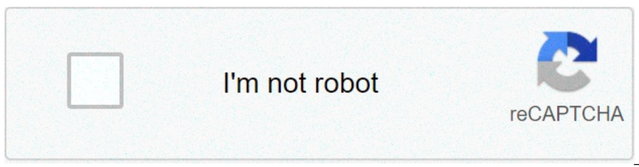

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Most valuable diamond found in arkansas

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. -- A bank manager discovered a 9.07-carat diamond at a state park in southwestern Arkansas after thinking the precious gem was a piece of glass.Kevin Kinard of Maumelle found the second-largest diamond in the 48-year history of Crater of Diamonds State Park on Labor Day, according to a news release from Arkansas State Parks.Kinard said he and his friends hauled sifting equipment to the state park in Murfreesboro. Kinard noted that he's been visiting Crater of Diamonds regularly since he was a kid but had never stumbled upon a diamond until Sept. 7.“I only wet sifted for about ten minutes before I started walking up and down the plowed rows,” he said. “Anything that looked like a crystal, I picked it up and put it in my bag.”While searching in the southeast portion of the 37.5-acre (15 hectare) diamond search area, Kinard scooped up a marble-sized crystal that had a rounded, dimpled shape.“It kind of looked interesting and shiny, so I put it in my bag and kept searching,” Kinard said. “I just thought it might’ve been glass.”Several hours later, Kinard said he and his comrades stopped by the park’s Diamond Discovery Center, where park workers identify visitor findings and register diamonds.“I almost didn’t have them check my finds, because I didn’t think I had found anything,” Kinard said. “My friend had hers checked, though, so I went ahead and had them check mine, too.”Upon having his finds assessed, an employee informed Kinard he had discovered a diamond.“I honestly teared up when they told me,” Kinard said. “I was in complete shock!”Assistant Superintendent Dru Edmonds noted that conditions were ideal for Kinard to spot the gem.“Park staff plowed the search area on August 20, just a few days before Tropical Storm Laura dropped more than two inches of rain in the park,” he said. “The sun was out when Mr. Kinard visited, and he walked just the right path to notice the sunlight reflecting off his diamond.”As of Wednesday, 246 diamonds have been registered at Crater of Diamonds State Park this year, weighing a total of 59.25 carats. On average, people find one or two diamonds there daily. It was all treat, no trick this Halloween for Steven McCool of Fayetteville, Ark., at Crater of Diamonds State Park. The 34-year-old found the third-largest diamond of the year. “Arkansas is the only state in the country that has a diamond mine open to the public,” said Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism Secretary Stacy Hurst. “While many diamonds are found every year, it never ceases to be exciting! I hope Mr. McCool’s story inspires even more people to visit Crater of Diamonds State Park.” McCool said he was planning on going back to Fayetteville, but extended his stay since there had been a good rain and conditions were optimal to find a diamond. That turned out to be a good decision. He was wet sifting, or sifting dirt using screens and water, his 11th bucket of the day. His hands were soaked through his gloves and the water was ice cold. Time was ticking down, and the park was closing in about 30 minutes. “As my eyes were panning to it, I was thinking it could be an amber piece of glass like an old Coke bottle,” McCool said. “Once I focused on it though, I knew it was a diamond. I was like ‘No way! No way!’” Even though he is a self-proclaimed “newbie” at diamond hunting, McCool knew this was a diamond. He put his treasure in a safe place and continued wet sifting the rest of the dirt he collected in the Canary Hill area of the park so he could go through it at home since the park was about to close. Visitors are allowed to take up to five gallons per person/per day of sifted gravel home to look through at their leisure. This was his fifth trip to the Crater and typically he would take all of his finds to the identification table to find out what treasures he found. This time, he said, “I went up there and was like ‘Where do I register my diamond?’” He was right. “Mr. McCool’s find is a 4.49-carat sparkling, canary yellow diamond that is about the size of a jellybean and seems to have great clarity. It is a stunning diamond,” Crater of Diamonds State Park Assistant Superintendent Meghan Moore said. She also said that finding a diamond that large wet sifting is unusual. “It is extraordinarily rare to catch a diamond in the top screen of a screen set. The mesh size of the top screen is larger and typically used to catch and remove bigger pieces of gravel – not diamonds. The average diamond size found wet sifting a quarter of a carat. Typically, larger diamonds are found by surface searching.” “I put the diamond on the ground just to see if I would have noticed it,” McCool said. “It was very large, proud, and shiny. There were others looking in that area, so if it would have been just a little closer to the surface, someone could have easily found it.” On Labor Day of this year, Kevin Kinard of Maumelle, Ark., found a 9-carat diamond, the second-largest diamond found in the park’s history by surface searching. McCool named his diamond the BamMam Diamond, his 7-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter’s initials.