Copper in Michigan: A Brief History

About 1.1 billion years ago, the continent began to split down the middle, causing an upwelling of basaltic magma at the spot that would become Michigan’s upper peninsula. This rift, the Keweenawan Rift, would deposit sequences of thick flood basalts. During this volcanic activity, hot, dissolved-mineral enriched water was pushed through cracks and fissures in existing rock. This hydrothermal fluid deposited out native copper along with other elements like silver and arsenic. For this reason, many pieces of copper from the Upper Peninsula resemble what was once a void space in (a crack, gap, or bubble) in the surrounding rock. These mineral resources would first be mined by Native Americans between 5000 BCE and 1200 BCE. European settlers would later begin mining copper in the mid-1800s, and the industry thrived through the mid 20th century. In 1997, the last active copper mine in the Upper Peninsula closed.

Case Acknowledgements

- This case would not be possible without the generously loaned pieces from L. Lemmen.
- The Kona Dolostone is the sculpted work of local artist R. King.

*amygdule: deposit of mineral in a round void space in rock.
Images:
1. **Silver** Minesota Mine, Rockland; Ontonagon County, Michigan
2. **Copper** Centennial Mine; Houghton County, Michigan
3. **Petoskey Stone** Petoskey, Michigan

Information from:
**Mindat.org** – The world’s largest online mineral database.


For an introduction to the geology of Michigan, please reference:

*Geologic History of Michigan* by Prof. Kiril Spiroff, Mich. College of Mining & Technology

*available for reference in the Dice Mineralogical Museum

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By Jillian Herlinger (Dice Scholar / Museum Curator 2021-2022)