

How I became interested in mineralogy.

My route to geology and mineralogy is a circuitous one, relying heavily on chance encounters with the science.

It probably started with my childhood fascination for the many rock walls in and around my small home town in upstate New Jersey. And in our old family encyclopedia there were few color plates, but one of them was a composite of many gemstones from the American Museum collection. My favorite page ever.

My Dad took a class that involved local field trips, and he brought us along. I became addicted to that rush you feel when you find an interesting mineral or rock.

Starting college as a music major, I joined a couple of people I knew in taking geology to meet the physical science requirement. There were drawers at the back of the room filled with minerals. I know now that they were in bad shape from having been rolling around in there for years, but to me they were wonderful. Changed my major to geology very soon after that.

Specimens like minerals evoke thought processes in humans of all ages that involve higher levels of cognition that mere pictures and words can never achieve. The younger the audience, the more important it is to show them a diversity of natural materials. Museums can offer exposure to specimens, as well as the opportunity for teaching and social interaction.

Museums often gauge the public's interest in exhibits by how long people linger in a particular hall, and by the amount of finger and nose prints on the glass at the end of each day. Halls of minerals always have more smudges than any other.

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