

Idaho, the Gem State

Idaho has been nicknamed “the Gem State” since its territorial days. The name of the territory, however, was originally more hype than fact. The word Idaho was supposedly derived from a purported Indian word “E-Dah-Hoe” meaning “Gem of the Mountains” or “Light on the Mountain.” In truth, it was a neologism taken by those politically interested in getting the Idaho Territory established. So the “Gem State” was not on first intent justly honored for its gem and mineral treasures, though as it has turned out it could have been.

From A for acanthite to Z for zoisite, over 240 different minerals have been identified in Idaho. The state can claim world class specimens of vivianite, pyromorphite, cerussite, smokey quartz, aquamarine, ilvaite, and other minerals. Many of these unusual specimens are rare and today cherished exclusively in museums, private collections, and the wares of gem dealers. One fabulous exception to this limited availability is the official state gem, the “Star Garnet,” a beautiful stone found in some abundance only in Idaho and India.

Look for your very own 4-ray or 6-ray star garnet at the Emerald Creek garnet area in northern Idaho operated by the U.S. Forest Service. A brochure is available from the U.S. Forest Service, St. Joe Ranger District, P.O. Box 407, St. Maries ID 83861 (phone: 208-245-2531). For a nominal fee, individuals can obtain a daily permit that allows them to extract as much as 5 pounds of garnets. This area is open from Memorial Day through Labor Day, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Friday through Tuesday.

Because two-thirds of Idaho is federal land, it is a good idea to check with local offices of the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management about public access and road conditions in a particular area. These

federal offices have information about areas that may be closed to collecting, and they sell or provide up-to-date maps of specific areas under their control. The offices are located in towns throughout the state. The USFS also has ranger stations throughout each of the state’s ten national forests.

The Idaho Geological Survey also sells Forest Service maps and has topographic and geologic maps and publications available at its main office in Moscow. Ask for a free *List of Publications* or view the list on the Web at www.idahogeology.org.

Beginning and experienced gem collectors may also wish to consult the following books:

Lanny R. Ream, *The Gem & Minerals Collectors Guide to Idaho*: Gem Guide Book Co. (Baldwin Park, California), 329 p.

J.A. Beckwith, *Gem Mineral of Idaho*: Caxton Printers, Ltd. (Caldwell, Idaho), 130 p.

D.D. Alt and D.W. Hyndman, *Roadside Geology of Idaho*: Mountain Press Publishing Co. (Missoula, Montana), 393 p.

Collecting minerals is hard work, so you should plan to take regular breaks from your labors. For information about the many regional tourist highlights in Idaho, contact the Idaho Department of Commerce, Travel Promotion, Joe R. Williams Building, 2nd Floor, Boise, ID 83720 (Phone: 208-334-2470 or 1-800-842-5858). From fishing to skiing to just plain relaxing in some of the most remarkable scenery in the world, Idaho has it all.

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