

Express Yourself

A License to Collect: Part 2

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Figure 1. Author Jeff Starr and his car with its “FLRITE” (fluorite) license plate.

PART 1—A RECAP

Who among us would not love to put a gorgeous plate of amazonite and smoky quartz on the rear deck of our car? Or hang a great Kombat mine cerussite from our rear-view mirror to enjoy the sparkle. Or, perhaps, mount the head of a small raptor on the car's hood to replace the manufacturer's ornament.

Fortunately, for those of us who crave to express ourselves via our vehicles, there is a safe, affordable option, without causing us to worry about that expensive specimen fading, cracking, or mysteriously disappearing. We have, instead, the license plate—that most public of public documents, composed of a combination of numbers and letters and, depending upon the state, generally made up of six to eight characters.

License plates date back to 1905 and early on began to take on a life of their own. Variation upon variation, tweak upon redesign seemed to happen on a regular basis. Personalized plates, or vanity plates, appeared on the scene officially around 1973. Since then, their popularity has soared, with customized plates reflecting everything from the auto owner's marital status (2BWED) to their occupation (ITCH



DR) to their pursuits (AU DIGR) to their religious beliefs (1WTHGOD) to their favorite foods (2M8OS; MMMBA-CON) to their mathematical prowess (2N2R4) to their intelligence (DMBLND) to their financial standing (-CSHFLW). A Google search of “vanity license plates” turned up 45,200 entries. There is even an online Dictionary of Custom Li-

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cense Plate Terms (<http://www.baac.net/michaell/plates>) for those needing a primer on the common abbreviations used in vanity plates.

And that brings us to the subject of this article—those involved in our hobby giving in to their desire to shout to the world, “This is me!” The photos shown here were mostly taken at the Denver and Tucson shows from 2010 through 2012 by me as I prowled the parking lots; the remainder were sent to me by the owners. Be it rocks, minerals, fossils, or geology, each plate expresses the personality and interests of its owner. Thus began the first part of this article, which was published on pages 360–361 in the July/August 2011 issue of *Rocks & Minerals*. There was also an invitation for readers to send in photos of their license plates and the stories behind them.

PART 2—EVERY PLATE TELLS A STORY

Here, then, are the plates and a bit about them, either in my words or in direct quotes from the owners of the plates. I hope you enjoy them.

#1 MINER: This plate belongs to one of the best emerald (Hiddenite, North Carolina) and amethyst (Jacksons Crossroads) miners around – Terry Ledford (Ledford’s Minerals) of Spruce Pine, North Carolina. It was the result of a friendly competition between Terry and another miner.



3LOBYT: John Stade of Ferguson, Missouri, writes [We have been] “serious amateur fossil collectors for almost fifty years, and we love trilobites.”

4QUARTZ: Judy Qualls works in the shop at Coleman’s crystal mine in Jessierville, Arkansas. She is a great ambassador for the hobby and was a huge help to me through the years when I brought my students and their parents there every October to collect.



AQUAS: Ernest Hanlon of Colorado Springs, Colorado, writes, “When Colorado first came out with personalized license plates, there were only six spaces. Later they changed it to seven spaces. My first thought was to have ‘I DIG IT,’ but with only six spaces it would have been ‘I DIGIT.’ My wife said people seeing that would say, ‘There goes an idiot, and he doesn’t know how to spell it.’ So I dropped that idea. I wanted ‘RHODO’S’ (I collect rhodochrosites), but someone already had that, so I got ‘AQUAS’ because I used to spend a lot of time on Mount Antero collecting aquamarines.”

BC BONE: Claudeen Chisolm of Tucson, Arizona, sells “dinosaur bone, jewelry, cabs, knives, and so on. BC BONE stands for ‘Before Christ Bone.’”



BYNATUR: Former Dallas collector Rick Rolater, who now lives in Eagle, Colorado, writes, “This is the name of our business, the By Nature Gallery, which sells minerals and fossils that are made ‘by nature.’”

