

JOURNEY TO SRI LANKA

Captured on a joint field trip hosted by Gem-A and the National Association of Jewellers (NAJ), this picture of a Sri Lankan miner, taken by Charles Evans FGA DGA, reveals the human face of small-scale sapphire mining.

There exists a wonderful dynamic synergy in some small-scale gem mining between Mother Nature's cycle of the seasons, the farmer and the miner, all while being licenced and controlled by the state. When the dry season is in full swing, the rice paddies in the Elahera region of central Sri Lanka switch from food production to mining. The dry fields are excavated as the rich soils of this country cease to produce food and are exposed down to the layers of old alluvial gem-bearing gravels. The fertile topsoil is laid to one side in order to be replaced as the mining season ends and the holes get filled in again for the rainy season. The sub-soils are put in another pile. The high water table provides the water necessary to wash the extracted gravels. The two miners pictured here, who are also rice farmers, were showing me their finds of the day, including a mixture of well-formed gueda sapphire crystals, some well-tumbled tourmalines and some impressive garnets. ■

The second annual Gem-A and NAJ field trip to Sri Lanka is taking place this month (October 1-16, 2018). Attendees are given an escorted tour of various mine sites, as well as the opportunity to buy gems, see gem-cutters in action and partake in a safari.