

Government tackling legacy of abandoned mine sites

Tipperary, 21st April 2008

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Mr. Tony Killeen, T.D., today formally opened a 3 day, "Green Mines" international Conference in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, which is part funded under the auspices of INTERREG IIIB, Atlantic Area.

Welcoming the participants to Nenagh, the Minister said, "*Nenagh is a particularly appropriate location for the Green Mines Conference given the commencement of rehabilitation of the Silvermines former mining areas.*" He said that delegates would be able to see, at first hand, the problems created by centuries of mining there and be briefed in relation to the detail of the rehabilitation plans which were about to commence. The Minister noted that planning permission for the work of Gortmore had been granted recently and that tenders for that phase of the project were closing later in the week. He congratulated the County Manager and his team for the progress achieved in the last year.

The Silvermines rehabilitation project, which is funded by the Government, would, the Minister said, be carried out in accordance with best international practice. It was also intended to transform the area into a valuable community resource with tourism potential.

The Minister said that the legacy of old abandoned mine sites is not peculiar to the Silvermines area or to Ireland. Similar problems are to be found throughout Europe and the rest of the world. A more modern approach to environment issues generally has led to governments having to turn their attention to clearing up such sites. He reminded delegates that the Green Mines project is an international collaboration with financial support from the INTERREG programme and is targeted on environmental remediation projects at abandoned mine areas. He also said that modern working mines are operated in a more environmentally sustainable manner and also had mandatory arrangements for their closure phase.

"The Government is aware of the need for balance between remedying the adverse environmental effects of mining and preserving the historical, cultural and economic features of the mining heritage", concluded Minister Killeen.

Historical and Modern Mining

Ireland has a long and rich mining heritage, which is confirmed by numerous examples of historic mines, as well as a thriving modern mining industry.

Historical Mining

Records of mining in Ireland date back to the Bronze Age (ca 2000 B.C.) when southwest Ireland was an important copper producer, with evidence of old workings at **Killarney, Co Kerry** and **Mount Gabriel, Co Cork**. Although *gold* has played an important part in the cultural history of Ireland, notably in the wealth of recovered gold ornaments, records of gold extraction or its occurrence are relatively sparse and poorly documented prior to the 17th century. Iron was worked in the eastern half of Ireland during the 16th and 17th centuries but it was not until the late Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, that the Irish metal mining

industry really flourished. During this period, almost every county had at least one metal mine producing copper and lead-silver amongst other minerals. Coal was also mined extensively during that time. During the first half of the 20th century, the mining industry was not particularly active, although a wide range of minerals were produced. These included bauxite and rock salt in Northern Ireland, as well as *pyrite, phosphate, barite, gypsum* and *coal*. In 1940, the passing of the Minerals Development Act heralded the most intensive period of exploration and mining that has occurred in Ireland, and one that has continued to this day.

Modern Mining

The Minerals Development Act of 1940 did have the desired effect of stimulating exploration and mining, but it was the Finance Act of 1956, which provided significant tax advantages for new mining companies, that had the catalytic effect. The arrival in the late 1950s of a number of Canadian exploration companies was soon followed by the discovery of the **Tynagh, Co Galway**, *lead-zinc-silver* deposit in 1961. It was the discovery of the **Tynagh** deposit, in a geological setting that had not previously produced any significant mineralization, that started a chain of mineral discoveries. In 1962, the **Silvermines, Co Tipperary**, *lead-zinc* orebody was discovered. This was followed by the delineation of the *Ballynoe barite* deposit, adjacent to **Silvermines**. In 1964, the **Gortdrum, Co Tipperary**, *copper-silver* deposit was found. All of these became profitable mines, and all are now closed.

