

TICK CANYON, SPRING 1969

By Ron Wood

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I paid a visit to an old friend, Tick Canyon, on March 29 this spring, for a three-fold reason. First, and personally important, to enjoy a day in the beautiful soft downy scenery of April, away from routine pressures, in a setting I've learned to gratefully appreciate. Then, to satisfy curiosity as to conditions after the exceptionally heavy rains of February and early March. Finally, to dig some howlite for our forthcoming South Bay Show, June 7th and 8th.

Well, the day was beautiful indeed. After the heavy rains, and generally late and cold winter, the hillsides were wearing the soft mantle of downy green that is nature's gift every year after shedding winters frosty coat.

The flowers, and yucca were yet to put on their May day festival, but spring was in the air; a gentle breeze caressed tender grasses, last years gaunt yucca stalks, and basalts of ages past, alike. Even the two Sycamores up the canyon, just below the waterfalls, impatient to be released from winters grip, showed tiny wisps of green to contrast with the up-ended red sedimentary rock on one side-and the basalt forming the waterfall on the other.

Thus, with the sun bathing the hills and the canyon with the beauty of spring, it became obvious that if any howlite was to be dug, I'd better get at it, and satisfy additional curiosity later.

So, up I went to the top dump of the old Lang Borax mine, to get a sackful of "the best howlite, anywhere," as I have done before. Guess I even dreamed of taking a howlite "trainload" down the canyon, even as the daily 80 ton production of high grade calcines roared down the steep five mile grade to Lang Station 50 years ago. But the trains haven't run since 1922, and howlite likewise proved to be just a bit harder to come by than it was in 1965! Seems a few (?) folks have worked reachable depths of the dump since the August 1965 story was written in the *Lapidary Journal*, and if howlite is to be had from the big top dump, you had better figure on digging 8 feet at least into and under the many times worked over material that covers the original fill. Also you better plan on making the hole wide enough (six to eight feet) to preclude being buried alive if and when the "overburden" caves in. Because cave in it will, and the chances are you'll have to empty the hole many times before getting down to the howlite. On one such cave in, imagine my surprise when someone else's shovel handle was revealed, sticking halfway out of one side of my hole. I retrieved the shovel, a good one, but further search did not reveal any "body," so I guess the shovel's all that had been buried.

Yes, there's still howlite there, but it takes an awful lot of muscle, steadfastly applied, to the shovel! Needless to say, one sackful was enough, since I wanted to save enough energy to hike up the canyon, see more old "haunts," and what

the water runoff had accomplished. So down to the car, the howlite tucked away and a soda pop later, I traded shovel for camera, and started a never to be forgotten walk up the canyon. The walk was to take me through the old mine calcining and screening foundations and up canyon for about a half mile.

The pictures tell the story of "water power" erosion pretty well. The first picture shows what's left of the old road down into the mine foundation and dump base area. Only half a "track" is left, with a sheer drop of 6 feet into the gully. The half "track" remaining, is badly cracked parallel to the face of the cave in, so more is ready to go, at anytime. This road, as such, no longer exists. As a matter of fact, the ends of the ties of the original railroad track are exposed at the base of what's left of the old road mass.

The second picture shows water still flowing through a completely cut road, at the old turn in the road just before reaching the concrete mine building remains. The cut is a sheer two feet deep, four feet across, and with sharply serrated edges of water carved, up-ended, sedimentary rock. This is completely impassable except on foot.

The "shot" of the gully at the base of the old mine buildings offers some concept of the present gully depth here. This area, once a favorite parking and camping spot, is no longer within reach of the automobile. We used to be able to drive a good ¼ mile further up the canyon, completely around the base of the mine dump, careful scrutiny of this picture will show a gully running from two to six feet deep, where the "road" once threaded its way. Does the next one look like a waterfall? Ever think you'd see water running over the retaining wall at the up canyon end of the mine area? Well that's what it is, three weeks after the last heavy rain! Wow! What a sight that must have been.

The second waterfall picture is of water tumbling through the basalt gap about a half mile up canyon from the mine. This is a very beautiful stretch of canyon, most of the man made scars have disappeared. Note the exposed roots of one of the two old Sycamores, at the left. Water has cut the gully to 6 feet deep here, and about half the root system of this old giant is now exposed.

The wigwam looking structures appear about a ¼ mile above the waterfall. These structures must have been erected last summer, possibly for scouts. Note the torn plastic draping the canyon mouth, and the diving platform at the nearest shelter. A "water line" around the other side of these abutments, indicates that the plastic had backed up about 6 feet or more of water depth at the diving board.

This was quite a surprise since this rockhound has obtained considerable gem quality bloodstone, green jasper, and some of the most beautiful jasp-agate ever, from

an area about a hundred yards around the corner! But the biggest and best surprise of the day, was uncovered in the stream bed before reaching this spot!

Reminiscing some past rockhounding, I recalled about four years ago, burying a 70 lb. piece of jasp-agate, that was one piece too many at the time, on one of the hillsides above the gully. Wondering if I could relocate the piece after this time, I was "optically" searching the hillside from across the stream for old clues, and noted a small fresh gully straight down the hill at about the right spot. Starting to wade across the stream, my eye caught the sight of wet agate in the stream bed, and doggonit, you won't believe it, but there at my feet was *the* 70 lb. piece of agate. This time, I brought it home!

Is there more there? You bet there is, on the hill, and in place. It'll take well tempered steel and muscle, and sweat, to get it out. Yes, Tick Canyon's still there, as beautiful as ever. But cars will now have to stay on the turnouts of the Davenport road, the road down to the mine dumps is no longer passable.

