

CHAPTER 39

TICK CANYON HOWLITE

“’E was white, clear white, inside.”

—RUDYARD KIPLING:

Gunga Din

Appearing rather frequently in the work of amateur lapidaries as an ornamental material, the white, borate mineral called howlite has lately been used, when suitably dyed, as a good substitute for turquoise. It thus becomes an American gem of some consequence on two counts—for itself and especially as a disguised replacement for a gem much better known than it is.

The natural whiteness of howlite is marked in places by a thin veining in black or dark brown. The mineral occurs in nodules resembling cauliflower, which may grow to 1 foot in diameter. Howlite is soft enough to be carved readily and does not take a high polish. It is a hydrous borosilicate having the formula $H_5Ca_2B_5SiO_{14}$.

Tick Canyon, near Saugus, in Los Angeles County, California, is the principal source of howlite. In the Sterling borax mine, the nodules are found in gray clay and shale. Colemanite, another borax mineral, is, however, the main product.