

The Ventura Gem & Mineral Society presents: **Rockhound Rambling** The Official Bulletin of the VGMS

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IN THIS ISSUE

- President’s Message
- Editor’s Note/ “Paws on Rocks”
- Clubhouse Search
- Program Review & Schedule
- Field Trips
- 2025 Holiday Party
- Show
- Workshop
- Federation News
- Meeting Minutes
- “Rockhound Ramblings” (Editorials)
- Outreach
- Pebble Pups
- *NEW* Crossword
- Club Business
- Chips and Boulders
- Calendar

2025 ROCKHOUNDS OF THE YEAR



Congratulations to Erin Valenzuela, 2025 Rockhound of the Year, and Valerie Churchill, 2025 Junior Rockhound of the Year!

The VGMS annual Holiday Party was a wonderful way to wrap up 2025 and ring in 2026. To remain an active member and continue enjoying all the club has to offer, please remember to payback your 2026 membership dues. Dues are payable annually on January 1. If you do not renew by February 1, you will incur the new \$5 application fee.

Here’s to another year of great finds, dusty boots, and rocks in our pockets!



VENTURA GEM & MINERAL SOCIETY (VGMS)

P.O. Box 1573, Ventura, CA 93002

Purpose of the VGMS

In a welcoming club environment, VGMS encourages interest in the earth sciences, mineral and fossil collecting, field trips, and the lapidary arts, including jewelry making. Our monthly meetings feature interesting lectures by amateurs and experts. Via facilities in our clubhouse, we offer workshops and opportunities for crafting polished stones, in addition to maintaining a museum and library for educational use. We also sponsor an annual show for members to share their collections and jewelry with the community, during which we award a student scholarship in the Earth sciences.

Club Essentials

Contact

Email: info@vgms.org

Website: www.vgms.org

Annual Membership Dues

First adult member in a household: \$30 new member/\$25 renewal

Subsequent adult member(s): \$15 each

Children ages 5-18: \$15 each, with adult member

Children ages 4 and under: free with adult member

Regular Meeting

7:30-9:30pm at the Poinsettia Pavilion

Santa Paula Room, 3451 Foothill Rd., Ventura, CA 93003

January-October: 4th Wednesday of the month

November-December: 2nd Wednesday of the month

Anyone may attend and is welcome. The December meeting is normally a holiday party.

Board Meeting

7pm via Zoom

First Thursday of the month

Members who wish to attend may write to info@vgms.org to request the Zoom link.

Field Trips

Announced in the bulletin and the regular meeting.

RSVP for field trips at whoscoming.org/vgms

Annual Show

The Club's Annual Gem Show is held the first full weekend in March at the Ventura County Fairgrounds.

Workshop/Museum

11969 N. Creek Rd., Ojai, CA 93023

Open Workshop Day: 3rd Saturday of the month

Certified Member's Workshop: 1st Sunday of the month and 2nd Wednesday of the month

Federation Affiliation

California Federation of Mineralogical Societies (CFMS)

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Photo of the month credit

Photo of the month provided by Jim Brace-Thompson

Club Colors

Blue and gold

2026 Elected Officers

President	John Cook
1st VP, Programs	David Springer
2nd VP, Field Trips	Tyrone LaFay
3rd VP, Show	Diane Cook
Recording Secretary	Sheri Hultman
Treasurer	Celia Churchill
Bulletin Editor	Monika Blackburn
Membership Secretary	Erin Valenzuela
Web Director	Troy Schmidt
Federation Director	Jim Brace-Thompson
Parliamentarian	Nancy Brace-Thompson

2026 Committee Chairs

Ways & Means	Jenifer Russell
Museum	Jim Brace-Thompson and Troy Schmidt
Library	Heather Seaton and Robert Seaton
Historian	Jim Brace-Thompson
Hospitality	Susan Slyker
Pebble Pups	Erin Valenzuela
Junior Rockhounds	Lisa Batchelder-Hetrick
Facilities	Robert Seaton
Stewards	John Cook, Tyrone LaFay, David Springer, and Ron Wise

Note From the Membership Secretary

Just a reminder that 2026 membership dues are now due! We take check, cash, and Zeffy (on our website: <http://vgms.org/membership/>), you can pay at a meeting or workshop day, or mail to the club's P.O. Box. Don't forget the dues were raised this year to \$25 for a single (or first) member and \$15 for additional adults and Pups/Jrs in your family. The deadline to renew without penalty is January 31st so get them in ASAP! Late renewals will have to pay the new member rate (\$5 more) Please when you renew, let us know if you have any changes to your contact info- email, phone, address etc. so we can get the updated member directory out on March 1st. Thanks to all the members who have paid already! You should have received your cards and receipts in the mail - let me know if you have not. Thank you!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

John Cook



Happy New Year, VGMS!

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and is ready for another exciting year with the Ventura Gem & Mineral Society. It was great to see so many familiar

faces at our December Christmas Party. We enjoyed good food, fun conversation, and a wonderful evening celebrating our club and the friendships that make it so special.

One of the highlights of the evening was announcing our Rockhounds of the Year. Congratulations to Erin Valenzuela, our adult Rockhound of the Year, and Valerie Churchill, our Pebble Pup Rockhound of the

Year. Your dedication, enthusiasm, and willingness to help truly represent the spirit of VGMS – we are very proud of you both.

As we move into the new year, we will be gearing up for our March show and other club activities, so there will be plenty of opportunities to get involved. If you have time to volunteer or would like to help with preparations, please feel free to reach out to myself or Show Chair Diane Cook. Your help is always appreciated and makes a real difference.

Also, a friendly reminder that membership dues are due. Please be sure to renew so you can continue to enjoy all that VGMS has to offer.

Here's to a fantastic year ahead filled with great meetings, fun field trips, and lots of beautiful rocks.

Rock on,
John Cook

EDITOR'S NOTE

Monika Blackburn



Is there something you would like to see in the bulletin? If you have any articles, photos, or comments about the bulletin, please email me at vgmseditor@gmail.com.

In this issue, be sure to look out for our very first featured rockhounding hound—Leia, the

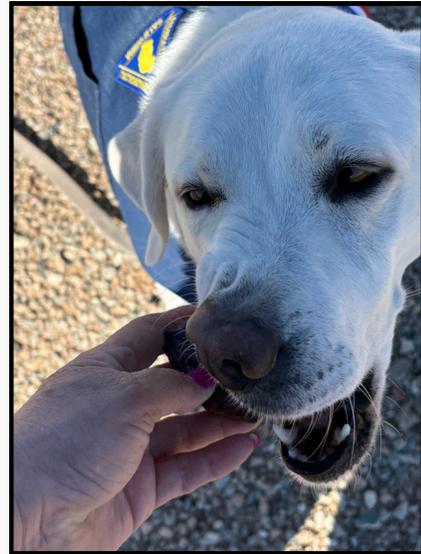
dog of Diane and John Cook! I'd love to receive submissions of your own pets for this new feature, "Paws on the Rocks." We also have items for sale listed in the "Chips and Boulders" section at the end of the newsletter; if you have something club-related to sell, let me know and I'll be happy to include it. And last but not least, don't miss Dan Kitay's crossword in this issue—hopefully the first of many. The answer key can be found at the end. As always, thank you for reading!

Paws on the Rocks: Leia Goes Rockhounding in Quartzsite!

Diane Cook

This month's VGMS rock dog spotlight goes to the Cook's sweet girl, Leia, who joined them on a rockhounding adventure in Quartzsite near Bouse. Wearing her official VGMS vest, Leia was right by our side as we searched the desert floor for hidden treasures.

Not to brag... but she may have been our best finder of the day! Leia proudly posed with a beautiful piece of hematite, clearly pleased with her discovery. Whether she was following scents or just good old rockhound intuition, she proved once again that great finds sometimes come on four legs.



It was a wonderful reminder that our adventures are even better when shared with our furry family members. Way to go, Leia – VGMS is proud of you!

An Update on the Search for a New Home Base

Jim Brace-Thompson

The last couple of months, I've pointed out that we are under serious pressure to find a new home base for our society. We have little over a year before we'll likely need to vacate and make a move into new digs for our workshop studio, museum, library, and storage space. To coordinate the search, an ad hoc committee has been formed consisting of David Springer, Art Lopez, Diane Cook, and me. Happily, we have a promising lead in the works.

