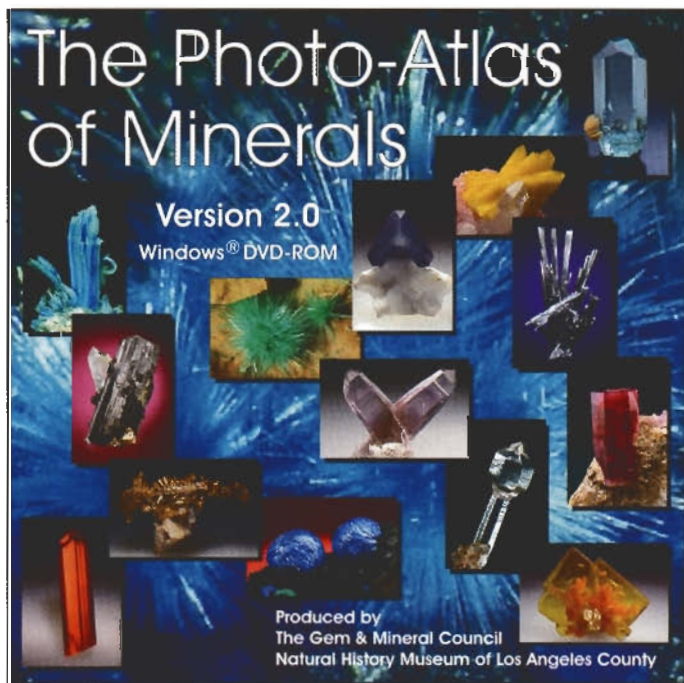
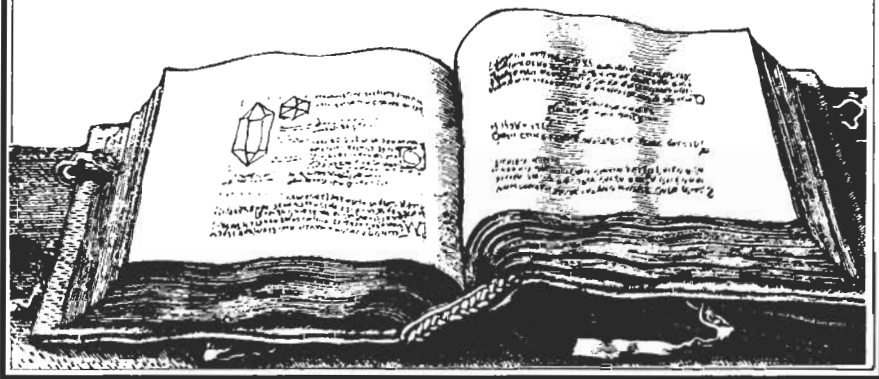


Book Reviews



The Photo-Atlas of Minerals

DVD-ROM, Version 2.0 for Windows®. Published (2006) by the Gem & Mineral Council, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. Developed by Dr. Anthony Kampf and Dr. George Gerhold. Price: \$59.95, upgrade price \$39.95. For information and to place an order visit: www.nhm.org/pam

The second edition of the Photo-Atlas follows the first edition after about five years. It avails itself of the most modern software tools, that have allowed the authors to come out with an excellent, easy to use product. The Atlas requires the use of a PC

of suitable characteristics, as detailed on the envelope of the DVD (a PC supporting Windows 2000 or Windows XP or higher and with a good resolution screen will do the job). Also, we recommend installing the program on the hard disk of your PC: it will use about 4GB of memory, but its performance will be much improved. After reading the simple Instructions section, you will be ready to use the Atlas.

The Photo-Atlas is basically a very large collection of images, mostly at high resolution and of good to very good quality, especially those authored by high level mineral photographers like Jeff Scovil (2,300 photos)

and Wendell Wilson (about 3,500 photos). Some images show well known, high class specimens, other images show rarely seen minerals, at times from exotic localities. In total, about 16,000 specimens of 1,700 species and 3,500 localities are included.