“What’s more precious than a precious gem? My children. So, I named it after my children and the name will stay with the diamond forever,” he explained. “I called my son afterward and asked him if he remembered what Thanos’s Mind Stone looked like and told him I found one!” He says he is not sure yet if he will sell or keep the diamond. “I’m torn. I’m somewhat sentimental. It’s my first diamond I found. I am the first person to unearth this, the first person to touch it. It’s hard to wrap my head around it. I am blown away by the clarity, the beauty, how rare it is. I’m definitely blessed, not lucky. It was the Lord’s work,” he said. “Mr. McCool hit the nail on the head. This is part of what makes Crater of Diamonds State Park such a special place. Not only is it the only place in the world where you can search for finders keepers diamonds, no one else has made your discovery before you. Each diamond is unique, as is each discovery,” Arkansas State Parks Director Grady Spann said. McCool said he can’t wait to come back to the state park for another diamond hunting adventure. “I’ve set the bar really high and it will be really difficult to top this one. The hunt and the excitement that comes with this is it for me. You never know what you’re going to get,” he said. “It’s a lot of work but if you work hard and persevere, the reward is even greater if you find something. You’re just blown away.” Quick Facts About Crater of Diamonds State Park Diamonds come in all colors of the rainbow. The three most common colors found at Crater of Diamonds State Park are white, brown, and yellow, in that order. In total, over 75,000 diamonds have been unearthed at the Crater of Diamonds since the first diamonds were discovered in 1906 by John Huddleston, a farmer who owned the land long before it became an Arkansas State Park in 1972. The largest diamond ever discovered in the United States was unearthed here in 1924 during an early mining operation. Named the Uncle Sam, this white diamond with a pink cast weighed 40.23 carats. It was later cut into a 12.42-carat emerald shape and purchased by a private collector for $150,000 in 1971. Another well-known diamond from the park is the Strawn-Wagner. Found in 1990 by Murfreesboro resident Shirley Strawn, this 3.03-carat white gem was cut into a round brilliant shape weighing 1.09 carats. It graded as ideal cut, D-colorless, and flawless and was set in a platinum and 24-carat gold ring. In 1998 the State of Arkansas purchased this diamond for $34,700 in donations and placed it on permanent display at the park visitor center. Admission to the park’s diamond search area is currently limited to 1,500 tickets per day due to COVID-19 restrictions. Visitors are encouraged to purchase tickets in advance at www.CraterofDiamondsStatePark.com, to ensure access. Crater of Diamonds State Park is located on Arkansas Highway 301 in Murfreesboro. It is one of 52 state parks administered by Arkansas State Parks, a division of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism. About Arkansas State Parks Arkansas State Parks is a division of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism. Arkansas state parks and museums cover 54,400 acres of forest, wetlands, fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation facilities, and unique historic and cultural resources. The system includes 1,100 buildings (including 183 historic structures), six National Historic Landmarks, a National Natural Landmark, 16 sites on the National Register of Historic Places, and War Memorial Stadium. The state parks have 1,800 campsites, 1,050 picnic sites, 208 cabins, five lodges, and 415 miles of trails. Eight million visitors annually come from all regions of the country. Park staffs provide over 42,000 education programs, activities, and special events to more than 700,000 participants each year. Established in 1923, Arkansas State Parks preserve special places for future generations, provide quality recreation and education opportunities, enhance the state’s economy through tourism, and provide leadership in resource conservation. Connect with us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and visit ArkansasStateParks.com and ArkansasStateParks.com/media to learn more about everything we have to offer. If you have the good fortune to live long enough, it is a physiological fact that you only turn 40 once, though the ink of that fact can get smudged slightly if you’re an identical triplet, one of three daughters