In the November 12-25 issue of *The Ventura Breeze*, I published an article telling the community about us and our hunt for a new home. Soon thereafter, we received an email from Dana Benson, the administrative coordinator for The Miracle Center Church of Ventura, which has a 4-acre property with 6 buildings, many with empty rooms seeking to be filled. We jumped as soon as we received this, and by December 5 Dana was giving us a tour of the campus, along with rental rates being requested. The rates on the steep side for what we can afford, but good chemistry has been established, and we hope we may be able to negotiate a win-win. As we left off, Lead Pastor Lonnie McCowan was to meet with their Board before scheduling a meeting with our committee. We're keeping our fingers crossed!



David, Diane, Jim, and Art took a preliminary tour of facilities at Miracle Center Church and now await a meeting with Pastor Lonnie McCowan.

If you would like to join our Facilities Search Committee, we welcome your help. Even if not interested in being on the committee itself, if you have ideas, connections, or knowledge of possible target locations (or knowledge about things like how to apply for grants), we'd love to hear from you. Contact David. This is truly an all-hands-on-deck issue, and the clock is ticking.

PROGRAM REVIEW & UPDATE

David Springer, 1st VP – Programs



January Meeting - Show and Tell

At our membership meeting in the month of January, we continue the tradition of holding a Show and Tell meeting open to all members. Please physically bring with you what you

desire to talk about and approach me with your topic before we start the meeting so I can ensure we have ample time for you during the program. This is always a relaxed and fun meeting where we get to hear from members on the special item or items that they bought, made, collected, etc.

February Meeting - Show

Again, in accordance with tradition, we reserve the February meeting to be all about the upcoming show.

The Show Chair and the various other leads will present to the membership all aspects of the show and solicit your support to volunteer, which is essential in conducting our annual show. Paper sign-up sheets will be available, and for all those who do volunteer, we will be issuing parking permits for the Ventura Fairgrounds parking lot.

Future Programs

For the months of March and beyond I am actively coordinating with several interesting individuals to present on some fresh and fun topics for our 2026 meetings. Stay tuned for updates in the *Rockhound Rambling*.

FIELD TRIPS

Tyrone LaFay, 2nd VP, Field Trips



Trip Report: Tentative Field Trip Schedule for 2026

January 31, 2026: Tajiguas Beach

February (tbd): South Cady Mountains

March 28, 2026: 2nd Annual Rock Yard Tour (Diamond Pacific in Barstow; 2-Sisters in Yermo) in conjunction with the Victor Valley Gem & Mineral Club and Southern Nevada Gem & Mineral Society.

April (tbd): North Cady Mountains (4WD; multi-day weekend trip)

May (tbd): Aerial Acres & Castle Butte

October (tbd): Clear Creek Management Area (AWD; multi-day weekend trip)



Tajiguas Beach Field Trip, 2025

Any changes to the above list, or any additional field trips, will be announced via membership email blasts; and/or at monthly membership meetings; and/or in the monthly newsletter.

*Note: all scheduled VGMS field trips are subject to change.

December 2025 Back Canyon Museum Trip and Rock Sale

David Springer

The author came to learn of the estate that contains the museum in a For Sale lapidary saw ad issued a couple of months earlier. On a return trip from dropping off member Richard Pisor's father's saw to local rockhound genius Wes Lingerfelt up in Nipomo, CA, I phoned the issuer of the ad and he gave us the address where the saw was available to see. We (myself, Ron Wise, and Richard Pisor) all agreed to make this side trip on the way back from Nipomo to Ventura. Using our Google maps, we quickly found the road off Ocean Blvd. in Lompoc, CA, and we turned left down a rural canyon road. We turned into a gated estate and were initially greeted by two roving watch dogs, and thereafter by Tyler Frank, son of decedent Robert Frank, and his amiable neighbor Calvin Mylott. They showed us the gorgeous Diamond Pacific 24" saw and other lapidary items, one of which I purchased a few weeks later (yes, another sphere machine, go figure!). While conversing with Tyler and Calvin, we came to learn they were desirous of selling off most of the accumulated rocks housed in two modified truck containers along with some other lapidary equipment, and I explained that VGMS could probably help them out with that! After some initial inspection, we recognized that most of the rocks were derived likely from local rockhounding trips in Central California. After having looked over the saw and other lapidary equipment, we were invited to visit their museum. We of course said yes and were pointed the way up a short path to a rustic looking building. Needless to say, we were treated to a very unique experience! Afterwards, we all thought this would make a perfect day trip for our club so I made arrangements with Tyler and Calvin to set up a club day.

On Saturday, December 6, 2025, at about 10AM per my arrangement with the estate, a group of about 25 or so VGMS members and a few of their friends gathered at the estate of Robert Frank to attend the rock sale and visit the two museums on site for a planned field trip. The estate is located up San Pasqual Canyon Road outside of Lompoc, CA, hence the given name of the museum, the "Back Canyon" museum. It features a lifelong "collection of collections" associated with the

energetic and curious Robert Frank, son of Harold Frank, the founder and former CEO of Applied Magnetics which had its world headquarters located in Goleta, CA. At one time, Applied Magnetics was the largest employer in Santa Barbara county second only to U.C.S.B. Tyler Frank was not able to attend this event, but neighbors Calvin and his wife Donna were both on site to welcome us and escort us around. They had also set aside some vintage jewelry, antique glassware, and Americana items for us to peruse/purchase along with the rocks and fossils.



Photo 1

The rock sale proceeded briskly with a few dozen avaricious rockhounds packed into a former truck container inspecting shelves and table tops overflowing with rocks of all shapes and sizes, including nice mineral specimens, a shelf of fossils, shelves of whalebone, jaspers, agates, and trays and trays of slabs, etc. (see Photo 1). We learned that Robert had ventured to Quartzsite for a couple of years which accounted for the variety of rocks found. The atmosphere was a generally quiet rumble of laser-focused rockhounds, broken up by an occasional gleeful cry of "Eureka" when

a particularly nice specimen was found. Pricing was \$1/pound for most everything except select specimens that went for a bit more. I do not know what the totals were but comparing the contents of the container before and afterwards, it looks like we cleared out close to 1/3 of the container contents which would equate to at least several hundred pounds of rocks. I myself took home about 100 pounds. We arranged the museum visits to start at 11:45 AM giving most folks about 1.5 hours to peruse the rock piles.

varieties of barbed wire on display with descriptive tags in his museum. In addition, the upper museum featured lots of cast iron Americana such as a huge variety of tools, Franklin Stoves, old washing machines, bullets and shells, cash registers, etc. running from floor to literally hanging down from the ceiling (see Photo 3). On the outside of this upper museum, they had strung a sequence of colorful insulators to create a lattice that served as a fence (see Photo 4). Even the stairways leading between the upper and lower museums were replete with fossil plates of sand dollars and whale bone.



Photo 2

Folks began to break away and head up the path to the first of two museums (see Photo 2). The “building” that comprises the museums were constructed by neighbor Calvin by welding together 6 truck containers, facing the sides with distressed wood, and cleverly hiding the seams using timber. We started in the upper museum which featured probably the largest and most complete collection of colored glass insulators in the world. They reportedly have in their collection in a separate area one very rare glass insulator that is worth \$30,000 alone! I was struck by the sheer size of the barbed wire collection that Robert had amassed. I learned from Calvin that at one point Robert was the president of a Barbed Wire Association, so it explained how he came to possess and recognize the literally hundreds of varieties of barbed wire on display with descriptive tags in his museum. In addition, the upper museum featured one very rare glass insulator that is worth \$30,000 alone! I was struck by the sheer size of the barbed wire collection that Robert had amassed. I learned from Calvin that at one point Robert was the president of a Barbed Wire Association, so it explained how he came to possess and recognize the literally hundreds of



Photo 3



Photo 4

The lower museum was visited next and pretty much blew everyone away. It too had simply too much to grasp in a single visit, as it was stuffed with layers of collections spanning several disciplines. For sure the emphasis was on rock and minerals and fossils, but the

number of colored glass bottles and Native Americana were also emphasized. In one aisle, I looked over a bead collection, an antique canned fruit collection with colorful labels, some antique religious artifacts, an entire bead collection, a marble collection, and it transitioned to an aisle of well-lit colorful poison glass bottles on display (see Photo 5). Having the knowledgeable Calvin Mylott on site was essential to providing the background and details around each exhibit, allowing us to truly understand the breadth of collecting that Robert had been engaged in over his lifespan.

