

Online resources for Rock and Mineral Enthusiasts.

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The Internet is an amazing resource. You can spend a lifetime using it, and not scratch the surface of the information that it contains. Fundamentally, the Internet is just a system of wires and equipment that connects your computer or phone to computers around the World that store information. It allows people to connect and interact, share news and passions, and disseminate information. Most people understand how to visit websites and search on Google. There are other tools and techniques that are also available for free that open a world of possibilities.

Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Wikipedia is a general knowledge, user-created/edited free encyclopedia. The content is generated 100% by regular people like you and I. This may sound like a recipe for disaster, but it results in a fantastic resource. For every kook out there, there are hundreds of hard working experts who watch the pages and correct errors. On top of that, since it is created by the people that use it, the topics it covers are extensive. The entries are not limited to what a Britannica editor finds interesting. Unable to find information on a topic? Create a page for it! Found an error in an article? Fix it!!

All articles in Wikipedia follow a similar format, and are usually contain references. It can be the launching point for any topic, leading to other Wikipedia articles, or external websites.

There are hundreds of articles on rock and mineral related topics, and once you start researching and reading for fun, you can easily spend untold hours clicking on links, opening external websites for additional information, etc.

Youtube, Vimeo, etc.

<http://www.youtube.com>

<http://www.vimeo.com> (High quality videos)

Youtube and other video sites are great for learning new techniques for lapidary, new locations for collecting, and general information. After searching on some simple terms like “cabbing” “lapidary”, “mineral collecting”, thousands of videos surfaced. The quality will vary from “Wow, great information!” to “I will never get those minutes back from the abyss”, but overall the results are quite good. Don’t forget to check the “related videos” section next to the video you are watching. You can queue up multiple videos and watch them all in order.

Vimeo is a much smaller website, but the quality of the videos is typically better than Youtube, both from a visual quality level and an artistic perspective. Spend some time searching for your favorite topic.

Google Earth

<http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>

Google Earth is one of the most amazing free programs available right now. It is a program that allows you to view almost any place on the Earth from space.

Obviously, it is not real time images, but the quality of the data can be astounding. In addition to imagery from space, it also has a full topography database of the Earth, 3D buildings for most major cities, images uploaded by people and organizations like National Geographic, a built in web browser for instant access to information on points of interest, etc.

Not only can you view it straight down like a map, but you can pan and tilt the image and see the topography of the area as well. You feel as if you are a bird flying over the landscape. I have spent hours exploring various areas around the World:

- Try to track the Great Wall of China through the wilderness. You can find huge decrepit sections of it in the middle of nowhere.
- Fly through Yosemite Valley.
- Find the nuclear testing grounds in the area north of Las Vegas, and look in nearby Area 51 for aliens.
- Explore the Egyptian pyramid area, and look for lost pyramids in the desert.

Google Earth is also a great method of mapping and tracking collection areas. There are databases available on the internet that can be loaded in to the program. For instance, the USGS has an extensive database of all known past and present mines, mineral collection zones, etc. Load it up, and you have an interactive mineral map of the entire World.

Once you find an area of interest, you can map out the approach to the site, and also looks for other likely areas for collecting. I have used Google Earth to map out mining sites near my area, then hiked to the area and found lots of great placer mining artifacts. It can show you old trails, old workings, etc.

The program will help you plan for a collecting trip by showing elevation changes, accessibility, relative remoteness, etc.

Once you completed a trip, if you used a compatible GPS unit to track the adventure, you can then upload the GPS track to the program, and see where you went. Then, you can add notes and share the results with other rock enthusiasts.

USGS Mineral Resources library. Click on the big "Download with Google Earth" button:

<http://www.gelib.com/world-mineral-resources.htm>

USGS geological information (Example: Nevada). Click on the nvgeol.kmz or nvgeol.kml links and open in Google Earth.

<http://tin.er.usgs.gov/geology/state/state.php?state=NV>

A hobbyist attempt to create a database of collecting sites. Click on “Collecting Locations”, then “Download Google Earth File”:

<http://www.findingrocks.com/cgi-bin/index.cgi>

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/>

Many folks now have Facebook accounts. It is a fantastic way to stay in touch casually with friends and family, and to share interesting links or information. Facebook is also a great resource for rock and mineral clubs. Many clubs have Facebook pages, enabling them to easily share club information, show news, field trips, links to interesting sites, pictures from various functions, etc. Also, Facebook has a nice discussion mechanism that allows people to discuss various topics. I created a Facebook page for our club, and will publish the information on the website and the newsletter when it is active.

Use the search bar at the top of the page to look for topics: “Gem mineral” “lapidary” “fossil” “gold panning” etc.

Here are some local clubs that have Facebook pages. Feel free to “like” or join the group and say hi.

