



Time Travellers Club

October-17

Dear Club Member,

I spent most of my childhood and early adulthood in the Peak District. My Dad was an outdoor pursuits instructor, and as a result much of my time was spent on top of hills, climbing cliffs, or down holes.

Down some of the holes is a very special mineral, only found under one hill in the whole world. Blue John is a type of fluorite (normally white, this crystal intrusion is one you find in many rocks). What makes Blue John special is the colour, it has unique bands of blue-purple and yellow. The mineral can only be found under Treak Cliff hill just outside Castleton, and although similar deposits with the blue colouring occur occasionally, none have the dual colour of Blue John.

The name itself is something of a mystery. As a child I was always told it was a corruption of the French "bleu et jaune" which was mangled by the Derbyshire accent in to Blue John. This never made much sense to me, because I've always identified the colour as being purple, and definitely not blue. It was thought the name developed when the mineral was exported to France in the late 1700's to make ormolu ornaments (show pieces for rich aristocrats featuring lots of gilding, and semiprecious minerals). However, there are no export records to substantiate this, and Matthew Boulton (of steam engine fame) was already using the mineral to make ornaments in the mid-1700's. It seems illogical that it would be exported, given we have records of Boulton trying to buy ever increasing quantities of the mineral.

Another possible origin of the name is from a different mineral. A type of Zinc Ore (black in colour), also found in the caves, is known as Black Jack, so naming another mineral Blue John is a reasonably logical leap.

An alternative reason for the name may come from the Cornish miners who came to work the lead mines in the early 1740's. Blue John is a name given to many minerals in Cornish mines, coming from the Cornish word *bleujenn*, which originates from the Old Cornish *blodon* meaning flower, or blossom.

Either way, the mineral itself is beautiful, and skilled craftspeople still turn it in to beautiful bowls and pieces of jewellery. The initial mining quantities were relatively high, up to 20 tonnes being removed in any one year during the mid 1800's. Later, recognising the scarcity of the mineral the leases of the mine were limited to 3 tonnes per year. Now only half a tonne is mined, but a new vein was discovered in 2015.

As ever, words can only say so much, so I will put up some links to pictures of stunning Blue John items on the Ravelry spoilers thread.

Happy Spinning,

Katie