

## Non-Metallic Ores

Wyoming ranks first in the list of states producing bentonite and the industry centers around the Black Hills, in Weston and Crook counties in northeastern Wyoming. Bentonite is a colloidal clay made up principally of clay minerals of the montmorillonite group. It originated through the devitrification of volcanic ash laid down on the floor of a sea which covered Wyoming during Cretaceous time, and occurs in beds up to 10 feet thick in the siliceous Mowry shale.

Even though bentonite is widely distributed over the state and the supply is virtually inexhaustible, mining is fairly restricted to the Black Hills area because of the low dip of the beds and the small amount of over-burden. The bentonite is mined by power shovels and transported to stock piles to await drying and pulverizing processes. The largest producers are the American Colloid company, Eastern Clay Products, Inc., the Schundler Bentonite company, the Wyodak Chemical company, B. H. Thoeming, and the United Minerals Products company.

Bentonite has been used extensively as a binder for foundry sands, in mud-laden fluids used in drilling rotary wells for oil, in oil refining, in the ceramic industry, in the manufacture of paper, and in other ways. Wyoming's annual bentonite production is around 200,000 tons.

Vermiculite - Wyoming is one of

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