



AGATIZED CORAL and Other Silicified Fossils

This Fall 2019 exhibit, featuring Florida's state stone, agatized coral, is a diverse and stunning assemblage drawn from the personal collections of experienced Florida geologists Sam Upchurch and Gary Maddox. The display provides a unique opportunity to view an array of rare agatized and silicified corals, and other silicified fossils, and to learn about the local origins, formation, and distribution of these natural wonders.



THE COLLECTORS

SAM UPCHURCH is a former Professor and Chairman of the Geology Department at the University of South Florida in Tampa. He became a collector of minerals and fossils when he was a teen and has been collecting for over 50 years. His expertise is in Florida karst, sedimentology, and geochemistry. In the late 1970s he received a research grant from the State of Florida to develop a method for archaeologists to identify locations in Florida where early Native Americans obtained chert (silicified limestone) for the manufacture of tools such as spear points, arrowheads, and knives/scrapers. This method has been in use for over 30 years by local archaeologists. As part of this work, he and his colleagues discovered the mechanisms of silicification in Florida. Dr. Upchurch has continued to collect and study silicified rocks and fossils, some of which are displayed in this exhibit.



Sam Upchurch talking about a sample of silicified limestone at a quarry in Hernando County, Florida.

GARY MADDOX began collecting minerals in 1966 at the age of eleven. It all started when a new kid moved into his Jacksonville neighborhood from Nebraska with a small box full of colorful agates, jasper, and minerals. Having never seen anything like this before, he immediately developed a strong interest in minerals, and, from there, for geology in general. This interest was further advanced when he joined the Jacksonville Gem & Mineral Society, which provided him with the opportunity to go on numerous field trips throughout north Florida, collecting minerals, fossils, and observing Florida geology first-hand. His interest continued into college where he studied geology and environmental science. Since 1986 he has worked as a hydrogeologist for the State of Florida. In 2003 he began a commercial mining project in south Florida, collecting and preserving calcite-filled clams and other mineralized fossils, which led to dealing in mineral and agate specimens online and at gem and mineral shows as "Apalachee Minerals." (www.apalachee-minerals.com)



Gary Maddox of Apalachee Minerals in Tallahassee, Florida.