

Open File Report 1985-05

GOLD PROSPECTING

Gold occurs in most rocks and in seawater in minute amounts referred to as the background level or value. Any quantity of gold above the background value for a given environment or rock type is of interest geologically, but does not necessarily mean that a mine may be profitably operated.

The presence of gold has been reported in both bedrock and unconsolidated material from many sites around the State, but whether or not these reported finds are legitimate or fraudulent is not known in most cases. No attempt has been made to distinguish fraudulent occurrences for the report, but the list which follows is arranged from most substantiated to least.

Because gold is known to occur in the bedrock of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Canada, it is likely that some of it has become separated from the rock and transported by running water or moving glacial-ice. This gold, known as placer gold, will occur in deposits of sand and gravel at the point where it ceased to be transported. It may be possible to find placer gold anywhere in the glaciated portion of the State and in the river valleys of the unglaciated part of the State.

Successful prospectors only look for gold in the places where gold is most likely to have been deposited. They learn whatever they can about how running water or moving ice could concentrate heavy substances, then they look for gold. Likely spots are in sandy lenses of glacial terraces or where modern streams have cut through glacially transported sand and gravel. In areas where thin overburden covers the bedrock, look in stream gravels and in crevices in the bedrock of stream beds, especially where the flow rate of the stream is suddenly decreased, as below rapids and waterfalls. If gold is present, it will usually be found mixed in with sand or fine gravel, not with large gravel or with silt. The sand is often black with heavy, dark colored minerals and the gold will have to be picked out of the black sand with a tweezers. Your library may have books on prospecting or geological processes that could help you learn where to look.

Gold panning can be an enjoyable and rewarding recreational pastime, but the most likely rewards will be your participation in a pleasurable outdoor activity, rather than you becoming wealthy. Knowledge of the environmental and legal consequences of your chosen activity will allow you to take the precautions necessary to ensure your continued enjoyment of the sport. Disruption of stream banks and bottoms clouds the water with sediment that is harmful to aquatic life, so perform your panning so as to cause minimal disruption of the stream banks and try not to introduce sediment into the water. No permit is needed for simple panning; but exploration, prospecting, and mining have legal definitions in the Wisconsin Statutes and are regulated by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). A discussion of your proposed streamside activities with your district DNR supervisor will introduce you to the regulations and why they are needed to protect the environment. Any gold you find will belong to the owner of the mineral rights under the land where you prospect, unless you have an agreement to the contrary with the mineral rights owner. Ask the landowner for permission before you pan, and ask the park superintendent before panning in a state park. For answers to legal questions, contact a lawyer.

Know the regulations, ask for permission to pan, respect the environment, have fun, and good luck!

Reported Wisconsin Gold Occurrences

Listed in Order of Decreasing Substantiation by William P. Scott, May 8, 1985

Massive sulfide deposits--gold occurs in association with much greater amounts of zinc and copper, silver generally present also.

Crandon Deposit sec. 25, T. 35 N., R. 12 E.

Flambeau Deposit sec. 9, T. 34 N., R. 6 W.

Pelican River Deposit sec. 29, T. 36 N., R. 10 E.

Only the Flambeau Deposit has been mined. It was mined from 1993-1997 producing over 150,000 ounces of gold from 1.8-million tons of copper-gold ore. This is the only known commercial production of gold in Wisconsin.

U.S.G.S. Drillhole--one flake of gold in association with galena, barite and pyrite found in Guttenberg Member, Decorah Formation, NE, SW sec. 32, T. 4 N., R. 1 E.

Town of Easton--gold in association with sphalerite and pyrite in metamorphic rocks near the Wolf River Batholith, sec. 26, T. 29 N., R. 9 E.

St. Croix Dalles--placer gold was produced from gravel in the bed of the St. Croix River above and below the falls around 1890.

Miscauno Exploration (Old Victor Smeister prospect)--gold was found in porphyroblastic argillite, a shaft was sunk to at least 49 feet, occurrence was small and localized and never mined, location is NE, SW sec. 16, T. 36 N., R. 21 E.

Archie Gold Prospect--greenstone, gabbro, quartz diorite with granite to the south, gold in quartz veins running E-W, inconsistent gold values found in 1937, SW, SW sec. 8 and N, NE sec. 17, T. 36 N., R. 20 E.

Davis Hill--gold, copper and silver values from conglomerate in 1922, NW, NW sec. 11, T. 44 N., R. 6 W.

The following reported gold occurrences have very poor documentation and may be fraudulent.

Plum Creek--gold prospecting began along the main branches of Plum Creek south of Rock Elm in Pierce County in 1888, locality is best known for diamonds, T. 26 N., R. 15 W.

Big Falls--a shaft or test pit was dug in the center of the Eau Claire River about 1930, recovery of placer gold in rumored from crevices in bedrock, SW sec. 13, T. 27 N., R. 8 W.

Knapp Mining Prospect--assays of "sandy limestone" gave low gold and silver values in 1909, stock in the Knapp Mining and Investment Company was sold locally, T. 28 N., R. 14 W.

Gold Diggers Area--prospector named Mr. Edan lived in an old logging camp and prospected the area about 1900, may have developed the prospect pits in the area, square pits in volcanic rocks with some blue and white quartz grains and no magnetic anomaly, NW, SW sec. 10, T. 40 N., R. 11 E.

Hawthorne Occurrence--placer gold reported from area, T. 46 and 47 N., R. 12 W.

Silver Mine Hill--several adits reported in east and west side of hill near Chippewa River, now filled with water, gold and silver rumored to have been found in Mt. Simon sandstone, (Eau Claire County?)

Silver Springs--just south of where Route 37 crosses Lowes Creek in Eau Claire County there is an adit which is now cemented shut, gold and silver rumored to have been found.

Neillsville and Granton areas--gold rumored to have been found in the basal conglomerate of the Mt. Simon sandstone, T. 27 N., R. 1 W.

Prairie du Chien Prospect--gold and silver supposedly discovered in cherty areas of Prairie du Chien dolomite in 1903, assay values not substantiated by later testing, "salting" with gold suspected, near Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.

Cumberland Nuggets--gold nuggets reportedly found by farmers in 1905, sec. 21, T. 37 N., R. 15 W.

Darwin McDougal Farm--Grant County farmer reported "yellow ore" in sandstone, samples of which showed "a fair amount of metal", reported in the Fennimore Times, August 26, 1936, a shaft was sunk, exact location not known.