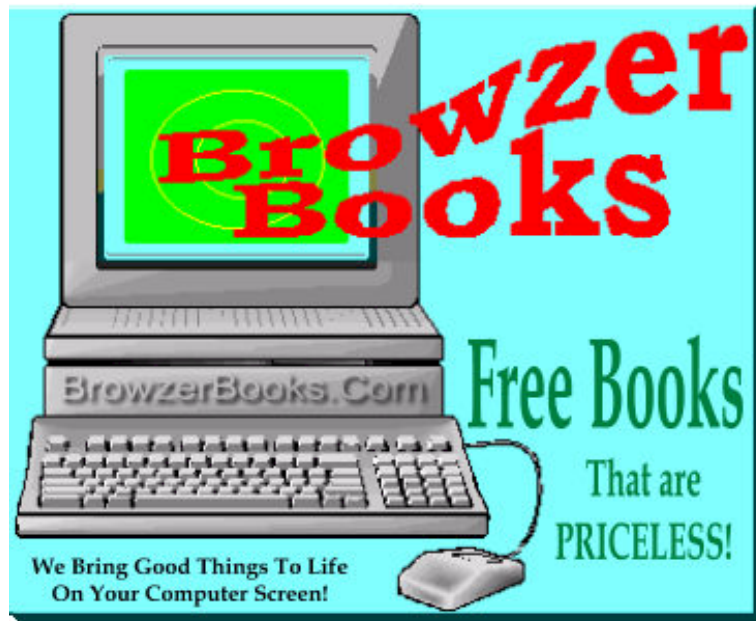


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# The Crater of Diamonds State Park

by Lin Stone

Here you will discover just how hard it is to find diamonds, what kind of work is involved the kind of tools needed, and the fun your family can have.

Many people dream of finding a diamond.

Where do they look?

- on the sidewalk
- in the trash
- behind the hot water heater
- in the chair cushions
- in the kitchen sink
- in the ash tray
- in a muddy field

Diamonds have been found in all these places, and many more. Let me tell you about the luckiest diamond finder in the world though, Shirley Strawn.

Shirley Strawn carries a shiny rock around with her, just for good luck.. It has worn smooth over the years. She doesn't know what kind of rock it is, but she does know it is beautiful, and that it is very lucky.



## **Luck is important to Shirley.**

A week after a 4.33 carat diamond found at Crater of Diamonds near Murfreesboro Arkansas turned out to be fake, Shirley was lucky enough to find a real gem there. It was a perfect quality diamond worth right at \$38,000.

When she found that 3.03 carat diamond did she stop to celebrate?

"No, it is unlucky to quit before the bell sounds."

Shirley stayed there to dig, and it was lucky she did.  
Two hours later she found a 74 point canary yellow diamond.  
These are so rare  
they are only found at the Crater of Diamonds in Arkansas.

## Luck didn't happen right off the bat though.

In fact, Shirley dug for nine weeks before she found her first diamond.

How did she do it?

She was the first one at the mine, and the last one to leave. Repeatedly she hooked herself up to ropes on barrels like these and dragged them up to a hundred yards to where she could work the mud more conveniently.



Can you imagine how HEAVY these barrels are?

For many hours every day,  
for over two months she dug  
seven days a week.

"I don't mind the wind.  
I don't mind the cold.  
I don't mind the rain.  
But when it gets too dark to see,  
I'll take my mud somewhere else  
to play."





Shirley will hop up on a bucket and play all day long with her diamond mud. Shirley doesn't mind doing all the hard work that must be done at the diamond mine because you can always clean up.

If a hole needs digging, she doesn't mind jumping in to dig down six feet or so, and why not go ten feet down while she is down there in the hole?

That makes sense because the 3.03 carat diamond that she found was 10 feet deep.



This was the second largest diamond found there and That makes 10 feet sound kind of lucky. Right?

"Well," you might ask.

"With all that wealth in her possession, did Shirley at least quit her job?"

"No, I'm still housekeeper at the Pike County Hospital.

All the 3.03 diamonds in the world would not change me a bit."

Besides, Shirley thinks that being out of a job is unlucky. "It means you have to borrow money from a friend to get back into the park because it isn't payday yet."

