

Mineral Spotlight: Barite

Barite, also known as barium sulfate, has an orthorhombic crystal system with tabular crystals. It is one of the ores of barium, the other one being witherite. In other instances, barite occurs as plates forming fan shaped "cockscomb crystals" or "desert roses" as pictured in the sample above. Barite has a hardness of 2.5-3.5 with fragile prismatic cleavage.

Powdered barite is used in drilling muds to increase mud weight and assist in down-holing the hydrostatic pressure, in turn preventing oil and gas blowouts. It is also used in x-ray imaging of the gastrointestinal tract. It is found in medium to low temperature hydrothermal veins found with lead, silver and antimony sulfide. It is also found in replacement veins and cavities together with limestones and other karst features.

This feature was posted on Dice Museum social media by Museum docent Gregory Ian Oduor on 6/23/2021. It has since been edited to fit a web-based format.

