

Art and Science 2: UNM Meteorite Museum by Larry Schemel, retired USGS scientist.

Catherine Fraser's recent talks on the Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Taos region of New Mexico brought back many fond memories of our off-season trips. For example, we visited Bandelier National Monument with snow on the ground and very few visitors. It was almost spooky. Old Town is always fun for shopping, but be sure not to miss its' Rattlesnake Museum. On one trip, we had a couple of extra hours before flying out, and went over to the University campus to find the UNM Museum of Meteorites. That turned out to be an exciting and rewarding experience.

Founded in 1944, the research institute was one of the first in the world for the study of meteorites. Although the museum, which holds over 600 specimens, is currently closed to the public because of the pandemic, you can view some displays and examples of meteorite types on the web site <http://meteorite.unm.edu>. New Mexico is a good place to find meteorites because of the desert, and you can see locations of local finds on the on-line map. The site also describes how to identify a meteorite and distinguish it from a "meteor-wrong". References are made to the International Meteorite Collectors Association site, www.meteorites.com.au, which has a very good section on identification as well as other information.

Although finding a meteorite is rare, there are often opportunities to purchase them at shows. Unfortunately, even small samples can be very expensive, and cleaning, cutting and etching requires specialized tools and dangerous chemicals. Being a Chemist, I purchased a very small rough specimen from a vendor at a PGGGS show many years

ago with the intent of "bringing it to life". It didn't take long for me to determine that it was just too dangerous and time consuming to properly etch. It is less than an inch long, and was found in the mile-wide Canyon Diablo crater in northern Arizona. The meteorite is Nickel and Iron, and I had hoped to treat it with acid to produce a specimen similar to the one shown below.



Three major types of meteorites are described on the UNM and IMCA web sites along with pictures of etched and polished specimens. The three major types are **Iron**, which is mostly metal, **Stony Iron**, which is a mixture of metals and silicates, and **Stony**, which is primarily silicates.

In closing, this area of New Mexico is very worthy of a trip, particularly during winter when there are fewer tourists and the weather is cool to cold. I'll never forget the Kit Carson ranch in Taos, the Santa Clara pueblo, the Pecos National Monument, and the Turquoise Trail between Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Santa Fe is very special. I still have my mug from the Coyote Café, but there were other great restaurants too. Don't forget to visit the local art stores and museums. We have beautiful examples of the local Santa Fe art on the walls in our home to remind us of those great times off-season in this region of New Mexico.