

## **Rockhounding, Safety & Public Land Use**

---

A number of rockhounding areas in Central Oregon are accessibly yearlong, except when snow or muddy roads temporarily prevent access. Other sites in higher elevations are completely inaccessible throughout the winter months. Nearly all areas are accessible for at least six months of the year.

### **Rockhounding**

- Semiprecious gemstones, mineral specimens, and common invertebrate fossils (such as snail, clam, and leaf fossils) may be collected from public lands (that are open to rockhounding) in reasonable amounts for personal use.
- The collection of any vertebrate fossils is prohibited without a permit.
- Collecting any rock materials including common invertebrate fossils and petrified wood from public lands for commercial use or barter is prohibited.
- A Federal law passed in 1962 provides for the removal of limited quantities of petrified wood by the general public from public lands administered by the BLM. One person may remove not more than 25 pounds plus one piece per day, but not to exceed 250 pounds per person during each calendar year. Quotas between two or more people may not be pooled to obtain pieces larger than 250 pounds. These limits apply across all BLM-administered lands, not just the Prineville District.
- No mechanized equipment or explosives may be used when rockhounding. Use nonmechanized hand tools such as shovels, picks, chisels, rock hammers, and crowbars.
- The rockhound collection sites described on these web pages are located on public lands, which are managed by the BLM and the USFS.
- Other sites occur on private lands and some designated rockhounding sites have isolated parcels of private land within them. Recognize and abide by posted private land signs. When in doubt of public land ownership, please contact the BLM or the USFS for assistance.
- Some areas on federal lands occur on staked mining claims. The gemstones and other minerals on mining claims are the property of the mining claimant. It is illegal to collect rocks on mining claims without permission from the claim owner.
- Finally, always follow the [Rockhound's Code of Ethics](#). Doing so will help ensure a pleasant experience for all visitors to the public lands.

# Rockhounding, Safety & Public Land Use

## Rockhound's Code of Ethics

Rockhounds, both as individuals and collectively as members of clubs, pride themselves on their good manners in the field. They know that maintaining their good reputation is important in order to keep the welcome mat out at collecting sites. This code of ethics is in general use throughout the rockhounding community and is posted here for your information.

- I will respect both private and public property and will do no rockhounding on privately owned land without the owner's permission.
- I will keep informed on all laws, regulations or rules governing collecting on public lands and will observe them.
- I will, to the best of my ability, ascertain the boundary lines of property on which I plan to collect.
- I will use no firearms or blasting material in rockhounding areas.
- I will cause no willful damage to property of any kind -- fences, signs, building, etc.
- I will leave all gates as found.
- I will build fires in designated or safe places only and will be certain they are completely extinguished before leaving the area.
- I will discard no burning material -- matches, cigarettes, etc.
- I will fill all excavation holes which may be dangerous to people or livestock.
- I will not contaminate wells, creeks, or other water supplies.
- I will cause no willful damage to collecting material and will take home only what I can reasonably use.
- I will support the rockhound project H.E.L.P. (Help Eliminate Litter Please) and will leave all collecting areas devoid of litter regardless of how found.
- I will cooperate with field trip leaders and those in designated authority in all collection areas.
- I will report to my club or federation officers, Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service or other proper authorities, any deposit of petrified wood or other material on public lands which should be protected for the enjoyment of future generations for public educational and scientific purposes.
- I will appreciate and protect our heritage of natural resources.
- I will observe the "Golden Rule," will use "Good Outdoor Manners" and will at all times conduct myself in a manner which will add to the stature and "public image" of rockhounds everywhere.

