

Mellen "Black Granite"

A number of quarries near Mellen, Wisconsin produced a building stone locally called "black granite". This rock is more correctly identified as anorthosite, and the quarries have much of interest for rockhounds.

Anorthosite is an igneous rock like granite, but contains mostly plagioclase feldspar, usually with a bit of pyroxene, olivine or magnetite. The anorthosite near Mellen is part of a larger body of igneous intrusions formed by the same magma that popped through to form the lava flows around Lake Superior. Instead of erupting, the Mellen magma cooled slowly below the ground, forming coarser crystals. The plagioclase near Mellen is dark gray to nearly black and crystals can reach several inches in length. This forms a dark but sparkly rock similar in appearance to larvikite, but unfortunately without the play of colors that make larvikite so distinctive.

One quarry, still active from time to time is just south of Loon Lake, easily visible from the road leading from Mellen to Copper Falls State Park. Another quarry lies about 1/2 mile east of this on an unmarked, but passable, dirt road. In both quarries the anorthosite is very dark, and is cut by dikes of a white rock of more granitic composition. Locally the anorthosite becomes very coarse with large black plagioclase and brown blocky pyroxene crystals developed.

My favorite quarry, however, is west of Mellen. It can be reached by following GG west out of Mellen about 4 miles to Quarry Road. Turn right and follow Quarry Road about 2 miles. The quarry, its walls painted with graffiti, is visible on the left. The road is a good all-weather gravel road suitable for cars. A few tenths of a mile further on the road is a dirt track off to the left into what appears to be a dump for the quarry. Both spots are good places to hunt for minerals, although the footing is locally tricky and heavy hammers and goggles are needed for serious collecting. Plagioclase and pyroxene are extremely common and can be in very large crystals. The really coarse material is at times associated with massive pyrite and ilmenite, making very attractive specimens. Hornblende forms along the edge of white veins of a more granitic composition. Sometimes these veins open into small pockets with hornblende and plagioclase crystals. Laumontite, chlorite, bornite and chalcopyrite may occur along veins and shears. Also along these shears one can find some molybdenite in soft gray metallic masses up to 1 inch across.

This quarry is a popular local spot for picnicking. There is a lake in the quarry and I've seen at least one family dangle a fishing pole in it. All in all

this is a pleasant spot to break up the monotony of a long drive up to Michigan's copper country.

- Dr. Bill Cordua, University of Wisconsin-River Falls