

## "Mineral & Gem": the Friendly Atmosphere of the Vosges Mountains

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1. The entrance to the town of the Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines.

**Photo: Michael B. Leybov  
if not mentioned otherwise**

2. Julien Lebocey and Roger De Ascenção Guedes at the booth of *Le Règne Minéral* magazine (France).
3. The locals in ancient miners dressing.
4. Peter Lyckberg (collector, Sweden) and Mike Rumsey (curator of the Natural History Museum of London, UK) with latest issue of "*Mineralogical Almanac*" devoted to the Saranovskoe deposit.

The 53<sup>rd</sup> edition of the mineral show, now called "*Mineral & Gem*," was held as usual in Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines (France) near the end of June (23–26). Sainte-Marie is a small, quiet town in the heart of the Vosges Mountains (Fig. 1). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was a major center of mining (mainly silver) which has left in the region dozen of abandoned mines and empty galleries. The show is considered to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important in the world, after Tucson and Munich. Mining in the region was later replaced by the textile industry, but it too has also almost disappeared after World War II.

This rich past is however remembered by two events, which during each summer attract in one week between 20,000 and 30,000 visitors, 5 to 6 times the size of the local population: the *Gem & Mineral* show at the beginning of the summer and, at the end, a textile patchwork festival (Carrefour Européen du Patchwork), considered to be the first of its kind in Europe and, possibly, in the world.

The position of Sainte-Marie within the "big three" might be in danger because of the recent opening of a mammoth (but problematic) show in China (Changsa, Hunan). But the Chinese market, which has a great potential in a country which has provided many fine specimens in the past, is still in its infancy. Let see what it will become in future years. Sainte-Marie this year had slightly less than 1000 exhibitors, against about 1200 in Munich. It expected more than 30,000 visitors, as in former years. But on Friday, the only day I attended the show, the attendance was not especially high. It was easy to stroll in the alleys and to enjoy the friendly atmosphere of the show, even to park your car in official parking areas (always a problem in Sainte-Marie) if you came sufficiently early. This was possibly due to announced bad weather, with the usual Friday storm which indeed poured very heavily at noon, flooding the last remnants of our "tarte flambée" in the terrasse of our restaurant for lunch. But this relatively limited attendance might also indicate a stable number of visitors against a regularly growing number of dealers, a remark that we heard from several regular attendees. Possibly a threat for future shows in these days of the Internet!



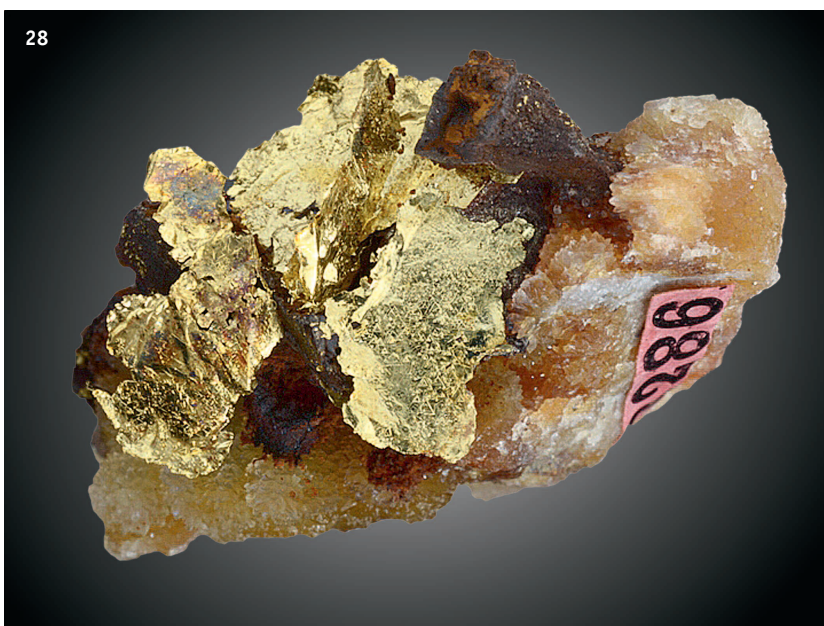


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28. **Gold** on matrix. 3.8 cm. Berezovskoye deposit (?), Central Urals, Russia.  
Photo: Michael Leybov.



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27. **Fluorite** with sphalerite. 16 cm tall.  
Second Sovetskii Mine, Dalnegorsk,  
Prymorsky Kray, Russia.  
Photo: Joaquim Callen.

29. **Calcite**. 9 x 7 cm.  
Sokolovskoye Iron Mine, Kustanai Province,  
Kazakhstan. Photo: Michael Leybov.





30. Mariella Rossi, Adriaan Bornman and Oy-Ling Talula Booth from Rock On, South Africa (left to right).



31. Sammi Makki (Matrix India).



32. Famous international dealers (right to left): Wolfgang Wendel (Germany), Dylan Stolowitz (USA), Mike Bergman (USA), Nick Stolowitz (USA).



33. Mustafa Ghulam and Jacques Touret.



34. Cathie Cordival, general manager of "Mineral & Gem" International Show in Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines.



35. Dr. Guanghua Liu (AAA Mineral International, China), organizer of the Beijing Show (November 2016).

a superb set of crystals of native bismuth (wismut), many of them showing nice figures of ongoing crystallization and/or partial melting (gediegen wismut). Coming from the Erzgebirge Schlema (Bad Schlema) mine, this sample reminds me of the SAG/SDAG Wismut Company (Chemnitz), with many thousands workers the largest producer of uranium in the former East Germany (DDR) at the time of the Cold War.

To conclude, I would say that the Sainte-Marie Show has preserved most of its interest, its very special atmosphere of being entirely in a former old mining city and with the strong involvement of the entire population. It is certainly worth the visit, but there are signs which could indicate a less brilliant future. The ever increasing number of dealers is not matched by an equal number of clients. There is still some feeling among many people that natural stones are worth nothing, as you can collect them freely. The number of serious collectors does not seem to increase substantially year after year, much to the contrary. As one of the best dealer told me, *"the peak is behind us"*. On the other hand, the region of Sainte-Marie has much to offer, and I feel confident that many people from many countries will still plan to travel to the Vosges at the beginning of the summer. They should not only spend a few hectic days in crowded alleys, but also enjoy the many sites worth visiting in the Vosges. Not only the old mines around Sainte-Marie, in practice only open to the public during the show, but the places in the Southern Vosges, e.g. the copper mine of the Ducs de Lorraine at Le Thillot, about 50 km away, or the geology center Terrae Genesis at Saint Amé near Remiremont, the place where the granite industry started in France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, the art treasures from Strasbourg and Colmar are not far away, and not to forget culinary delights: anyone has not tasted a slice of Munster cheese while sipping a glass or two of Riesling wine does not know the ultimate art of living the French way.

Author thanks Dr. John White for improving English style of the article.