

The Himalaya pegmatite mine, Sand Diego County, California: History and minerals

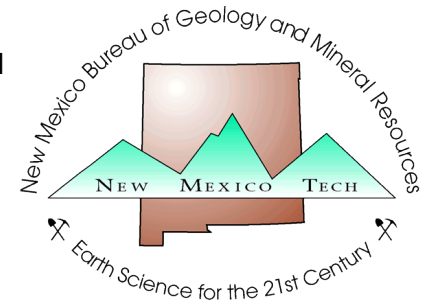
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Mark Ivan Jacobson


Since 1890, the minerals from the pegmatites of southern California have become well known across the United States both for faceted and polished gemstones of colored tourmaline, aquamarine, morganite and kunzite but later, for iconic mineral specimens of the same species. Although the easy material was gone by 1912, this never slowed down the collectors. Despite diminished returns at a greater expense, mining on the Himalaya pegmatite vein has continued. New specimens and collecting stories continue to be revealed at mineral

shows. This talk will briefly recount the mining history of the Himalaya pegmatite and reveal the minerals recovered from this amazingly prolific pegmatite vein.

The pegmatites of southern California were first discovered and exploited for gem tourmaline by Henry Hamilton on the southern slopes of Thomas Mountain, Riverside County in 1872. The gem tourmaline discoveries at Mesa Grande were reported in 1899. The pegmatite might have been known by 1875, based on local oral histories recounting that kids, both Indian

56 THE JEWELERS' CIRCULAR—WEEKLY. April 17, 1907.

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Figure 1. The Tannenbaum tourmaline mine, know today as the Himalaya mine, at Mesa Grande, circa 1907. From the Jeweler's Circular, April 17, 1907.

and settlers were bringing crystals home or trying to trade them away (Jacobson, 2009). A specimen in the California State collection in San Francisco proves that by 1896, local adults knew about gem tourmaline from what became known later as the Himalaya vein. Gail Lewis put in his claim on the southern end of the vein sometime between 1898–1902, whereas the northern end was claimed by Charles Orcutt on November 16, 1899. Orcutt mined his portion of the vein in 1899 and publicized his discoveries. His claim was soon overstaked by another group—D. L. Hoover, C. E. McGary, and the shoe retailers of Frank F. Wright, and Frank N. Wright. This group named their claims the Sancho Pancho Mine. The latter owners granted an option of their properties to Archibald Edward Heighway, Jr., the “Cincinnati giant,” as the New York Times called him (Jacobson, 2008). He took over the property in 1901, started mining, reneged on the royalty payments, and overstaked the Sancho Pancho claims. He then sold the property to Lippman Tannenbaum who was promptly sued by the Hoover group. Just before this problem went to court, Tannenbaum paid the Sancho Pancho owners \$6,000 in December 1903 and the problem went away (Jacobson 2010, 2017).

The height of mining activity by Tannenbaum peaked in 1910. Mining afterwards decreased radically due to both a sluggish domestic and foreign market and financial mismanagement by Tannenbaum. Tannenbaum filed for bankruptcy in April 1913. After the creditors took over the property it was leased circa 1914 probably to the George Ah Quin Company with periodic mining by Thomas Ah Quin, Jr.; Henry Quin and Fred Rynerson. By 1922, the Chinese market for pink tourmaline had regained sufficient strength that the southern California mines could no longer fulfill all the demand. Circa 1925, the General Electric Company of New York leased both the Himalaya mine and San Diego Mine on the Himalaya pegmatite dyke for exploratory mining for pollucite, the only known cesium ore.

In 1925, Thomas Ah Quin, Jr. was able to buy the Himalaya mine properties outright with Fred Rynerson buying the San Diego mine. In 1935, Ed Over and Arthur Montgomery leased the Himalaya mine for specimen and gem tourmalines. Although they found tourmalines, the quantity was inadequate for a profitable return on their effort. In 1937, Thomas Quin passed away with the Himalaya property being inherited by his married daughter, Helen Quin Kong. In turn, she sold the property to Ralph Potter in 1952. The long term on-site caretaker, Herb Hill, informally allowed specimen collectors on the mine site. By 1958, the underground workings were re-opened with the new tourmaline pockets being opened and specimens being marketed.

In December 1963, Ralph Potter formed the Himalaya Gem Mines, Inc. to own the patented and

unpatented claims; shares of this company were sold a group of 8 local mineral collectors, with Potter retaining an interest in the company. Underground mining continued until the winter rains of 1969 which caused the adit that accessed the underground workings to collapse. In July 1977, William “Bill” Larson as principal for Pala Properties International obtained a ten year lease and reopened the mine. Due to weathered near surface bedrock, Larsen created a new, lower adit to intersect the pegmatite below the shallower mine tunnels to reach less weathered pockets. In 1988, Larson, as owner of Pala Properties International, purchased the mine. Afterwards the mine continued to be successfully and profitably operated by Pala Properties until 1997.

In 1998, Chris Rose took possession of the Lohrer Claim which had the open adit with the two more northern patented claims being sold by Pala Properties. In pre-covid 2020, the Himalaya mine on the Lohrer claim was being worked by Chris Rose with dump material moved off site to be sold as a pay-to-dig tourist activity. The San Diego mine, on the southern extend of the Himalaya pegmatite dyke is still retained by the descendants of Fred Rynerson.

The Himalaya pegmatite mine has been the most prolific producer of gem elbaite in the United States. Kunz (1905, p. 134) stated that “about 6 tons” of elbaite was shipped to New York—gems, carving material, and specimens. Weber (1963, p. 91) stated that perhaps 90 tons of elbaite and beryl has been produced! This was all before the mining activities of William Larsen who has only added to the mine’s production. Due to all these efforts numerous specimens can be found in public and private collections as well as available on the market. In addition, the pegmatite is still capable of producing specimens and gems.

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