



California State Rock

Serpentine

Adopted: April 20, 1965



Serpentine: California State Rock

Adoption of the California State Rock

Senator Luther E. Gibson, of Solano County, had served in the California State Senate since 1948.

On January 27, 1965, he introduced Senate Bill No. 265 (SB 265) in the Senate designating native gold as California's [official state mineral](#) and serpentine as California's official state rock.

Serpentine was described as a spotted, mottled mostly dull green rock resembling a serpent's skin. It was found in California but was not unique to the state.

The green serpentine was considered an attractive rock, suitable for ornamental stonework. Polishing could produce a marble-like sheen.

Often referred to as verde antique or serpentine marble, it was used to craft small items such as bookends and paper weights and also used for decorative elements on

buildings throughout the state.

Serpentine also served, and serves, as a host rock for minerals such as chromite, magesite, cinnabar, and chrysotile asbestos.

In an April 14, 1965 letter to Governor Edmond G. Brown, urging the Governor's approval of Senate Bill No. 265, DeWitt Nelson, and Director of the California Department of Conservation wrote:

"Although serpentine is not unique to California, it is by no means widely distributed elsewhere; and in many states does not exist at all. Serpentine indirectly is of great economic importance to California. It is a host rock for the state's newest and most rapidly--growing mineral industry--asbestos, now bringing in several millions of dollars annually. It is an attractive rock, selected varieties of serpentine make good cutting material and is used for bookends, paper weights, etc. Designating serpentine as the state rock will increase the market for such items and improve the local economy in a number of places."

Mr. Nelson also expressed his enthusiasm for being the first state to adopt a state mineral and a state rock.

"At the moment, California has the opportunity of being the first state to recognize this need and of making a selection in advance of any other states."



Serpentine exposed on hillside

The legislation had the support of the California Federation of Mineralogical Societies, and the ideas for a state mineral and a state rock were endorsed by the California Academy of Sciences and the California Division of Mines and Geology.

SB 265 was approved by a full vote of the California Senate on March 22, 1965 and sent on to the Assembly for their consideration.

Assemblyman Pearce Young of Napa County sponsored the bill in the Assembly. A little more than two weeks after its approval in the Senate, on April 8, 1965, SB 265

was approved unanimously (69-0) by the Assembly

On April 20, 1965, Governor Edmond G. Brown signed Senate Bill No. 265 designating native gold as California's official state mineral and serpentine as California's official state rock.

CHAPTER 89

An act to add Sections 425.1 and 425.2 to the Government Code, relating to state emblems.

[Approved by Governor April 20, 1965. Filed with Secretary of State April 20, 1965.]

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 425.1 is added to the Government Code to read:

425.1. Native gold is the official State Mineral and mineralogic emblem.

SEC. 2. Section 425.2 is added to the Government Code to read:

425.2. Serpentine is the official State Rock and lithologic emblem.

California was the first state to adopt an official state mineral and an official state rock.

Chrysotile asbestos, occurring in serpentine, is a carcinogen listed by the EPA. Because of serpentine's association with asbestos and the demonstrated health hazards of asbestos, there have been calls for stripping the serpentine of its title of official state rock.

California Law

The following information was excerpted from the *California Government Code*, Title 1, Division 2, Chapter 2.

CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE
TITLE 1. GENERAL
DIVISION 2. STATE SEAL, FLAG, AND EMBLEMS
CHAPTER 2. STATE FLAG AND EMBLEMS
SECTION 420-429.8

425.2. Serpentine is the official State Rock and lithologic emblem.