



John Siefke digs for buried treasure at every opportunity.

Rock Star: John Siefke

We meet near the quietly gurgling sluiceway at Emerald Hollow Mines in Hiddenite. As I shake his calloused hand, I wonder if “The Stones” T-shirt he chose to wear today is more in reference to the fabulous mineral specimens he unearths here daily, than to the British rock band. You see, John Siefke is a man obsessed. For the best part of thirty years, John has been digging around in the sticky red clay of Alexander County at every given opportunity, looking for crystals. But now it seems that the real gem he has been searching for has turned out to be the happiness of others. And he appears to have found it.

How did you end up living in Alexander County and digging around in the bottom of a big hole every day? I ask jokingly. “A year and a half ago, I moved here from Cincinnati, Ohio. But way back in 1991 I went to Hilton Head and they had a rock shop. And I was asking if they knew any place around there to dig. They said that there was place in Hiddenite. And that’s all they told me. Immediately I went and looked it up. We didn’t have the computers back then, so I looked it up on a road map, and I was like ‘There it is!’ So, I left Hilton Head and drove to Hiddenite and stopped here at the Emerald Hollow Mine. I went ‘creeking’ that day. I found the mineral specimens they put in there for the kids to find and enjoy, and even though it wasn’t native stuff that I found first, that got me going!”

“So, then I started digging,” John continues. “I would come down here and do three and four day weekends through the summers for years and years. I actually pulled out these giant, smoky quartz crystals! I brought one of them to show you today. And then I made a decision at that point. I said, ‘I’m going to retire early, move down here, and spend the rest of my life doing this stuff! And spreading the word and showing people.’ It started as rock collecting, but it turned into something completely different. The educational part is there, but it seems like I’ve impacted a lot of people’s lives by the comments that I get on my videos I post. Like people say, ‘Your videos got me up off the couch and I’m out there digging now! I want to thank you for that.’ I get that all the time. And that makes me feel so good and keeps pushing me. It’s like we’re able to give it to the next generation.”

“If you look me up on Facebook, it says I’m in Taylorsville, but I really live down off Rink Dam Road. All the videos I take of my digs are on my page, but I also post them on six other Facebook groups like ‘Rock Hound’ ‘Rock Collectors’ and ones like that. I haven’t sold anything that I’ve found, but I do trade. And what I’ve been doing is—now I’ve got a 14-year-old daughter that is not into this at all—but there are people from all over the world that are, and they connect to me. There was a woman in the Netherlands and she really wanted some of these crystals so I said, ‘I’ll send you some rocks and you just send me stuff from the Netherlands that are like souvenirs from there that I can give to my daughter.’ And this lady was so happy with her crystals! She kept sending us stuff from the Netherlands, and Sweden, and Denmark.

People & Culture
by Layne Hendrickson



A nice double terminated milky quartz crystal.

She was just so tickled by that!”

ered jeans and produces a sizable, light green emerald crystal that is absolutely water-clear. How deep did you have to dig to find that?! I ask in awe. “Eighteen inches to two-foot-deep at best” he replies with a huge smile. “It’s 4.65 carats. I found it three weeks ago. And then I found some little amethyst points down there too. And I’ve been getting tons of red rutile. And I found a nice quartz fragment that had red rutile imbedded in it. Since it was broken, I polished the broken section to provide a little window to view the cherry red rutile crystals imbedded in it. I find all kinds of quartz crystals—scepters, tabbies, twins, triplets. I made nine videos in one day! I found 50 crystals that day!”

So, what gave you the idea to start doing the videos?

I enquire. “I always took a camera with me, and I always took pictures. And I’ve been doing that since the ‘90s. I’d go back and look at the pictures and I’d think, ‘But now days there are videos and that’s so much easier. So, I figured I’d try that. And then I thought ‘Maybe people will like these.’ So, I put them up on Facebook and the response just snowballed! Quickly!”

What has been the most challenging part of your rock hunting quest? I ask. “I guess actually the most challenging part, whether it’s in my personal life, or with others, is just getting people to believe in it. Mike and Dottie Watkins owned this place when I first moved down here. They were always so sweet and

so nice to me. I told them that I’d be back when I retired and they were like ‘Yeah, whatever...’ But I did what I said I was going to do! I told the people that I was going to wake this place up, and that was over a year ago. I would like to somehow turn this into something so my daughter Lexi doesn’t have to put up with the stuff I had to put up with in my old career. Whether she takes this video business and runs with it, and does something with it, or we gather up all these things I’ve found and head to Tucson and sell them and make tens of thousands, I don’t know where it’s going to go. But the whole thing is to show my daughter that hard work pays off, and also to help her through her life, through college or whatever.”

What’s your favorite part? I ask. “I come out here and dig,” John answers after a moment’s reflection. “I think through my problems. There’s nothing better. You can hear the creek and the birds, smell the pines. And of course, there is the thrill of finding things, but lately my favorite part has turned into the videos! The fact that I’m having such a positive effect on peoples’ lives and getting them up off the couch. They’re writing to me, ‘We look forward to your videos up here in the north and we’re snowed in, and you’re the only relief we have!’ It’s almost gone past rock hunting to making people smile. If you can pass on positivity that’s great. And there’s nothing wrong with helping your own karma out! I believe that may be the reason I find such cool rocks. Like I was digging over there. I was actually just spreading out this hole. I hadn’t found any emeralds yet. I had found everything but emeralds. I didn’t expect it. But I’m scratching away in the dirt, and then all of the sudden Mother Nature is like ‘Here.’ And then it was just lying there staring at me! And I was like, ‘Okay, I’ve found six-sided quartz before, I’m not falling for this. But wait a minute, it’s got a flat top like an emerald!’ I put it in my pocket and I ran all the way back to the front office to show everybody!”

“I guess Jason Martin and Dottie Watkins each own half of this place now. And Jason, when I first came down here, he was telling me what he wanted this place to turn into. And I liked what he was saying. He wants us to pass this on to the next generation. You can find amazing things in the ground here! I have posted the videos of me doing it! And now we have something to pass on to the next generation. I told my daughter Lexi about my plan when she was little. Now I can tell her ‘I went out there and chased my dream and you saw it, so you know it can be done.’”

Watch John Siefke unearthing amazing things on his Facebook page.



John had this quartz fragment polished to reveal the hidden world of red rutile within



John Siefke diligently searching for tiny treasures in the sluiceway at Emerald Hollow Mine in Hiddenite

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