In late 1970, the world-class **Navan, Co. Meath** lead-zinc mine was discovered. Initial reserves indicated that the orebody was four times as large as that at Silvermines which, in its time, was the largest underground *lead-zinc* mine in Europe. The **Navan** discovery placed Ireland firmly on the international map, and resulted in a huge demand for prospecting licences. However, during the next twelve years, the efforts of the exploration companies resulted in what can only be described as technical successes, with the discovery of sub economic deposits at **Tatestown, Co Meath** (*lead-zinc*), **Courtbrown, Co Limerick** (*lead-zinc*), and **Charlestown, Co Mayo** (*copper*). This was followed, in the early eighties, by an increase in gold exploration. Discoveries of gold at **Curraghinalt, Co Tyrone**, and **Lecanvey** and **Cregganbaun**, both in Co Mayo. None of these deposits were mined, although a discovery of a near-surface gold deposit at **Cavanacaw, Co Tyrone**, went into production in 2000.

In 1986, the discovery of the **Galmoy, Co Kilkenny**, lead-zinc deposit sparked a revival in base metal exploration. The nearby Lisheen, Co Tipperary, lead-zinc deposit was found in 1990. The **Navan, Galmoy** and Lisheen mines are owned, respectively, by **Boliden, Lundin Mining**, and **Anglo American**. Together, the three mines account for almost 40% of European *zinc* production, and 20% of *lead* production. The mines produce metal concentrates, all of which are exported for smelting.

Current mining in Ireland is not restricted to metal mining, though. There are significant resources of *gypsum* in **Co Monaghan**, where **Irish Gypsum** produces some 500,000tpa from an open pit (**Knocknacran**) and from an adjacent

underground mine (**Drummond**). In **Co Kilkenny**, at **Bennettsbridge**, **CRH** produces *dolomite* and *dolomitic limestone*. In Northern Ireland *rock salt* is produced at **Kilroot, Co Antrim**, by the ***Irish Salt Mining and Exploration Company***. Other minerals that are exploited to a lesser degree are *fireclay*, *Connemara marble*, *silica sand* and *coal*.

source:

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<http://www.dcmnr.gov.ie/>

GSI - County Clare

<http://www.gsi.ie/Your+County/Home.htm?county=Clare#map>

GSI - County Galway

<http://www.gsi.ie/Your+County/Home.htm?county=Galway>

GSI - Publications & General Interest

<http://www.gsi.ie/Publications+and+Data/General+Interest/>

The Exploration and Mining Division of Ireland

<http://www.emd.ie>

<http://www.minex.ie/>

The Petroleum Affairs Division of Ireland

<http://www.pad/>

The Geological Survey of Ireland

<http://www.gsi/>

The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland

<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/gsni/>

The Environmental Protection Agency

<http://www.epa.ie>

The Irish Planning Appeals Board

<http://www.pleanala.ie>

Duchas the Heritage Service for Ireland

<http://www.heritagedata.ie>

Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland

<http://www.mhti.com/>

Mining in Ireland

<http://www.infomine.com/countries/ireland.asp>

Historic Mining Sites

<http://www.epa.ie/whatwedo/enforce/pa/mines/>

Mining History Network

<http://www.projects.ex.ac.uk/mhn/>

Inter-Agency Group Report *of the investigation into the presence and influence of External in the Silvermines area of County Tipperary published by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in 2000*

<http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/index.jsp?file=publicat/silvmine/silver.xml>

Expert Group *On Lead In Silvermines County Tipperary - EPA Interim Report of 2002*

<http://www.epa.ie/downloads/pubs/land/name.13067.en.html>

EPA Report *Of The Investigation Into The Presence Of Lead And Other Metals In The Tynagh Mines Area, County Galway, 2003*

<http://www.epa.ie/downloads/pubs/land/name.13110.en.html>

Final EPA Expert Group Report *For Silvermines County Tipperary - Lead And Other Relevant Metals, 2004*

<http://www.epa.ie/downloads/pubs/land/name.13068.en.html>

iSCAN Newsletter Vol. 7 December 1998

<http://www.iscan.ie/newsletter/volume7.htm>

The Arigna Mining Experience

<http://www.arignaminingexperience.ie/location.htm>

Footprints in Coal Exhibition

<http://www.discoverypark.ie/exhibition.html>

Mining through the Millennia Exhibition

<http://www.gsi.ie/Programmes/Heritage/Exhibitions/Mining+through+the+Millennia+-+Panels.htm>

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<http://www.yearofplanetearth.org/>

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Additional Links, Reading Material & References welcomed

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