

V101 - Rockhounding - AL

KW: When you close your eyes and think of winter, you might conjure thoughts of snowflakes, big coats, and being able to see your breath when you go outside. So...that's not the case in Phoenix.

KW: While we don't have a winter wonderland in which to walk, it *is* the most wonderful time of the year to go on a hike or spend more time outdoors during the day. The reprieve from the heat allows Phoenixians better weather to explore our desert landscape.

KW: And while you're on that hike, you might stumble upon a few cool looking rocks. If you take them home or whip out your phone to search what you've just found, congratulations! You're a rockhound!

KW: No, not Steve Buccemi's character from the 1998 movie Armageddon...

movie clip

KW: But the recreational study and collection of rocks, minerals and gems.

KW: Welcome to Valley 101, an Arizona Republic and azcentral.com podcast where we answer your questions about metro Phoenix. I'm your host, Kaila White. On this week's episode, producer Amanda Luberto will walk you through what rockhounding is, where you can participate and just what you can find around the state.

theme up to fade

AL: My mother doesn't know it...but she's a rockhouser. My whole life it's been a family joke that at the end of any hike, stroll or beach walk, my mother will have a pocket full of cool rocks that she found. She can't help it.

AL: Even sometimes to this day when she is looking for something in her purse, she'll unveil a rock at the bottom and say "Oh I found this and wanted to know what it was so I took it home with me!"

AL: It's very charming and one of my favorite things about her. Sometimes I'll even pick up interesting rocks to text her and ask what it is. Sometimes it's quartz or petrified wood, but oftentimes I'm just picking up lava rock or worse, man made gravel.

AL: One of our listeners, Renee, wanted to know about rockhounding for the gems aspect. They told me that they love southwestern style jewelry and even make some beaded jewelry for fun. The idea of finding their own stones was really enticing to Renee so they were interested in finding out what can be discovered while rockhounding around the area.

music change

AL: Amethyst, Turquoise, Quartz, Jasper and Peridot are some of the most common gems and rocks that you can find in Arizona. But I wanted to know a little more so I called Susan Emberley.

AL: Susan is the general manager and founder of the Four Peaks Mining Company store in Scottsdale. The store sells jewelry, minerals, crystals, rocks, and even has a replica of the Four Peaks Mine that you can walk in. We chatted while she stood behind the counter.

[00:00:58] **Susan:** rock hounding used to be gold mining, basically. So people look for specific rocks based on location. But if you're just a rockhounder and you know that's an aficionado, then you would have a book that says if you go to Kingman, you'll find turquoise. If you go to the four peaks, you'll find the amethyst. Where to find quartz, where to find specific rocks in specific locations doesn't necessarily guarantee that you're going to find those rocks in those locations. But it also helps people. If you have a book on Rock County to know, it's like, say, you're up in the White Mountains, what kind of rocks would be available up there? If you find something, it would help you to identify it. [00:01:46][48.0]

AL: It's sort of like treasure hunting mixed with bird watching.

[00:01:53] **Susan:** Exactly. Except, you're looking down the whole time. [00:01:55][2.6]

AL: So how do you start? Susan suggests getting some books or websites ready that you can use as guides. Like she said, ones that will let you know what to look for in specific areas or something to help identify what you've already found.

AL: Though, if you want to get more serious about it, there are a few more hoops you have to jump through.

[00:02:42] **Susan:** There are rock hunting clubs that will go on specific expeditions. So say, if you wanted to find quartz, you would go up to Payson and there's a diamond point quartz mine up there where you can pay and go in and dig for quartz. So the real serious people know where the specific areas are and they'll go up to Quartzite and you have to pay to get a permit and go out to certain areas to find specific items. [00:03:14][32.5]

AL: Yes, there are rules in the world of rockhounding. A spokesperson for the State Land Department told me that no rockhounding is legal on state trust land. You will need a recreational permit, which you can get online, but you're not allowed to take anything.

AL: This is because the land was granted protection during Statehood and is monetized for the benefit of the trust beneficiaries. The main beneficiary is the K-12 public school system according to the spokesperson.

AL: This might seem like a bummer, but fortunately only ~~around~~ about 13% of land in Arizona falls in this department. Which leaves plenty of space for collecting and scavenging for rocks. Most of this land is regulated by the Bureau of Land Management or the Arizona Forest Service.

AL: But! Even on this land there are rules. According to a brochure on rockhounding that the Arizona Bureau of Land Management directed me to, some restrictions include how much you can collect per day and how you collect it.

AL: For instance, it states that you may collect a reasonable amount which is defined as 25 pounds per day with a total of 250 pounds per year. That still seems like quite a lot! It also says that you cannot use motorized and mechanical devices or explosives to get to your rocks. And that no unnecessary degradation of the public land occurs while removing rocks, minerals or gemstones.

AL: These regulations are set in place for preservation and protection.

AL: You can find the full list of rules by googling Arizona Bureau of Land Management rockhounding and I will make sure to include a link in the article to this episode on azcentral.com.

music change

AL: If you want to safely follow the rules but maybe find something more serious than what you can see on your average hike, you can go on tours with groups like the Four Peaks Mining Company that Susan is a part of.

AL: I asked her to tell me a little more about the mine.

[00:06:45] **Susan:** So our mine was found in the late eighteen hundreds by gold miners that were up there looking for gold. They found quartz quartz can be a precursor to gold or a precursor to amethyst. So when they got all their stuff up there, their donkeys and their meals and their equipment and realized it was quartz, they abandoned the mine and it sat untouched until nineteen twenty five and then it was repurchased again. And so the owner of our store owns the original claim. We mined some of the highest quality amethyst in the world, and it's the only commercially mined gem of this mine in the United States, and it's in between the third and fourth peaks of the Four Peaks Mountains. [00:07:25][40.1]

AL: Kurt Cavano is the one with the original claim. Through his company, you can get a very rare experience.

[00:08:02] **Susan:** we do private tours. ~~We oh, we just started doing them again in September.~~ The Four Peaks Mountains were shut down because of the bushfires for over a year, like a year and a half. We've been closed and we just reopened in September and rebuilt our miner's cabin. So where we were doing tours again now, so there are \$400. You go out to a private ranch on the beeline highway and you take a helicopter up to the mine and the miner takes you inside the mine and you mine for amethyst and keep what you find.

[00:08:34] [32.1]

AL: But if you're looking for this to just be a small hobby and \$400 with a helicopter ride weren't really what you had in mind, here are some of the best areas to find gems, minerals and rocks around Arizona.

AL: Burro Creek in Wickenburg, the Round Mountain area in Duncan, and the Black Hills area in Safford are all free and legal places to rockhound in the state. In these locations you can expect to look for fire agates, jasper, opalite, geodes, and quartz.

theme music starts

AL: As far as tips go, always bring water on a hike, maybe grab a book on rockhounding and...

[00:11:21] **Susan:** and definitely the best thing that I can say is wait till it rains, because then you have all the washes come down and all the rocks come up to the surface. So right after a rain is the best time in Arizona to look for rocks. [00:11:36] [15.3]

theme music up

KW: Thanks so much Amanda. Please be sure to check out the article with this episode on azcentral.com to get the full list of regulations.

KW: Thanks for listening to this episode of Valley 101. If you have other questions about metro Phoenix, visit valley101podcast.com. You can leave your tips for us there. You can also find us on Twitter at [a-z-c-podcasts](https://twitter.com/azc-podcasts).

KW: I'm Kaila White, signing off for this week. Take care.