Thundereggs from the Florida Mountains - From Mine to Mantel

Lori Lytle Coleman

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The annual New Mexico Mineral Symposium provides a forum for both professionals and amateurs interested in mineralogy. The meeting allows all to share their cumulative knowledge of mineral occurrences and provides stimulus for mineralogical studies and new mineral discoveries. In addition, the informal atmosphere encourages intimate discussions among all interested in mineralogy and associated fields.

The symposium is organized each year by the Mineral Museum at the New Mexico Bureau of Geology & Mineral Resources.

Abstracts from all prior symposiums are also available: https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/museum/nmms/abstracts

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Thundereggs from the Florida Mountains -From Mine to Mantel

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Introduction

Owner of the Spanish Stirrup Rock Shop, Lori Coleman has been mining thundereggs in the Little Florida Mountain in Luna County, NM fulltime since 2009. Her world-class deposit Lava Cap came onto the collector's scene at the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show in 2010. The first woman keynote speaker at the International Agate Expo in Austin, TX in 2019 she loves to tell her story and passion for mining New Mexico's incredible Thundereggs.

History

Mining in the Little Florida Mountain dates to the early 1900's. The remains of an old Manganese mine is still seen there today. An area known as South Canyon is part of an ancient Rhyolitic Lava Flow. Surface trace materials can be found of agate, thunderegg cores, flow banded rhyolite and common opal. Loris's first claim on BLM (Bureau of Land Management) was filed here. The deposit's name is Lava Cap. To manage the mining most efficiently Lori filed for permits through the NMMM. After securing bonds and writing a mining plan she was permitted to bring in equipment. The rest is history.

What is a Thunderegg

Similar to the well-known geode, a thunderegg has a shell that is rhyolite, making it impossible to simply pop open with a hammer like a geode. It must be cut open with a diamond-bladed rock saw. Thus exposing what makes New Mexico Thundereggs some of the best in the world. Lava Cap is known for its red shell, agate, common opal, quartz, and pseudomorphs after what is suspected calcite with manganese oxide pigments.

Two halves of a thunderegg in visible and ultraviolet light (showing green fluorescence)

Minerals and Fluorescents

Because of the presence of uranium salts in the fluids that precipitated the agate and quartz in these thundereggs, they react to ultraviolet light as pictured above. This makes the Lava Cap Thundereggs highly sought after by collectors of fluorescents.

The Everyday Person

While mining in 30-day stints, Loris's goal is 500-1000 lbs. a day. With this kind of volume, she quickly had to figure out how to market her materials to more than the small group of collectors worldwide. This led to building her world-class facility in Alto, NM where all the thundereggs are processed into decorative and useful objects.

The Facility

Loris's husband, Bruce, is a retired Engineer and designed a world-class processing facility. The

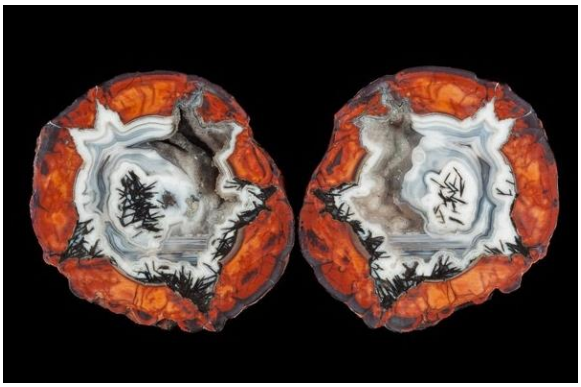
first phase of the processing facility was built in 2018. Each area was designed for the equipment it would hold. There is a saw area, lap area, coring area, sphere area, tumbling area as well as ultrasonic drills and woodworking machines to make stands out of local wood.

Lori loves equipment almost as much as she loves rocks! The shop now measures 160'x50' under one roof. They can produce all their own electric power with the solar panels on the roof. They also catch the rain off the roof to supply the water needed to keep the laps and tumblers going. The crusher allows them to take all the left-over cuttings and supply the tumblers. Thus using 100% of the material mined.

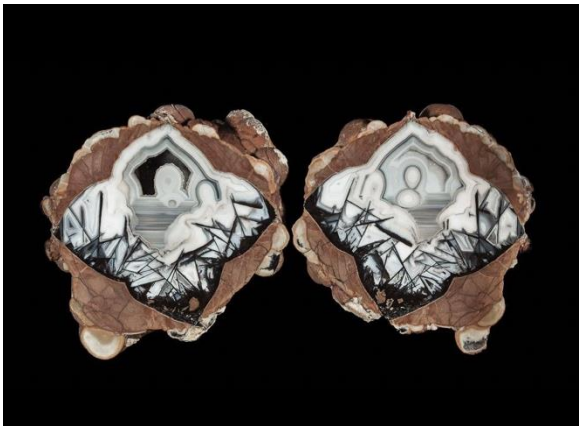
Up to the Mantel

Building a facility just outside of Ruidoso, NM a mountain town tourist mecca was the best business decision Lori & Bruce made. This allowed them to create all sorts of product lines to supply the tourists with all rock related décor for their homes in New Mexico, Texas, Arizona and beyond. From spheres to wine bottle holders, she's got you covered. The rock is mined, processed, and sold here in NM. She is most certainly New Mexico True.

Lori with a particularly large thunderegg.



Lava Cap Thunderegg Pair



Lava Cap Thunderegg Pair with black, tabular pseudomorphs.

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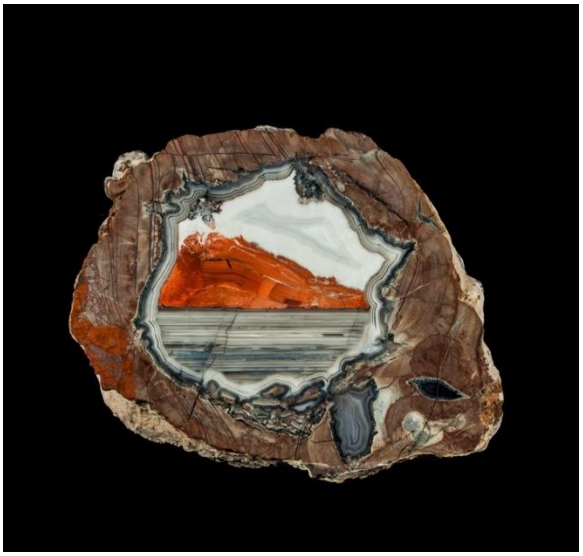

Lava Cap Thunderegg half with Tilt