The fossil cabinets and displays were also world-class including dinosaur eggs, a complete Ammolite from Alberta that was likely 2 feet in diameter on a rotating metal display base, two halves of a pyritized ammonite from Volga River, Russia, on a top shelf that must have been close to 18" in diameter, large plates of shell fossils, fish fossils, again including everything dear that we rockhounds have come to appreciate, and too numerous to list. They also included some lovely Arizona Petrified Wood tabletops in a few locations of the museum that were jaw-dropping. The fluorescent display was at one end of the "building" well-disguised and set back with shelves from floor to ceiling against a black backdrop. The overhead lighting included both short and long wave UV and was very high-end such that when the incandescent lighting was shut off, the fluorescent display literally popped with color. The sheer size of the specimens took my breath away ranging upwards from 6 inches to well over 2 feet for some fluorescent specimens (see Photo 7).



Photo 5

The mineral specimen cabinets numbered 6 total and contained world class specimens of fluorite, calcite, etc. mostly in large sizes 8-16 inches, and well-lit. Labels were sparse representing a future opportunity to assist the folks that run this? I saw lots of Chinese mineral specimens that were available nearer to 2010 but are no longer being exported. The floor was also occupied by overflow (see Photo 6). Simply too much to list here.



Photo 7



Photo 6

I am sure everyone had a favorite thing or two that they saw. Following the museum visits, some returned to the rock piles, some pored over the jewelry and glassware, I purchased some beautiful aqua blue glass insulators that were "over stock" for \$1 apiece, and a lovely Murano glass piece to add some color to my sphere collection. I saw lots of high-end jewelry going to several members, and some other folks from elsewhere were loading their truck with 6-foot length panels of stained glass that came from inside the house. Lots of sales going on.

To finish off the day, most of us joined up for a late lunch at the Solvang Brewery, located in Lompoc, CA. The food there was REALLY good where members experienced everything from tri-tip, to brisket, to burgers of different make-up, and platters of different foods, and lots and lots of French fries and onion rings (see Photo 8). The drive home was a familiar buzz of a recent experience doing and seeing what all rockhounds enjoy spending their free time on.



Photo 8

VGMS Holiday Party 2025: The Festive Tradition Continues!

Jim Brace-Thompson

December 10 marked another fine year-end extravaganza for VGMS with our Annual Holiday Party at Poinsettia Pavilion. A beautifully clear night gave us a great view across Pierpont Bay all the way to the Channel Islands and the twinkling lights on oil platforms in between. Per the sign-in sheet, 53 members and guests—48 adults and 5 kids and junior members—came together to enjoy a festive potluck feast, Christmas-themed quizzes, a raffle with nearly a dozen prizes up for grabs, a gift exchange, and grab bags for kids along with a raffle of their own. We applauded Erin Valenzuela as our 2025 Rockhound of the Year and

Valerie C. as Junior Rockhound of the Year. Of course, we also had our fill with a potluck feast fit for kings and queens. (Thanks to Celia and Chris Churchill for preparing the ham and to Terry Wilson for the turkey.) Per usual, the size of the table holding desserts proved too small. Finally, with Michael Rittenberg officiating, we rang out the old and rang in the new officers, although all those faces on stage sure looked familiar. Last, but not least, we recognized the superb guidance David has given us as President as we passed along a Past-President's plaque and gavel. Thank you, David!



53 people filled the Poinsettia Pavilion banquet hall at our annual holiday shindig.



With Erin providing holiday-themed quiz questions, Valerie and Rylee distributed raffle tickets for correct replies.



There were plenty of good eats at the banquet table.



Michael served as our installing officer for our 2026 VGMS Board.



David announced our Rockhounds of the Year: congrats to Erin and Valerie!



David served us well as President, leading us to yet another AFMS All American Club Gold Award as the best rock club in the nation!

VGMS Members Visit Steve Wolfe’s New Mineral Warehouse

Diane Cook

VGMS members were recently invited for a second private visit to mineral vendor Steve Wolfe’s new warehouse, a special opportunity offered by invitation only. The warehouse is filled with an incredible variety of specimens, and everyone who attended had a fantastic time browsing and learning more about Steve’s collection.

If you would like to be included on the list for a future visit, please contact Diane Cook at dianecook.cfms@gmail.com to be added to the invitation list for the next trip.



SHOW

VGMS Demonstrators Shine at the Gold Coast Show

Jim Brace-Thompson

At the Gold Coast Gem Show on November 15-16, VGMS provided a bevy of demonstrators to highlight different aspects of our hobby. David Mautz demoed fossil cleaning and prep. I demoed silver work with precious metal clay. Dick White demoed soft-stone carving. Phyllis White and Renee Frisk-Jones demoed wire-wrap jewelry-making while Elyssa (the third member of a 3-generation team) demoed Kawaii Kandi Corn beading. We were joined by members from other clubs. Thank you, one and all, for sharing aspects of our hobby with the public in ways that capture attention and draw folks in.



For Elyssa, Renee, and Phyllis, jewelry demonstrating is a 3-generation affair.



David coaxes fossil out of matrix at the Gold Coast show.

I spent my time during the show narrowly focused on the demonstrator tables, so I only have second-hand knowledge of all the other fun stuff that was happening. My apologies if I leave anything or anyone out. In addition to our demonstrators, many members contributed to a successful VGMS booth in many ways –from Art and Susan Lopez who organized and ran the booth to Kathryn Davis (who was there as a dealer), Robert Seaton, Sheri Hultman, Celia Churchill, Erin Valenzuela, Jared McGowan, Nancy Brace-Thompson,

Dan Kitay, Leslie Cox, and pebble pups and junior members Skyla, Valerie, Bowie, Lucia, and Rylee. I saw many others, as well, whose names weren't on the log sheet such as, for instance, David Springer who was doing double-duty that weekend as a shop steward at the clubhouse and as a helper at the VGMS booth. And, as always, let's acknowledge T-shirt salesman supreme, Michael Rittenberg, along with Emily Delatorre. Thanks to everyone who helped!



Art and Susan ran the VGMS booth while Lucia and Skyla pitched in with others.



Dick finds creatures hidden within soapstone.



Jared helps kids find just the right colors for dinosaurs.



Jim turns sand dollars from the beach into silver pendants.

Conejo Gem and Mineral Club's 49th Annual Show

Conejo Gem and Mineral Club's 49th Annual Show
"Pageant of a Thousand Gems"

WHEN: April 18 - 19, 2026, Sat 10am-5pm - Sun 10am-4pm.

WHERE: Borchard Community Center, 190 N. Reino Road, Thousand Oaks 91320

Includes: Exhibits of rocks and mineral collections and lapidary; Vendors of minerals, fossils, gems, jewelry; Silent Auction of rocks and minerals in the rough and fossils; Demonstrators of lapidary work; Youth Room with games for prizes; Plant sale; Hourly Raffle. Free entry; Free parking.

For more information about our Club, see www.CGAMC.org

Country Store Update – Donations & Volunteers

Hello to all Country Store donors!

Thank you so much for your continued generosity. At this time, we are limited on storage space, as the kiosk is basically full. If possible, please bring all donations to the fairgrounds on Thursday or Friday, which is our preference. We can accept donations on Saturday or Sunday if that is your only option.

Every item is truly needed and greatly appreciated. As you know, the Country Store—our popular “garage sale” (no used clothing or electronics)—is one of our best fundraisers, made successful by our members’ contributions. We also have many repeat customers each year who look forward to it.

Sue and I have carried the ball for many years and would now like to turn it over to some younger, energetic members. We will absolutely be there to help and guide anyone interested—we just want to share the fun! While it can be hard work at times, it really is enjoyable and rewarding.

