

MINERAL COLLECTING CODE OF PRACTICE

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Mineral collecting has been undertaken worldwide for hundreds of years, but has become increasingly difficult in recent years to a number of factors, including:

1. Health and safety issues, and closely related legal and insurance issues, affecting mining companies and landowners
2. Overworking of many sites by increasing numbers of collectors and dealers
3. Different mining methods, resulting in less specimens recovered
4. Mining economics changing, resulting in more rapid and large scale mining methods, and no time for collecting
5. Increased environmental awareness
6. Increased Government regulations (mostly in regards to issues 1 and 5)

Most mineral sites are finite in size and number, and can be important for many reasons besides the minerals. We have no general “right” to collect; in a similar manner to the age-old activities of mining, forestry, hunting and fishing, this activity must be regulated and balanced against environment protection and land-use activities, and is often found wanting. People involved in mineral collecting, as with all the above activities, are too often seen as a collection of greedy earth-rapists and if we wish to continue this activity, especially for oncoming generations, we need a code of practice to indicate our responsibilities to nature and society. Amateur collecting has always been of great importance to professional mineralogy, and this needs publicising. Responsible collecting must balance the scientific, educational and recreational values of mineral collecting with a need for conservation of the resource, plus other

The following is my attempt a first draft for this code, based on some accepted fossil collecting codes (Palaeontological Society, undated; Shepherd, 2003). Please send me any comments and we will see if we can get this improved and into our constitution.

Draft Code-Introduction

Minerals are a key part of our natural heritage and form a major scientific, educational and recreational resource. They are fundamental to understanding the nature and origin of the earth and universe.

Mineral collecting is an activity pursued by many people, for whom their discovery, study and display provides a stimulating experience of the natural world. Aesthetics are more important than science to many collectors, but this does not negate their sample’s potential scientific value. However, the available resource for most collectable minerals is finite and it is only through a prudent approach to collecting that this activity will remain viable for future generations to enjoy.

In most circumstances responsible mineral collecting (see code of good practice below) can offer positive benefits for Earth heritage conservation and the furthering of geological understanding. This is particularly true where the mineral resource is extensive and subject to high levels of natural or artificial degradation, as in eroding coastal sections or active quarries. In such situations minerals can be lost unless collected. The responsible collecting of minerals is therefore an acceptable approach to the sustainable management and safeguard of our mineral heritage.

Irresponsible collecting delivers no scientific gain and is therefore an unacceptable and irreplaceable loss from our mineral heritage. It will pose a clear threat where collectable minerals are rare or limited in extent, as in a cave or a vein. Collecting without proper recording and

curation, inexpert collecting, over-collecting and inappropriate use of power tools and heavy machinery are likely to reduce or even destroy the scientific value of such sites. We should oppose irresponsible mineral collecting especially on sites of scientific interest.

Code of practice

Adopting a responsible approach to collecting is essential for conserving our mineral heritage and maximising its value to science. The basic principles set out below should be followed by all those intending to collect minerals.

1. The principal importance of minerals is for scientific, scholarly, and educational use by both professionals and amateurs. The numbers of specimens of various mineral species vary widely but most are rare and conserving and making available for study significant finds and their contextual data is critical.
2. To leave minerals uncollected assures their degradation and ultimate loss to the scientific and educational world through natural processes of weathering and erosion, or through mining.
3. Collecting - in general, collect only a few representative specimens and obtain these if possible from fallen or loose material. An exception may be when the collectable material will be otherwise destroyed (eg. by mining). Detailed scientific study will require collection of minerals in situ. Specific guidelines should be drawn up for important sites, in conjunction with the land managers.
4. Access and ownership – except for designated fossicking areas, permission to enter private or public land and collect minerals must always be gained and a prospecting licence should be obtained. All relevant government laws and landowners or land manager's directions should be obeyed. A clear agreement should be made over the future ownership of any minerals collected.
5. Site management - avoid undue site disturbance, especially to wildlife, trees, stock and private property. Do not leave the site in an untidy or dangerous condition for those who follow.
6. Recording and curation - always record precisely the locality at which significant minerals are found and record relevant occurrence details. Ensure that these records can be directly related to the specimens concerned (i.e. label or number specimens). Where necessary, seek specialist advice on specimen identification and care (e.g. from local museums).
7. If rare minerals are found, a suitable professional mineralogist should be notified, and representative specimens should be placed in a suitable repository, normally a museum with good curatorial and storage facilities.

References

Shepherd, R. 2003. English Nature - SSSI's & Fossil Collecting Code.

<http://www.discoveringfossils.co.uk/SSSIs%20Fossil%20Code.htm>

Starkey, R., Mineral collecting and conservation. <http://www.russellsoc.org/confreport.doc>

The Paleontological Society (undated). Code Of Fossil Collecting. <http://www.paleosoc.org/pscode.html>