

HEAVY MINERALS IN BRAZILIAN TROPICS: A TOOL EXTENSIVELY USED IN THE PAST BY GEOSCIENTISTS.

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In the 19th century, it was a hard task to make geological transects across Brazil, as travelling was very difficult in the humid tropics. These domains show a high level of rock alteration and vegetal cover. Rivers played a major role, not just as a way of transport, but as a source of information. Some heavy minerals present in the river's sands were frequently used as the only clue to what there was up there. In this research we used two sources of material to reconstitute former geoscientists methods and aims: the Mineralogy Cabinet of the Ouro Preto School of Mines and the Natural History Museum, both in the state of Minas Gerais. These institutions have sand samples collected by Henri Gorceix, Orville Derby and others, during the end of 19 century and beginning of the present one. Apart from general data, the field works focussed mainly on diamond satellite minerals and monazite. As diamond production in Brazil was low, attempts were made to discover new deposits through heavy minerals provenance. Monazite was systematically studied as a consequence of large beach placers discovery. The use of heavy minerals was the more important prospection method in this epoch.