefit of any special gear.

But, most respectable rockhounds will have at least three pieces of gear:



- 1 A rock hammer



- 2 Safety glasses



- 3 A loupe or small magnifying glass to examine potential treasures

If you wish to enjoy the day with your young rockhouser, however, you might wish to bring along a few more items. Below are lists that, as a result of trial and error, we've assembled to increase the odds of having a more enjoyable adventure. Some folks will need more, some will need less. Beginning with these lists, however, should provide a good start on a fun trip.

This Guide includes tips that are designed to help make rockhounding a bit easier and more enjoyable for busy families. Like most activities or hobbies that families

participate in, fun and successful rockhounding adventures require some advance planning and preparation.

The amount of advance planning and preparation depends, of course, on the intended expedition. Obviously, rock collecting in your own back yard requires little, if any, advance planning. On the other hand, a family trip deep into the woods or desert and well past the last paved highway may be more fondly remembered if there has been some advance planning and consideration of potential problems and risks.

This Guide includes numerous tips - many are the result of experiences (some fondly remembered and some otherwise) - divided into various categories.

In regard to where to find the equipment and gear referenced in this Guide, you might consider the following:

- Wal-Mart - look in the camping as well as the hunting/fishing section
- Sporting goods stores such as Cabella's, Sportsman's Warehouse, & REI
- Forestry stores such as benmeadows.com
- Goodwill stores
- EBay
- Rock shops - these are increasingly hard to find. Quite simply, rockhounding as a hobby in the United States reached its peak sometime after World War II and before the Bicentennial.
- Rockhounding clubs - these are the very best source. You'll find that, if you join a rockhounding club, you will meet a lot of folks who may have extra gear and a great deal of experienced-based advice



ROCKHOUNDING DAY TRIP - SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

This section provides useful checklists for gear that you may wish to consider. The following checklists are included:

- The Basics - Very Handy Rockhounding Gear for Every Trip
- Safety Gear to Take Along
- Comfort Gear

- Clothing
- I Wish I Would Have Brought ...
- Gear for -
 - Caves
 - Deserts
 - Mountains
 - Western Washington (it rains!)
- Gear for -
 - Agates
 - Gemstones
 - Crystals
 - Fossils

In reviewing the checklists and determining what you need, you should ask yourself a few who, where, and what questions:

- **Who** is going with me?
 - Young children?
 - Older people?
 - Pets?
 - Do they have any special needs - *e.g.*, medicine, equipment, diet, mobility limits, etc.?
- **Where** am I going?
 - Mountains (think elevation and colder weather - even if it is warmer at lower elevations; there may be snow on roads; etc.)
 - Rural areas (cellular telephones may not work; services and supplies may not be close by)
 - In remote areas, there are far fewer opportunities for fuel, food, medicine, etc.
 - Streams (think about water levels)

- Nature - think about wildlife (e.g., bears, cougars, snakes, scorpions, ticks, etc.) and other conditions that you may not usually deal with on an everyday basis. In addition, be mindful that, in the past few years, there has been a substantial increase in illegal drug activity in public and private forests.
- **What** am I going after?
 - Stream collecting - you'll want rubber boots and a hand tool (garden cultivator)
 - Land, road cuts, hillsides, etc. - you'll want a rock hammer, safety goggles, etc.
 - Digging - a shovel sized to the length of the hike (*i.e.*, the longer the hike, the smaller you may want the shovel)
 - Gold - a gold pan or dredge
 - Quartz crystals - gloves



THE BASICS - VERY HANDY ROCKHOUNDING GEAR FOR EVERY TRIP

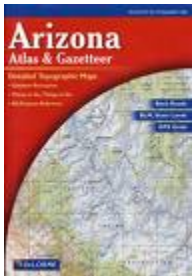


- o **Map & Directions**

Make sure they are current.

An even better choice is a detailed topographical map. That way, you will know - in advance - whether you're on flat terrain or will be scrambling up hills.

DeLorme makes an excellent Atlas & Gazetteer -for many states - that we use on a regular basis. For some states, a few rockhounding sites are even noted. These are available through DeLorme, on Amazon.com, and occasionally at Costco.