If you are interested, please contact Sue Slyker or Shirley Layton. Our phone numbers are listed in the directory. Thank you, and we look forward to seeing you at the show!

Warm regards,
Sue Slyker & Shirley Layton



The Country Store is a perennial favorite at the show.

WORKSHOP HAPPENINGS

Editor’s note: The Workshop Happenings section, formerly dedicated to a written article, will now showcase photos submitted by our readers. Send us your favorite shots— general workshop goings on, projects you’re working on, material that you plan to work with - and we will include them.







FEDERATION NEWS

Keeping Up-to-Date with CFMS

Jim Brace-Thompson, VGMS Federation Director

Here's some of the latest from our umbrella organization, the California Federation of Mineralogical Societies:

- With the new year, officer change forms and dues/insurance are due from all local societies. (Celia has VGMS well in hand with this.)
- The dates are set for the Annual CFMS Show & Convention! It takes place a bit later than usual. Timed to coincide with the annual club show of the hosting Reno Gem & Mineral Society, it's scheduled for September 18-20. Watch this space for details to come, including instructions on how to enter a competitive or noncompetitive exhibit.
- I'm seeking applications from kids for the CFMS Junior Achievement Award. See my accompanying article for full details. The application form is on the CFMS website (<https://cfmsinc.org/juniors-achievement-award/>), and I'll have them on our

take-one tables at our January and February club meetings. The deadline is March 1.

- Camp Paradise has released their 2026 flyer, which I'll have on our take-one table at our next few monthly meetings. This residential workshop retreat offers classes across the full range of lapidary arts, metal work, and jewelry making. You can sign up for one week or two weeks at \$600 per week for tuition, lodging and meals. They'll accept applications starting March 15.
- I'm still seeking donations of raffle prizes (with a value of at least \$75) for the AFMS Endowment Fund Raffle. See details in another article in this issue of *Rockhound Rambling*.

Encourage Kids to Go for the CFMS Junior Achievement Award

Jim Brace-Thompson, CFMS Junior Activities Chair

As I've noted several times, applications are being accepted for the 2026 CFMS Junior Achievement Awards to acknowledge outstanding performance by kids in hobby-related areas and beyond. I've had the application form on our take-one table at our monthly meetings, and I'll continue to place them there at our January and February meetings. It's also posted to the CFMS website (<https://cfmsinc.org/juniors-achievement-award/>).

This award requires an application from the junior member that will be scored against other applications. At the CFMS Convention Awards Banquet, winners receive a Certificate-of-Achievement and \$100. There are two age groups: Pebble Pups (under age 12) and Juniors (12-18). The child's age as of December 31, 2025, determines the group. Anyone winning last year needs to sit out a year to enter again UNLESS s/he has moved up from Pebble Pups to Juniors. Applications should be accompanied by a short cover note by the child highlighting accomplishments to which s/he wishes to draw special attention; basically, "in your own words, tell us where you really shine." Kids then mail or email applications to the CFMS Junior Activities Chair, i.e., me! I'm happy to field questions: jbraceth@roadrunner.com. The deadline is March 1.

Notice of winners, with brief descriptions of accomplishments, will be posted in the CFMS Newsletter, and they'll be honored at the CFMS Convention Awards Banquet. If winners are unable to attend, certificates and checks will be mailed or passed along to a club member in attendance. Several VGMS pebble pups and juniors have won or been runners-up since I began this program six years ago. Do you have rock-crazy kids in your household? Encourage them to go for it!



Whose names will appear on this year's CFMS Jr Achievement Awards?

VGMS Offers a Camp Paradise Scholarship!

Jim Brace-Thompson, VGMS Federation Director

Run by the CFMS Earth Science Studies Committee, Camp Paradise is a residential workshop experience that takes place annually in the wilds of northern California near Clipper Mills. It offers a range of classes on lapidary arts, stone carving, metal work, beading and jewelry making, and more.

The VGMS Board has decided to hold a raffle to award a scholarship for one lucky member to attend Camp Paradise from Sunday, August 23, 2026, to Friday, August 28. VGMS will underwrite the cost for the week, which is \$600.00. (This includes room, board, and classes.) This scholarship does not cover costs for travel to and from Camp Paradise and other miscellaneous expenses, such as any materials fees individual classes may require. Because the Camp Paradise administrators will be holding a space for us, the raffle winner needs to fully commit to attending.

Each raffle ticket costs \$25.00, and you may purchase any quantity. Tickets may be purchased from January to March, with the winner to be drawn at the March member meeting. As with many things in life, there is a hitch. If it turns out there's a total lack of interest and we don't sell at least a dozen tickets, the raffle will be canceled and we'll reimburse anyone who purchased tickets. But based on the interest folks expressed when Nancy and I gave a presentation at our September meeting about our Camp Paradise experiences, I'm hopeful we'll sell an ample number of tickets.



You, too, can attend this class at Camp Paradise—buy your raffle ticket today!

Support the American Federation Endowment Fund

Jim Brace-Thompson, CFMS Chair for AFMS Endowment Fund

The AFMS Endowment Fund supports the free badges our VGMS kids earn, judges training for competitive exhibiting, and more. One way AFMS raises money for this fund is via an annual AFMS Endowment Fund Raffle. You can help! How so?

Make a specimen donation! We invite hobby-related items such as gem, mineral or fossil specimens, metal work projects, jewelry, stone carvings, bead projects, etc. I wish to thank several VGMS members who have already generously provided items. David Springer donated a sphere of fluorescent Avila Beach DeeDeeite. Phyllis White crafted a pendant featuring a Bumblebee Agate cabochon in a sterling silver wire-wrap setting. Diane Cook donated a rhodochrosite pendant in gold-filled wire-wrap setting. And I myself used precious metal clay to craft a silver sand dollar pendant. In addition, Susan Chaisson-Walblom (Antelope Valley Gem & Mineral Club & our CFMS Immediate Past-President) has donated a dinosaur bone pendant in sterling silver.

I'm gathering items within the CFMS, and I welcome additional donations prior to the 2026 MWF-AFMS Show & Convention May 23-24 in St. Charles, Illinois. If you can donate an item, kindly bring it to our January, February, March, or April meeting, along with a brief description and estimated value, or email me (jbraceth@roadrunner.com) to arrange a hand-off. Here's thanking you in advance!



A few of the great items already donated for the 2026 AFMS Endowment Fund Raffle. We invite you, too, to add an item!

MEETING MINUTES

VGMS Board Meeting, December 4, 2025, via Zoom

Called to order at 7:00 PM PST, David Springer presiding

Attendees: David Springer, John Cook, Tyrone LaFay, Diane Cook, Celia Churchill, Monika Blackburn, Erin Valenzuela, Troy Schmidt, Jim Brace-Thompson, Nancy Brace-Thompson, Dick White, Phyllis White, Terry Wilson and Robert Seaton.

Old Business

- Jim will put the rules together for a Camp Comfort raffle in 2026.
- Clubhouse search - there will be a zoom meeting on Tuesday, December 9th at 7pm right after the show planning meeting. The committee toured the Miracle Center Church on Teloma Dr., Ventura to see if it was viable for the clubhouse. Another option is to speak with Marcus Erickson who owns a ranch and oil museum in Santa Paula.

New Business

- A tree fell on the front fence at the clubhouse. It looks like only the top metal polls need to be replaced. Robert said it would cost about \$100 for replacement supplies. David will email Jeri Cooper at the Ventura County Parks to let her know.
- Another tree needs to be monitored.
- Nancy motioned the board to compensate Jim for mailing the monthly pebble pup challenge with a \$25 saw card. Troy seconded and the board approved.