## Recreational Activities

# Rockhounding, Safety & Public Land Use

## Safety

- Stay out and stay alive; abandoned mines are potential killers. Rotten timbers, open shafts, toxic gases, and a lack of oxygen can be deadly.
- Rockhounding is mostly a rugged and dirty pastime. Clothing, especially footwear, should be serviceable and adequate for hiking in rugged terrain, digging, and weather conditions. Boots are recommended.
- Be prepared for extreme weather conditions including rain or snow at any time of the year. Temperatures in the winter can drop below 0 degrees and summertime temperatures can be over 100 degrees. Carry extra food, water, clothing, fuel and other supplies.
- Always tell someone where you are going and when you plan to be back.
- Always wear proper protective equipment (gloves, safety glasses, etc.) when striking or breaking rocks.
- Rockhounds may unknowingly create hazards through careless digging. Undermining the root of a tree is both destructive and dangerous, as it may cause the tree to fall. Tunneling through unsupported soil or under overhanging banks that may cave in on the digger are unsafe practices. Deep or steep-sided pits or trenches should be filled upon completion of digging, as they pose a hazard to both people and livestock.
- Be aware that the roads leading into the digging sites may be used by heavy trucks carrying logs, gravel, livestock or other products. Travel at your own risk. Unimproved roads can be dangerous to travel when wet, muddy or snowy. Rockhounds should inquire with the BLM or USFS about possible road closures and fire restrictions prior to visiting the rockhounding sites.
- Rattlesnakes may be found in certain areas during the warm months. Watch for them in rock slides, around damp areas, under old buildings, ledges, etc. Prompt medical treatment is always advisable if bitten.
- In the spring, wood ticks are found in sagebrush and timber fringe areas, where they can hang on the tips of bushy twigs and transfer to any person or animal that brushes past. Ticks can carry spotted fever and other infections. They should be removed promptly, and the bites should be treated.
- Protect your pets by keeping them under control at all times.

# **Rockhounding, Safety & Public Land Use**

---

## **Fire Safety**

Fire is an ever-present danger in the dry country east of the Cascades. During particularly dry seasons, the public land agencies may apply fire restrictions to protect users and resources. Check for current fire conditions and rules before venturing out.

### **Contacts:**

Central Oregon Interagency Fire Dispatch Center - (541) 416-6800

Fire precaution level and closures (covers Forest Service, State, and BLM) - (800) 523-4737

Report a Fire - (800) 314-2560

### **Follow safe campfire rules everywhere:**

- When fires are allowed, use existing fire rings or use a metal fire pan with sides that are at least two inches high (a clean oil pan will work). Elevate fire pans on a stable arrangement of rocks to prevent heat from sterilizing the ground.
- Keep your fire small and build your campfire at least 5 feet away from any flammable material (grass, brush, and trees).
- Preserve the natural scenery for everyone and protect wildlife habitat. Do not cut or gather live or dead wood for your campfire -- bring your own wood or charcoal from home. Do not build your campfire against a rock outcrop where a lasting fire scar can form.
- Before you leave your campfire, stir the ashes and coals with water. Keep mixing until you are sure it's out cold! Carefully feel all ashes with bare hands to make sure the fire is out, DEAD OUT!
- Campfires are not an appropriate place to dispose of garbage. Pack your trash and ashes out.

### **Other fire precautions:**

- Keep vehicles off of dry grass and brush -- heat from exhaust systems can start fires.
- Smoke only in vehicles (use ash trays) or in cleared areas devoid of grass, brush, or other flammable materials.
- Be prepared. Carry one gallon of water or a fire extinguisher, an axe and a shovel.

# **Rockhounding, Safety & Public Land Use**

## **Public Land Use**

- Motor vehicle and ATV use is limited to existing or designated routes. Do not travel on primitive roads during wet conditions. In addition to the increased risk of getting stuck, deep rutting is likely to occur and will significantly degrade the quality of the road for other visitors.
- Practice "leave no trace" camping techniques by packing out your trash, burying human waste 6-8 inches deep, and camping in existing primitive sites rather than creating new ones.
- Some rockhounding sites on public lands occur near or adjacent to Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) or Wilderness Areas. WSAs are lands that are under wilderness review.
  - Motorized travel in WSAs is restricted to designated roads. This also applies to bicycles. In Wilderness Areas all mechanized and motorized travel is prohibited.
  - Cutting of live vegetation or standing dead trees and shrubs is not allowed.
  - Rockhounding is restricted to surface collection only. Digging is prohibited.