



RHODESIA'S GEMSTONES



MAN'S fascination with gemstones is age-old. In Cleopatra's day the Egyptian emerald mines were already famous throughout the known world, and since then the gemstone's qualities of eternal beauty, durability and romance have ensured continuous interest.

Practically all the known gemstones are minerals, and, although there are around 3,000 different types of minerals, only about 70 of them are classed as gemstones.

It is remarkable, therefore, that Rhodesia has recorded discoveries of more than half that number (40 different types are displayed on this page). Furthermore, as most of our gemstones have been found during the last 10 years, there is a promising future for prospectors in the vast areas of Rhodesia's open spaces.

Some believe that Rhodesia is the fabled land of Ophir, which produced gold for King Solomon's temple, as many ancient gold workings have been found in different parts of the country. The search for gemstones, however, appears to be more recent, and dates from the diamond find in the Somabula Forest by Moir in 1903.

Moir had worked the diamond gravels of the Vaal River in South Africa and immediately recognised "promising" gravel in the Somabula stream where his coach crossed on the road to Gwelo. Together with his brother, he indeed did find diamonds, as well as small sapphires, rubies and chrysoberyl, including the rare cat's eye variety. Large-scale prospecting and mining took place between 1905 and 1908, but petered out as the results did not meet the expenses. Afterwards several small-workers tried to make their fortunes, but interest waned and activity all but ceased.

A sudden change in the fortunes of Rhodesia's gemstone industry came on October 7, 1956, when the first emerald was found in the Belingwe district. A second, and superior, deposit was found in the same area during May the following year. When these perfect, deep rich-green stones came on the world market, Rhodesia made gemstone history overnight and established herself as a source of some of the world's finest emeralds.

This tremendous discovery sparked off an enthusiastic interest in emerald prospecting, and, within a few years, determined prospectors were rewarded with new finds in the Filabusi and Fort Victoria district. In the search for emeralds many other gemstone deposits were also discovered.

The Sandawana emerald belongs to the large beryl group, many varieties of which occur in Rhodesia. The pure beryl, known as Goshenite, is completely colourless. The presence of impurities give the others their characteristic colouring, the green of the emerald being due to the presence of chromium, while the varying shades of aquamarine have been ascribed to minute quantities of iron.

Another group of gemstones well represented in Rhodesia is the quartz family. The pure quartz is again completely colourless and was first discovered in the Alps, and was believed to be a form of frozen water. It was called crystal, from the Greek word



Emerald



Aquamarine



Golden Beryl



Goshenite



Morganite



Chrysoberyl crystals



Alexandrite crystal



Greenish Beryl



Tourmaline crystal



Rubellite



Tourmaline



Indicolite



Topaz crystal



Garnet



Epidote



Fluorspar



Apatite



Cornelian



Smokey Quartz



Rock Crystal



Amethyst



Rose Quartz



Bluish Quartz



Mtorolite



Moss Agate



Citrine



Jasper



Agate



Lace Agate



Hydrophane Opal



Iolite
(Water sapphire)



Amazonite



Aventurine



Moonstone



Haematite



Kyanite



Unakite



Diopside



Nephrite



Chrysocolla



A superb piece of rock crystal, showing to perfection its crystalline structure.

KEY TO GEMS ON FRONT PAGE

Top: Rough-tumbled aquamarines and golden beryls.

Centre: Moss agate.

Bottom: Sandawana emeralds in their rough state.

An amethyst geode, or rock cavity with crystals which have grown inwards. Found near Bulawayo.



for ice, and even today it is still often called rock-crystal.

Apart from rock-crystal, many other beautiful varieties of quartz have been found in Rhodesia. There is the purple amethyst, the clear yellow citrine and the soft pink rose-quartz, and not many countries can boast of such lovely green moss agate and lace agate.

The tourmaline group is most remarkable for its glorious colour varieties and has risen high in the ranks of jewellery. The name comes from a Singhalese word "turmalī" and was first used when the stones were brought to Amsterdam from Ceylon in 1703.

Black opaque tourmaline, rich in iron, has been known in Rhodesia for many years, but recently green, blue-green, rose-red and pink varieties of gemstone quality have been found. As can be seen from the crystal shown, several colours can exist in the same stone.

Rhodesia has even presented a new gemstone to the world in recent months. It is an emerald-green crypto-crystalline quartz called Mtorolite, found in the country's famous chrome-bearing rock on the Great Dyke. In 1960 this rock was also found to bear a jade variety called nephrite. This greenish stone has been used by the Chinese for centuries to carve ornaments of great beauty. In the East it is considered equal to, if not above, any of the gemstones.

Most Rhodesian gemstones are found in pegmatites, a very special and rather rare "vein" formation. The age of some of these formations has been established at about 520 million years. Scattered as they are over the country, the gemstone industry, apart from the mines of Belingwe and Filabusi, is the realm of the small-worker who uses hand-picking methods rather than blasting and mining on a large scale. The work of these prospectors, fossicking in the bush, has placed Rhodesia amongst the leading gemstone-producing countries of the world.

Hunting for gemstones is not restricted only to the professionals, for prospecting and the cutting of gemstones is also the hobby of numerous Rhodesians, who combine in a vigorous Rhodesian Gem and Mineral Society. Periodic exhibitions of their work show a high standard of technique and a selection of specimens that is remarkable.

The visitor to Rhodesia can acquire no better souvenir of the country than its gemstones, either in reasonable tumbled-stone jewellery or exquisite examples of cut stones in precious metals. They will always remain a colourful reminder of the riches of Rhodesia.

Rhodesia Calls acknowledges with thanks the assistance of Dr. Jan Kanis, a Salisbury gemmologist, for his assistance in writing these notes, and for providing all the stones, except the group of Sandawana emeralds, from his extensive collection.

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