



THE CLIFF MINE

Keweenaw County, Michigan

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The Cliff mine, located at the base of an impressive basalt cliff southwest of Eagle River, Michigan, is one of Michigan's earliest copper mines and the first to turn a profit. The economic success of the Cliff mine drove the spread of copper mining in Upper Michigan as a whole. Fine specimens of copper, silver and other minerals collected by miners dazzled mineralogists who had never seen copper specimens of such quality. Although surviving specimens from the Cliff mine are fewer in number than those from later mines, they hold a special place in collectors' hearts because they were the first.

INTRODUCTION

The Cliff mine was not the first mine in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula, but it was the first to turn a profit. Actually, to say that the Cliff turned a profit is a bit of an understatement: it was practically a bonanza, returning more than \$2.5 million in dividends to stockholders on an initial investment of about \$110,000. This fabulous profit margin spurred strong investment in other properties, few of which performed anywhere near as well. Without the success at the Cliff mine, it is likely that mining in the Lake Superior District would have taken far longer to develop.

From a mineralogical standpoint, the Cliff mine, like other vein-type occurrences, had a somewhat different character than most other copper deposits in the region. Unfortunately, relatively few specimens with proper locality attribution have survived, but many of those are of exceptional quality.

Because it was the first success, and because of the fine specimens which it produced, the Cliff mine is the obvious starting point for a detailed look at the history and mineralogy of the Lake Superior District.

LOCATION

The Cliff mine is located in southwestern Keweenaw County, Michigan (which makes up the northern end of the Keweenaw Peninsula) about 6.5 km southwest of Eagle River, Michigan. The mine location is at the base of a picturesque cliff of basalt (the Greenstone flow) which forms a prominent feature across much of Keweenaw County. Today, all buildings at the site are in ruins and have been overgrown by the thick Keweenaw forest; they are not readily visible from Cliff Drive, which passes between the mine site and the town site. The only indication of the presence of a former mine visible from any distance is a large dump pile, which has remained mostly unvegetated (in part because of regular visits by rockhounds and mineral collectors hoping to find a nice copper specimen to take home). The West Branch of the Eagle River crosses the property, but at this distance upstream it is really no more than a creek about a meter wide which can be crossed fairly easily with a good jump.

The climate is cool and temperate, with short, wet summers during which temperatures rarely exceed 90°F, and long, cold winters with exceptionally heavy snowfall. The Cliff site is near