Turning diamonds into gold dust must be unlucky too, because Shirley still has most of the diamonds she has found.

"I did give one to my mother.

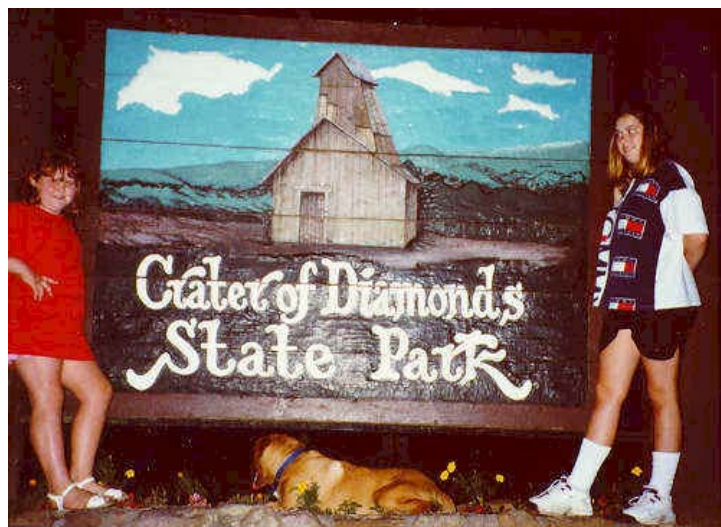
It was a half carat canary yellow diamond.

My father got a charm for it  
and my grandmother got the chain,  
and we made it into a necklace  
then gave it to my mother for Christmas.

"Another diamond I found was made into  
a lucky unicorn pin so I could wear it.  
But the luckiest thing you can do with a diamond  
is lock it up."

It is a lucky thing for Shirley that Murfreesboro has a bank with safe deposit vaults.

These are American diamonds Shirley is finding in the dirt. They are in a -dig-it-yourself diamond mine called the Crater of Diamonds near Murfreesboro in Arkansas. It is the only place in the world where you get to keep all the diamonds you find.



# How Hard is a Diamond?

On a Scale of 1 to 10  
With 1 being very soft and 10 being very hard  
A diamond scores a 10 on the Mohs scale.

Taking it one step at a time  
Here's how you can perform your own test:

1. Easily scratched by a fingernail.
2. Just barely scratched by a fingernail.
3. Scratches and is scratched by a copper coin.
4. Not scratched by a copper coin and doesn't scratch.
5. Just scratches glass and is easily scratched by a knife.
6. Easily scratches glass and is just scratched by a file.
7. Not scratched by a file.
8. Scratched only by corundum and diamond.
9. Will scratch anything but a diamond.
10. Scratched only by another diamond.

Yes, you might think, but just how good are these American diamonds that I can pick up for free? Will the diamonds I find have to take a back seat to the commercial diamonds being found in Africa and Australia because they aren't quite as hard?

"Well," says Shirley. "When your African diamond gets too tough to be cut with another African diamond, you can always call in an American diamond to finish the job."

Yes. It's a fact.

American diamonds are 20% harder than African diamonds.

More importantly, says Shirley,  
"Finding American diamonds is luckier."

It doesn't matter how bad the weather gets, Shirley doesn't mind helping other people get lucky at finding diamonds that they can take home and keep forever as their very own.

One visitor from Germany got really lucky with Shirley's help. She found the largest diamond there since 1972. The story was written up locally, and in Germany too. Everybody was so excited. "I was so happy for her."



Right after a hard rain you can find diamonds exposed on the surface of the mud. That's because mud will not stick to a diamond. Therefore the mud slides down and the diamonds show up. Keep the sun in front of you and watch for little glints of light that will pinpoint where the diamonds are.

Hey, how about using black lights to find the diamonds in the dark? Sorry Charlie. Expensive tools like that are forbidden at the park so that EVERYBODY has an equal chance to find a diamond of their own to take home and show off to all their friends and neighbors.

Why do diamonds keep popping up on top? That's because the maintenance crew at the diamond park will harrow up the ground. Since anyone can take barrels and buckets full of the mud (and gravel) home with them to work, harrowing up the ground will expose more diamonds for you to find.

