

CHAROITE

Discovered in eastern Siberia near the River Chara in 1978, charoite is an opaque mineral of a very attractive violet colour with minor inclusions of other minerals. It has a hardness of 5 to 6 on the Mohs scale and takes a good polish, rendering it suitable for use in jewellery and to make carved boxes and ornaments.



Charoite vase. (Photo: AJ)

CHRYSOBERYL

Chrysoberyl is renowned for two famous types of gemstone – cat's-eye and alexandrite.



*Chrysoberyl.
(Photo: ATG)*

Alexandrite is a highly prized gemstone, mainly because of its unusual feature of changing colour from grass green when viewed in daylight to rich red when seen in artificial light.

It was originally discovered in the Ural mountains in 1830. As the strongest colours are red and green, the colours of Imperialist Russia, the stone was named



Alexandrite: seen (left) in daylight and (right) under a tungsten lamp. (Photo: MM)

after Czar Alexander II, who came of age on the day it was discovered. It has subsequently been found in Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Brazil, Madagascar (Malagasy Republic) and Zambia. However, the Russian stones are still the most highly prized.

With a hardness of 7.5 on the Mohs scale it makes an excellent ring stone. It is, however, one of the more expensive gemstones, worth from about £900 per carat up.

Due to its high value, it has been the subject of simulants: both synthetic corundum and synthetic spinel