who arrived into the world within two minutes of each other. What is already a milestone birthday becomes even more significant. In any event, it was for this very reason that Angelica Lopez and her two sisters, Monica and Veronica, decided to do something novel to mark their fourth decade on Earth. Unlike their 30th birthday, which they’d celebrated by sipping slushy, brain-numbingly cold margaritas poolside in Cancun, on September 15, 2019, they were standing in an Arkansas state park, a sun-baked dirt field bumping 37.5 acres out before them. Trowels and shovels in hand, they took turns turning over the ground and inspecting it for diamonds, lifting up their sunglasses to squint closer at what could be. Alas, it wasn’t; neither Angelica nor Monica nor Veronica found any diamonds that day. But it was not a wash, this visit, says Angelica, a financial advisor living in Detroit, who was thrilled to be doing something different than she’d ever done. “In the States, we as travelers tend to get enamored with big attractions like the Grand Canyon or Mount Rushmore,” she says. “But there are cool little places like this all over our country that people just don’t know about.” Officially, this cool little place is known as Crater of Diamonds State Park, a 911-acre, teardrop-shaped bundle of land two miles south of Murfreesboro, Arkansas, population 1,641. It is 232 miles from Dallas to the southwest, and 240 to Memphis in the northeast. The park has walking trails and 47 campsites and a gift shop selling souvenir pins, patches, and spoons, but most people come here to dig, and dig they do, for this state park is the world’s only diamond-bearing site accessible to the public. What you find, you can keep. And despite the triplets striking out, other prospectors have struck it rich. Really, really rich. Three billion years ago, long before the advent of any sort of plant or animal or dinosaur, diamonds were being forged 100 miles below the ground, when 2,000-degree magma and atmospheric pressure 60,000 times greater than the Earth’s surface came together to force billions of carbon atoms to bond, crystallizing into gems. These gems stayed there, relatively undisturbed, until 100 million years ago, when force finally pushed the diamonds up, up, up, expelling them through volcanic pipes, conduits to the surface that form during violent subterranean eruptions. (Although there are tens of thousands of volcanic pipes across the world, less than 1 percent of them have carried diamonds.) Upon reaching the surface, the volcanic material spewed in all directions, and once cooled, it was covered in layers of sediment over time. There, diamonds rested, waiting to be discovered. And some discoveries have been more fortuitous than others. In the early spring of 1867, a 15-year-old boy named Erasmus Stephanus Jacobs was playing on the banks of the Orange River in Hopetown, South Africa, when he saw a “little white pebble” in the sun and pocketed it with a handful of other rocks, which he took home and deposited on his family’s farmhouse floor to little fanfare. The boy’s mother, however, spoke of the pebble’s “curious sparkle” to a neighbor, Schalk van Niekerk, who asked to see it. By then, the stone had been tossed into the yard, but “after some little search it was found in the dust, for nobody on the farm would stoop for such a trifle,” wrote Gardner F. Williams in his 1910 book, The Diamond Mines of South Africa. After van Niekerk cleaned the dust off the pebble and saw its sparkle, he offered to buy it, but was rebuffed: Since the stone was worth nothing, after all, he should have it for free. The “pebble” changed hands several times before coming before Lorenzo Boyes, the acting civil commissioner of the nearby town of Colesberg, who found it could scrape glass. “I believe it to be a diamond,” he said. Still, Boyes was in the minority; a majority of examiners thought it to be topaz, and the stone was so lightly valued that it was put in an unsealed envelope and passed to the foremost mineralogist of the colony, Dr. W. Guybon Atherstone, by regular mail. Atherstone’s verdict came quickly: The pebble was a 21.25-carat diamond. “I congratulate you on the stone you have sent to me,” he wrote to Boyes. The diamond—the first one discovered in South Africa—came to be known as the Eureka Diamond, sparking the Kimberley Diamond Rush and marking the beginning of the Mineral Revolution, which changed the balance of power in South Africa and set the foundations for racial segregation. “If you find a diamond, people will find you.” Some 8,800 miles away, in the U.S. South, John Branner monitored the developments. As Arkansas’s newly minted state geologist, Branner knew that the stones found in South Africa were located in peridotite soil, which Arkansas had, too. With this in mind, Branner searched the surface area in Pike County, known for its