

WILDACRES RETREAT

by Gary Buhr,

Everett Rock and Gem Club

- The Airbus 321A took off from Seattle and flew 2284 miles to Charlotte, North Carolina. Three time zones later, a reservation at Avis put wheels under Gary Buhr for the northerly drive into the mountains.
- WILDACRES is a conference center offering its facilities to nonprofit groups which conduct educational or cultural programs and seminars. A true retreat! Undisturbed by through traffic or noises of the city, where peace abounds, surrounded by Nature. In 1946, WILDACRES was dedicated by Madolyn and I.D. Blumenthal (1894-1978) to the betterment of human relations and interfaith dialogue. Since 1972, WILDACRES has operated as a public charity. Situated on 1600 acres at an elevation of 3300 feet atop a mountain called Pompey's Knob and located halfway between Asheville and Blowing Rock in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Locally, this area is referred to as Little Switzerland, NC for postal service.
- my precious opportunity was sponsored by AFMS. Dee Holland of Tendoy, ID and Chairman of the AFMS Ad Hoc Judges Training Program invited participants from each of the seven Federations to attend Exhibiting & Judging classes at the WILDACRES RETREAT during the September session. This class was facilitated and led by B. Jay Bowman of Ponce City, OK. Mr. Bowman is a former EFMLS and AFMS Uniform Rules Committee Chairman and longtime instructor of Exhibiting & Judging classes.
- WILDACRES provides facilities throughout the year for nonprofit groups that have planned educational programs. Since 1973, the Eastern Federation of Mineralogical & Lapidary Societies (EFMLS) twice annually hosts workshops. Classes/workshops this week included Cabochon Making, Soapstone Carving, Exhibiting & Judging, Faceting, Forging, Micromounting, Mineral ID, Silversmithing and Wirecraft. The workshops are interactive, hands-on with world-class instructors and facilitators. About 100 attended this September session. Overall, an exquisite opportunity to tap into the educational Treasures of Rockhounding in America. The talent, experience and expertise gathered at this WILDACRES RETREAT will supercharge your learning curve and fire up your "sparkplugs", regardless of which part of your hobby rings your chimes. The folks of the EFMLS are the finest hosts and hostesses you will find anywhere in this world! Couple that with the professional WILDACRES Staff and you magically have the best of the best in an environment that can only be described as "heavenly". The bottom lines here involve sharing, learning, fellowship, teaching, friendship and creativity, which reflects the core values of the EFMLS.
- Every day there are three homemade meals prepared by the Staff Chefs who love natural variety while providing nutritious, plentiful meals. Listen or chat with the friendliest Rockhounds in America while you dine. Looking out the dining hall windows you only see lush green forests of deciduous softwoods and fragrant pines. Classes are about three hours mornings and afternoons, then social hours, breaks for meals, visiting on the patios or walking on the nature trails brings a healthy balance to your daily schedule. Plenty time to appreciate the vacation or retreat part of your week at WILDACRES. The "Wildacres Prospector" newsletter keeps you well informed with a daily publication by Ye Old Editor, Carolyn Weinberger and prolific contributors.
- Special Guest Fred Ward gave us fascinating visual presentations on Pearls, Rubies, Sapphires, Opals, Diamonds, Jade and mining after breakfast and dinner. Mr. Ward is a Graduate

Gemologist, a world-class photographer and humorous story teller with thirty years of freelance writing for National Geographic, Newsweek, Time, Fortune and Life Magazines. He authored and published the six volume “Fred Ward Gem Books” and is now based in Malibu, California.

- Middle of the week is a “Free Day” where you can relax even more or attend Field Trips to local quarries, museums, Mt. Mitchell, the Biltmore Estate, the Folk Art Center or many collectible shops in nearby towns. A highlight of that day is an afternoon Tailgate Party to buy, sell or trade Rockhound Treasures. Sharing sessions included live, home grown music, prospecting tales and a two hour film about the famous Sweet Home Mine of Colorado by the Collector’s Edge, which revealed the actual extractions of mind boggling Rhodochrosite specimens. Another film brought us up close and personal with the volcanoes of Hawaii. After dark, “Free Day” was topped off by the Chalk Mine Field Trip for fluorescent specimens. Only in America can you go on a one week vacation with a “day off” in the middle!
- To help support the fantastic bargain that EFMLS provides during the week, there is also a “Good Stuff” Auction on Friday evening. Over 200 donated items went to the highest bidders during a very entertaining and profitable auction.
- My good fortune was to attend the classes of Exhibiting & Judging. What a profound opportunity for seasoned Judges to interact and discuss issues of the AFMS Uniform Rules with newer Judges from around the USA. We answered many questions, asked questions and brought up some new issues as we traveled through the magnificent Uniform Rules that have been established by the pioneers of Exhibiting & Judging. The “Big Goal” is for each Federation to have a Certification Program for Judges which would be approved by the AFMS Judging Committee and also consistent with the basic Certification Program that EFMLS now has in place, and is the only one! The AFMS Uniform Rules are standardized, straight forward and successful if followed correctly. Just imagine the new positive mood for Competition Display exhibitors if they knew that the Judges had completed a “Certification Program”. Seems like that idea would be considerably more productive while preventing problematic situations of Judging discrepancies, especially in “fly-up” situations.
- Although no pets are allowed at WILDACRES, the main office sports a huge, curly-haired chocolate poodle. Keeva is very gentle and welcomes everyone with her big brown eyes. Words really cannot describe the bliss and fond memories created at this Rockhound Retreat because the environment and experience affects you on so many levels. The wording on the upper lodge fireplace says: TO BLEND THE GRACES OF MODERN LIFE WITH THE BEAUTY OF THE WILDERNESS and the wording on the lower lodge fireplace says: BEHOLD, HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT IT IS FOR BRETHERN TO DWELL TOGETHER IN UNITY. As you look out from the porches and patios you see and smell the green mountain forests, while listening to the “music” of spring peepers, crickets and cicadas. Truly a honor to visit this mountain top paradise. Although EFMLS members have first choice, there may be an opportunity for you to help fill the next session to capacity. Write to WILDACRES RETREAT, P.O. Box 280, Little Switzerland, NC 28749-0280 or visit www.wildacres.org about the setting or contact EFMLS for specifics on the next workshop to investigate whether you should GO FOR IT!