

H.M.S. Beagle's Rockhound's Checklist

This is a more or less exhaustive list of equipment that will be needed on a typical rockhounding trip. Each piece of equipment is listed with its field utility:

- ☐ **Tool Bag:** A canvas or leather mason's tool bag or a suitable backpack works well; get one big enough to carry everything you will typically need while crawling around on site. Don't get one that's too big, or it may become too heavy as you attempt to put too much equipment in it. Remember what you carry up must come back down, and, hopefully, you'll have some specimens to carry down. Each person should have his or her own tool bag.
- ☐ **Rock Hammer:** A chisel point hammer is helpful for splitting layered rocks and for prying rocks out of matrix or bedding planes. A pick point hammer is useful for chipping specimens out of matrix that doesn't have easily separated layers. A light weight hammer is easier to carry, but a heavier hammer provides more momentum when striking a rock. Take along a hammer, or hammers, that you think you will need for the trip. Don't forget that you can carry one type of hammer in your tool bag and your favorite hammer in a holster on your belt. If you rockhound with a friend, remember that you can parcel out equipment between your tool bags.
- ☐ **Chisels:** A selection of chisels is always nice, but you should have at least one really big one for breaking large rocks and a tiny one for delicate, but non-prep, work. The bigger the chisel the more important it is to have a hand guard on it to prevent injury while chiseling on one rock while being distracted by another.
- ☐ **Safety Glasses:** Don't pound on rocks without wearing them.
- ☐ **Gloves:** A nice supple pair of leather gloves is nice, but they tend to get hard after a while especially after drying out from having been on a pair of really sweaty hands all day.
- ☐ **Paintbrush:** A ½" to 1" synthetic bristle paintbrush is very handy for lightly brushing debris off small specimens. A bigger brush, >3", can be helpful for clearing loose material from large areas.
- ☐ **Knife & Pick:** Don't take along your finest, inlaid handled knife. Instead a good quality utility knife like a Swiss Army knife with a few tools as well as the usual blades, or a hunting knife, will serve you well. An ordinary ice pick works well in the field.
- ☐ **Putty Knife:** A good, springy putty knife about 1" wide makes a good, relatively nondestructive, tool for separating layers of soft shale when looking for small fossils such as fishes, insects and leaves. Always choose a blade that is resistant to rusting.
- ☐ **Magnifying Glass or Loupe:** A loupe that folds into its own protective cover is best and these can often be worn on a lanyard around one's neck. Many rockhounds proudly wear their loupes around their necks, even when formally dressed; it's a kind of identification badge. A 10X loupe is the most commonly used. When in the field keep it tucked into a shirt pocket or inside your shirt so that it doesn't get in your way.
- ☐ **Specimen Bags:** Canvas or cotton, drawstring bags are useful, but not really necessary. Ordinary "lunch" bags are just as good. Carry a small supply, possibly two different sizes, flattened, in your tool bag. If possible always tuck the filled specimen bags back into your tool bag, but another, empty cloth bag can be used for this purpose. Some empty 35 mm film canisters will be useful, too.
- ☐ **Compass or GPS:** A compass is the barest necessity, but even the most modest GPS will do what a compass will as well as provide you accurate latitudes and longitudes so that a good collecting site can be easily found again. GPSs are also available with altimeters built in and others have the Family Radio Service, FRS, two-way radios so you can keep track of others in your 'hounding group. Some high-end GPSs work on the Microsoft Office system and include Word so that notes and other critical information can be recorded and accessed in the field. The best of these are the size of personal digital assistants, PDAs, and will easily fit in a shirt pocket or onto a belt.
- ☐ **Maps:** The need is obvious.
- ☐ **Journal/Notebook:** While an electronic PDA/GPS can be an easily carried device for recording notes, it is always a good idea to have a compact field notebook or journal in which you can make detailed drawings and notes and into which you can transcribe your electronic notes later. Waterproof field notebooks are a good idea and are available with carrying pouch and pen.
- ☐ **Pencils & Markers:** Ordinary #2 lead pencils, at least two (with erasers) should be carried. A permanent ink, felt-tip marker is useful for marking rocks that you want to leave in place but intend to take a closer look at later. The marker can also be used to identify the contents of specimen bags, and fine-point marker can be used to mark directly on specimens before placing them in your specimen bags.
- ☐ **First Aid Kit:** It is not unusual for a 'hound to get small knicks or cuts "on the job." A comprehensive kit should be carried in the car, but in your tool bag it is usually only necessary to have a few bandages, antiseptic cream and sunscreen.
- ☐ **Identification Book(s):** A selection of reasonably comprehensive, but easily carried identification books are always helpful. It isn't necessary to carry these in your tool bag, but you'll want them at the end of each day when relaxing back at your base of operations (e.g. camp or motel).
- ☐ **Crack Hammer:** This is useful when needing to break up large rocks or to drive a large chisel. These are heavy, usually around 2 lbs, and before including one in your tool bag be sure you really need it at the collecting site. Otherwise leave it in the car until needed.
- ☐ **Pry Bars & Large Picks:** These probably won't fit in your tool bag, but can be used for climbing and scrabbling around as one would use a walking cane. Another name for these large picks is "mattax."
- ☐ **Shovel:** An easily carried, folding, entrenching tool, as used by the military, is very useful. If it doesn't have one, fashion a sling from nylon webbing and carry the shovel over your back while walking or climbing.
- ☐ **Gold Pan:** While of little value when 'hounding in dry areas, this will certainly provide one with some pleasant diversions down at the creek's edge, and it is a painless way to prospect for gold and other precious metals.
- ☐ **Metal Detector:** Use this for dry-land prospecting, or, if water-proof, for locating likely panning sites in streams.