

HISTORY

Mount Apatite Mineralogical Composition

The area in Auburn known as Mount Apatite in Auburn is honey-combed with pits and small prospects which are situated on either side of the Hatch Road. Records indicate that three specimens of tourmaline from the Mount Apatite area were added to the collection of Maine's State Geologist in 1839. Exploratory mining of this sector began as early as 1868.

The names of Pitt P. Pulsifer, John S. Towne, Loren B. Merrill, Nathaniel U. Greenlaw, and William R. Wade are all associated the work which has been done at Mount Apatite. The complex of quarries here have produced significant amounts of gem tourmaline, purple apatite, and other minerals as well as substantial amounts of feldspar. Thus, Mount Apatite and it's mineral wealth is familiar to collectors all over the world.

During the mining of Mount Apatite, just after the turn of the century, a tremendous crystal of smokey quartz was discovered in the ledge. This massive crystal is approximately nineteen and one-half inches long, and nine inches thick. This remarkable smokey quartz crystal is on display at Perham's of West Paris.

Since the mining at Mount Apatite began in 1883, some exceptional gems have been faceted from the tourmaline harvested from these ledges. The American Museum of Natural History in New York City displays an exquisite rectangular stone weighing 11.87 carats which was cut from Mount Apatite tourmaline.

Mining Activity

In 1902, an area on the Hatch Farm was leased by Maine Feldspar Company of Auburn who immediately began mining for feldspar. The material they mined was of very good quality and the production was substantial. This spar was needed to maintain the processing plant they had established nearby at Littlefield's Station in 1897. The Maine Feldspar Company mined an average of one hundred fifty tons of spar each month, and their operation continued for many years. This feldspar was an essential material for the ceramic industry. High grade feldspar is the key ingredient in the production of translucent chinaware of fine quality. Feldspar produced in Maine was transported via ship to porcelain and china factories in England. Since the Maine Feldspar Company ceased their operations early in the 1930 era, there has been no further mining of this location. Collectors nationwide continue to explore the dumps searching for gems and many nice specimens have been found.¹

City Acquisition

During the early 1970's, the City of Auburn acquired approximately 300 acres of open space for future recreational use that comprises the Mount Apatite park at a cost to the city of \$100,000.00.

Register of Critical Areas

The Mount Apatite quarries were listed as critical area #92 in December of 1977, and the principal management recommendation was that the area should not be used for purposes that would preclude access to the bedrock features. This recommendation would not seem to bar digging in the quarry tailings for gems and minerals, which is a very popular activity at the site. Ironically, this recommendation is somewhat at odds with the preservation of historic resources at the site, but it may be appropriate that the site is more valued as a unique geological and recreational area than as an industrial site.

¹ Maine's Treasure Chest, Gems and Minerals of Oxford County, Jane C. Perham, Quicksilver Publishers, West Paris, Maine

In summary of historic period cultural resources, three nineteenth century structures within the project area are located in areas of substantial development. It is possible, but not demonstrated, that some structural remains of these buildings exist, but associated land use patterns are almost certainly heavily disturbed. Unless further documentation of the twentieth century mining operation is recommended by the MHPC, before being further disturbed by "gem hunters", then no further work is recommended for this area.²

Development

The development of Mount Apatite has been minor since it's purchase. The City of Auburn did receive a grant of \$2,500.00 in 1976 for the construction of snowmobile trails, a snowmobile shelter, picnic grounds, and sanitary facilities. This effort was coordinated with the Andy Valley Snow Gypsies Snowmobile Club who had interest in the development of inter-city snowmobile trails.

Development continued that year with the help of CETA employees, who worked on trail clearing, safety wall construction around the quarry areas, and construction of park entrance signs.

Lease Agreements

The Auburn City Council and the Andy Valley Snow Gypsies Snowmobile Club entered into a Lease Agreement on July 18, 1977 that allowed the snowmobile club to construct a clubhouse on the site and to construct park snowmobile trails. This agreement was for a period of five (5) years, automatically renewed for additional one year terms, unless either of the parties give notice of termination.

² University of Maine, Farmington Archaeological Research Center

The City of Auburn and the United States Army agreed to a land exchange on March 3, 1989 that allowed the City of Auburn to acquire 42.5 acres of National Guard property in exchange for 104.5 acres of city owned property for the construction of the Auburn Suburban Little League baseball fields and a multi-purpose area for community recreation. This ratio was determined based on the assessed value of the two parcels. The Maine National Guard allows public use of their property at Mount Apatite except during periods of training (see Section D, Regional Analysis, pgs. 21 & 22, Memorandum of Agreement.) The Mount Apatite Committee and the Maine National Guard have coordinated site planning in this recommendation to maximize development resources for public use of both properties. Thirty-one acres of property that includes Auburn Suburban Little League fields and city recreation area is presently authorized by Maine National Guard License. (Expiration Date: 1995).

The City of Auburn leased to Auburn Suburban Little League on February 13, 1989 the premises located on the westerly side of the Garfield Road and bounded on the southeast by the CMP line, on the west and northwest by land of the National Guard, and on the north by the Stevens Mills Road extension. This lease is for a period of twenty-five (25) years with a right to renew for an additional twenty-five (25) years.