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GEMSTONES & PEARLS GEMOLOGY

The Case for Red Emerald

A rare North American beryl with an identity crisis

Which is easier to remember and understand: bixbite or red emerald?

This red member of the beryl family has been called bixbite almost since Maynard Bixby discovered it in 1897. But the awkward name, meager production and small gems have relegated the material to a role as a rare gemological curiosity.

Now Gemstone Mining Inc., Cedar City, UT, the owner of the only known bixbite deposit – the Ruby Violet claim in Utah's Wah-Wah mountain range – plans to increase production and make more material available by fall. Settling on a salable trade name now is significant for retailers who plan to market the gemstone.

The History

Red beryl has many marketable attributes. It possesses the same physical and chemical characteristics as emerald, except it's colored by microscopic traces of manganese (emerald is colored by chromium and/or vanadium). It's natural, the only known source is in the U.S. and producers say a lot of material lies waiting for mechanized production.

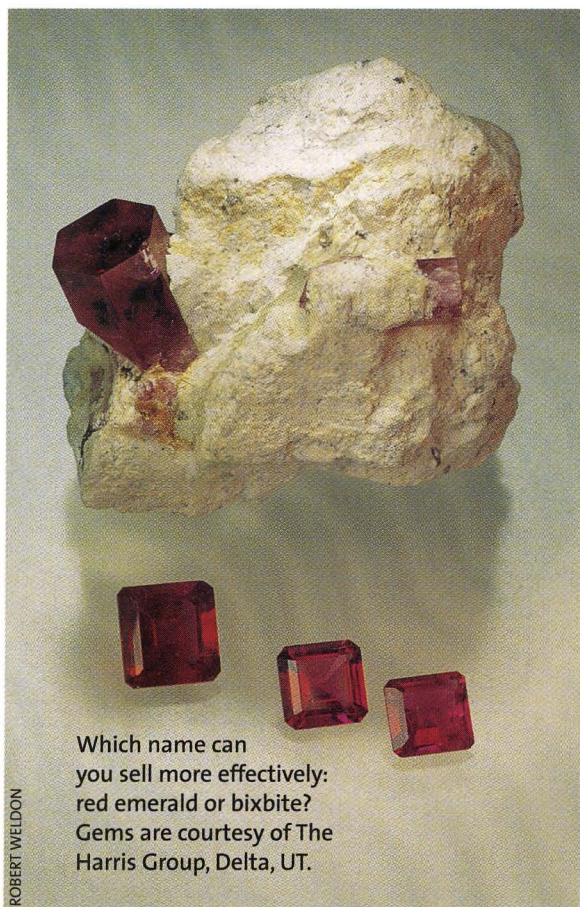
But producers say calling the material by its species name – red beryl – won't resonate with consumers. "The purpose of a name is communication," says Kelly Hyslop, CEO of Gemstone Mining Inc. The company

says consumers would accept the name red emerald more readily.

But using the name red emerald is fraught with gemological controversy. Here's a look at both sides of the issue.

Arguments Against Red Emerald

- ◆ Definition. In antiquity, *smaragdus*, the Greek root word for emerald, referred to green gems that may or may not have been emeralds. The modern definition for emerald is saturated bluish green, green or yellowish green beryl. Emerald is a synonym for green.
- ◆ Respect for Bixby. Calling red beryl



Which name can
you sell more effectively:
red emerald or bixbite?
Gems are courtesy of The
Harris Group, Delta, UT.

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by something other than bixbite would dishonor its discoverer.

- ◆ What about pink, yellow and blue beryl? If red beryl benefits from the emerald association, so shouldn't morganite, goshenite and aquamarine?

Arguments for Red Emerald

- ◆ Gemological similarities. Emerald and red beryl are type III gems in the clarity classification system of the Gemological Institute of America. They have similar amounts and types of inclusions. Other beryls are type I, being relatively free of inclusions. Emerald and red beryl don't respond to heat treatment; all other beryls do.
- ◆ The name makes it easier to communicate rarity and value. Red and green beryl occur much less fre-

quently and in smaller sizes than the other beryls. "This makes red and green more expensive, further supporting use of the term red emerald as a clear way to inform consumers of how value and pricing are associated," says Edward Boehm of JOEB Enterprises, Solana Beach, CA.

- ◆ If we accept pink, purple and yellow sapphire, why not red emerald?
- ◆ Bixbite could be confused with bixbyite, a black, opaque mineral also discovered by Maynard Bixby.

Policy vs. Practice

Proponents say arguments against the term red emerald are becoming moot. "There's a logical association between green and red emerald that can be supported by the trade-accepted practice of

using a descriptive prefix to denote the various colors of sapphire," says Boehm.

And for people who object on the basis that *smaragdus* means green, Boehm points to sapphire: "Sapphire is historically been associated with blue, from the Greek *sapphiros*, meaning blue." But the trade readily uses the word sapphire with other colors.

Ray Zajicek of Equatorial Imports, Dallas, TX, says the name red emerald makes sense for other reasons also. "This is not like aquamarine or heliodor, which respond to enhancements and the cutting wheel in a different way than emerald does," he says. "I have sawed and preformed it. I have cut, polished and immersed it in a colorless medium. This is an emerald, except it's red."

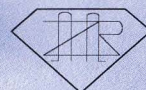
— by Robert Weldon, G.G.

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