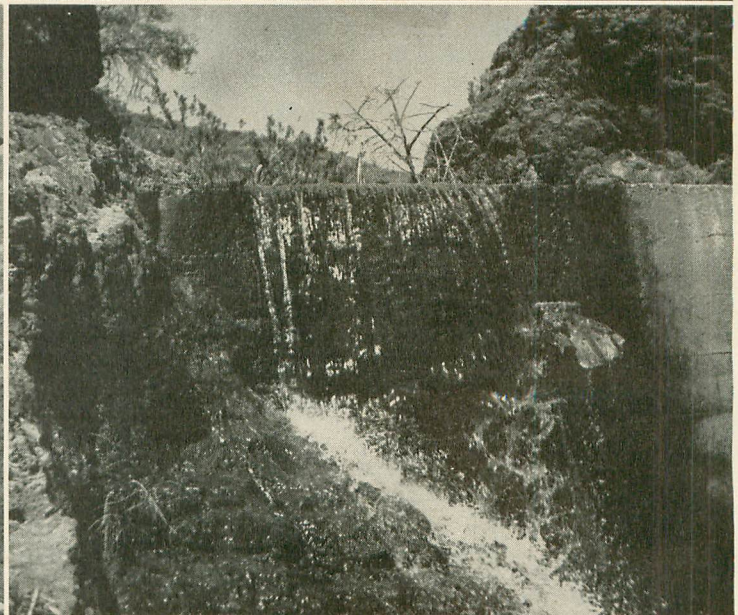
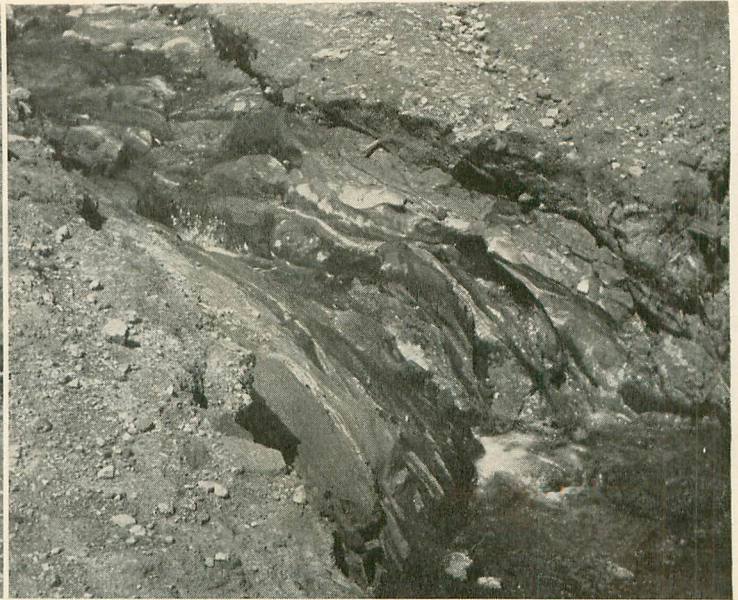
As a matter of special interest, a letter dated April 11, 1969 from Mr. N. J. Kockler, Director of Public Relations, U.S. Borax Company, reveals that there are no present real estate development plans for the mine property.

Yes, our South Bay show will have some howlite available for visitors, plus many added attractions such as: mineral specimens from Butte, Montana (by Mr. & Mrs. Ed Reardon of the San Fernando Mineral & Gem Society); native copper specimens from Ajo (Mr. & Mrs. J. G. Meldrum, Pasadena Mineralogical Society); polished petrified wood (John & Kay De Spain, Oxnard Gem & Mineral Society); snuff bottles, carved from Jade (Mildred & Byron Stein, Long Beach); handwrought jewelry (Mal & Ruth Meacham, Pasadena Lapidary Society); miscellaneous gold related items (Russ Clark of Rolling Hills); jewelry, best in the class (Gary Owens jewelry class); whalebone carvings—the ancient art of "Scrimshaw" (Robert Boice, Redondo Beach); turquoise and silver channel work (Stanly Times of El Segundo).

All that, and a "piece de resistance," exhibited by the Los Angeles County Museum Vertebrate Paleontology section, a Jaguar cat, 8 feet long-5½ feet high-2 feet wide, taken from the La Brea tar pits. Interested in some professional fossil restoration?

Add to this the membership displays, manufacturers and membership working exhibits covering the hobby from cabbing to faceting and channel work, and the makings of the South Bay annual show are impressive indeed. Hope you all can make it. Please see Calendar of Events section, *Lapidary Journal* for time and place. ⊕

(See Photographs on Page 432)



Top left—This is what's left of the old road down into the mine foundation and dump base area. Only a half track is left with a sheer drop of six feet.
 Center left—This gully at the base of the old mine buildings offers some idea of the present depth of the gully. The cut is two feet deep and four feet across.
 Lower left—This waterfall was created by water tumbling through the basalt gap about a half mile up canyon from the old mine site.

Top right—Water is still flowing through a completely cut road at the turn in the road just before reaching the concrete mine building remains.
 Center right—Another small waterfall was formed by water spilling over the retaining wall at the canyon end of the mine area after three weeks of heavy rain.
 Lower right—The wigwam looking structures were about one-fourth of a mile above the waterfall and were probably built for scouts last summer, notice the plastic draping and diving board at the nearest shelter.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RON WOOD