Dig Me. The Great State of Maine Minerals & Gems

Maine Department of Economic Development

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METAL ORE SPECIMENS

There are four principal metal ore minerals found in Maine.
1. Pyrite - iron sulphur; (2) Galena - lead sulphur; (3) Sphalerite - zinc sulphur; and (4) Chalcopyrite - copper sulphur. Most specimens are found in the eastern part of the State, in the Blue Hill area (no. 11) of Hancock County and the Lubec-Eastport area (no. 12) of Washington County. There were scores of old mines dotting these areas and the waste dumps are the best places to look for specimens.

PYRITE. This iron mineral forms in shiny, brass colored cubes or many faceted semi-rounded shapes. Pyrite which often looks like gold specks is the "fool's gold."

GALENA. A steeley gray metallic colored mineral which always comes in perfect cubes. Galena is said to possess 'perfect cubic cleavage' and it is found most often in eastern Washington County and near Acton in York County.

SPHALERITE. Of all the common ores, the zinc ore mineral looks the least like a metal. It is a glassy brown or yellow color, usually a four-sided crystal. Sphalerite and galena are usually found in the same deposit. The minerals are usually covered with a rusty brown stain which is easily washed off.

CHALCOPYRITE. Chalcopyrite is much the same color as pyrite but is yellower and brighter in appearance. Chalcopyrite rarely occurs in good crystals; but rather as massive blobs, streaks or veinlets in the rock.

GOLD. It has a 'heavy golden' color and in flakes shows a mirror-like shine. It will gleam like no other stone when it appears in a pan full of gravel. The Swift River tributaries are the best places to pan for the shiny stuff.
**An Exciting Experience**

Gemstone collecting provides all of the famous features of the Maine vacation, with something extra; it combines the thrill of a treasure hunt for the whole family with exercise in the good Maine sunshine, and it provides something of value to take back home.

In Maine, "rock hounds" search for gold and such semi-precious gemstones as beryl, garnet, topaz and tourmaline. No elaborate equipment — all you need for an expedition are stout shoes, a good hammer, a small pick and a desire to be outdoors.

Waste dumps containing quartz and feldspar are the most likely places to search for gemstones. The gemstones appear in the host rocks as vari-colored chips or blobs. The good gemstones are brittle. Care must be used in breaking them loose with your hammer.

Most of the gemstones that you will be prospecting for are found in a special kind of rock formation called pegmatite. This occurs in fairly large pod shaped bodies, often a half a mile or more in length. Most of the pegmatite pod is made of quartz and feldspar.

Gemstones usually occur as small blobs, crystals and masses scattered through the pegmatite. Geodes or gem pockets occasionally are uncovered in the quarry walls. These pockets have provided the richest gem finds in New England.

Include in your plans a collecting trip for metal ore specimens, near any of the old metal mines of Hancock or Washington Counties. The sulfide ore minerals of copper, lead and zinc, when fresh, have a minerals called carbonates; which are blue or green colored stones. When they are dissolved they form other bright brassy yellow. In most cases, these minerals have been covered near any of the old metal mines of Hancock or Washington Counties. The red beaches (Jasper Beach) in this area provide a scenic setting for collecting prolific accumulations of red rhyolite which make excellent polished specimens.

**Mineral Localities in Maine:**

There are scores of other localities equally as attractive but the few given here will provide a practical starting point.

1. **Topsham-Brunswick Area:**
   - Consolidated Quarry
   - Fisher Quarry
   - Staples Quarry
   - The quarries in this area are located about four miles north of Topsham on Route 24. Clear red garnets, green tourmaline and rare smoky quartz crystals have been found in gem quality. Fisher Quarry is perhaps the most promising prospect. Gem topaz has been occasionally found in this locality.

2. **Rumford Area:**
   - There are many old pits and quarries along the top of Black Mountain which provide excellent prospecting for gemstones and unusual mineral specimens. Lepidolite, pink tourmaline, spodumene (a lithium mineral) and a rare variety of white beryl. Go north out of Rumford on Route 120, along the Swift River, for about 10 miles. At Roxbury Notch turn left on a dirt road into the hills. It is two miles into the road leading off to the left toward the prospects. Old beryl prospects are on the left after you cross the Rumford line.

3. **Rubellite Mine:**
   - This is a fine locality for gem beryl, rutile, pollucite (a cesium ore), vari-colored tourmaline, and the principal area for fluorescent pegmatites actively being quarried.

4. **Paris-Hebron Localities:**
   - Foster Mine
   - Havertinen Quarry
   - Mills Quarry
   - A few miles northwest of Hebron, are several large inactive quarries. Among the gemstones on the dumps and quarry walls are gem beryl, garnet, tourmaline and good quartz crystals. The rare minerals, columbite, tantalite, pollucite, are found occasionally.

5. **Mount Mica:**
   - The quarry is noted for the variety of gemstones of high quality found there: apatite, amblygonite, gem beryl, lepidolite, manganese minerals, topaz and tourmaline (gemstock).

6. **Bennett Quarry:**
   - These quarries have been operated for feldspar during the past decade, but are now inactive. They have a fairly rich suite of good minerals and gemstones: gemstock tourmaline and beryl, good clear and smoky quartz, amethyst, etc.

7. **Tammenin Quarry and Harvard Quarry:**
   - Excellent collecting exists in this area for tourmaline, apatite, beryl, rose quartz, etc.

8. **Newry:**
   - The red beaches (Jasper Beach) in this area provide a scenic setting for collecting prolific accumulations of red rhyolite which make excellent polished specimens.