Nevada County Gem and Mineral Society

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Nevada-County-Gem-and-Mineral-Society/218180284874620>

Sierra Buttes G&MS

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=109552105758940&v=wall>

Generic page for all clubs:

<http://www.facebook.com/RockGemMineralClubs>

Twitter

<http://www.twitter.com>

What the blazes is Twitter? Good question. Twitter is a service that allows a person to “follow” people or organizations. When someone from the organization “tweets” a message, it will show up on whatever app you are using to view Twitter. It is a casual way of spreading information to interested followers. Clubs use it to send out show information, interesting links, etc. The messages are limited to 140 letters, so you have to be brief and concise.

Okay, you are still asking yourself: What the heck is Twitter. I don’t blame you; it is a strange concept. Give it a shot: set up an account (it is free), search for interesting keywords, and “follow” the results. The updates from the organizations will start to show up when the organization tweets.

Be careful: You may find your brain oozing out your ears if you follow too many “Ashton Kutchers”. There is a lot of noise on Twitter. Only follow people and groups you really want to hear from. Feel free to follow @ncgms for the Nevada County Gem and Mineral Society.

Google books

<http://books.google.com/>

Google has been working on an effort to “digitize” or “make available on the internet” all the books in the World. Obviously, they have run in to legal issues with copyrights, but they have an extensive library of books available, and they are all searchable.

Next time you search for something on Google, go to the top bar of the page and click on the “more” link. You will find a “books” link, and you can search for your topic in millions of books. The key strength of this is with old books that are no longer in print, or are otherwise not searchable. Imagine going in to a huge library, and instead of going through aisle after aisle of books looking for a needle in a haystack, you can shout “I want to find a book that has information on Majuba Mountain in Nevada!” and all the books in the library with any mention of Majuba Mountain are instantly placed in your lap on the right page. Wow.

Online Forums

Another great resource on the web is forums. Forums are websites that allow people to discuss various topics. Facebook is fine for casual discussions, but a generic rock and mineral forum can have many more members. You can ask questions, participate in discussions, post items for sale, etc. Forums can be used when a personal touch is required for a question you just can find the answer for.

Collecting:

<http://dirtyrockhounds.proboards.com/>

<http://rockhoundstation1.net/forum/>

Mineral discussions:

<http://www.mindat.org/forum.php>

Lapidary:

<http://www.gemologyonline.com/Forum/phpBB2/index.php>

<http://gemstone.smfforfree4.com/>

<http://rockwerks.freeforums.org/>

Websites:

I specifically left this for the end. There are numerous website scattered across the internet, and most people are familiar with Google / Bing. Here are a few websites that are helpful. Thanks to Dan Chaplin for adding to this list.

Minerals and collecting:

<http://www.mindat.org/index.php>

Mindat.org is a great resource for all things mineral related. There is detailed information on every mineral under the sun, dealers for the mineral, locations, etc.

<http://geology.com/>

Great site for all thing geology and Earth science related. Maps, careers, articles, rock identification images, etc.

<http://www.rockpicks.net/index.htm>

Rockpicks is a website created by a rock enthusiast that tries to list and show collecting sites. It has maps, pictures, tips, etc.

<http://www.rockhounds.com/>

Rock and Gem magazine, online version.

<http://www.nbmgs.unr.edu/Mapping/index.html>

University of Reno geologic mapping page. Great resource for maps and information about Nevada geology.

http://nevada-outback-gems.com/Rockhound/Rockhound_Corner.htm

The Rock Hound's Corner. This site has lots of field reports, general information, pictures, etc. of rock hounding in Nevada and Oregon. This one is written from an enthusiast's perspective, so it is light on technical information.

<http://www.xmission.com/~jbdaniel/locations.htm>

Utah Rockhounding. Great site for rock and fossil collecting in Utah.

Mineral Database sites

<http://www.mineralatlas.com/General%20introduction/frames%20general%20descriptions%20alphabetical.htm>

<http://tinyurl.com/5sobp3a> (shorter alternate)

Mineral Database. Want to know the specific gravity of Armenite? This is the site to check.

<http://mrdata.usgs.gov/mineral-resources/mrds-us.html>

USGS Mineral Resources On-line Spatial Data. MRDS describes metallic and nonmetallic mineral resources throughout the world. Included are deposit name, location, commodity, deposit description, geologic characteristics, production, reserves, resources, and references.

<http://rruff.geo.arizona.edu/doclib/hom/>

Another database of mineral information. This is not a site, but a collection of papers that describe minerals. The papers are in PDF format, and are easy to print. Lots of technical information.

<http://www.galleries.com/minerals/by-name.htm>

Minerals by Name. Not just a mineral classification site, this site also dives in to basic Earth science topics. Not as technical as some of the other sites, but there is lots of information.