Officer Reports

- 1st VP - Programs - John Cook
 - Next meeting is the Holiday Party at Poinsettia Pavilion. Set-up is at 5:30pm, pot-luck dinner is at 6:30pm. There will be a gift exchange (worth \$15-\$20) and a raffle. Plus, a kids raffle and prizes.
- 2nd VP - Field Trips - Tyrone LaFay
 - Fieldtrip on 12/6/25 from 10:00am to 2:00pm to the Tyler Frank Estate in Lompoc for a rock sale and to see the private museum.
- 3rd VP, Show Chair, Diane Cook:
 - Next show planning meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 9th at 6pm. Jim and Diane will meet in January to discuss social media publicity.
- Treasurer - Celia Churchill
 - Sent out the budget via email prior to the board meeting. If anyone has outstanding VGMS expenses for 2025 please send them to Celia before December 20,2025, for payment. Celia motioned the board to pay for previous bought new Nova wheels. Troy seconded and the board approved.
- Secretary - Sheri Hultman (absent) - Nancy took minutes.
- Web Director - Troy Schmidt
 - Website is now up to date. Troy asked if there were stewards for the January workshops. David will get back to Troy.
- Membership Secretary - Erin Valenzuela
 - There were 5 adults and one pebble pup to vote in as new members. Celia made the motion, Diane seconded, and the board approved. Erin emailed the board members after the meeting saying she missed one new member at the board meeting and to vote on that member. Via email the board approved the missed new member.

- Federation Director - Jim Brace-Thompson
 - Jim Brace-Thompson – the next CFMS show is tentatively planned for Reno in September 2026. A CFMA directors' Zoom meeting might be held in June 2026. Jim is accepting donations for the AFMS raffle.
- Bulletin Editor - Monika Blackburn (absent)
 - The November/December bulletin will be coming out on Sunday, 12/7/25. Bulletin deadline for next issue is January 10, 2026.
- Parliamentarian/Scholarship - Nancy Brace-Thompson
 - Nancy Brace-Thompson – The scholarship deadline is January 16, 2026.

Committee Reports

- Pebble Pups - Erin Valenzuela
 - The next meeting will be 12/13/25 at 10am at the clubhouse. It will be a holiday party, and Juniors are invited.
- Juniors - Lisa Batchelder-Hetrick (absent):
 - Nothing to report.
- Ways and Means- Jenifer Russell (absent):
 - Nothing to report.
- Museum - Troy Schmidt:
 - At the Sunday workshop on December 25, 2025, Troy will be adding some new labels and taking pictures on minerals.
- Educational Outreach - Jim Brace-Thompson
 - Ventura Charter Eco Fest will be on April 26, 2026. Tentative Moorpark Flory Elementary Science night planned for February 26, 2026.
- Archivist/Historian: Jim Brace-Thompson
 - Nothing to Report
- Librarian - Heather & Robert Seaton:
 - Steve Hardinger's new book is now in the library.
- Facility Maintenance - Robert Seaton
 - Fixing the fence (covered in new business) and fixing the saw room door.
- Stewards - Ron Wise, John Cook, Tyrone LaFay and David Springer:
 - Robert will buy new kitty litter for the saw room. Jim will donate a bag of kitty litter.

With no further business, President David Springer adjourned the meeting at 8:25pm.

Next Board Meeting: January 8, 2026, at 7 pm via Zoom.

Next Membership Meeting: January 28, 2026, at 7:30 pm at Poinsettia Pavilion, Ventura.

Respectfully submitted on December 12, 2025, by Nancy Brace-Thompson for Sheri Hultman, Recording Secretary.

VGMS General Meeting, December 10, 2025, at the Poinsettia Pavilion

Called to order at 6:30 PM PST, David Springer, Presiding
7:00 PM – 7:30 PM was social time.

Welcome to the Holiday Party!

Old Business

- Michael Rittenberg installed the 2026 Board:
 - President: John Cook
 - First VP of Programs: David Springer
 - Second VP of Field Trips: Tyrone LaFay
 - Third VP Show Chair: Diane Cook
 - Secretary: Sheri Hultman
 - Treasurer: Celia Churchill
 - Bulletin Editor: Monika Blackburn
 - Membership Secretary: Erin Valenzuela
 - Federation Director: Jim Brace-Thompson
 - Web Director: Troy Schmidt
 - Parliamentarian: Nancy Brace-Thompson

New Business

- Rockhound of the year Pebble Pup/Junior was Valerie Churchill.
- Rockhound of the year Adult was Erin Valenzuela.
- Robert will have Monika send out an email about having a case at the library about our show.

We had a great holiday dinner with turkey and ham provided by the club and members brought side dishes and desserts. There was a raffle and white elephant game played.

Next members meeting is Wednesday, January 28, 2026, at 7:30 at Poinsettia Pavilion.

Erin Valenzuela motioned to adjourn the meeting. Jen Russell seconded. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted on December 31, 2025, by Sheri Hultman, Recording Secretary.

VGMS Board Meeting, January 8, 2026, via Zoom

Called to order at 7:03 PM PST, John Cook presiding

Attendees: David Springer, John & Diane Cook, Sheri Hultman, Robert Seaton, Celia Churchill, Terry Wilson, Lisa Batchelder, Erin Valenzuela, Jim and Nance Brace-Thompson, Monika Blackburn, Tyrone LaFay, Dick and Phyllis White, Troy Schmidt and Shirley Layton.

David Springer motioned to approve the December 4, 2025 Board Meeting minutes as they are printed in the bulletin. Erin Valenzuela seconded. Motion passed.

Old Business

- David Springer motioned that VGMS would be willing to pay up to \$300 toward Camp Paradise, if not enough raffle tickets are sold to cover the cost. Nancy Brace-Thompson seconded. Motion passed. Jim will make a flyer and put something in the bulletin. The drawing will be done at the March Members meeting. Jim and Nancy will make the tickets.

New Business

- David Springer received a donation from an old Oxnard club member. It was a slant cabber, tile saw, and dop pot. David Springer motioned to sell all three items. Monika Blackburn seconded. Motion passed. Watch for them to be listed in the Chips and Boulders section in the newsletter.
- Website password will remain the same for now.

Officer Reports

- 1st VP - Programs - David Springer
 - January meeting will be Show & Tell.
 - February meeting will be all about the March show.
 - May meeting will be a Silent Auction.
 - David is working on the line up for the rest of the year.
- 2nd VP - Field Trips - Tyrone LaFay
 - January 31 will be the rescheduled Tiguas Beach field trip.
 - Tyrone has planned 6 field trips for the year- he will put the information in the upcoming newsletter. He is waiting to hear if Conejo's field trip lead will plan any trips. Oxnard does not have anyone.
- 3rd VP - Show- Diane Cook
 - March Show meeting 1/13/26 at 7pm on Zoom.
 - Vendor contracts are being returned.
- Treasurer -Celia Churchill
 - Celia will have a budget done by 1/22/26. She will email it out for the board to review.
- Secretary - Sheri Hultman
 - Nothing to report.
- Web Director - Troy Schmidt
 - Exhibitor applications on the website in the members' area but will also be added to an area where non-members will have access.
 - Troy has added an index of the club's rocks. He is working on a fossil and mineral index.
 - We will need to have a new credit card to pay for our website by July.
 - Update website with new membership rates and Tyrone is no longer a steward, but Robert is one now.
- Membership Secretary - Erin Valenzuela
 - Erin Valenzuela motioned to accept new members; Rebecca Youhanaie, Mary Maler Clark, Grant Clark, Nathaniel Cummings and Eleni Kouvaras. David Springer seconded. The motion passed.
 - After the above were voted in, we have 60 Adult members, 13 Pebble Pups and 2 Junior members. Total 70 members.
 - Diane will work on updating the By-Laws and the Handbook.
- Federation Director - Jim Brace-Thompson
 - Celia has already taken care of the dues, insurance and officer change forms.
 - Dates for the CFMS show have been set. It will be in Reno, September 18-20.
 - All the forms are ready; Diane just needs to get them approved at the next board meeting.
 - Applications for the CFMS Jr. Achievement award are being accepted.
 - March 15 is when Camp Paradise officially opens to accept applications. Jim will bring flyers to our next meeting.
 - Jim is still seeking donations for the AFMS endowment fund raffle. Thank you to David, Phyllis, Diane, and Jim for donations.
- Bulletin Editor - Monika Blackburn
 - Deadline for newsletter is the 10th of the month, vgmseditor@gmail.com.
 - Monika and Erin will work on recreating the birthday list. The current version got corrupted.

