From January through August 2005 my wife, Monica, and I are living in Kyoto, Japan. While here, I am sharing my observations of the mineral collecting “scene” with readers of Rocks & Minerals in this article series, News from Japan.

Although I have visited Japan twice before, it continues to hold a mystique for me. Much here is still new and very foreign, but there are also many similarities to life in the United States. Hamburger and pizza, for example, have spread the world over, and Kyoto has some aspects that are as modern as those in any big city. However, it is the differences—the new things—that add spice to any cultural experience. Sushi and sashimi have become commonplace in the West, but nothing prepared me for my first taste of raw chicken and horse! Instead of bundling up in sweaters or sitting in front of a nice fire to ward off the cold of winter, Monica and I go skinny-dipping in large communal hot springs (onsen).

Mineral collecting in Japan also has similarities and differences with that in the West, and I will be reporting about collections, mineral shows and dealers, field collecting sites, new mineral discoveries, and anything else that may be of interest to the mineral collector.

Mineral Shops

Although Japan is on the other side of the world, it is not really that far from home by airplane—or, in some cases, by experience. Wandering the narrow streets around Teramachi Arcade in central Kyoto, I came across what appeared to be a small mineral and bead shop. Inside, much to my surprise, I found two floors packed with minerals recently purchased at the Tucson Show, including many fluorites and linarites from the Hansonburg mining district in Bingham, New Mexico. (It was only last summer that I watched Ray DeMark open the pocket in which many of these specimens were found.) There were also quite a few fluorite specimens from Clay Center, Ohio, my own Ohio backyard. The shop is called Crystal World, and it is located on Sanjo Street (Arcade), one-half block east of Teramachi Street.

Later, walking in Gion, the famous entertainment and geisha district in eastern Kyoto, I discovered another mineral dealership. This shop’s name is Gion Ishi, meaning “rock.” It is located on the south side of Shijo Street, about a block west of its intersection with Higashioji Street, and carries a wide variety of minerals (in all price ranges), gems, and fossils, including large decorator specimens. Ishi also has a shop in Tokyo.

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Among the several other mineral and rock establishments in Kyoto, is Oherikosha, a large shop on the west side of town (Yamashita-cho 1-110, Tokiwa, Ukyo-ku). Global specimens comprise most of the stock in these stores. It is more difficult to find classic Japanese minerals because mining in Japan has decreased significantly in the last half-century, and many of the famous mineral locations are no longer producing. Fortunately, the mineral collecting community in Japan is alive and strong, and new mineral finds continue to appear.

The Masutomi Geology Museum

Kyoto is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Japan, and rightfully so. It was spared the ravages of U.S. bombing during World War II, so more cultural heritage sites are preserved here than in any other part of the country. Visitors who want to see Japanese minerals in Kyoto find that the best place to start is at the Masutomi Geology Museum, located on the north side of Demizu Street, a half-block west of Karasuma Street, on the west side of the Imperial Palace Park. The museum was established in 1973 by the late Dr. Kazimosuke Masutomi, in whose honor the mineral masutomilite [a mica with the composition K(Li,Al,Mn^{2+})_3(OSi,Al)_4(O,F,OH)_12] was named. In 1991 its management and ownership were converted to a foundation, and the present name was taken.

Although the museum has a Web site (http://www.masutomi.or.jp/engmuseumindoormap.html), it offers only limited information in English. The museum is open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. On display are minerals, fossils, meteorites, and some rocks, most of which are of reference quality. They represent only a portion of the approximately twenty thousand-specimen collection. Cases are overcrowded with specimens and written information. Most of the labeling is in Japanese, but mineral names are usually in English. The display is a good representative collection of Japanese locations with an emphasis on minerals from Kyoto Prefecture.

The museum is intimately tied to the mineral collecting community in Japan. Not only does it house and display the Masutomi collection, but it also has an affiliated society, the Japan Geological Studies Club (Chigakukenkyu-kai), which supports and has access to an extensive museum library, research equipment (including petrographic microscopes, sample preparation tools, and a powder X-ray diffractometer), and three full-time staff members. Mr. Takashi Fujiwara
is the chief researcher and aids in mineral identification and characterization for museum members and at the many museum-sponsored activities.

The Masutomi Museum organizes mineral shows in Kyoto and Osaka as well as classes and field trips for its members. On 23 January a small show was held in Kyoto. In the morning, attendees browsed the stocks of about fifteen Japanese dealers who set up tables; in the afternoon several talks were given, including one on new minerals from Japan by Mr. Satoshi Matsubara, of the National Science Museum in Tokyo. The museum and Chigakukenkyu-kai also publish a quarterly journal called Chigakukenkyu. With its articles on minerals, fossils, geology, and club activities, it reminds me of early issues of Rocks & Minerals.
Cherry Blossom Stones

One of the most interesting mineral occurrences in the Kyoto area is known locally as “cherry (sakura) blossom stones.” These are actually pseudomorphs of sericite (a fine-grained white mica) after cordierite and are found included in hornfels or slate as a product of contact metamorphism. The original cordierite crystals were sixling twins that give the pseudomorphs a flower-shaped cross section. Minor hematite gives some specimens a red color.

Coming Next

As I write this, the first reports of cherry blossoms in Japan have made the national news, and anticipation of flower-viewing parties (o-hanami) and the mineral-collecting field season grows. In my next article I hope to report on both!

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