Module B. Colour from the Cosmos

Lesson 10 - Diamond Geology and Geography

Why is Diamond Rare?

Diamonds are "rare" because their formational environment is well below the Earth's surface and only special geological conditions allow their transport upwards. However, diamonds are not as rare as most people are led to believe. Their great historical value coupled with a greater geological understanding of their formation since the early 1900's has prompted and facilitated exploration for new sources.

Hundreds of new diamond-bearing pipes have been discovered across the globe although only a handful of those have been rich enough to be developed into mines. Prior to discoveries in South Africa at the end of the 19th century, diamonds were only sourced from alluvial deposits in India (and briefly from Brazil). There, perhaps only 50,000 carats would be produced annually. In the early 1900's global production was in the millions of carats; by the 1950's it was in the tens of millions. Today nearly 170 million carats of diamond are mined annually. The concept of diamonds as being rare has been perpetuated through history from times when production was scarce.