



Strange « cornerstones »

Meet the crystal: an astonishing « cornerstone », flat-sided and more or less smooth to the touch, as if made to measure.



Fluorite on sphalerite, Elmwood, Tennessee, USA. © Coll. Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Grenoble

Crystal: a word that came in from the cold

The etymology of « crystal » provides a first clue as to the initial musings on the origins of certain stones and rocks. It comes from the Greek « *krystallos* », meaning ice. Could it be that rock crystal is actually water - frozen so hard that it has been fixed for eternity?

We find the same analogy between rock crystal and other transparent materials in the naming of crystalware... which has nothing to do with crystals.

Crystal: a definition which has evolved

In the 18th century scientists used the term crystal to describe any angular stone with oriented plane surfaces.

In the early 19th century crystal referred to any homogeneous solid material characterized by planar faces.

In the 20th and 21st centuries it refers to any material whose atoms are arranged in an ordered pattern.



Garnets on micaschist, Fort-Wrangell, Alaska, USA. © Coll. Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Grenoble



Quartz, Gardette, Isère, France. © Coll. Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Grenoble



Rutile inclusion in quartz, Brazil. © Coll. Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Grenoble



« *Krystallos* » : frozen water or ice.