timber, convinced there were diamonds waiting to be discovered. Branner found nothing in 1889, but he would soon be proven correct. In 1906, a man named John Wesley Huddleston was working on his 160-acre farm outside Murfreesboro, itself in Pike County, when he noticed the same thing Jacobs had—an interesting pebble. “I was crawling on my hands and knees . . . when my eyes fell on another glittering pebble. . . . I knew it was different from any I had ever seen before. It had a fiery eye that blazed up at me every way I turned it. I hurried to the house with the pebble, saddled my mule, and started for Murfreesboro . . . riding through the lane, my eye caught another glitter, and I dismounted and picked it up out of the dust,” Huddleston told the Arkansas Gazette. A month later, he sold his land for $36,000—now around $1 million—and prospectors flooded. For years, thousands of prospectors occupied a tent city along the road to the land. In 1924, prospector Wesley Basham uncovered the largest diamond ever found in the U.S., a 40.23-carat pink diamond named “Uncle Sam” after Basham’s nickname. Years passed. The land never quite produced enough diamonds to merit the development of a commercial diamond mine, and so it was sold, and sold again as a private tourist attraction—first the Diamond Preserve of the United States, and then Millar’s Crater of Diamonds. Discoveries continued: A 15.36-carat white diamond unearthed in 1956; a 3.11-carat diamond resembling a caricature profile of President Dwight D. Eisenhower found in 1957. Finally, in 1972, the Arkansas State Parks, Recreation, and Travel Commission acquired the land to create a state park. Arkansas has nodded to its diamond-producing legacy in myriad other ways. In 1912, a five-person committee from the Pine Bluff, Arkansas, chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) voted to approve a design for the state flag: a large white diamond on a rectangular field of red. In 1967, the state designated the diamond as its official gem. In 1993 and 1997, Hillary Clinton wore a “naturally flawless,” uncut, pillow-shaped 4.25-carat yellow diamond found at Crater of Diamonds at her husband’s presidential inaugurals. The Arkansas state quarter, which launched in 2003 and depicts rice stalks and a mallard flying above a lake, has a cut diamond front and center. All celebrate the simple, indisputable fact: that there is no other U.S. state that offers visitors the chance to get so close to actual diamonds. Since Crater of Diamonds’ inception 49 years ago, at press time, 34,241 diamonds have been registered at the park since 1972; 103 have been registered so far in 2021. (In carats, more than 6,800 carats of diamonds have been registered since 1972; 16 carats have been registered this year.) “The park records one to two diamond finds a day,” says Waymon Cox, who is originally from Murfreesboro and has been a park interpreter at Crater of Diamonds since 2008. “With enough dedication and looking in the right places in the right ways, your chances of finding one are good.” (Cox himself has found three.) Though the average diamond found at Crater of Diamonds is the size of a match head, between 20–25 points of weight—too small to be cut—1,021 of the diamonds found have been more than one carat. (There are 100 points in a carat.) Amethyst, agate, jasper, peridot, garnet, and quartz can also all be found and kept at Crater of Diamonds State Park, but it’s the big diamonds, unsurprisingly, that most visitors are after. As for when someone does discover a diamond over one carat, Cox says, the park will only share the news with the finder’s permission. They then give the so-called finders time: time to change their privacy settings on social media, and time to remove their phone number and address from public records. Says Cox: “If you find a diamond, people will find you.” Contrary to popular belief, you do not need to be a professional gemologist to hunt diamonds at Crater of Diamonds State Park, which makes 1,500 tickets available online per day to visitors—you just need to be willing to get a little dirty. “I would say there were no people any greener than we were, when we showed up,” says William “David” Dempsey, who first drove to Crater of Diamonds with his family in 2020 from Athens, Alabama, after changing vacation plans due to the COVID pandemic. “But I would encourage folks to have a plan, and to work the plan. Don’t be surprised if you get results.” To search for diamonds, there are three main tactics, and which one “hunters” choose is typically determined by two factors: weather and time. “Surface searching”—strolling up and down the rows of dirt to look for any gems on the surface—is most productive after a hard rain, when water has rinsed the rocks and the dried dirt “helps the diamond’s metallic luster stand out against dark diamond-bearing soil,” per the park. (It is also