Sodalite

Sodalite can be one of the constituent minerals of lapis lazuli, but is often cut as a gem itself. It is an attractive blue stone marbled with white and may also be confused with lapis. It is also found in other colours but only the strong blue is used. It never reaches the ultramarine of lapis but the royal blue is

Sodalite cabochon. (Photo: KW)

very striking. It has also been called 'Canadian Bluestone'. Occasionally flecks of pyrites are found in the stones.

Originally discovered in commercial quantity in Canada, it has subsequently been found in several other areas of the world: the USA, Norway, India, Brazil and British Columbia (Canada).

It has hardness of 5½ to 6 on the Mohs scale. It is tricky to cut due to a strong cleavage, but polishes into very attractive cabochons for pendants and brooches. It is also fashioned into beads and even into larger items such as boxes and clock cases.

Sphalerite 4.19 cts. (Photo: ATG)

Sphalerite

This rare ore of zinc is yellowish or green in colour with an adamantine lustre. Its dispersion is 3-times higher than diamond, making it a most impressive gem when cut. Unfortunately it is very soft – only 3.5 to 4 on the Mohs scale – and consequently is only cut for collectors. Its name comes from the Greek, meaning 'deceitful' or 'treacherous'. Sphalerite is found in mainly in Europe and the USA.

Sphene

Another stone appearing on the TV shopping channels, sphene, also known as titanite is strongly pleochroic (yellow, green and brown) with a high double refraction and an adamantine lustre. Until recently, it was classed as a collectors' stone. It is soft, at 5 to 5.5 on the Mohs scale, so consideration must be given to its mounting; rings would be

Sphene 3.52 cts. (Photo: ATG)

vulnerable. It is sensitive to heat, which may change its colour, and to chemicals; ultra-sonic cleaning is best avoided. It is found in Burma (Myanmar), Brazil, Mexico, Austria, Sri Lanka, Canada and the USA.