



# THE COPPER FALLS MINE

---

*Keweenaw County, Michigan*

**Christopher J. Stefano**  
*The Mineralogical Record*  
6354 North Camino Los Mochis  
Tucson, Arizona 85718  
cjstefanoxls@gmail.com

**Philip Persson**  
Persson Rare Minerals LLC  
P.O. Box 17748  
Golden, Colorado 80402  
Philip.M.Persson@gmail.com

*The Copper Falls mine, located in northern Keweenaw County, Michigan, was one of the earliest mines opened in the Lake Superior District. Despite its lack of economic success, it operated for more than 50 years and produced numerous fine specimens of copper, silver and associated minerals which grace public and private collections throughout the world.*

---

## INTRODUCTION

The Copper Falls mine was opened in 1845 and operated almost continuously until at least 1901. With such a long history, one would expect to learn that the mine was a great success. However, despite producing more than 25 million pounds of copper over its lifetime, the Copper Falls mine never turned a long-term profit, only paying dividends to shareholders a few times and never returning the initial investment. Continuous hopes that it would suddenly turn profitable kept it running despite the history of failure. Thanks in part to the long life of this economically unsuccessful mine, many fine specimens of copper, silver and other minerals were recovered by miners. In addition, the relatively high elevation of the Copper Falls mine kept the upper levels of the workings dry, allowing fearless mineral collectors access until the recent sealing of the abandoned shafts and adits.

## LOCATION

The Copper Falls mine is located in northern Keweenaw County, Michigan, approximately 4 km southwest of Eagle Harbor, Michigan. The site is accessible off of the Eagle Harbor Cut Off road which connects US highway 41 to Michigan State highway 26. The Copper Falls area has a rugged topography with several ridges

exceeding 200 meters above the level of Lake Superior. Valleys are filled with small lakes, swamps and small creeks. The most important of these is Owl Creek. Owl Creek contained showings of native copper in a small waterfall, hence the “Copper Falls” mine name. No buildings survive at the mine site, but dump piles from the various workings still exist and are popular hunting grounds for rockhounds and tourists.

## HISTORY

The Copper Falls mine was one of the earliest to operate in Michigan’s Keweenaw Peninsula, opening in 1845 (Butler and Burbank, 1929). See the short article entitled “The Keweenaw County Fissure Mines” at the beginning of this issue for a summary of the early history of the district that led to the development of mines like the Copper Falls.

According to Foster and Whitney (1850), interest in the Copper Falls site was initially sparked when explorers discovered hammerstones and other Native American mining implements in the vicinity. The property was originally leased by David Henshaw in 1843 (Western Historical Company, 1883). The first discovery of mineralization on the property, in a waterfall along a small creek, came in 1843 or 1844 (Butler and Burbank, 1929). A copper-bearing