

OKLAHOMA ROCKS!

Rocks & Minerals: Oklahoma's Specialties

Would you believe in gold in Oklahoma? Diamonds? The Wichita Mountains in Kiowa and Comanche Counties was the site of a frantic gold rush in 1901, when almost 2,000 miners and prospectors worked the area. No gold was ever discovered, and the "rush" was over by 1907. In more modern times – 2009 to be exact – diamonds were discovered in Beaver County. But there's no reason to try to find them – they're nanodiamonds, a millionth of a millimeter in diameter. Geologists believe that they formed by a comet or meteorite impact about 13,000 years ago.

Oklahoma is proud of its geological heritage and designated the barite rose, or rose rock, as the state rock in 1968. These unusual rocks occur almost nowhere else in the world and are found in a relatively narrow belt from eastern Oklahoma County to the southern tip of Cleveland County. The "roses" form as a result of the mineral barite crystallizing in red sandstone, with the crystals assuming the shape of flower petals.

In 2005, Oklahoma designated a state crystal – sand gypsum, or hourglass selenite. These can be easily dug from the loose sand in the Salt Plains Wildlife Refuge near Jet. In addition to officially designated state rocks and minerals, many unusual quartz specimens have been found near Hochatown in McCurtain County.

Certain industrial minerals here also deserve special attention. Extremely pure quartz sand is mined in Johnston and Pontotoc Counties that can be made into glass. Even salt is harvested from saline brines along the Cimarron River in Woods County.



Activities:

1. Many of Oklahoma's state parks are special because of the rocks and minerals that fill the landscape. Match the following state parks and resorts with the rock or mineral that makes it special:

Alabaster Caverns
Black Mesa
Glass Mountains
Great Salt Plains
Little Sahara
Natural Falls
Red Rock Canyon
Roman Nose
Quartz Mountain

Gypsum
Sand Dunes
Granite
Hourglass Selenite
Red Sandstone
Gypsum (selenite variety)
Basalt Lava Flow
Gypsum (alabaster variety)
Limestone



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2. Use the book of maps posted at nie.newsok.com to answer to following questions.

a) Much of the gypsum in Oklahoma comes from the Blaine Formation in Blaine County. What other counties have gypsum quarries?

b) A relatively new geological resource in Oklahoma is flagstone, which is used in patios, walkways and buildings. Almost all Oklahoma flagstone is sandstone. What two adjoining counties contain most of the state's sandstone quarries?

Newspapers for this educational program provided by:

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