- o **Compass and/or GPS**

It is easy to get lost - especially if you venture far from a road or well-marked trail. A compass or GPS will reduce the risk of staying lost, especially if you practice and know how to use them. A GPS also will allow you to mark your rocking locations so that you can easily find them in the future or share the sites with others. Your rockhounding friends will very much prefer a GPS location to a 'by the creek' location that may be impossible to find.

Even a basic GPS also allows you to mark the location of your automobile thereby substantially decreasing the odds that you would have to stay lost. Our daughter developed the habit of waymarking our auto (and her clean clothes) in second grade. It's not hard to do, and it is very handy.





- o **Rock Hammer/Rock Pick**

If you pack a rock hammer, always pack (and then use) safety goggles. **Every time.** It only takes one swing to blind yourself or someone with you.



Safety goggles are pretty low on the 'fashion index,' but, unless you're a pirate, so are eye patches.

If you are with children, remember that many children will learn more from your example than what you tell them to do (while you do the opposite).



- o **Crack Hammer & Cold Chisel**

Be sure and get a crack hammer. Stick with a 3-pound size. Remember, you will be carrying this and you won't want the extra weight of a larger hammer. Besides, it often takes several swings and, even, with the three-pound size, you'll get a workout.

Do not use a normal hammer or sledge hammer; they are not designed for this and may send metal slivers flying.

In regard to chisels, you may wish to spend the extra dollar to get a cold chisel with a hand guard. It will only take whacking your fingers or hand once to convince you that you should have gotten the chisel with the guard. Also, chances are that your child will want to swing the crack hammer and, believe us, their aim won't be spot on every time.

Accumulate a variety of chisel sizes. Sometimes you will want a wide blade chisel but other times you will want a chisel with an inch or less blade or a point.





- o **Garden Cultivator & Trowel Hand Tool**

Simple garden tools - especially a trowel and the rake-like tool - are very handy. You can rake through rocks, dig small holes, etc. The metal tools will last much longer, but the plastic ones are lighter to pack and travel with. Costco, on occasion, has a larger sized three-pack set of garden tools made of sturdy metal that we've used for several years. These have survived heavy-duty field-testing.



- o **Bucket (or canvas bag)**

The rocks you collect are likely to be wet, dirty, or sharp and will be much easier to carry in a bucket. A five-gallon bucket - especially when full - is probably all the weight you'll want to carry. No need for a huge bucket.

Use a heavy-duty plastic bucket rather than a metal bucket. A couple of reasons. First, it will be a lot lighter. Second, you may be on gravel or bumpy roads and, believe us, metal buckets will drive you crazy.



- o **Loupe**

Or hand magnifying glass. Plastic loupes (10 or 15 power) are inexpensive and can help you identify specimens before hauling them several miles and then finding out that they were not what you anticipated.



- o **Picnic Supplies**

Food, snacks, and water.



- o **Litterbag**

Pack out your garbage. If you have not been to the woods recently, you may be shocked at how much garbage you will find. There is no need to make the problem worse.



SAFETY GEAR TO CONSIDER



- o **Safety Goggles or Glasses**

These really are a must if you will be using a rock hammer, pick, or similar tools.



- o **First Aid Kit**

At a minimum, it is a good idea to have band aids, antibiotic cream, tweezers, and a cold compress.



- o **Sun Screen**



- o **Insect Repellent**

For children, you may wish to consider wipes rather than spray so as to reduce the possibility of eye irritation.



- o **Poison Ivy/Stinging Nettles lotion**

You may not always be able to find a slug to wipe on your skin after getting into stinging nettles; having lotion handy is a great idea.



- **Sting Eze**

In the event you run into hornets, wasps, yellow-jackets, it is a good idea to have Sing Eze. This is a concentrated topical ointment. It works.

- **Gloves**

Some specimens will have sharp edges. In addition, gloves may come in handy to minimize blisters and natural irritants (e.g., stinging nettles).

- **Safety Whistle**

Storm safety whistles are an especially useful safety tool for children (you can hear a whistle much farther away than a scream and it takes much less effort for the child).

- **Fire Extinguisher**

- **Matches or gas lighter**

In case you are stranded and need to spend the night in the woods and need a fire or signal fire.