Officer Reports cont.'d

- Parliamentarian/Scholarship - Nancy Brace-Thompson
 - The scholarship due date is next Friday. We have one applicant. The committee will be Nancy, Diane, Sheri and David.
 - If Nancy doesn't hear from the professors by Monday, she will give them a nudge. We don't always award if none are qualified.

Committee Reports

- Workshop New Home - David Springer, Art Lopez, and Jim Brace-Thompson
 - Meeting next Tuesday January 13 after the show meeting.
 - Following up on leads and they could use more help.
- Pebble Pups - Erin Valenzuela
 - Still working on the Alf Museum visit, maybe in summer.
 - Jan. 25 will be the next meeting. Topic will be decided.
 - Feb. meeting will be to work on our new case for the show.
 - The March meeting will be at the show. The Valley Prospectors are going to do a gold panning class and also bring a metal detector.
- Juniors - Lisa Batchelder-Hetrick and Erin Valenzuela
 - Future meetings will be done quarterly.
 - Possibly a field trip to the LANHM to see "Unearthed Raw Beauty" exhibit.
 - The La Brea Tar Pits are doing some pay to dig experiences, possible field trip.
 - Lucia and some other students have started a paleontology club at her school. Lisa would like to bring that group of students to one of our meetings.
- Museum - Troy Schmidt
 - Over the last 6 months, Troy has been adding our catalogue to one large file where he can add photos. So far 1545 specimens have been added.
 - He has already added to the website item names, numbers, and locations. He is working on photographing the items.
 - He is happy to give the board and anyone who needs access a tour.
- Educational Outreach - Jim Brace-Thompson
 - Jan. 18, we will be putting a display into the E.P. Foster Library about our upcoming show.
 - Feb. 26, science night at Floray Elementary School. We will be doing the Magic Magnetic Minerals.
 - March 19, family science night at Oceanview Elementary School. No theme yet.
 - April 26, Ventura Charter School will be holding their Eco. Fest. We will do California Dinosaurs.
 - Jim needs volunteers. John will help Feb. 26 and Erin will help March 19. Jim will put out in an upcoming bulletin.
 - He is expecting more requests.
- Historian/Archivist - Jim Brace-Thompson
 - Our 2025 archive binder and our newsletter archive are ready to put in the cabinet at the clubhouse.
 - Rock and Gem Magazine are interested in Jim doing an article for their June issue on the history of our club. If anyone wants to help please let Jim know.
- Librarians - Heather (absent) & Robert Seaton
 - Nothing to report.
- Clubhouse Maintenance: Robert Seaton
 - Drainage was fixed behind the clubhouse. It flooded by the back stairs.
 - Robert replaced beam for the saw room.
 - Roof is still clean.
 - We will have some weeding to do in Feb. and/or March.
 - Robert and another member put in a rain gutter over the front door.

Committee Reports cont.'d

- Stewards - John Cook, Ron Wise (absent), Robert Seaton & David Springer
 - David and Robert will cover clubhouse days, Feb. 1 and Feb. 21.
 - Diane will get an updated list of certified members and Erin will get an updated list of current members.
 - Jim would like to see if current stewards could takeover writing about the workshops. David and John will help do that.
 - David will reach out to the county again, but if he doesn't hear anything, they will fix the fence.

David Springer motions to adjourn the meeting. Troy Schmidt seconded. Motion passed at 7:46pm.

Next Board Meeting: February 5, 2026, at 7 pm

Next Membership Meeting: January 28, 2026, at 7:30 pm

Respectfully submitted on January 24, 2026, by Sheri Hultman, Recording Secretary.

ROCKHOUND RAMBLINGS

Crappy Urban Collecting in Scotland Walking in the footsteps of paleontological history!

Jim Brace-Thompson

Traveling a quarter of the way around the world? Don't forget to pack your trusty knapsack! Fossils are where you find them. And find them we did while visiting my daughter's family in Edinburgh, Scotland, over the holidays. While Nancy took daughter Hannah and granddaughter Clementine Christmas shopping, I boarded a city bus with son-in-law Peter and grandson Lukáš for an adventure in urban collecting. After a transfer to another bus and a short walk down steep stone steps, we found ourselves at our destination: the highly built-up harbor at Wardie Bay (AKA, Wardie shore) in Granton, north of the main city of Edinburgh on the southern shore of the Firth of Forth.



Wardie shore features urban collecting with a backdrop of high rises as you roam a beach accessible only at low tide.

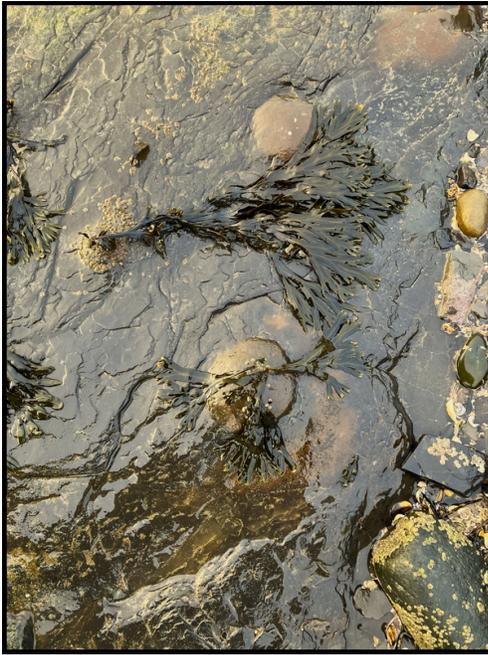


Peter and Lukáš make their way to Wardie shore at Granton Harbour.

During the Victorian period, paleontologists had a field day here, literally. At low tide, black oil shales of the lower Carboniferous Period may be observed as a flat platform slippery with seaweed. Say hello to the 325-million-year-old lacustrine deposits of Wardie Shale. In this and other formations to the west of Wardie pier and Granton Harbour (where quarrying once took place), paleontologists have been pulling out fossils since the 1830s. While fossil leaves and woody bits, shrimp, and even a rare tetrapod have been unearthed, fish are the main attraction. 18 species, including a rare fossil shark fauna, have been identified.

The fossils come from the same period as the famous coal measures at Mazon Creek, Illinois, where I collected as a kid. It's believed conditions here were somewhat similar, namely a marginal environment with a deep tropical lake or lagoon of brackish water at the edge of a sea, where thick black mud accumulated. Freshwater alternated with saltwater during occasional marine intrusions. Just as at Mazon Creek, the resulting Wardie Shale abounds in round rusty-red siderite (ironstone) concretions. But while the Illinois concretions contain a huge variety of fossils (fern fronds, worms, shrimp and horseshoe crabs, jellyfish, etc., etc.) those at Wardie shore are, well, crappy. Their primary contents? Coprolites.

Coprolites? Crap. Turds. Fossil poo presumed to be of sharks and all those other fish Victorian scientists found. Shark poo has a distinctive spiral pattern and may contain fish scales and bones visible under magnification. Some of these concretions are said to yield fish fossils, but the vast majority (as I can attest) contain only spiral coprolites.



Fossil-bearing siderite concretions can be seen in place in the Wardie Shale, but resist the urge to pry them out! No active digging or excavating is allowed here.

For such a wee site hemmed in by urban development, Wardie shore wears big shoes in paleontological history. Those Victorian paleontologists prospecting the locality included none other than William Buckland, the first person to name a dinosaur. He also coined the term “coprolite” in 1829 upon examining “bezoar stones” collected by Mary Anning in southern England. Apparently, they held a fascination for him, especially those he collected in 1834 at Wardie shore. He had an end table inlaid with these concretions that had been cut and polished. While he kept it prominently displayed in his drawing room, it’s now on display at the Lyme Regis Museum.

When these concretions are sliced in half and polished, distinctive cracks filled with minerals surround the coprolites at the center, giving them a look much like septarian nodules. The cracks are in-filled with pyrite, giving a nice shiny golden appearance. Those cracks radiating out from the coprolites also give such specimens their nickname of “beetle stones.” Cut-and-polished specimens can be had online or in rock shops for as little as \$25 for half a concretion.

