

## **Benitoite**

### **The “Blue Diamond”**



On October 1, 1985, benitoite was designated as the official State Gem by the California Legislature. Benitoite crystals are usually rich blue to light blue in color, and rarely, white or colorless. Gem-quality benitoite is found only in one location—near the headwaters of the San Benito River, San Benito County, California.

Information is slim on the exact discovery of benitoite, but according to the California Division of Mines, it was discovered in 1906 by J. M. Couch at the now well-known Benitoite Gem Mine locality in San Benito County. The mineral was thought to be sapphire, but a San Francisco jeweler, through curiosity, ran a series of tests on his “sapphires” which revealed an entirely new gemstone. In 1907, George Davis Louderback, a mineralogy professor at the University of California at Berkeley, was asked to identify the mineral. He determined that it was a new mineral species and named it benitoite after the river, county and nearby mountain range where it was found.

Mathematically there had been a vacant spot in the table of possible crystal shapes, but nothing to match it had ever been found before, nor has any other mineral been found which fits this particular one’s peculiarities. Basically, it is hexagonal; and technically it is ditrigonal- bipyramidal, which does not occur in any of the other classes of crystals.

This then is indeed a true California First and has been identified as a barium titanate silicate, 6½ in hardness, and lends itself to brilliant sapphire-like stones when a gem quality crystal is faceted.

The emblem of the California Federation is a triangle surrounding a Golden Bear. The triangle with its points cut off was chosen, with pride and purpose, for its representation of the extremely rare crystal formation of the benitoite.