New Mexico Fluorite Locations – Found and Lost

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Fluorite in New Mexico is abundant and widespread. Northrop and LaBruzza (1996) cited locations in twenty of New Mexico's thirty-three counties. Mindat lists over 600 sites, prospects, and mines in New Mexico! An article by Simmons (2020) with photographs, is the most comprehensive and current coverage of New Mexico fluorite occurrences, while Bulletin 21 by Rothrock, et. al. (1946) documents the extensive fluorite locations, county-by-county, known at that time. This abstract will be limited to some of the more significant fluorite occurrences that have taken place in the last forty years. Due to the constraints of time and space, only a small portion of New Mexico fluorite locations are provided.

Fluorite, Bohrnstedt Fluorite mine, White Sands Missile Range. 15.2 X 11.5 cm. NMBGMR #16600 Phil Simmons photo.

Possibly the most significant New Mexico fluorite occurrences and specimen recovery event took place in the spring/summer of 2023 at the Blanchard mine in the Hansonburg district near Bingham. Two itinerant mining entrepreneurs (Michael Eagleton & Bradley Culebra) were authorized to collect specimens at the Blanchard mine in March 2023. They subsequently opened a pocket in what had previously been dubbed the 'Eagles Nest'. Two large specimens (over 30 pounds) of stepped, intergrown, green fluorite cubes up to three inches were recovered. Shortly thereafter, the miners showed a third similar specimen to the mine owners (Mike Sanders and Ray DeMark). Shortly thereafter, an agreement was reached between the owners and the miners to excavate specimens from the pocket which was named the 'Ice Cream Igloo Pocket'. Mining started in April and continued into the summer. A large number of specimens were recovered (some were exceptionally large – over 100 pounds). The last depositional stage, less than 1mm, was purple over the dominant crystal color green. The dig was terminated on 22 June with the final recovery of 'The Beast', a specimen weighing approximately 1,100 pounds!

Fluorite, Pine Canyon Dist. 9.0 X 7.9 cm. Mike Sanders specimen. Phil Simmons photo.

Purple octahedral fluorite labeled Catron County, New Mexico, first appeared on the market in the early 1970's. Dick Jones of Casa Grande, Arizona was the primary seller. Following his death in 1982, Robert North and one of the authors (RSD) made a search to locate this occurrence. An additional search of Catron County fluorite locations was also unsuccessful. Doubting the Catron County provenance, North and DeMark searched Dick Jones's claim records at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and suggested a possible location in the Burro Mountains southwest of Silver City in Grant County. Upon investigation of the site by Robert Dickie and one of the authors (RSD), they found this was indeed the location of the elusive 'Catron County' fluorite. Claims on the property had lapsed, so in 1983 they filed a new claim and named it 'Judith Lynn'. A subsequent mechanized (track-hoe) dig at the site in 1994 produced a large volume of fluorite specimens. In 2019, another mechanical dig at the site was completely unproductive, and the area was reclaimed in accordance with U.S. Forest Service directives. Future specimen recovery from the Judith Lynn claim is doubtful.

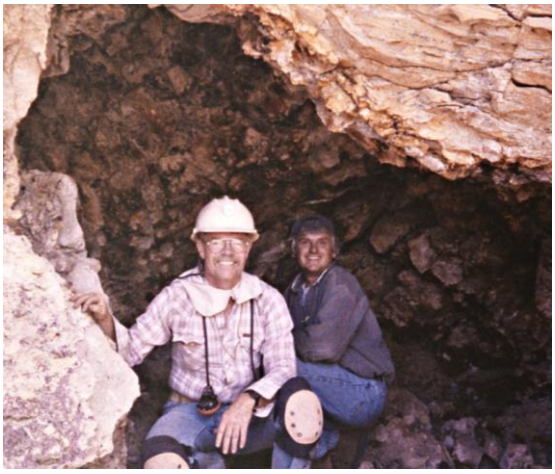
Fluorite on Quartz, Cabresto Creek deposit, Questa Dist. 11.4 X 7.8 cm. Fred Ortega specimen. Phil Simmons photo.