generally more lucrative, with the average diamond found on top of the ground weighing nearly two-thirds of a carat compared to the park average of one-quarter of a carat.) The second—“dry sifting”—involves turning over the dirt with a hand tool and examining the dirt first by sight, then using a screen to sift the material. Buckets, shovels, and screens are all available for rent at the Diamond Discovery Visitors' Center; battery-powered and motor-operated equipment isn’t allowed. The third and most involved method of searching for diamonds is referred to as “wet sifting.” A multistep process, it first requires diamond hunters to dig deep holes and wash the dirt they remove in a series of screens to catch gems at different increments. (To do so, the modern-day miners lug soil to the park’s two open-air pavilions, which have water troughs and tables.) As the screens are submerged, the sediment floats away, while the heavier materials, like diamonds, remain. Diggers use at least two screens, but some, like Dempsey, use three: a quarter-inch screen, an eighth-inch screen, and a 16th-of-an-inch screen, the mesh of which is similar to a window screen. It is monotonous, thankless work, though occasionally shot through with a streak of white-hot adrenaline. Says Dempsey: “The first thing you do is check your top screen, and your heart always pounds a little bit. Because if you have a top-screen find, it’s big.” “I thought somebody was messing with me at first because it was so big.” Watching a seasoned wet sifter work is akin to watching a ballet of the hands, which submerse, rotate, rinse, rock, and bounce their series of screens to pile the heavier materials in the center. Once they’ve sifted material on the smaller screen, hunters will invert it in one solid motion, like flipping over a cooled cake onto a plate. Anything with potential will be scooped up with a pocket knife or fingernail and put into a pile to be appraised by park staff free of charge. Crater of Diamonds also allows visitors to take up to five gallons of gravel home to be examined, which means that many of the diamonds uncovered have never been reported or registered. Dempsey, for his part, found a small diamond weeks after his second trip, while sitting in his living room. But it was on the first visit to Crater of Diamonds—that one in 2020—that he turned up a 2.73-carat diamond while wet sifting. “I thought somebody was messing with me at first because it was so big. Of course, you say ‘diamond’ around a wash facility and everybody stops,” he says. “We got swarmed. Everybody wanted pictures. I’ve got this diamond in my hand worth thousands of dollars, and I’m a little overwhelmed.” Dempsey, who named his diamond the Dempsey-Ducharme Diamond after his family’s experience at the park, had the gem appraised and cushion-cut to 1.16 carats. After researchers at the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) examined the stone, they ascertained it was a rare type IIa diamond, which has “no measurable” nitrogen or boron impurities and is chemically pure. (Less than 2 percent of all naturally occurring diamonds are type IIa.) “Discovering a type IIa gem diamond is remarkable enough, but uncovering one from a source in the United States, where few diamonds occur, is definitely a noteworthy event,” they wrote in a post about their findings. “I don’t want to give the exact figure [of how much it’s worth],” Dempsey says. “I’m not quitting my job tomorrow, but it is certainly the most valuable thing I’ve ever found. And it was bigger than the one I gave my wife when I asked her to marry me.” Diamonds have been held in high regard since the 4th century B.C.E., when they were first discovered in India. Soon, they were being transported along the Silk Road, coveted in the West for their ability to cut metal and refract light. Plato thought that diamonds were celestial spirits embedded in stones; ancient Romans wondered if they were splinters from fallen stars. Centuries later, once a renowned oracle in Paris during the 18th century “determined” that a diamond worn on the fourth finger of the left hand would serve the twin purposes of warding off evil and attracting good fortune, a market for diamond rings was born. Yet prior to the 20th century, there was little scientific knowledge about diamonds, and so what made one valuable varied. Bigger was better, true, but better was otherwise subjective. And so, in the 1940s, the GIA established an international diamond grading system based on the four Cs: cut, clarity, color, and carat weight. At the heart of each of the four criteria is precision. Because even a hair of a carat can make a significant difference in pricing, weight is typically measured to the hundred thousandths of a carat. (Statistically, per the GIA, a majority of diamonds used in fine jewelry weigh one carat or less.) Clarity—the absence of any blemishes