



THE LAOHUAN MINE

GONGCHENG, ZHUANG, GUANGXI, CHINA

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Uniquely beautiful sky-blue plumbogummite pseudomorphs after pyromorphite first came from the Laohuan mine over 20 years ago. This locality, east of the city of Guilin in Guangxi Province, China, was commonly but incorrectly referred to as the Daoping mine or the Yangshuo mine for many years. The specimens are now unique Chinese classics.

LOCATION

Much confusion has surrounded the location of the famous plumbogummite/pyromorphite source in Guangxi Province, China. The confirmed correct locality consists of artisanal workings on the slope of Laohuan ("Old Tiger Hill") (23°06'55" N, 110°38'18" E) at Haiyang Mountain (Haiyangshan) east of Guilin City in Gongcheng County, Zhuang Autonomous Region of Guangxi Province, China. The famous pyromorphite occurrences at the Yangshuo mine and the interconnected Daoping mine, with which it has been confused as a source of plumbogummite specimens, both lie nearly 40 km to the south (as the crow flies).

HISTORY

The Laohuan "mine" (a collection of artisanal adits and excavations dug into the side of Laohu Hill) was originally worked for lead, zinc, silver and barite (it is currently referred to on Mindat as "unnamed Baryte mine, Laohu"), but because the ore proved to be rather low-grade, commercial ore mining there ceased long ago. However, since the local miners discovered that specimen-quality pyromorphite could be mined there, along with other minerals recognized later (including plumbogummite, cerussite, a little malachite and sparse wulfenite), they found that they could make more money in the specimen business, and have since been mining only for crystals. Specimen mines are not numerous in China,

and are often quickly exhausted; perhaps this is the only location currently operating (intermittently) just for crystal specimens, as most other mines operate, to one extent or another, for industrial grade ore as well.

Laohuan is the world's most important locality for plumbogummite, although for the time being mining there has mostly been suspended. The main tunnel area has been mined out, but it is possible that other crystal pockets might still be found there by mining in other directions. In any case, mining from the original adit has ceased for now. A few plumbogummite specimens showing other habits have been recovered from other excavations in the area, but thus far not as many or as important for quality as the specimens found at the original site, where a great many holes have been dug into the mountain, most of them now abandoned but a few still being worked, in all cases being mined just for crystals.

The history of the Laohuan occurrence and its specimens on the mineral market is best reviewed in the context of the nearby Daoping and Yangshuo mines, which have been great specimen producers as well. The history of those two mines is recapped below. The discovery of pyromorphite pockets at Daoping and Yangshuo provided a new source of income for the local miners, and thereafter the mining and prospecting for specimens throughout the area intensified, resulting in the discovery of collector-quality plumbogummite and pyromorphite crystals at Laohuan.