That's right, you can take mud and gravel from the park home with you. The rules are though that you must haul it out by hand. No motorized tools of any kind are allowed inside the park. Now you understand why Shirley had to drag those barrels around, huh?

Now it is true that a lot of Shirley's fantastic luck comes from having her own specially designed tools to work the diamond mud with. She doesn't mind showing you how to make tools like she has made, but she does insist that you make your own tools to work with.

You can buy your own professionally made tools at the front office store. Or you can bring your own from home. Or, just walk around, hoping that a diamond jumps up and bites you.



That DOES happen occasionally, and at least once a little dog snuffed a diamond up his nose and all the owner had to do was pick it out – once it was pointed out to her by James Archer, a digging friend of Shirley's from Nashville. James believes in luck too; he believes it is unlucky to tell anybody how many diamonds he has found. But James does admit he has put

all his children through college (possibly by using the diamonds he found).

The park has set up little stations where you can work your mud. The stands are set at a height rather similar to the height most people set for washing dishes. As you can see here in the first wash, you will first get rid of the mud, leaving gravel, gemstones, rocks, fossils and other hard material.



You keep working -- by moving to another station where the water is cleaner -- so that you reduce what you are working with to find what you are looking for, diamonds. This is a slow process. Sometimes it takes even Shirley three long months to reduce a full barrel of mud from the mine down to what is known as a pad.



A pad is where your washing gets really serious. Your eyes must be sharper than ever, your attention in constant use.

Otherwise you can lose some of the rare gems.



Yes, rock hunting in the crater is great for many other kinds of stones too. For example, Jasper, agate, quartz, amethyst, calcite, barite, mica, and kimberlite are found in abundance. Mica has a bad reputation of course and is known as Fool's Gold.

Shirley has dug up samples of most of these gems as well as fossils, and says that you can find garnets at the mine too. "In fact, when you get down to the garnets that is the best indicator in the world that you will find a diamond nearby."



Down there among the garnets Shirley has found a one-carat 50 silver cape, a really rare diamond It was the only silver cape found in 20 years. She has a small red diamond, which is also very rare. In fact, there are only three known finds of red diamonds. "The most common diamonds are clear white, yellow and brown."

Points and carats are confusing to many.

But, points and carats are simply measures of weight.

It takes 100 points to equal one carat.

One carat of diamond is equal to two grams of hard carbon.

The admissions desk at the mine has samples of diamonds and the other gems likely to be found there. Many people, even after studying the stones are dismayed though. "I wouldn't know a diamond if I saw one!"

That is not true, according to Shirley. "When you find a diamond you will immediately know it is a diamond."

One of Shirley's favorite stories is of the woman who got frustrated with finding no diamonds and declared there were NO diamonds at the park. To prove her point she removed the diamond from her engagement ring and dropped it to the ground. "If I can find MY diamond then that proves there are NO diamonds at this park."

Then she glanced down at where she had dropped the diamond out of her ring. That's when she began to scream, for her diamond was not anywhere to be seen.

Shirley came over and found out what had happened. “Okay everybody. Let’s all back up one step and stand very still in one spot. We will not move from this spot until we find the diamond.”

So they stood there and looked and gazed until their eyes hurt. After some long, anxious minutes there was a sudden splash of fire and one of the group very slowly inched forward to pluck the diamond up from the dirt. The woman was more hysterical with the recovery of her diamond than she was with the loss.

I just happened to walk into a store when two jewelers dropped a diamond one time. They too froze and looked first in the cuffs of their trousers. Then they looked on the desk. Next, without moving, they studied the floor. Nothing showed up and so, with them still sitting in the same places I swept the floor. The diamond did not show up.

Then they searched their laps, then the chairs they were sitting in. At this point they gave up. I swept a larger area. Then we moved the desk and made sure we had swept under it as well as possible. Still no diamond. We moved everything within five feet of where the diamond had been lost, and still no diamond.

As a last resort I went through a box of magazines nearly eight feet away from the desk. Nothing. But that box was the very last place that diamond could have been. Therefore I went through the box again, very carefully. With each magazine I pick it up and shook it out. Half way down in the box one of the magazines automatically opened to a page, and there it was.