or feathering—also affects a diamond’s value. With diamonds, it’s all about what you cannot see, which means that the absence of color is also highly prized; the more transparent a diamond, the higher its value. Diamonds are graded alphabetically from D (“colorless”) to Z (“light”), with each letter grade in between hewing to a defined range of color appearance. Rarer colored diamonds, like naturally occurring pink or blue diamonds, are outside this grading system. “I can say without fear of contradiction that it is the most complex diamond ever cut.” More than anything else, however, a diamond’s value comes from its cut. And once cut, there are technical terms for the elements a diamond is graded on: “brightness” (the total light reflected from a diamond), “fire” (the dispersion of light into the colors of the spectrum), and “scintillation” (the pattern of light and dark areas, and the sparkle when a diamond is rotated). Other aspects not based on appearance —“weight ratio, durability, polish, and symmetry”—are more about design and less about looks, according to GIA standards. Master diamond cutter Mike Botha has been working with diamonds for more than 50 years, after getting his start in 1967, when he had an apprenticeship in diamond cross-working—polishing each facet of a diamond one by one—in South Africa. Since 1998, he has been the CEO of Embee Diamond Technologies in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, responsible for diamond design, research, and development. In his decades in the field, Botha has been commissioned to cut some veritable “big ones”: a 314-carat diamond for Diagem International; a 353.9-carat diamond produced by Premier Mine of De Beers in South Africa. But when he heard about the “Esperanza,” a teardrop-shaped 8.52-carat gem that was found at Crater of Diamonds in 2015 by Bobbie Oskarson, it was Botha himself who contacted Laura Stanley, vice president of Little Rock’s Stanley Jewelers, hoping to collaborate with the pair, who were working together. Botha had visited Crater of Diamonds in 1999 and says it was this personal experience—plus hearing his own father’s stories of small-scale diamond mining growing up—that “stirred up passions” for the Esperanza. That, and it was a stunner. “When I first saw the Esperanza, I was blown away by the quality of the rough crystal,” says Botha, now in his mid-70s. “The color and clarity were beyond anything I saw prior.” Stanley, Oskarson, and Botha reached an agreement for cutting the Esperanza. (Esperanza, which is Spanish for “hope,” is also the name of Oskarson’s niece.) But before he even began the process, Botha created a 3D model of his design, calculated the angle of each face using trigonometry, and developed a faceting sequence that allowed for the most accurate and effective execution of turns. Then, he started cutting—mentally, that is. “During the weeks preceding [the actual job], I cut the diamond in my mind, over and over, until the sequence and execution were fully committed to memory and my subconscious mind,” he says. In September 2015, Botha shipped his 800-pound cutting bench across the border and flew from his home in Canada to Little Rock, Arkansas, to begin shaping the diamond before the public at Stanley Jewelers. After 180 hours at the grinding wheel, he had transformed the rough diamond into a 147-face triolette that resembles a falling teardrop and nets out at 4.65 carats—about half of the size of a quarter. “I can say without fear of contradiction that it is the most complex diamond ever cut,” Botha says. “My only regret: I wish it weighed 100 carats.” Today, the Esperanza has its own Facebook page, and remains for sale. It is worth an estimated $1 million, making it the most valuable diamond ever discovered in the United States. But that might not be for long. Kevin Kinard first went to Crater of Diamonds on a second-grade field trip in the 1990s. It was a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Kinard’s hometown of Searcy, Arkansas, and when the class arrived at the park, Kinard, by his own recollection, was unimpressed. “It was just a big old dirt field,” he says. He found nothing. Kinard returned to the park one more time as a child with his family, but started going back once a year in earnest in 2015, when he’d take off on weekends with friends to explore state parks, of which Arkansas has 52. “Arkansas is a really beautiful state,” says Kinard, a bank branch manager who lives in Maumelle, two hours northeast of Murfreesboro. “We have the mountains and the rivers and lakes. And we have Crater of Diamonds, which is unlike anywhere else in the world.” Kinard is such a fan of state parks, in fact, that in 2020 he was intent on finally filling his Arkansas state-parks passport, a free, pocket-sized, rust-colored booklet with a page for each state park: get your booklet stamped at every park, and you