CU XLS: Marc L. Wilson of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, writes, “Love of copper crystals has driven my career since my first visit to the Detroit Gem and Mineral Show in 1968. It led me to Michigan Tech in the heart of the Copper Country, to the A. E. Seaman Mineral Museum where I worked as a student, and eventually to the Carnegie Museum of Natural History [where he is the collection manager and head of the Section of Minerals]. It also led to lasting friendships with other copper enthusiasts such as John Barlow, Gene Schlepp, and Jim Uhelski.”



DEDFISH: Daniel Winester of Colorado writes, “‘DEDFISH’ comes from my annual collecting of Eocene Green River Formation fish (Kemmerer, Wyoming) and giving many away. In 2009 when I was collecting at the Warfield (Springs) quarry, there were also three vehicles with plates ‘FOSSIL’ (or ‘FOSSILS’) from Utah, Wyoming, and Nebraska. Two of them were owned by quarry workers.”

EOFISH: Thomas Lindgren of Tucson, Arizona, is a fancier of Eocene-age fossil fish and CEO of GeoDecor Fossils & Minerals.



FLRITE: This is my current plate. My collection, or at least the serious phase, began with a focus on fluorite because of its varied colors, good availability, and reasonable prices—the last a necessary consideration on a teacher’s salary. My collection has since become more well rounded. I have been asked many times if the plate meant “flirty” or “fly right,” or if I was a dentist.

FOSSILS: Kim Nielsen of K & K Minerals in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, carries fossils as well as minerals.





GEO WIS: Emeritus Professor of Geology Carl Bowser, of Tucson, Arizona, “taught forty years in the University of Wisconsin’s geology department, then

moved to Tucson last year from Wisconsin. Geo (logist)—Wis (consin).”

GLAUCUS: Bryan Swoboda of Marina del Rey, California, writes, “One of the things we mineral collectors love is the ability to appreciate what nature provides us when a spectacular new mineral is uncovered. Prior to starting BlueCap Productions, my love and appreciation for nature was focused on documenting the wonders of the underwater world with a production company I started called Glaucus Productions. The story behind ‘GLAUCUS’ is that he was a Greek fisherman who one day found some magical seaweed. Upon consuming the seaweed, he was transformed by the gods into a half-man, half-fish creature similar to what we’d call a merman. Once his transformation was complete, he turned his back on the land and spent the rest of his life exploring the oceans. This sounded like a perfect life to me, and so in 1995 when I bought my first Ford Explorer, I ordered this plate and have had it ever since.”



GLG ROX: Maureen Garrett of Yuma, Arizona, writes, “I loved your very short article in *Rocks & Minerals* dealing with vanity license plates.

I also like perusing parking

lots at rock shows, seeing everyone’s passion displayed on their plates. I fall into the same category. An associate professor of geology at a local community college and earth science teacher at a local high school, I wear my passion on my truck. Please find attached a picture of my plate: ‘Geology Rocks.’”

GOLD PNR & GOLDDST: “GOLD PNR” is “ROC HOWN” Jimmie Witt’s other plate. He obviously enjoys panning for gold. “GOLDDST” belongs to Jimmie Witt’s wife, Belle. He thought it was appropriate after more than forty-four years together.



JURASIC: This plate belongs to John Jurasic of Royce City, Texas. One afternoon I was driving in Rockwall, Texas, and came upon a big SUV with a Colorado plate with “JURASIC” on it. When asked about it, the couple replied that they know about the

Mesozoic because it’s their *name*! Here is the story from John Jurasic’s wife, Renae: “I looked up the last-name origins in my husband’s father’s autobiography that he gave to the family a few years ago. The original name is Jurassic. There is a town high in the Jura Alps, along the border between France and Switzerland, where the entire population has the last name of Jurassic. At a certain point, one of the Jurassic families moved from Switzerland to Croatia, where one “s” was dropped from the spelling of the name because of difficulty in pronunciation. My husband’s father came to the United States in June 1951 after great distress and suffering in Europe from the 1930s and 1940s.”

