

Reivilo and the Stone-Breakers

by
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There is something almost spiritual about breaking open a rock, the faint wisp of ancient atmosphere rapidly escaping, finally free of its crystal-lined void in which it was trapped for hundreds of millions of years.

Reivilo? Olivier?

I had heard of Pering Mine, probably read about it in the 'Minerals of South Africa' but had only once saw a mineral specimen from this site. So when Ray Biram told me that we had been granted permission by the mine owner to visit the mine, I was ecstatic. I tried finding information on the mine and its minerals on the Internet but came up with precious little except a few pictures of the open cast mine. "Where was Pering?" I thought. I was told that the mine was near a place called Reivilo but I could not find Pering mine on the map. Reivilo was about 70 km west of Vryburg and near to the Taung child fossil site. "Reivilo, what a strange name, was it Italian or Portuguese?" I thought. I was later to learn that the name is Olivier spelt backwards and named so by the original owner of the farm in the area.

Reivilo or Bust

At dawn I left my home at Fourways and drove along deserted country roads through Ventersdorp, Coligny, Vryburg and finally onto Reivilo through Taung. Bruce Cairncross was to travel with me but called just before I left to say that he could not make the trip as he had an emergency at home, I could hear that he was disappointed. I arrived at the mine just after 12PM and within minutes Ludi von Benzing arrived and we stood chatting waiting for the rest of the group to arrive. Due to a mix-up the rest of the group only arrived about an hour later. We were introduced to our custodians, George, Sakkie and Pieter who gave us some background on the mine before we departed for the dumps.



The Open cast mine at Pering. Now closed and partly filled with sulphurous water. White sulphate efflorescence developing from acid mine drainage seeping out from the open pit walls can be seen in the distance

Hammer and Tongs

We drove through the plant and mine areas in the mine minibus looking for good specimen sites. There were so many potential sites that we decided to randomly select one. We were dropped off in an area covered by numerous piles of gray rock. The rock had been dumped by truck and each dump was roughly conical in shape and about 2 to 3 meters high. I made my way towards the dumps and aware of how heavily laden I was with equipment, a 5kg hammer with long handle, two Eastwing geology hammers, gloves, a large plastic box, a bag on my back which contained my water an energy bar tucked away somewhere and an ever essential, espresso coffee maker and small gas burner. Walking over the rock piles was tough going, as the rock was loose and of various sizes and often a sharp piece would penetrate my socks and pierce the skin on my shins. On one occasion I lost my balance and fell, the 5 kg hammer missing my hands by inches as I tried to grapple the sliding rock mass. I located a promising looking area which contained a lot of large boulders with visible crystal lined cavities. I hammered away at one of the boulders and suddenly felt a stinging sensation on my neck and nose as my face was pelted by shards of splintered rock. For a moment I was aware that I was wearing safety glasses but was soon conscious of a deep cut on my nose and a shard of rock embedded in my neck. I pulled on the shard, removing it, and was immediately aware of blood on my hands, neck and nose. This was certainly a lesson for me to always wear safety glasses when using a hammer on rocks.



Fossil ripple marks - evidence of a warm shallow sea that existed here 2 billion years ago. The largest rock is about 5 meters in length

Saddleback Dolomites and other strange things ...

The dolomite crystals found generally covered the specimens almost entirely and are of a pearly luster making them quite attractive and certainly 'collectable'. I found several rather aesthetic pieces varying from about the size of an orange up to that of a football. Honey-brown sphalerite occurs as crustiform and colliform masses with small gray galena cubes either partly coated by dolomite or growing over the dolomite. Minor pyrite sometimes as 'buckshot pyrite' and chalcopyrite is also present. I found a large specimen containing several double terminated clear quartz crystals associated with the typical saddleback dolomite crystals along with a finely disseminated black mineral that appeared to be micro-sphalerite. A few specimens were found containing what appeared to be asphalt or some organic form of carbon sometimes also associated with the quartz - I'd seen similar material from the Wits gold mines. To me this made sense and my theory is that the source of carbon would most likely be from the then prolific stromatolites that once colonised the continental shelf in which these dolomites were deposited.

Murray Skikna was working an area about 10 meters away from me and judging by his "wow!" every few minutes, he must have discovered the 'mother lode'. A few times I heard him crashing to the ground as he tried to negotiate the sliding sharp rocks.

We returned to the same site the following day after a good meal at Reivilo's only restaurant and a good nights rest at the mine's guest house. A truly remarkable visit to this mine which I will not forget in a long time. A special thank you goes to Jeff Leader, General Manager of Pering Mine, our custodians, Sakkie, George and Pieter for their time and patience and to Ray Biram for arranging the visit.



Back Row: The 'Reivilo Stone Breakers' at Pering Mine, June 2003. Left to right: Murray Skikna, Este Steyn, Douw Steyn, Owen Garvie, Ray Biram, Kevin Hean
Front Row: Lynette Dreyer, Allan Fraser
Pering Mine can be seen in the distant background



Murray Skikna proudly displaying some of the spectacular dolomite and sphalerite specimens he found



The author, exhausted and sunburned, but satisfied with the minerals found



Leaving the collecting site, laden with material. Murray is the foreground wearing his helmet backwards, his characteristic trademark.



Pieter, Sakkie and George, our custodians to whom we are forever grateful for their time and patience