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Giant gypsum crystals up to 11 meters long in the Cave of Crystals, Naica, Chihuahua, Mexico,		Commen	t Policy		
Gypsum is a naturally occurring mineral which is often used in indu processes and which in nature, if left alone for thousands of years, grow into huge translucent, towering and eerie, crystals more than ' metres tall. These are famed for their beauty in places such as the of Crystals in Mexico. Nevertheless, the formation of gypsum has ur now been largely unexplored. A study by researchers from the School of Earth and Environment at University of Leeds and the Laboratorio de Estudios Cristalográfico CSIC-University of Granada found that gypsum starts off as tiny crys a mineral called bassanite. Most of us know this as Plaster of Paris we use it in building, art-work, casts and fireproofing. Currently bass	strial can 10 Cave ntil t the s tals of as sanite				

By experimenting with supersaturated gypsum solutions, the researchers were able to produce bassanite at room temperature. This than transforms to gypsum.

dehydrating quarried gypsum at 150 deg C. Builders, artists and medical specialists buy the bassanite powder and add water to create a malleable material that hardens once dried again.

Professor Liane G Benning from the University of Leeds said: "This process has never been documented before. In nature gypsum grows as these fantastic large crystals, yet we show that in the lab gypsum actually grows through the assembly of many, tiny bassanite crystals. These link together like a string of pearls before they crystallize to gypsum. We studied hundreds of high-resolution images and caught the tiny bassanite crystals in the act of assembling into gypsum"

Their findings are published April 6 in the journal Science.

The lead author, Alexander van Driessche from the Laboratorio de Estudios Cristalográficos in Grenada said: "Our study shows a new, low cost and low temperature way of making bassanite, although so far we have only managed to keep it stable for up to one hour."

This finding may also be applicable for reducing the clogging of pipes and filters through the precipitation of gypsum during water desalination or oil production. It can cost millions of pounds to remove gypsum from a pipe -- a serious economic problem specifically for countries supplying much needed drinking water.

Source: Science Daily

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