get a commemorative coin or patch. Though Kinard and his friends had been to Crater of Diamonds once already that year, in May, they’d forgotten to get the proof in their passports. And so, with Labor Day looming, they decided to return. When they looked, however, the weekend sessions at Crater of Diamonds were fully booked. Labor Day it was. At five a.m. that holiday morning, Kinard was awake; an hour or so later, he was sitting at the Miner’s Diner & Steakhouse in Murfreesboro with his friends Ginger and Brian, a sausage, egg, and cheese breakfast sandwich in front of him. By 8, they were at the park gates, dragging their folding chairs and cooler to a shaded area in the southwest corner of the field. Once they’d set up camp, Kinard and Ginger took off to surface hunt, each one heading in a different direction. Brian stayed behind to wet sift. After an hour, Kinard returned with his pockets full, and showed Brian his discoveries. One rock in particular—a marble-sized crystal with a dimpled surface—caught Brian’s eye. That looks interesting, he told Kinard. At 12:30, with lunchtime fast approaching and the temperature hovering at 90 degrees, the trio packed up their gear and headed to the visitor center to get their passports stamped. Ginger visited the service station to have her finds examined. Kinard said he would have left then, if it were not for his friends' insistence that he have his finds checked, too—after all, what was the harm? So Kinard did what Ginger had done all those minutes ago: spread out his wares on the table and watched as a ranger picked through the stones. “When they told me, I teared up. I was in complete shock. I still think about that day.” When it came to the rock Brian had said looked interesting, the ranger paused, her hands stilling over the stone. She picked it up, put it down, and asked Kinard to wait. Soon, he was shown to an office, where he waited some more. People filtered in and out. Finally, they addressed him: “They said, ‘Why don’t you have a seat? We’re going to tell you something,’” he says. Kinard had found a 9.07-carat brown diamond, the second-largest ever since Crater of Diamonds became a state park in 1972. (The 16.37-carat white “Amarillo Starlight,” discovered in August 1975, is the only one to best it.) “When they told me that, I teared up,” says Kinard, who named his diamond the Kinard Friendship Diamond. “I was in complete shock. I still think about that day.” In its rough form, Kinard’s diamond—the fourth-largest ever found in the U.S.—has more than 900 points. In May, he flew with gemologist Toddy Pitard of Lauray’s in Hot Springs, Arkansas, to New York to learn more about the gem and its potential. “The anticipation of what I had was killing me,” he says. But after getting the diamond assessed at the World Diamond Tower in the heart of Manhattan’s Diamond District, Kinard was encouraged to keep the stone in its rough form—no polishing, no cutting. “It’s a beautiful chocolate diamond,” Kinard says. “It’s a nine-carat diamond. Those are very rare, and very hard to come by. But when that diamond gets cut, it’s going to look like every other diamond. What sets it apart?” It is fitting, Kinard says, that a diamond from Arkansas—known as the “Natural State”—will be left in its natural form. In the coming months, Kinard and Pitard will work together to design a piece of jewelry that showcases the diamond in all its dimpled glory. After that, Kinard says he is unsure of what will come next: He will work with an Arkansas museum to display the piece, maybe, or sell it when the time is right. He declined to share a dollar estimate, but the potential to surpass the Esperanza is there. (Oskarson’s diamond was 8.52 carats in its rough form, remember.) You do the math, he practically winks. “My diamond was found on 9/7, and it weighed 9.07,” Kinard says. “God put me on the right path.” Despite the challenges and restrictions of the COVID pandemic, 129,218 people traveled to Crater of Diamonds in 2020 for what was a record-breaking year, with more than 80 carats of diamonds unearthed. That visitor number is expected to go up in 2021: Historically, the big discoveries send admission to the park spiking, says Cox. And why wouldn’t they? After all, for visitors to Crater of Diamonds, it’s the success stories like Kinard’s, Dempsey’s, and Oskarson’s they speak of that keep them coming back to the field. It’s the idea that the next big one could be right there, inches from their fingertips or buried just beneath their boots. The glory of touching something no human hand has ever before touched. A pebble to call their own, perhaps—one that could change their world. >> Next: Waterworld most valuable diamond ever found in arkansas. what is the largest diamond found in arkansas. are arkansas diamonds valuable. are arkansas diamonds worth anything. how much are diamonds worth found in arkansas