

Abstracts of Presentations

by Jeff Scovil and Dimitry Belakovsky

Jeff Scovil: Madagascar - Travelogue & Mineral Specimens

In the July of 2008 Jeff Scovil traveled with Tomek Praszkiel of Warsaw, Poland and several friends to the island of Madagascar on a "mineral vacation". They traveled through the south-central region of the island, primarily visiting famous pegmatite localities and buying mineral specimens from the local dealers and miners.

Several scenic, purely touristic areas were also visited where they saw the unique flora and fauna of the areas such as lemurs, chameleons and the bizarre baobab trees. One of the most fascinating areas visited was the karst region known as Tsingy Bemaraha with its other-worldly limestone spires and caves.

The presentation will feature both the local scenery and the mineral specimens that have made Madagascar a famous specimen-producing country.

Dimitry Belakovsky: Famous Mineral Localities of Russia and the Former Soviet Union

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This presentation will provide insight into both the historical development of mineral localities in Russia and the former Soviet Union (FSU) from the late 17th Century through the current time and in the mineral species and specimens that these localities have produced.

A number of interesting mineral localities were known in Russia already by the end of 17th century. By that time people began to recognize the value of minerals not only as ores but also as mineral specimens. In 1716 the first mineral museum in Russia, the mineral cabinet of Kunstkamera, was established by Tsar Peter the Great. The specimens from Russian mines of Urals and Siberia as well as from Europe were displayed there. Since 1725 the Kunstkamera (including its mineral cabinet) is a property of Russian Academy of Sciences.

Within next 50-60 years the number of discovered mineral deposits increased dramatically due to Great Siberian Expeditions activities. Those were related to expanding Russian Empire to the Pacific Ocean and even further. Besides the polymetal, gold and silver ore deposits a number of mineral localities were discovered or described at that time. Among them famous topaz and aquamarine deposits of Sherlova Gora and Adun-Chilon, tourmalines of Transbaikal, lapis at Baikal Lake, wiluite-vesuvianite of Yakutia and many others.

There were not that many significant discoveries during the whole 19th century, however exploration & prospecting were still in progress. Amazingly one of famous localities – Emerald mines was discovered in 19th century in a seemingly previously well-investigated area of the Urals.

The next great period of mineral deposits discovery was around 1920-1960 with a peak in the 1930s. Again it happened because of the government support to the expeditions aimed at investigations of natural resources. In the early 1920s apatite deposits as well as a number of unusual minerals of alkaline pegmatites were discovered during Mineralogical Museum expeditions to the Khibiny and Lovosero massifs of Kola Peninsula. Later active exploration began at Tetyukhe (Dalnegorsk), Primorskiy kray and in Norilsk. In Central Asia, mercury, stibnium, sulphur, tin and other deposits also produced great mineral specimens as well as localities with rare and unusual minerals were discovered by Tajik-Pamirian expedition. Optic quartz and fluorite deposits, copper, and tungsten deposits were discovered at Ural Mts., Kazakhstan and Transbaikal. Uranium and diamond deposits were discovered also at that time. By the late 1950s the majority of currently known famous mineral

deposits in the Soviet Union were already discovered and were producing ores and mineral specimens.

Unfortunately a lot of nice mineral specimens got dumped due to the lack of interest to mineral specimens after the late 1950s. This interest re-appeared in the late 1990s, when many of those mines were already closed.

In terms of number, quality, and importance of mineral specimens produced by Russian and FSU deposits all mineral localities could be conditionally subdivided into three major groups:

First group includes localities and mineral specimens with well developed crystals and druses of a number of mineral species and their combinations. The best examples are: Dalnegorsk in Primorskiy kray which is still producing excellent druses of galena, sphalerite, chalcopyrite, pyrrhotite, tetrahedrite, quartz, calcite, datolite, danburite, hedenbergite and others; East and west slopes of Subpolar Urals where besides huge varieties of excellent quartz, druzes, titanite, rutile, anatase, apatite, calcite, hematite, ilmenite, kaynosite-(Y) etc. were found in nice aesthetic specimens. Pegmatites of Mursinka and Lipovka area of Urals bearing world famous topaz, heliodor, elbaite, amethyst and others; Emerald mines in the Urals produce emerald and other beryls, alexandrite, phenakite, apatite, molybdenite, spessartite etc.; Kara-Oba and Akchatau in Kazakhstan (hubnerite, fluorite, apatite, rhodochrosite, bertrandite, quartz etc.) and a few other localities also belong to that group.

Second group combines localities with fine specimens of one or two species. Examples are: Malkhan pegmatite field, Transbaikal (tourmaline); topaz and beryl of Sherlova Gora, Transbaikal; the recently famous Rubtsovskiy mine (cuprite, copper, iodides); Altyn-Tyube, Kazakhstan (diopside) and many others.

Third group encounters localities of rare & unusual minerals. Those can be represented by Khibiny and Lovozero massifs at Kola Peninsula (world record for a number of mineral species found in one place), Murun and Inagli massif in Yakutia or Darai-Pioz massif in Tajikistan.

More details will be given during the presentation.