- o **Hard Hats**

Especially if you will be rockhounding in a quarry, near a high bank, or in a cave. In addition, if you are walking through a forest, a hard hat is a great idea (take a look up sometime and see how many loose branches you see that, with a slight breeze, will come speeding down like spears).



- o **Orange (High-Visibility) Vests**

Especially during hunting season.



- o **Emergency blanket**



- o **Flash Light**

Remember to bring extra batteries (or use a hand charging flashlight) and bulbs.



- o **Mobile Telephone**

Remember, you may be out of range of cellular service, but, in the event of an accident, you could drive to a service area and call. You may want to invest in a waterproof case (or zip-lock bag) and many cell phones have a very low tolerance for moisture. Most don't survive a dip in a creek.



- o **Walkie-Talkies**

These can be useful communication tools, especially the versions with built-in GPS.



COMFORT GEAR



- o **Tissues**



- o **Hand Sanitizer**



- o **Insect Spray or Wipes**



- o **After Bite Spray/Cream**



- o **Sunglasses**



- o **Wet Wipes**
Lots of wet wipes



- o **Bucket**

If needed, these can make a useful outdoor toilet. Obviously, the woods don't have bathroom facilities. That is an important fact to keep in mind and plan accordingly.



CLOTHING



- o **Old Clothing**

You may get wet and dirty rockhounding and are likely to end up on trails or old logging roads. Wear old, durable clothing. A long sleeve shirt (one that you don't value too highly) will offer some protection from blackberry vines, nettles, and mosquitoes. Similarly, you will want durable long pants.



- o **Rubber Boots**

Rubber boots are perfect for rockhounding in and near creeks. Alternatively, old tennis shoes or aqua shoes are very handy to wade creeks and wet areas.



- o **Hat**

Some protection against sun, ticks, etc.



- o **Old Towel**
To clean off.



- o **Backup Clothes**
You may wish to bring a complete set of backup clothes in case you fall in a creek. Better safe than sorry.



- o **Change of Clothes**
You may wish to change for the ride home



- o **Laundry bag**
For the dirty clothes



I WISH I WOULD HAVE BROUGHT ...



- o **Rock Book**
Especially one with color pictures to identify minerals, gems, fossils, and rocks.



- o **Specimen Samples**
Sample of the specimens to be collected to show friends who may be joining you for their first rockhounding adventure.



- o **Backpack**
A backpack or canvas bag will come in handy for packing gear, food, etc.



- o **Shovel**
Remember, a short one will weigh less and be easier to pack. Consider a folding camp shovel. If you're planning on serious digging, however, bring a real shovel. We've had great success with the mid-size D-handle round-nosed shovel. You can move a lot of material and the shovel isn't so big as to command an over-sized hole.



- o **Mattock**



- o **Screen**
For sorting out small stones.



- o **Bow Saw or Chain Saw**
A bow saw or chain saw (with fuel) will come in handy to cut any trees that may fall across the road and block your exit.



- o **A Rope**
This will help with climbing down banks or to tow a downed tree out of the way (assuming, of course, that your automobile is equipped to do so). We've used ropes to scale cliffs as well as explore caves.



- o **Pruners/Nippers/Machete**
If you will be visiting an area that has dense brush (e.g., blackberry vines, nettles, etc.) pruners, nippers, or a machete will be handy
If you choose a machete and don't have a lot of experience with one, you should consider getting one with a safety handle or drill a hole in the handle and add a wrist cord. It is not uncommon for inexperienced users to lose their grip.



- o **Scrub Brush or Wire Brush**
To brush dirt and mud off of rocks - no need to pack out heavy rocks that turn out to be not what you expect



- o **Colander**
To wash rock samples.



- o **Spray Bottle**
No one wants to pack a load of leaverite out on a long hike. If you take a spray bottle with you, you can tell what the specimens look like before deciding whether to haul them. We've also used small pressurized spray canisters (the kind you use to spray fruit trees) as they hold at least two gallons of water and last longer.



- o **Rock Sample Bags**
Especially useful for small rocks - with collection labels. Professional sample bags are very durable and have ties so that there is little chance for the rocks to spill out. These are also ideal to help keep specimens separate if you have more than one child.



