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# Geological treasure

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THE WORLD AROUND US

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Most Nova Scotians can name our province's famous symbols, from the mayflower, red spruce and wild blueberries to the duck tolling retriever, osprey, Peggy's Cove lighthouse and the Bluenose. How many of us would be stumped though if the question were: What is the Provincial Mineral?

Stilbite, a luminescent crystal formation composed of silica, sodium, potassium, aluminum and calcium was declared Nova Scotia's official provincial mineral by Royal Assent in the 1999 Provincial Mineral Act. It is found primarily on Partridge Island at the mouth of Parrsboro Harbour

and all along the Minas Basin and the Bay of Fundy in basalt deposits.

Stilbite probably began forming about 195 million years ago in heated ground water trapped in the lava from volcanic eruptions during the breaking up of the supercontinent Pangea by plate tectonics. The minerals formed so long ago in the fractures of hardened lava are a group known as zeolites, and probably the best known and most prized of the group is stilbite.

Not only is stilbite exceedingly beautiful but it has practical applications in the event of an oil spill because of its porous structure. It absorbs 90 per cent of its dry weight in hydrocarbons and 30 per cent in gases. It can, therefore, absorb unwanted odours and

alleviate the environmental impact of oil dust suppressants. It is also used as a filter for refining and as a water softener that attracts calcium and magnesium.

For those interested in metaphysics and alternative treatment, stilbite has a time-honoured reputation in folk medicine as an antidote to poisons. In fact, zeolites in general have a diverse and current fan base who attest to its therapeutic success in the treatment of their cancers. Stilbite has also been credited with healing brain disorders, laryngitis, skin pigmentation, and ageusia. It is used in crystal balls and is believed to facilitate spiritual enlightenment, inspire loving feelings and improve both concentration and clarity of memory.

We in NS are the custodians of

numerous geologically significant regions and resources, so it must have been challenging for our House of Assembly to pick just one symbolic mineral. I'm always awed by something we can hold in our hands today though it existed when a massive lost continent, originally given the Greek name Panagaia, was, as the word translates, "the entire earth."

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