

Encyclopedia of Mineral Names. The Canadian Mineralogist Special Publication

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BOOK REVIEW

Encyclopedia of Mineral Names. The Canadian Mineralogist Special Publication 1

By William H. Blackburn and William H. Dennen, featuring the artwork of Peter I. Russell
Mineralogical Association of Canada, Ottawa
1997, 360 p., US & Cdn \$40, hardcover

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There are more than 3700 known mineral species, and those published by the end of 1996 are all listed in the *Encyclopedia of Mineral Names*. After a short but excellent introduction to the naming of minerals, the authors provide information on all minerals either grandfathered or accepted by the Commission on New Minerals and Mineral Names (CNMMN) of the International Mineralogical Association (IMA). These are cited in bold face. In addition, commonly used group names and series names, as well as commonly used species names not presently accepted by the CNMMN or of questionable validity are shown in plain face. After each name, the chemical formula, crystal system, and space group are given. If the characterization of composition or structure has not been completely clarified, the relevant item is followed by a question mark in parentheses; if unknown, a question mark in parentheses appears alone in the appropriate position. In addition to these data, any relationship to other species is noted.

After these data comes the most in-

teresting information, the derivation of the species name (etymology). Forty-five percent of the known minerals are named in honor of a particular person, usually with a connection to geology, natural history, or the mineral species itself, but are sometimes a bit further afield (e.g., goethite, after the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe). Others are named for the discovery locality, the chemical composition, a distinctive physical property, or some combination of these. A concise paragraph is given describing the etymology of each name, with a reference to further biographical information for individuals memorialized in the major English language mineralogy journals. This is followed by the locality from which the type specimen came, if known.

The paragraph that follows differentiates this book from a good "coffee-table" mineral book, which this volume in fact resembles in size and format, and makes it a significant resource. The original reference to the mineral and its description is cited for each species, followed by a few later citations referring to significant work done on the mineral following the initial description. This information is nowhere else so easily accessible, and provides an invaluable tool for anyone seeking primary data on a particular mineral species.

Several additional nice touches are provided. There is, as an appendix, a brief etymology of the chemical elements. Additionally, a complete list of abbreviations for all journal references is provided as a second appendix. The mineral drawings which preface each letter of the alphabet are quite good, and, together with the page layout, make the text esthetically pleasing.

This volume clearly represents an enormous amount of labor on the part of the authors, and it is difficult to find

fault with their efforts. I have only two criticisms. First, a guide to the pronunciation of each species would have been especially useful, as the names of some minerals are rarely uttered as the authors intended them to be (e.g., ask your friends how the name "dixenite" should be pronounced). Secondly, I regret that this marvelous book was written a little too soon to include a reference for feinglosite!

My second problem will, in fact, be dealt with. As noted, the book has few references later than 1996. Fortunately, the authors plan to continue adding corrections, new information, and newly described species to the database, with yearly updates to be published in *The Canadian Mineralogist*. These supplements should allow *The Encyclopedia of Mineral Names* to remain a major reference work for anyone with a professional or other serious interest in minerals. Be warned, however, that this book is addictive; if you pick it up seeking a specific reference, you will have trouble putting it down again.