LUNATIC: Andrew Abraham of Colorado admits, “For more than ten years I have been crazy for lunar meteorites!”



METEOR CRATER: This is one I added. A souvenir plate, it is clearly from an Arizona store.

METEORS: Mike Martinez of Lathrop, California, writes, “In 1997, I purchased a brand-new Saturn wagon. After I picked up the car, I went to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get plates. I wanted ‘METEORITE,’ but it was too many letters, so I asked for ‘METEOR,’ ‘METEORS,’ ‘METEOR 1.’ (I am MARE Meteoritics, www.meteorflash.com.) My wife suggested ‘METEOR 2,’ but I told her I would have to try harder. I had no luck at all with any plate that had anything to do with meteorites. I was going to ask about ‘TEKTITE’ next, but I really did not want it. Instead I asked the woman at the counter to please look again, and she found out that ‘METEORS’ had been turned in two days earlier. So that plate has traveled more than 330,000 miles on my Saturn, and we are still going.”



MINERAL: Geologist and mineral collector Travis Paris of Knoxville, Tennessee, is a geologist, mineral collector, and author of the recently published “Tennessee Mineral Index” in the July/August 2011 issue of *Rocks & Minerals* (pages 300–328).

MINEROV: Bill Larson, dealer and collector in Fallbrook, California, explains, “Land Rovers were in vogue in East Africa when I was do-



ing business and leased Range Rovers. So I bought one of the first offered in the States and got 'MIN ROV' as a license plate because six letters were all we could have in 1988. Then I bought a new Range Rover with 'MINE RVR' as a license plate, but people thought it was 'MINE RIVER,' so last year with my new Rover we settled on 'MINEROV.' Mining and Land Rovers go well together. My first two each had logged more than 225,000 miles."



MINS4U: Marilyn Malmquist of Vista, California, enthusiastically shares, "Minerals for you! We sell minerals as a hobby."

MR BONES: Timothy Seeber of Colorado is everyone's favorite *Allosaurus*. Mr. Bones, wearing the skeleton of the huge dinosaur, roams the Main Show at Denver, bringing smiles to children of all ages . . . and a few screams, as well.



NEW JADE: George Schmerholz lives in the Sierra Nevada of California and sells fine sculptures that include jade. The plate is related to his business, jade-fineart.com.

OBROCKS: Rick Obermiller of Scottsdale, Arizona, related the following story, which I have paraphrased: "O" and "B" are the first letters of his last name. His original plate was "OB," but that garnered too many questions about if he was a gynecologist and too many "Obi Wan" comments. So he settled on "OBROCKS."



00037E: This belongs to Allan Young of Idaho. There is no story behind this particular plate, but I felt that I would have been remiss to not give kudos to the Gem State's wonderful plate design. After all, how much more hobby-related can you get?

PALATOY: Bill (and Jeanne) Larson (see MINEROV above) shared, "The first 'PALA' plate was 'PALATOY' on my 1989 bright red BMW M-6. My brother-in-law, manager of BMW in Escondido, called me because he knew I had several BMWs before they were ubiquitous. But he had located a rare one: the last new M-6 in California. He thought I should purchase it, so I did. The name just seemed



fun to both of us." Pala refers to the mining area and Bill's business, Pala Properties.



QURTZMN: Eugene A. Reynolds of Irvine, California, sports this plate and writes that it stands for "Quartz Man." He goes on to say, "My first very fine field-collected mineral [was quartz], and I have a large quartz collection that is worldwide."

RHODOCO: Dennis Streetman of Broomfield, Colorado, is clearly a fancier of rhodochrosites, and he runs "Rhodo Co" of Colorado.



