

## Margaret on rock collecting

In 1988 I became very interested in the geology of South-West England at which time I seriously started my rock collection and built it up over the next fifteen years living in North Devon.

However, my first rock came from Vesuvius, climbing up to the crater in July 1959. Also, I already possessed pre-Cambrian rock from Flinders Range, South Australia which I brought from my first visit in 1976.

I purchased several minerals and collected rocks from various areas of Great Britain and Ireland. Friends and work colleagues got to hear of my hobby and subsequently brought back rocks from their holidays and business trips.

I had a very interesting trip to Australia in 1994 which included visiting Alice Springs, Kings Canyon and Uluru. I didn't take a rock from Uluru (originally Ayers Rock). Several Americans had done so and sent them back having had spells of bad luck. I personally respect the aboriginals and their sacred rock. I had a very nice tour of the limestone quarry at Lilydale, Victoria, which was started by David Mitchell, the father of Dame Nellie Melba the opera singer. Also, a visit to Le Trobe University's geology department escorted by the senior tutor.

I have rocks from places as far away as The Falklands, Ascension Island, Tristan da Cunha, and one from the deep interior of the Rock of Gibraltar, all of which were given to me by military personnel. I also have a rare set (boxed) of lave stones from Mt. Teide, Tenerife.

I do not collect very much in retirement but now that I have settled in my home county, I shall be reading a newly acquired book entitled *Geology of the country around Canterbury and Folkestone*.



## More resources

### Books

*Teach Yourself Geology* by David Rothery

*A Field Manual for the Amateur Geologist: Tools and Activities for Exploring Our Planet* by Alan M Cvcancara

*The Practical Geologist: The Introductory Guide to the Basics of Geology and to Collecting and Identifying Rocks* by Dougal Dixon

*Peterson First Guide to Rocks and Minerals* by Frederick H Pough

*Simon & Schuster's Guide to Rocks & Minerals* by Martin Prinz, George Harlow and Joseph Peters,

### Websites

British Geological Survey: Natural Environment Research Council  
<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/home.html>

The Geological Society  
<http://www.geolsoc.org.uk/gsl/op/%20%3C/society>

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# ROCK COLLECTING

## A 'how to' guide for new collectors



by Margaret Phipps

*Sounding Out Your Heritage*

## Rock collecting as a hobby

Rock collecting is a great hobby because it is easy and inexpensive to do. It also gives you the opportunity to learn a lot about the natural history of the places you live, work or travel as you identify and document the rocks you collect. Rocks have exciting stories to tell about natural occurrences and shifting landscapes. By educating yourself about the different types of minerals, formations and textures, some rocks will lend themselves to stories of volcanic eruptions, epic floods, meteorite impacts, earthquakes, and advancing glaciers. Others may tell you about the lives of animals and about oceans, mountain ranges, and other environments that no longer exist.

Below are some simple tips to help you start your own rock collection – one as unique and interesting as Margaret's!



### Educate yourself

Margaret began her hobby by picking up a book: *British Regional Geology: South-West England* by E A & M C McKeown, M Williams and Edmonds. Living in the south-west at the time, Margaret was able to explore her natural environment in a totally new way as she learned about the local geology.

Similarly, you can learn more about your surrounding landscapes by picking up books at your local library or used book shop. You can also browse the internet for websites that provide basic information about earth science. Some starting points are for you to learn the difference between igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary rocks and the major subdivisions of each of

these rock types. As you learn about the differences in rock composition (what minerals are in a rock) and texture (grain size, layering, etc.), you will be able to tell about the environment in which the rock was formed, how quickly it cooled and the pressures or temperatures the rock has been subjected to. Like Margaret did, you may also want to get a rock identification guide. Margaret uses *Rocks and Minerals of the World* by Rudolf Duda and Lubos Rejl.



### Learn collecting rules

Know the rules and restrictions for collecting rocks. You may find that there are no restrictions on hobby rock collecting on private property if you have permission from the property owner. However, there are usually strict regulations about collecting on public lands.

### Getting started

Margaret began collecting in south-west England while living in Devon. Now, living in Whitstable, she is exploring her local geology using *Geology of the Country Around Canterbury and Folkestone* by G Bisson, B C Worssam and J G O Smart. Like Margaret, you may find it easiest to start collecting close to home, find an example of each most prevalent type and try to identify it. Next, look for rocks at places you visit frequently. Again, you will want to ask permission to before collecting samples.

### Assemble a toolkit

After exploring your local area and picking up easily accessible rocks, you may want to challenge yourself with different locations. In doing so, you may need to assemble a toolkit to break off rock samples. Some useful items include:

- Protective gear: eye protection (especially when hitting rocks or chisels), long pants, sleeved shirts and

gloves

- Hammer: flat chisel end (masonry hammer), pick point (most common with geologists, available at specialty stores), sledge hammer (working with larger rock samples) and chisel
- Shovel
- Hand lens or magnifying glass for looking at minerals in finer grained rocks
- Bucket and some stiff bristle brushes for cleaning off dirty samples
- Plastic or paper bags for storing samples



### Expand your collection

As you become more involved in rock collecting, you may find that others will want to help you expand your collection. Margaret found that when friends and family members often brought you rocks and minerals from their various travels. This enabled her to compile a collection that has rocks from a wide variety of countries.

You may also want to join or start a rock / mineral society in your area. This way you can meet others that share your interest. You may find that societies will have periodic collecting trips to quarries and other difficult to access locations. Members may also be interested in trading or giving away samples.

### Share your knowledge

If you assemble an outstanding collection of rocks, you may want to share it with others. Perhaps you would like to share it with local school or offer to display it at your local library. The best about learning a new hobby, like rock collecting, is to pass on your wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to others!