The years since the Victorian heyday have seen a lot of urban sprawl, reducing the fossil site to something of a postage stamp of its former self. And in 1985, the National Museum of Scotland took out a huge section of the shale to wade through back in the research labs. The locality is now a “Site of Special Scientific Interest.” No hammering or chiseling within the rocks, and if you find something big and important, you better report it, not collect it. However, you are allowed to pick up and keep anything loose on the beach, and this includes those siderite concretions.



While you can't excavate at Wardie shores, you're free to take home loose bits of slabs and concretions.

The locality continues to hold significance. Even famed University of Edinburgh paleontologist Steve Brusatte has commented on collecting here. He brings first-year Earth science students to teach the fundamentals of rock observation and description. On a “Fossil Friday,” he posted on Instagram, “a shout-out to some of the less celebrated fossils. Ones that are often ignored, even mocked. Said, by some, to be disgusting... preserved in abundance right here within the Edinburgh city limits, at Wardie Bay. The world’s most famous prehistoric latrine, where countless Carboniferous-aged fishes made their deposits...” I don’t know if he’s part of the team, but I’ve heard that paleontologists with the National Museum of Scotland are planning to CT-scan some of the concretions, hoping for 3D images of any fish remains contained within. So research continues from this tiny city beach now tucked between concrete.

Appropriately enough for a site known for coprolites, in days gone by raw sewage was apparently pumped directly into Wardie Bay here. In fact, a 1985 publication advises “any nodules should be boiled before breaking open to remove effluent.” Effluent. Such a polite British way to put it. Thankfully, sewage discharge has been halted and a lot of clean-up has occurred. In fact, the beach is now considered a swimming beach, and we saw several folks partaking, even in late December temperatures, while several families gathered on the shoreline along with dog owners and one lone man with a campfire.



Success! And yes, it is what it looks like: 325-million-year-old fossil shark poo in one siderite concretion.



Here's one big reason this fossil site remained unexploited for many years: raw sewage once flowed from this outlet! (Appropriate, I suppose, for a site that yields coprolites.)



This highly polished “beetle stone” was purchased from Mr. Wood’s Fossils and offer proof that it is indeed possible to polish a turd.

We managed to fill my knapsack with 20 concretions. While it’s rumored some concretions here hold fossil fish, the vast majority hold shark coprolites, and that’s what we found while hammering them open back at Hannah and Peter’s flat. Some split evenly, showing coprolites that clearly look like poo; others split transversely, showing what looks like a belly button of a spiral coprolite in cross section. Next time, I promised Lukáš, we’ll go someplace where the fossils aren’t so crappy.

And so we did. While still in Scotland we visited both Mr. Wood’s Fossils shop in Edinburgh and Caledonian Rock Shop in Glasgow. We found fossils-a-plenty at Mr. Wood’s (including a cut-and-polished Wardie shore coprolite concretion) and lots and lots of Scottish agates in Glasgow. Heading to Scotland? Call me for directions!



A peek inside Glasgow's Caledonian Rock Shop.

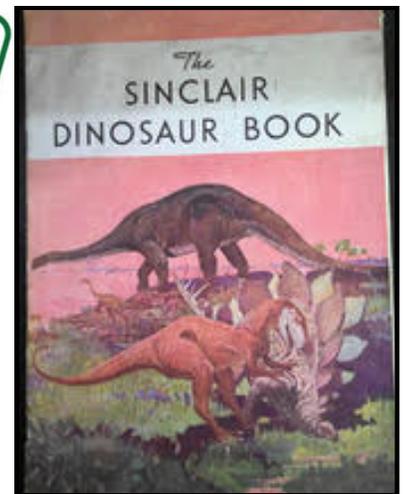


Mr. Wood's Fossils remains as busy as ever in the heart of historic Edinburgh.

What's up with you and Sinclair Gas Stations?

Erin Valenzuela

Henry Sinclair was a young druggist at the turn-of-the-century who took a gamble early in the beginning of the American oil industry. By the age of 31, he was the richest man in Kansas. In 1916, he formed the Sinclair Oil Corporation out of 11 smaller companies that he had acquired. By the 1920s, Sinclair was the 7th largest oil company in the world. In the 1930s, Sinclair Oil ad execs came up with a clever way to promote their lubricants, which the public believed to have been formed when dinosaurs ruled the Earth. A dozen dinosaurs were originally used in brochures, signs, stamps, and more, but it was the green Apatosaurus who captured the hearts of Americans. That famous green dinosaur is still used today in advertising and at Sinclair gas stations around the country. Sinclair Oil was one of the sponsors that the famed early American paleontologist Barnum Brown used to fund his dinosaur digs in Wyoming. It turned into a mutually beneficial relationship between Sinclair and Brown. When Sinclair debuted their new dinosaur logo at the 1934 World's Fair, Brown wrote their brochure—"The Sinclair Dinosaur Book"—and he also designed other promotional materials. Sinclair funded his entire 1934 fieldwork, you guessed it, working on a sauropod quarry. A few years later, Sinclair Oil gave money to Roland T. Bird—Brown's successor at the American



The famous logo and a copy of brochure by Paleontologist Barnum Brown

Museum of Natural History—for another sauropod discovery. In 1938, Bird found that the locals in Texas near the Paluxy River had discovered some dinosaur tracks. Bird soon published his description of the first sauropod tracks, possibly made by a Titanosaurus. Two years later, with more Sinclair money, big slabs of rock full of the sauropod tracks were excavated and shipped to a museum in New York.

A life-size Dino (pronounced dye-no) built by famed artist PG Allen was displayed at the 1934 Chicago World's Fair. For the 1965 New York World's Fair Dino and eight of his friends - other dinosaurs, made of fiberglass and equipped with animatronics - traveled down the Hudson River to the "Dinoland Pavilion."



The original Dino sculpture from the 1934 World's Fair

After a three-year, 1,000-mile road show, Dino's animatronics were removed, and he and his original T-Rex friend can be found today at the Dinosaur Valley State Park in Texas. In the 60's large balloon Dinos began appearing in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. In 1975, Dino was made an honorary member of the Museum of Natural History. The Sinclair dinosaur was parodied in the Pixar movie Cars with their Dinoco brand and Sinclair was the last name of the main characters in ABC's TV show Dinosaurs. Around the same time fiberglass dinosaurs began appearing at gas stations around the country and are still a favorite today.

In the *Why Dinosaurs?* documentary, Tony and James Pinto meet Erin, a cool Sinclair-loving mom from Utah whose Instagram is @dino_sitting. She has sat on 194 Sinclair dinosaurs, got to hold the Sinclair Dino balloon at the Macy's Parade, and even has one at her house that she decorates for holidays. It was lovely meeting her at the premiere and following her on Instagram. Since then (circa November 2024), I have taken 26 Sinclair Dino selfies in California, Nevada, and Tennessee. I have dragged family, friends, and gem club members along with me searching for gas stations and taking photos. Others have sent me photos and locations from their adventures. Sinclair Oil Corporation has liked and commented on a few of my posts! People



Selfie in San Diego



Erin, Celia and Diane in Reno. CFMS Show recon and Sinclair Dino hunters

sometimes ask why I like looking for Sinclair Dinos... I think it might be a combo of my love for dinosaurs and my former life working at an oil museum. I loved the science aspect of my job but also enjoyed learning about the oil history. My grandfather was born in Taft and worked in the oil industry, so oil is in my history, too. It's probably a combo of those things, plus it's a fun thing to do and share with the world. I'm excited for more Sinclair Sauropod selfies in 2026 and beyond - let me know if you see Dino on your adventures!

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Educational Outreach is Off-and-Running for 2026! Can you help?

Jim Brace-Thompson, Educational Outreach Chair

Requests for educational outreach from teachers and other groups slowed during the fall, but we're back to a good pace already for 2026. Here's what on the docket so far:

- Sunday, January 18, starting 1:00 PM: install a display illustrating the varied aspects of our hobby at E. P. Foster Library in downtown Ventura. (Display will be in place for 2 months.)
- Thursday, February 26, 6:00-8:00 PM, with set-up starting between 5:00/5:30: run a "Magic Magnetic Minerals" booth for Science Night at Flory Elementary School in Moorpark.
- Thursday, March 19, 5:00-7:00 PM, with set-up between 4:00/4:30: run a booth (theme TBD: Magnetic Minerals? California Dinos? Sand?) for the Ocean View School District's Family STREAM Night at Ocean View Junior High School in Oxnard.
- Sunday, April 26, 11:00 AM - 4:30 PM, with set-up starting around 10:00: run a "California Dinosaurs" booth for Ventura EcoFest at Ventura Charter School, Cameron Street, Ventura.



