Novaculite in Arkansas

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Novaculite is dressed down by almost the same methods used by the Indians centuries ago, the only difference being the substitution of a plain hammer of modern type for the round greenstone mallet of the Indian. The pile of stone shown at the right in the above picture has already been dressed and all cracked and imperfect parts removed.

Useful Stone Quarried Near Hot Springs Is Shipped Throughout the United States and Many Foreign Countries For Manufacture Into Whetstones.

Below the green, wooded slopes of the Ouachita Mountains in western Arkansas, layers of a rare, gleaming-white stone lie in wait for the quarrier's tool. Sought and valued by mankind through many centuries, it continues to be useful today without much recognition by the average individual. When plain John Doe thinks of it, he does at all, it is as a finished product—a grayish, glistening brown rock known as whetstone—which with a knife may be sharpened, perhaps, but surely nothing to get excited over, even if our own Arkansas hills are the only source from which the world must draw its supply.

But, as is true of so many of the natural wonders in this world, this stone which laces our mountains with its chill, white veils of beauty, remains, and a world of usefulness for those who take the time to seek for it.

Its origin is unknown. Given the name “novaculite” in 1819 by a geologist named Schoolcraft, it has been described as a “peculiar, massive chert, composed of minute crystals of silica, whose hard, sharp edges, surrounding microscopic cavities make it the finest natural whetstone in America.” Today, three theories are presented as to sources of the silica. One is that it is the sediment of some ancient, prehistoric sea; another, that it was formed by skeletons of minute, one-celled animals, and finally, that it is an ash formation produced by volcanic action. Probably no definite decision will ever be made as to the true source of this miraculous stone, but we do know that it must have been formed in some mineral deposit or stream and that it has been carried by water to its present location. The fact that it is found in Arkansas, along the Mississippi River, and gradually the stone became known as Ouachita Stone. A variety of novaculite is known in commercial markets today as “Washita Stone.”

The finest type of this stone is known as Arkansas Stone. While it is commonly identified as Washita Stone resembles the Arkansas Stone in all its physical characteristics, it is less common and its porous quality excludes it from the true novaculites. Its porosity gives it a dead, unglazed appearance, while the Arkansas Stone has a watery, lustrous surface.

Most of novaculite is white—silver-white, cream-white, or a greyish-hue color. In addition, however, there is scarcely a color that cannot be found in the distinctive shadings of this stone and there is one quite marketable “black” stone. In some instances, the coloring matter seems to denote important variations in quality; in others, it seems to have no bearing whatever on its physical composition. Beyond doubt, it does add interest and beauty.

In fact, novaculite is more than just a function of such a kind to the lover of beauty. There are no more scenic spots in our state than the wild and rugged mountainsides upon which one must quarry this flinty stone, and ask any man who has done so if it is not a more beautiful sight than the sudden appearance of a strata of this rock, formed with the sedimentary soil of the ages as shown with the common stones of later times, shimmering beneath the point of his questioning pick.

As a grinding tool, novaculite is one of the most important rocks in the world. It is used in every industrial field, from the highest levels of scientific research to the crudest flint tools of prehistoric man. Novaculite has been used for centuries to make sharp tools and bladelike objects. It is a hard stone, yet it can be shaped into a variety of shapes and sizes to meet the needs of different users. It is used in the manufacturing of drills, fillers, abrasives, and other industrial products. Novaculite is also used in the production of whitewash, which is a mixture of novaculite and water. The whitewash is used in the manufacture of pottery, porcelain, and china. Novaculite is also used in the production of rubber, which is a natural rubber that is made from novaculite. Novaculite is also used in the production of rubber, which is a natural rubber that is made from novaculite. Novaculite is also used in the production of rubber, which is a natural rubber that is made from novaculite. Novaculite is also used in the production of rubber, which is a natural rubber that is made from novaculite.

Conclusion: Novaculite is a stone that is used in many different industries and has been used for centuries. It is a hard stone, yet it can be shaped into a variety of shapes and sizes to meet the needs of different users. It is used in the manufacturing of drills, fillers, abrasives, and other industrial products. Novaculite is also used in the production of whitewash, which is a mixture of novaculite and water. The whitewash is used in the manufacture of pottery, porcelain, and china. Novaculite is also used in the production of rubber, which is a natural rubber that is made from novaculite. Novaculite is also used in the production of rubber, which is a natural rubber that is made from novaculite. Novaculite is also used in the production of rubber, which is a natural rubber that is made from novaculite. Novaculite is also used in the production of rubber, which is a natural rubber that is made from novaculite.
The report goes on to state that the only argument which had been presented against the manufacture of whetstone in Hot Springs was that suitable sand for finishing purposes was not available and that argument was flatly met that argument with the statement that the sand in the Ouachita river was as good as that used by Chase in New York.

In spite of this exhortation, however, nothing constructive along the line of centralizing the whetstone industry in Arkansas has been accomplished in the 50 years which have elapsed. True to prediction, the whetstone business has developed into a great industry, not only in this country, but throughout the world. Abrasive manufacturers everywhere are eager to procure the stone, the demand always exceeding the supply by many barrels.

One reason for this, strangely enough, is the fact that in this age of machinery comparatively crude methods are still used to quarry the stone. Of course, picks and shovels, the crowbar, drill and dynamite are decided improvements over the stone mallet and fire system of the American Indian, but that is about all that can be said of it. The largest producers of novaculite employ small groups of men who procure the stone only after toilsome labor with the pick, the blasting powder, and other similar means. From the rough stone, they select the finest, most flawless piece and, when a sufficient amount of the stone has been obtained, they squat beside the pile of blocks or slabs and dress them down in much the same manner as that employed in the Indian lodges centuries ago.

In spite of the difficulties that must be overcome in order to import the raw stone and pay for it, German manufacturers are among the heaviest buyers of novaculite. The Nazi regime, as everyone knows, has placed stringent restrictions upon all phases of life in that country today, and the whetstone industry is no exception. Before the stone can be ordered, a specific permit must be obtained from the German government. I quote, in part, from a letter dated January 8, 1938, addressed to W. E. Lewis of Hot Springs by a German dealer:

"In view of the quantities of whetstone (Novaculite) we require for this year, we are sorry to say that we cannot give you exact numbers of what we need as we are only allowed to import what our government is granting us, but we trust that we can import 10 barrels monthly. The undersigned will be in Berlin next week to get permission for the new 10 barrels, pre-formal invoice you have sent us recently, and as soon as we shall have got the permit, we shall give you the order by cable."

With regard to difficulties experienced in making payment for the stone, a letter received from a different firm in the same country says:

"If there had been the slightest possibility for us to remit you the small balance of $14.17 too, we should have done so with perfect readiness, but as you will be aware, we are not permitted to pay even the smallest sum for which we have no permission. We hope that the matter is thus settled and shall not fail to pass you further orders for stone as soon as we have permission to import further Arkansas stones."

In making the above mentioned payment, $500 had been remitted but the finality of the Nazi laws prevented this company from ever stepping their permit to pay even the small balance of $14.17.

These are some of the German headaches in regard to the marketing of novaculite, but each country—France, England, Japan and Holland, to mention some of the largest buyers—has its own peculiar problems and idiosyncracies of trade, all of which makes the whetstone business interesting and exciting, as well as profitable.

You couldn't find anything humdrum about it if you tried. In fact, it seems that no matter how the world goes, or what changes are wrought therein, novaculite continues to be a stone of romance and adventure, which refuses to stay forever in its native bed in the quiet Arkansas hills. Buffed in glistening wooden barrels, it goes skimming along the rails, journeying across the seas, to trickle like white magic into the industrial centers of the world.