- o **Zip Lock Freezer Bags**
These are great for storing small treasures so they don't get lost in the bucket of rocks (freezer bags seem to be stronger than the other bags); Gallon and/or quart size work best.



- o **Pen**
A sharpie is useful to label the bags. Especially useful if there is more than one child on the trip.



- o **Camera**



- o **Binoculars**
For bird watching, etc.



- o **Magnifying Glass**
A loupe is best - they are small enough to fit in your pocket or wear on a lanyard and usually are more powerful



- o **Seat Cushion & Knee Pads**
The older (or wiser) you get, the more you may appreciate packing along a padded seat cushion and/or knee pads. Most of the specimens are going to be on the ground and, the closer you get, the easier it is to find good ones. Crouching or having your knees in mud or rocks is not so much fun after a few hours. A gardening cushion or knee pads are a wonderful accessory. The cushion also comes in handy at lunchtime.





- o **Flashlight**
This will enable better searching in shaded creek bottoms and also helps identify whether a rock is an agate (hold the rock above the lens and agates will glow).



- o **Magnet**



- o **Rain Poncho**



- o **Extra Drinks**



- o **Extra Snacks**



- o **Extra Batteries**
For GPS, flashlights, headlamps, etc.



- o **Spare Tire**

Make sure it is inflated and that you also have a jack and the ability to change a flat tire.





GEAR FOR CAVES



- o **Hard Hat**



- o **Head Lamp**

These will fit right over your hard hat. The LED headlamps are great (and lighter). Although the light is a bit dimmer than traditional headlamps, the batteries last much longer. Take extra batteries. Avoid the temptation to purchase the cheap LED headlamps; they tend to fall apart ... at precisely the wrong time.



- o **Flashlight; Lantern**

Bring a flashlight for everyone. You might consider LED flashlights. Although the light is a bit dimmer than traditional flashlights, the batteries last much longer and, this is not the place to have your battery run out. If you are taking children, and want to use a lantern, you may wish to consider a battery-operated lantern rather than a fuel lantern.



- o **Rope**



- o **Seat Cushion & Knee Pads**



- o **Gloves**



- o **Crack Hammer & Cold Chisel**
Caves where rockhounding is appropriate usually are rock and, to extricate a sample, you will need a crack hammer and cold chisel. A variety of chisels will serve you well.



- o **Safety Goggles**



GEAR FOR DESERTS



- o **Extra Water**



- o **Snake Bite Kit**



- o **Sunscreen**



- o **Sun Glasses**



- o **Boots**
In desert areas, boots will provide some protection from snake hazards.



- o **Hat**



- o **Umbrella**
A large umbrella (e.g., golf umbrella) will provide a good deal of relief from the sun.



- o **Gloves**



- o **Tweezers**
Think thistles



GEAR FOR MOUNTAINS



- o **Sunscreen**
At higher elevations, the air is thinner and sunscreen is more important



- o **Boots**
In mountain areas, boots will provide some ankle support.



- o **Hat**



- o **Jacket**



GEAR FOR AGATES



- o **Flashlight**
Shining a flashlight on a stone is an easy way to determine whether the stone may be an agate



- o **Agate Probe (Steel Bar) or Long Drill Bit & Portable Drill (with extra batteries)**
Allows rockhounds to check below the surface for potential agates (based on sound)



GEAR FOR GEMSTONES

- o **Tweezers**



- o **Plastic Vial with screw-on cap or film canister**
Secure storage for small gemstones; with the film canister, cut a thin X in the top - that will allow you to insert a small gemstone (e.g., sapphire) without risk of spilling the stones

- o **Screen**



- o **Whiskbroom**



GEAR FOR CRYSTALS



- o **Wrapping Material**

Crystals can be fragile. Accordingly, extra newspaper, cloth, or bubble wrap is a good idea to transport the crystals safely. For small crystals, an egg carton may work.

- o **Band Aids/Gloves**

Some crystals are sharp



GEAR FOR FOSSILS



- o **Wrapping Material**
Fossils can be fragile. Accordingly, extra newspaper, cloth, or bubble wrap is a good idea to transport the fossils safely



- o **Whisk Broom**

✦ ✦ ✦ END OF CHECKLIST ✦ ✦ ✦