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Forgotten Gems: The Havasu region is a virtual gold mine for rock hounds

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Arizona's violent volcanic history, coupled with the Colorado River's millennia of cutting and churning through the earth's crust, have left a lot of cool-looking rocks and minerals strewn throughout the countryside surrounding Lake Havasu.

Everything from agates to fossils; onyx or turquoise; hematite, malachite, coprolite and rhyolite can be found within 100 miles of Havasu. If you know where to look.

Havasu residents Jim Peterson and Linda Chandler have both been combing the surrounding desert for decades, and are both members of the Lake Havasu Gem and Mineral Society and the Needles Gem and Mineral Society. Both longtime club members have experience rock hounding in other areas of the country, but say it's hard to beat the selection in Havasu's backyard.

"You can find rocks almost anyplace you go," Peterson said.

"More than you want to carry home — or at least more than you should," Chandler added with a laugh. Chandler said many of the nicest rocks in the area are the result of igneous actions — volcanic activity. "There is evidence of volcanic action all over, out here in the hills," she said.

If you look in the right places, you can also find gems and minerals that formed elsewhere hitching a ride to Western Arizona via the Colorado River or one of many washes during we times.

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“There is an alluvial fan over by Golden Shores,” Chandler said. “Massive amounts of water has come through there and it has brought in fossils and agates and all kinds of stuff.”

There is no shortage of nearby places to look, or varieties of rocks and minerals to find. But Peterson and Chandler both said it has been the people they’ve met along the way that has kept them interested in rock hounding through the years.

“I met Jim and his wife in 1998 and we are still friends,” Chandler said. “You make really good friends, and they are good quality friends. They don’t cheat you, they are just good down-to-earth people.”