RHODOMN: Bryan Lees of Evergreen, Colorado, owns this plate. Whether it is "Rhodo Man" or "Rhodo Mine," the very great Sweet Home mine and its miner are unequalled. Bryan owns The Collector's Edge in Golden, Colorado.

ROCK HC: Rock H. Currier of California is a wholesale mineral dealer.



ROC HOWN: Jimmie Witt (see "GOLD PNR" above) of Boise, Idaho, and owner of Palisade Gems & Jewelry, admits, "I dig rocks—so have rockhound plates."

ROCKS: This is one of my old plates. I also had "XTALS" when I was living in Illinois, but I no longer have that plate.



SIO2: Neil Prens of Reno, Nevada, is an enthusiastic collector of quartz. The plates were a gift from his wife, Cami.

SUNSTON: Christopher Rose of Nevada, owner of the Spectrum mine in Oregon, admits, "I would rather be digging for tourmaline," even though his plate says "SUNSTON."





TSUMEB: Marshall Sussman of Tucson, Arizona, sports a plate giving the name of his favorite mine, one of the greatest localities of all time.

WWHIT: This belongs to Dave Wilbur of Tucson, Arizona, and here is the story as related to me: "Since 2007 Dave Wilbur has been the host of BlueCap Productions' *What's Hot in Tucson* DVD series. This was, and still is, the only DVD series that gives viewers a real insider's look at what's going on at the Tucson Show. In 2011, when Dave purchased a new car, there was only one personalized license plate he could order: 'WWHIT' (Wilbur's **W**hat's **H**ot **I**n **T**ucson)."



YOGOS: Randy Gneiting of Columbus, Montana, explains, "Yogos are fine-quality natural blue sapphires found only in the Little Belt Mountains of central Montana. We mine them ourselves (Montana Gem, Inc.), then cut and set them and sell the jewelry using these fine stones. Yogos are unique to Montana."

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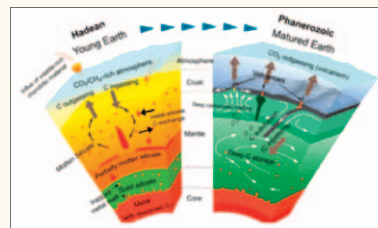
ZN CO3: Bill and Diana Dameron, formerly of Washington State and now in Portland, Oregon, are serious collectors of smithsonite, hence this license plate.



ZTRAUQ: Charles Borland of Bozeman, Montana, writes, "I wanted to tell you that I 'backed into' the hobby, but that is not true. My business is The

Quartz Connection, and quartz is found with many minerals. I wanted 'QUARTZ,' but there is a town in Montana with that name, and it was taken (as was 'QUARTZ1')." When I took this photo, I didn't even realize that this was *quartz* spelled backward.

Thus ends our foray into the world of mineral-related vanity plates. Perhaps they will inspire you to come up with your own unique plates. What better way to express yourself (XPRS USLF)!



MSA's newest Reviews volume, **Carbon in Earth**, edited by Robert M. Hazen, Adrian P. Jones, and John A. Baross, presents our understanding of Earth's carbon. It is a product from the

Deep Carbon Observatory (DCO) whose goal is to understand the Earth through the deep carbon cycle. More than 90% of Earth's carbon may reside in our planet's deep interior. DCO's goal is to understand the carbon cycle of the entire planet through time. The book includes chapters on the physics and chemistry of carbon at extreme conditions, the possible character of deep-Earth carbon-bearing minerals, the geodynamics of Earth's large-scale fluid fluxes, tectonic implications of diamond inclusions, geosynthesis of organic molecules and the origins of life, the changing carbon cycle through time, and the vast subsurface microbial biosphere. The entire electronic version of this publication is free. The table of contents with links for the free download of either the entire book, or individual parts, chapters, supplements, or videos, is at the MSA website. Open Access to the volume was sponsored by the Deep Carbon Observatory (DCO).



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