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Photographing Core Samples from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Critical minerals are an important research topic given their use in the development of batteries and electric vehicles. As a result, it is vital that researchers can examine geological samples easily and without having to repeatedly travel to and from an onsite repository.

Part of UW-Madison Extension, the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (WGNHS) provides objective scientific information about the geology, mineral resources, and water resources of Wisconsin. WGNHS owns a geological samples repository in Mount Horeb, which houses approximately 600,000 feet of rock core samples from more than 2,000 sites across the state.

In 2022, WGNHS worked to bring this vast collection to more people via a digital photo library that is accessible to the public. WGNHS applied for federal grant funding to pilot this photo library using photos of 200 rock core samples donated by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. (This collection was selected because of its relatively small size, making it ideal for a pilot project.)

The result is an interactive map, which shows the drill sites and lists relevant details (e.g., elevation, core depth). This represents a first step toward making the entire collection available to the public online. Since the pilot, WGNHS has received additional federal funding to add additional rock cores from 260 more sites to the photo library.



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