Our Magic Magnetic Minerals booth seems to attract kids like, well, a magnet!

If you can lend a hand volunteering at any of these educational outreach events, I welcome hearing from you. Email me at jbraceth@roadrunner.com.

PEBBLE PUPS

Erin Valenzuela, Pebble Pups

Our December Meeting was an end of the year celebration. We gave out badges and discussed some things the pups would like to do and badges they need to earn in 2026. My goal is to get have all the pups earn their Rockhound patch- completing 6 badges and on their way to Rockstars! The pups made snowman bead pendants and rock painting picture holders that they could give as gifts or keep for their collections. We finished the meeting with hot chocolate and treats!



Our projects

Our first Pup meeting of the year will be January 25th at 11am. We will be visiting the old standby- the Rocks and Minerals badge and for the pups who have it already they will be working on the Leadership badge by helping with the class and working on our case for the March show. Excited for some cool opportunities and rock adventures for the Pups in 2026!



Pups and their grownups working on the bead snowman jewelry

The Monthly Challenge: Fire Agate Glows Warm for the Winter!

Jim Brace-Thompson

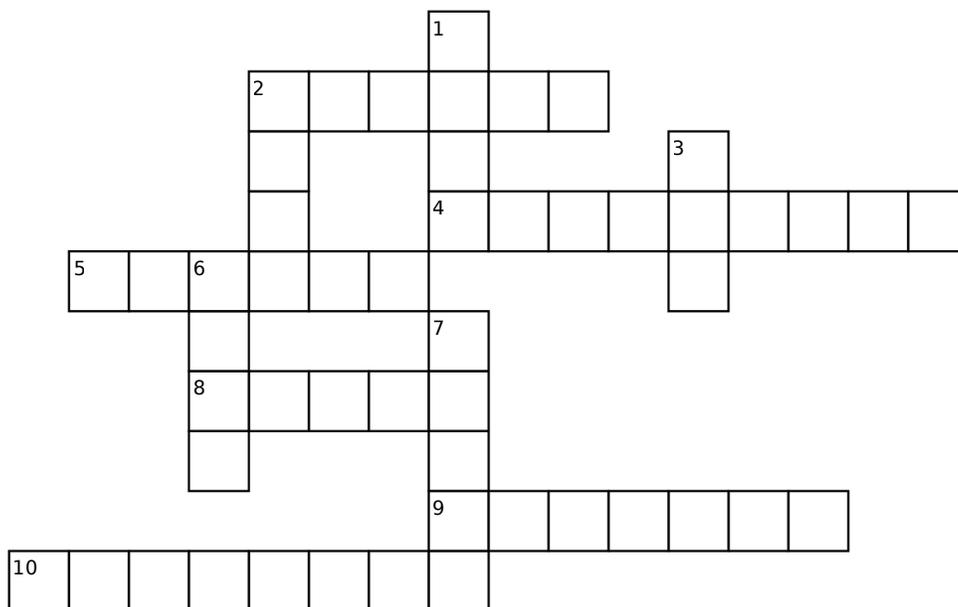
Our final Challenge of 2025 for Pebble Pups and Junior Members was tackled by Ryan, Connor, Wren, Dashed, Bowie, Otto, Oliver, Shea, Izzy, Gabby, Quinn, Lucia, Landon, Lexi, and Skyla. Each successfully identified our featured stone as fire agate from Arizona. Twist and turn it under the sun or a bright lamp, and it glows and flickers like embers in a fireplace to keep us toasty warm during these cold winter months. Connor loved learning that iron oxide is the reason for the shimmer behind the glassy window of agate.

Thank you to all who participated in our Challenges throughout 2025. Here's to testing your know-how in the New Year. So, once again, to all VGMS Pebble Pups and Junior Members: take The Monthly Challenge to test your knowledge while adding free mineral and fossil specimens to your collection. The Challenge is emailed to Pebble Pups and Junior members. If you have kids in the club and you haven't seen The Challenge, alert me (jbraceth@roadrunner.com) to get you on the email list.



For our last Challenge of 2025, kids received fire agate from Arizona.

VGMS Crossword Puzzle #1



Down:

1. abrasive particles used to grind, shape, and polish stones
2. a hardness scale
3. natural hole, pocket, cavity, or hollow area in a rock
6. a flat, relatively thin slice cut from a larger piece of rough rock or mineral
7. a hollow nodule or roundish stone with a cavity filled with crystals

Across:

2. a common rock in which mineral or crystal is embedded in
3. a stone with a color named after it
4. a stone with a color named after it
5. preserved remains, impressions, or other evidence of a plant or animal that lived long ago
8. layered variety of chalcedony, known for its distinctive bands of color and patterns
9. a process of attaching a stone to a stick
10. a chipping or crack in a stone

Submitted by Dan Kitay

Answers on page 32

CLUB BUSINESS

THANK YOU'S

A reminder: This “Thank You!” feature welcomes submissions from all club members. Know of someone who has helped the club or individual members in ways large or small? Everyone loves praise. Look hard for ways to give it to them. Send your praise to vgmseditor@gmail.com.

from Jim Brace-Thompson

Thank you to Art and Susan Lopez for pulling together our VGMS club booth at the Gold Coast Show and to all who helped in that booth and who served in the demonstrator area.

Thank you to last year’s officers and committee chairs—especially David Springer—for guiding us through a fun 2025, and thank you to all folks who have stepped up to guide us through 2026.

Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to another fun Holiday dinner party to close out 2025 in style!

Thank you to those already volunteering to help with educational outreach events this spring. If you, too, can help, contact Jim B-T.

CHIPS AND BOULDERS

This section of the Bulletin is for the sale of hobby-related items, by the club or its members. Please email the editor to advertise.

For sale from recent donation. All proceeds will go to VGMS.

Hi Tech Slant Cabber, complete and with extra discs - \$350. This is a gently used 8” slant cabber made by Hi Tech; it comes in its original box with the original instruction manual. These run off tap water and include their own drip and drain systems. It comes with the standard 4 discs (coarse through fine grits) that come with each purchase but also includes another 6 discs featuring intermediate grits and some extra polishing discs. New these costs \$700, excluding all the extra discs which new would add another \$150. These are great for all forms of cabbing, for polishing flat pieces including the backs of your cabochons and slabs and small end cuts. It takes up very little space and can be packed up and taken with you on your rockhounding journeys.



CLUB CALENDARS

2026 JANUARY

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
			1 Happy Birthday, Lauren Wideman!	2	3	4 Member Workshop, 12 p.m.-3p.m.
5	6	7	8 Happy Birthday, Dick White! Board Meeting, 7 p.m	9	10	11 Happy Birthday, Andy Anderson!
12	13	14 Member Workshop, 2p.m.- 5p.m.	15	16	17 Open Workshop, 9a.m.-12p.m.	18
19	20	21	22 Happy Birthday, Nick Hughes!	23	24	25
26 Happy Birthday, George Christianson!	27	28 Member Meeting, 7:30 p.m.	29	30	31	

2026 FEBRUARY

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1 Member Workshop, 12 p.m.-3p.m.
2	3 Happy Birthday, Steven Schaab!	4 Happy Birthday, Jim Brace Thompson!	5 Board Meeting, 7 p.m	6	7 Happy Birthday, Joneane Neville and Robin Tan!	8
9	10	11 Member Workshop, 2p.m.- 5p.m.	12	13	14	15
16 Happy Birthday, Richard Pisor!	17	18	19	20	21 Happy Birthday, Evi Orologas! Open Workshop, 9a.m.-12p.m.	22
23	24	25 Member Meeting, 7:30 p.m.	26 Happy Birthday, Audrey Harvey!	27	28 Happy Birthday, Terry Wilson!	