The Photo-Atlas is what it promises, i.e. a large set of images, but in addition, several of its features extend its scope well beyond that. Firstly, a page for each mineral species shows the main technical data (chemistry, symmetry, unit cell parameters, color, type locality etc.). In total, about 4,100 species are described, approximately all those approved by the IMA as of 2005. For 1,700 of them (about 40%) one or more images are included. Therefore, we can assume that for about 60% of the approved species no photo of acceptable quality was available. This is not surprising, as so many mineral species, especially of those approved in recent times, are known only as microscopic granules, or are intimately associated with other minerals and can be detected only by using the most modern mineralogical equipment. Others are earthy to powdery and unsuitable for producing a meaningful photograph. Prior efforts to present images of more species have yielded rather unsatisfactory results because of the modest (unphotogenic) quality of the specimens available.

This extension of the Atlas beyond plain iconography and into the field of systematic mineralogy has, of course, some limits: it will be difficult to update it frequently enough to follow closely the development of mineralogy (new species, discreditation of old species, new data, new localities etc.) as some of the best websites do: www.mindat.org, www.webminerals.com and others. To solve this problem, and also to enlarge the scope of the Photo-Atlas, each mineral page carries a "Link to Web" button that allows the user to connect quickly to Mindat, Webminerals, Handbook of Mineralogy, American Mineralogist Crystal Structure Database or JCrystalsoft.

The Photo-Atlas can be searched in various ways: by mineral name, locality, Strunz classification, physical properties (color, luster, hardness, density, streak, crystal symmetry), chemistry and various combinations of those factors. Other categories of images can be selected from the data base: twins, pseudomorphs, inclusions, gemstones, fluorescent minerals etc.

Some features of the Photo-Atlas are unique and make it functionally different from the various mineral websites available at present. First of all the quality and the resolution of the images is much higher than can be achieved by a website. To appreciate that, it is enough to activate one of the nicest features of the Atlas. Click the Photo

Gallery button on one of the mineral pages (e.g. gold, elbaite, or fluorite etc.), and you will see on the screen a wonderful display of large thumbnail images. By clicking any of the thumbnails, the full-size image appears almost instantly, giving great visual enjoyment and, for the lesser-known species, an interesting aid for sight identification.

Another nice feature is the automatic sequencing of images in the Slide Show mode. It can be set to show all of the Atlas images, or just those of gemstones, of twins, of pseudomorphs, of microspecimens etc.

You have a question about the pronunciation of one of those difficult names? Or perhaps you are not too familiar with spoken English? Click the button near the mineral name and, if you have speakers on your PC, you will hear its proper English (or, rather, American) pronunciation. This feature can also be used in the Slide Show mode.

You have a little time to play with two or three friends, or even alone? You can try the Identification Game: select one of three levels of difficulty and then try to identify the pictures that appear in sequence on your screen—a more challenging exercise than one might expect.

The more expert users can also add other images to the database in their PC. These images can then be retrieved, like the others, using the tools of the Atlas.

Finally a Glossary explains the scientific terms used in the mineral descriptions: about 400 of them, from acicular to xenomorphic: a useful tool to have, even beyond its use in conjunction with the Atlas descriptions.

The large quantity of images and data from many different sources has probably not allowed the authors to carry out a detailed verification of the locality and identification of some specimens, especially the microminerals. Users who are familiar with the various localities are invited to help improve the accuracy of the massive database by contacting Dr. Kampf or Dr. Gerhold. Updates will be posted on the web (at the date of this writing, Updates 2.01 and 2.02 are already posted).

In total, the Photo-Atlas is a very effective and useful tool. After reading the instructions, the user will enjoy exploring the various functions and looking at the images of favorite minerals or localities. The Atlas will then remain in his PC, ready to be opened and searched when needed. How can you be without it?

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(As written for

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