



Rockhounding Safely

*So you're ready to go rockhounding.
But are you really prepared?*

Rockhounding locations are often remote, in areas with bad dirt roads and poor cell phone signals. Do you know how to stay out of trouble, and what to do if trouble finds you?

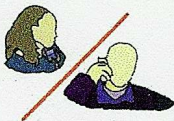
Here are some tips to make your rockhounding adventure as safe as possible:

Make sure you have permission. If you're on private land, make sure you've spoken to the landowner and gotten permission. Not all of them are happy to let you go with a warning - you run into the crazed shotgun-toting type as well now and then. It's not worth the risk!



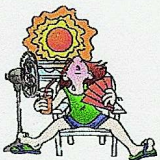
Don't work underneath overhangs. If you look up, and ask yourself, "hmm, what is keeping this giant pile of rocks and dirt from falling and crushing the life from me?" and the answer is "nothing", maybe you should move.

Tell someone where you're going, and when to expect you back. If you run into some difficulty, or get lost, you'll have someone who can send you help.



In hot climates, beware of sunstroke and heat exhaustion. It can sneak up on you, when you're really focused on the rocks you're finding. Pay attention to your body. Wear a hat, rest in the shade every so often, and drink plenty of water.

If you get lost, stay put. Since you told someone where you'd be, and when you'd be back, someone will be along to look for you soon. You'll be so much easier to find if you haven't wandered further away into the wilderness. Just stay there and wait.



Watch out for wildlife. Here in Arizona, there are rattlesnakes and black widow spiders that can both be found in rocky areas - don't put your fingers where you can't see, and if you do get bitten, seek prompt medical attention.

Make sure you know where you're going. Take along a map of the area, and study it beforehand. Know exactly where you're headed, and how to get back.



Make sure you know the local laws about rockhounding. Nothing can ruin your day like getting a ticket for collecting the wrong thing in the wrong place.

Take along more water than you think you'll need. I usually have several gallons in the trunk of my car, and it has come in handy more than a few times.



Keep your tools in good repair. You're swinging that hammer, trying to break a stubborn stone, and the metal hammer head comes loose, flies up and hits you in the face - not a good scenario.

Take along some food. You're burning a lot of calories, and probably sweating. You need to replenish lost minerals and salts, or you may begin to feel ill. It's also a good idea to keep some non-perishable snacks, like dried fruit or trail mix, in your car for emergencies.

Keep a basic first aid kit in your car. Hopefully you'll never need it, but if you do, you'll be glad you have it.



If you have a cell phone, make sure it's well charged before you leave. If you need to make an emergency call, you want plenty of battery life.

Wear safety glasses, if you're breaking rocks or doing anything that could cause chips to fly. Rock chips can cause serious eye injuries.

Don't go into abandoned mine shafts. I know, I know, they sit there like lures, inviting you to crawl right in with promises of minerals. But mine shafts are very unstable, and once the supports have been removed or rotted out, there's nothing keeping it from crashing down on you. Don't give into their dark temptations.



Keep an eye on the kids, or other inexperienced companions. It's easy for a child to wander off and get lost, or fall down a pit, or do something dangerous.

Wear gloves. Rocks are sharp. Add in the hammers, chisels, scorpions, snakes, spiders, and other sundry hazards, protecting your hands with a pair of nice gloves seems like a good idea.

Check the weather before you go. If it looks like bad weather, stay home. Remember that weather can change rapidly, especially in the mountains, and prepare accordingly.

