

From working mine to tourist attraction

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Mining and tourism

With the notable exceptions of the aggregate, china clay, salt, potash and gypsum industries, which contribute strongly to Britain's prosperity, mining is now a shadow of its former self. However, with the decline of coal and metal mining has come a surge in interest in the history of the mining industry. Mining tourism now forms a significant sector of the tourism industry in Britain. Although much has been lost, large numbers of artefacts still remain. These include engine houses, machinery, pits, dwellings and documents, of interest to researchers and tourists alike. In many parts of the country there are now mining museums, tourist mines and trails, as well as societies dedicated to the preservation, interpretation and restoration of Britain's mining heritage. Sites range from the prehistoric, such as the Grimes Graves flint mines in Norfolk, to recently closed coal mines such as the Big Pit in South Wales. Many diverse organisations are now brought together by the National Association of Mining History Organisations (NAMHO). Disused quarries are often transformed

into country parks for public recreation, while others become Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and are prized for their geological or botanical interest.

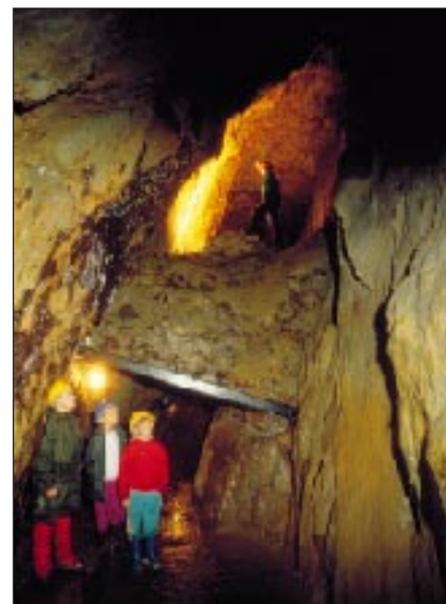


Photo: Sygun Copper Mine.

Underground visitors at Sygun copper mine in Snowdonia.

Mining has been a very significant part of the British economy since the industrial revolution. At times, mining for lead, copper, tin, iron, coal, salt, gypsum, potash, aggregates, slate and stone have been of world-scale significance. The famous Cornish tin and copper mines flourished for over 200 years in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As these mines declined, with competition from newer, richer overseas sources, they provided skilled miners and managers for hard-rock mines all over the world. Domestic coal and iron ore formed the basis of the industrial development of Britain, and whole communities grew up around a single commodity. Welsh slate roofed most of Victorian London and the chemical complexes of Cheshire and Teesside were situated on near-surface salt deposits adjacent to coalfields. Coincident with the development of the mining industry, large numbers of supporting companies flourished, supplying pumps, steelwork, boilers and specialised machinery of all kinds. They go back to the Boulton and Watt steam engines which used to pump the Cornish copper mines and include Ruston excavators, Anderson-Strathclyde coal conveyors and Holman compressors.



Distribution of mining heritage sites in the English Midlands, 1998. Data taken from NAMHO Mining Heritage Guide 1997, Down to Earth 1997, Lead Mining in the Peak District 1970 and other sources.