## **Diamonds Are Hard To Find**

Diamonds come in white, pink, yellow, blue and green. Green is probably the rarest because it has the least penetration of color and often the color disappears when the stone is cut.

What is a CUT? Here are some Diamond Terms

1. **CUT**. Not the shape of the stone, but the quality of its facets.
2. **CLARITY**. Clarity levels start at Flawless and descend from Very Very Slight (VVS) to Very Slight (VS) and Slightly Included (SI). Clarity measures the number of flaws or inclusions in a diamond.
3. **CARAT**. The weight of a diamond. One carat equals about 200 milligrams.
4. **COLOR**. Transparent diamonds (those created from 100 percent carbon) are rated on a scale from D (clear) through Z (light yellow). Grade D is the most prestigious, but, because they are so rare, natural diamonds with tints of pink, blue or purple have a cachet all their own.

The word "diamond" comes from the Greek word "adamas" meaning invincible. Diamonds were first used about 3,000 years ago in India and probably valued for their ability to refract light, although they were also said to be a strong talisman that protected the wearer in battle and warded off evil.

Some of the legends associated with diamonds include a city of diamonds protected by snakes, and diamonds that were impervious to the hottest fires. During the Dark Ages, St. Hildegard wrote that a diamond, held while making the sign of the cross, healed wounds and cured the sick.

Hoping to cure sickness, people even tried eating them, although this practice was largely unsuccessful and had stopped by the Middle Ages, when diamonds became valued for their worth, rather than their healing properties.

It was during this time that diamonds acquired the reputation for being poisonous. The owners of diamond mines perpetrated this myth, in an attempt to stop workers from swallowing diamonds and thus smuggling them out of the mines. Around the world, from the earliest days, stories and myths about diamonds have been filled with tales of good luck, mystical power, beauty and love.

Two of the world's largest and most beautiful diamonds were discovered in India during the Middle Ages – the Blue Hope and the Koor-I-Noor. In fact, India still provides the foremost diamond polishing industry in the world today. Smaller diamond finds continued, in Borneo, Brazil and the Crater of Diamonds here in America.

Even those finds weren't enough to keep up with the demand, as India's diamond supply dwindled. It was in the mid-19th century that the biggest diamond rush occurred, with the discovery of diamonds near the Orange River in South Africa.

Then diamonds were also discovered in Australia, but it wasn't until the 1970s that Australia's potential as a diamond producer became proven. In 1979, the Argyle pipe was discovered near Lake Argyle. It is the richest diamond deposit in the world, and now produces over a third of the world's diamonds every year.

Once upon a time the most sought-after diamonds used to be white diamonds. Then pink diamonds were discovered in the Argyle Pipe -- in a small valley at the south end of the Matsu Range in Western Australia.

Shirley was raised hearing diamond mine stories all her life. Her grandmother's grandfather, Lee Wagner, was a guard for 35 years at the mine. He also had many inventions that helped diamond finders get lucky.

Lee's brother-in-law John Huddleston, found the first diamond there in 1906.

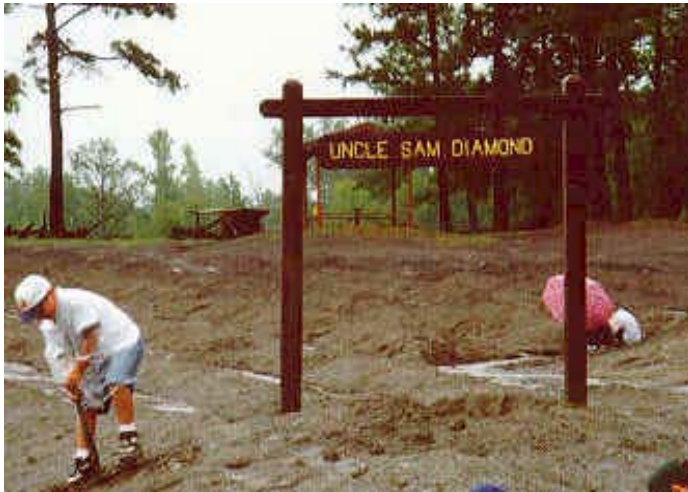
It was John's land back in those days. He found a 4.5 and a 3 carat white diamond in one afternoon on his farm. Immediately after his discovery he sold the 160 acre farm for \$36,000 to Samuel Winston Rayburn, president of Little Rock Union Trust Company.