The Tijeras Canyon District, southeast of Albuquerque contains numerous mines rich in fluorite. Access to the mines is restricted due to their location at the north end of the Isleta Pueblo and on Kirtland Air Force Base (AFB). The Galena King mine (a patented claim) is surrounded on three sides by Isleta Pueblo and on the north side of Kirtland Air Force Base (AFB). Collectors in the 1960s and 1970s recovered a large number of specimens from the underground workings. Stepped blue and purple octahedral and cubic fluorite were recovered from veins and seams in Precambrian gneiss. The last stage of deposition on much of the cubic fluorite was an unattractive iron oxide included fluorite layer that detracted from some of the specimens. In 2014, a self-proclaimed group (friends of the Galena King mine), in coordination with Kirtland AFB and Isleta Pueblo, took on the task of closing the two portals to the mine, which remain closed. Other mines in the district include the Highland Mary (aka Frustration) mine and the Lucky Bill (aka Octoroon) mine. The fluorite from these mines is similar to specimens from the Galena King mine.

Fluorite, Mex Tex Mine, Hansonburg Dist. 11.2 X 8.0 cm. Ray DeMark specimen, Phil Simmons photo.

Cookes Peak in Luna County was not well known for specimens prior to the 1950s. A

pocket opened in the Surprise mine by Mark Massis in 1989 yielded many excellent specimens (purple octahedrons up to two inches with a blue cubic core). Subsequent collectors have brought out blue-gray cubic crystals with edges modified by the dodecahedron. The property is currently under claim by Phil Simmons, Erin Delventhal, and others. Recent efforts (2014) by Simmons, Chris Cowan, and Mike Sanders have been very productive, and an exceptional specimen dubbed "The Camel" was recovered. It now resides at the NMBMMR Museum.



Mike Sanders and Vergil Leuth, Bohrnstedt Fluorite Mine, 1999.

The Gila Fluorspar District, in the ruggedly beautiful country of southwest New Mexico, is the home to the first fluorite mine in the state (Foster mine – Rothrock et al., 1946). Fluorite crystals from the Last Chance mine are mostly green octahedrons from 2.0 to 5.0 cm. Unfortunately, most specimens have a final depositional layer of colorless fluorite which detracts from their appearance, but this can be mechanically removed to reveal the saturated green color underneath. Other mines in the district include the Foster, Blue Spar, Watson Mountain, and Turkey Creek. Purple octahedrons are dominant in some of these mines. Jay Rosenbauer and the Hales family have collected extensively in the area and recovered excellent specimens. Mike Sanders pulled out an excellent plate of crystals from "The Cleft" which is above the Last Chance mine. It is now in the NMBMMR museum in Socorro.

The Zuni Mountain District in Cibola County was the largest fluorite producer in the state. Production was primarily in the 1940s and early in the 1950s. (Simmons, 2020). Crystals are generally cubic ranging from 1.0 – 3.0 cm. Purple to blue colors dominate, and the luster is rather dull, although in high luster, smaller crystals infrequently occur. Specimen recovery is mostly from dumps and outcrops in trenches and pits. Mines in the district include the Section 21 and 27, Prospector's, Ponderosa, Mirabal, Bonnekay, and numerous others. Rex Nelson has collected extensively in the district and acquired a comprehensive collection from many of the mines.

Cabresto Creek lies northeast of Questa in Taos County. Fred Ortega was alerted to the area in 2012 by an individual unfamiliar with minerals. Investigation by Fred revealed excellent purple octahedral stepped fluorite crystals averaging 1.5 to 2.5 cm. The crystals are mostly translucent to opaque. The outcrop is above a steep talus slope overlooking the creek. Collecting in the cliff outcrop is not for the faint of heart! Fred and Phil Simmons recovered many specimens on a drusy quartz matrix. Most of the worthwhile specimens are now gone, and further production is doubtful.

The Small Fry deposit/prospect in Rio Arriba County first came to the attention of collectors in the late 1990s. Bingler, E.C. (1968) described the property and was the first to mention the occurrence of fluorite. Pale to moderately dark purple, botryoidal, finely crystalline fluorite

often associated with baryte occurs in veins/seams in fine-grained volcanic rocks.

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