



# From Armenia to Montana

*Mining the knowledge of two countries*

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Gevorg Navasardyan stood at the top of a hill, looking down at a spill of splintered timbers, a rusted barrel and curled sheets of corrugated metal—the ghostly remains of what had once been a thriving copper lead zinc mine in western Montana. He was a long way from home—6,200 miles, to be exact—but the Iron Mask Mine’s mill complex made him think of his native Armenia.

“Reclamation is a problem in Armenia,” said Navasardyan, who works for his country’s Ministry of Nature Protection. “We have many mines in Armenia and there is a problem with wanting to clean them up.”

Navasardyan was on the last day of his three-week stay in Montana when he and BLM geologist Dave Williams toured the abandoned mine site in the Elkhorn Mountains. The international visit was arranged through the U.S. State Department’s Responsible Mining Program to bring Navasardyan and several other scientists from other countries to America for an intense exchange of ideas.

The program is a good value for the Department of the Interior, Williams said. “This is all geared toward responsible mining. It’s good to lay foundations with other countries. Now, we have a bridge between our nations.”

This was Navasardyan’s first visit to Montana and he said there are a lot of similarities between Big Sky Country and Armenia, which he called “the country of talking stones.” Situated between the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean seas, Armenia is a country of mountains, volcanoes, and lakes puddled in ancient craters. It’s also a nation full of mines—nearly 500 in a country

that measures 11,484 square miles, Navasardyan noted. Many of those mines perforate the hills around the pristine Lake Sevan, an aquatic crown jewel of Armenia.

“We realize we need to use its fresh water for drinking,” Navasardyan said. “We need to develop a reclamation plan.”

Environmental clean-up hasn’t always been a priority, he added. “But I think it will be getting better. Our government wants to find money for more reclamation because they understand it’s a problem.”

While working out of the Butte Field Office during his stay, Navasardyan shadowed Williams on the job. The two saw abandoned mine sites, ongoing operations at Montana Resources in Butte, and visited the Golden Sunlight Mine near Whitehall, which the Armenian said was the highlight of his time in America. “I was able to see the kind of operations and processes which we can use in my country in the future.”

It wasn’t all work and no play for Navasardyan, though. As his host,



*Butte FO geologist Dave Williams points out features of the former Iron Mask Mine site to Gevorg Navasardyan, a geologist visiting from Armenia. Photo by David Abrams*

Williams made an effort to get him out on the weekends to see some sites in western Montana, including the historic mining town of Garnet, a trip to Yellowstone National Park, the Grant Kohrs Ranch near Deer Lodge, and even an introduction to mountain biking around Butte.

As he and Williams left the Iron Mask site, en route to their next stop, Navasardyan said, “This has been a very good, important experience for me to come over here. I will try to use what I’ve learned here when I go back to Armenia.”



*Gevorg Navasardyan, a geologist visiting from Armenia, photographs an adit at the abandoned Iron Mask Mine site as Dave Williams, geologist with the Butte Field Office, looks on. Photo by David Abrams*