After changing hands several times, the Crater was purchased by the state in 1972 and made into a State Park. On the books it is not an outstanding source of revenue. In 1995 – for example – the operating expenses were \$518,070 while the revenues were only \$475,991 which may explain the political movement to lease the mine out to a commercial developer again. Shirley and other enthusiasts are dead set against the plan.

"The diamond mine might have lost money at the gate, but those 40,000 people spent a whole lot of money elsewhere, on motels, food, gas, and entertainment. This mine is the only place in the world that you can dig for diamonds and keep all you find, legally anyway. We need to keep it open to the public."

"The Crater of Diamonds Park provides a unique opportunity," says Michael Hall, Park Superintendent. "Finding a diamond worth thousands is roughly just a matter of luck. No special tools are needed, no special talent is required. Anyone walking through these doors has an equal opportunity to find the diamond of their dreams!"

He's right. Besides one place called Cherokee in California, the mine at Murfreesboro is the only area diamonds have been found in the U.S.



The Uncle Sam weighed 40.23 carats.  
The Star of Murfreesboro weighed 34.25,  
The Star of Arkansas 15.33

Since 1972 more than 19,473 diamonds have been found here, for a total weight of 3,903.84 carats.

571 of these weighed more than one carat.

How do these finds compare with diamonds found in the rest of the world? There are more than 350 named diamonds that are famous for their histories. Here are the top ten:

The Cullinan is the largest cut diamond in the world. It was found in South Africa and was named for the owner of the mining company. The Cullinan diamond was 3106 carats, and was cut into 105 stunning diamonds. The largest was named the "Star of Africa" and is 530 carats. In 1907 this diamond was given to King Edward VII of England, and set into the Royal Scepter. It is kept, along with the other Crown Jewels, in the Tower of London.

The Cullinan II is 317.40 carats. The color is white and is the cushion-shaped diamond that is in the center-front of the Imperial State Crown of Great Britain. It is also in the Tower of London with the British Crown Jewels.

The Dary-i-Nur is 186 carats, is pink and is in the Iranian Treasury. It is the largest uncut diamond in the world. Its name means "Sea of Light".

The Dresden Green is 41 carats; it is green, and a very rare type of diamond of extraordinary quality. It gets its name from the city of Saxony where it had been on display for 200 years. The Dresden Green is now on display at the Albertinum Museum in Dresden.

The Hope Diamond is 45.52 carats. It is blue, and is now found in the Smithsonian Institute. According to legend, a curse was placed on the large, blue diamond after it was stolen from an idol in India.

Whether you believe in curses or not, the diamond has really had a fascinating past – it was owned by King Louis XIV, stolen during the French Revolution, sold to pay gambling debts, owned and worn almost daily by an American heiress, sold and worn to raise money for charity, and finally donated to the Smithsonian Museum.

The Hortensia is 20 carats, is peach colored and is in the Louvre. It is one of the crown jewels of France, and was owned by Louis XIV. It was named after Hortense de Beauharnais, Queen of Holland, who was the daughter of the Empress Josephine, the stepdaughter of Napoleon Bonaparte and the mother of Napoleon III.

The Kohinoor is 108.93 carats, white and is located in the Tower of London. As with many of the most famous diamonds, there is a curse of death and destruction attached to it. Its name means "Mountain of Light" and legend has it that it actually comes from another diamond also rife with legend, called the "Great Mogul" which was said to have weighed 244 carats and mysteriously disappeared in 1665. The Kohinoor was owned by the first sultan of Mogul, and passed down through generations, until it was given to Queen Victoria. It was recut and now rests in the crown of Queen Elizabeth.

The Orloff is 189.62 carats. It is thought to have weighed about 300 carats when it was discovered. For a while, it was confused with the Great Mogul diamond. One legend of the Orloff is that it was set in the eye of a god statue in the temple of Sri Rangen, and stolen by a French soldier dressed up like a Hindu. He is said to have escaped by swimming down a raging river during a storm. It was eventually sold to Prince Gregory Orloff.

