

West Texas Wanderers Go Gemstone Hunting April 29th

Take a trip away from the daily hustle-and-bustle of life and enjoy Mason's relaxing, slow-paced lifestyle. The Petroleum Museum is hosting a field trip for West Texas Wanderers to "hunt" for Texas topaz on the **Bar M Ranch**, near Mason, Texas.

Pegmatite-bearing pink granite outcroppings found in Mason County are some of the oldest rocks on planet Earth. The best place in the state for hunters to find quartz crystals and the colorless and light blue varieties of topaz is in Precambrian granite, within the Llano Uplift. Topaz resembles quartz and ranges in color from clear to brown to yellow to sky blue. It is very difficult to find topaz. It occurs in granite outcroppings usually in streambeds and gullies but occasionally can be located atop the ground. As erosion processes wear it down, more and more of the gems are freed and deposited in washes and other low-lying areas.

On Saturday, April 29th West Texas Wanderers will meet on the square in downtown Mason and leave at 9:00 AM. We will have an opportunity to experience a "hunt-all-you-want" day along Honey Creek on the Bar M Ranch (and keep, of course!) what you find. Topaz hunting is a self-guided event at the Bar M. There may be some physical work, and requires patience and luck. Hunters will gain access to Honey Creek and its tributaries on the ranch. Hunters may hike and look on the surface or dig a hole as deep as you care to, then sift the material back into the hole.

Items you will need to hunt topaz are a pick and shovel and a wire screen with about ¼-inch mesh. Small pieces of topaz can sometimes be found by sifting dirt through the screen. Gem and mineral hunting on Bar M Ranch is \$15 per person per day. Equipment (screens and small shovels) rental is available for \$6 per unit per day.

Remember, this is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Hopefully you will find something of value on your screen to take home with you. Bar M Ranch is located about seven miles west of Mason, off Highway 377. Travel time is roughly 4 hours 15 minutes from Midland. And—It's not every day that you can see millions of bats. While we're in the area, we will wander to the nearby **James River Bat Preserve**. Around four million female bats live inside this preserve. The infamous Texas flying mammals can be seen emerging between 6 and 8 PM.



Recently, vineyards have been growing in Mason County. Texas Hill Country is famous for housing some of the best wines around. Mason follows this tradition by housing the award winning wines of Sandstone Cellars Winery. A stop at the Cellars is a absolute must to top off the day.

Mason is an extremely agriculturally based town located on Comanche Creek. The area has flourished for over 150 years. Mason residents take pride in their German heritage and are more than welcome to show Texan hospitality to tourists. A list of accommodations are available by visiting with Carey Behrends at the Petroleum Museum.