In an attempt to win back her heart, he gave it to Catherine the Great, who collected lovers and precious gems with equal passion. She had the diamond mounted on top of the double eagle in the Imperial scepter. It is now found in the Russian Diamond Fund, Moscow.

The Spoonmaker Diamond has many legends associated with it too. (It supposedly got its name when the owner--who is said to have found it sitting on top of a pile of garbage --bartered it to a spoonmaker for three wooden spoons.) More likely is that it was purchased by a Frenchman named Pikot, who bought it from the Maharajah of Madras in India. He took it to France, but was robbed when he got there.

The diamond ended up at an auction, and was bid on by the notorious Casanova. It was finally bought by Napoleon's mother, Letizia Ramolino, who later sold her jewelry to help her son escape from Elba. It was bought again by an officer of Tepedelenli, and put into the treasury.

When Tepedelenli was killed during a revolt, the entire treasury went to the Palace of Turkey, and the Spoonmaker's Diamond, now called the "Kasicki" is there.

The Taylor-Burton Diamond is a 69 carat pear-shaped white diamond that was originally called the "Cartier Diamond" after the jeweler paid \$1,050,000 for it at an auction. Richard Burton purchased it the day after the auction for Elizabeth Taylor. She later renamed it the Taylor-Burton diamond. Ms. Taylor wore the diamond publicly at a party for Princess Grace's 40th birthday party in Monaco. She sold the diamond in 1978 and used the funds to build a hospital in Botswana. The diamond was later purchased by Robert Mouawad.

The Crater of Diamonds park service offers everything you could possibly need to find your own diamonds. There is still the chance there may be some in there as big as these are, including refreshments and candy bars.

[Without charge you can see exhibits, demonstrations, literature and beautiful photos.](#)

For actual digging a nominal fee is charged of \$4 for adults and \$2 for children six and up.



More than 40,000 people come from all around the world annually to try their luck in the 35 acres of cleared field at the Crater. (The park is actually 888 pine-covered acres along the banks of the Little Missouri River)

It is an economical expedition for anyone. RV camping spaces are available for \$6.50 a night. There are 60 Class A campsites, picnic areas, restaurants, laundry, bath houses, playgrounds and dump station.

The Queen of Diamonds looks like the place to stay if you can't rough it at camp. This is a renovated 1902 Victorian home. It will delight you with its authentic furnishing. It is only two miles from the Crater so it is easy to zip out there with the first light of day.

For Southern variety there are several buffet-type restaurants in town which are just downright friendly.

Like Shirley, you can easily fall in love with the Murfreesboro area. "Besides being famous for diamonds, Murfreesboro is centrally located to one large lake and two beautiful rivers. There are hiking trails, great fishing and hunting. On the Little Missouri you can snag a rainbow trout below the dam, while above it, small mouth bass are waiting for you. The nearby Caddo River is regarded as the top small mouth bass stream in Arkansas."

There are winding stairs at Albert Pike for hiking. Lake Greeson is a close attraction too. On the west and south side of the lake is public hunting area. Whitetail deer, eastern wild turkey, squirrel and rabbits are plentiful. The bird watching is great. 200 species have been confirmed in this area, including 80 breeding species. Eagles can often be seen soaring over the lake.

"It's the prettiest lake I ever saw," says Shirley. "There are five thousand beautiful acres of clear water here in Lake Greeson. You will find camping facilities with four marinas and outstanding resorts."

To get to the Crater of Diamonds from Little Rock go 67 miles south on Interstate 30. At Arkadelphia there is a highly visible sign telling you to follow Highway 26 to visit the Crater of Diamonds. Right after you get off the freeway Highway 26 bears to the left and the signs are not adequate to get you on the right road without some neck-craning. After that, the road there is lined with pines and towering oak. You will also pass through the town of Delight on your way. It is known for being the hometown of Glenn Campbell, the entertainer.



Whether you come for diamonds, rocks or huge fossils like this one



Your family will find this a very rewarding vacation.

The end.