

Transboundary european World Heritage – a topic for UNESCO-Projectschoools

History of the Markus Röhling Tunnel in the Context of the Historic Development of Mining in the Ore Mountains and the Town of Annaberg Buchholz

The miner Daniel Knappe is said to have discovered a large silver find at Schreckenberg in 1491. As legend goes, an angel whispered the location in his ear. This is the origin myth of mining in the Ore Mountains, or Erzgebirge. A “great mountain call” attracted people from all over Europe to come and mine silver. Soon mining claims extended all around today’s Markus Röhling Tunnel.

Sources:

<https://www.annaberg-buchholz.de/de/leben/stadtportrait/geschichte.php>

<https://www.roehling-stolln.de/>

In 1496, the Saxon Duke Georg the Bearded founded the “new town at Schreckenberg,” later called Saint Annaberg. The coinage and the mining licensing authorities were established here, making the town one of the wealthiest in all of Saxony and the biggest in the German speaking countries. The Saint Anna Church, built between 1499 and 1525 as the largest hall church of Saxony, became a symbol for the wealth.

Sources:

<https://www.annaberg-buchholz.de/de/leben/stadtportrait/geschichte.php>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Anne%27s_Church,_Annaberg-Buchholz

From 1495 to 1500 alone, 15.5 tons of silver ore were extracted and the silver then minted primarily to coins. The silver discoveries necessitated new coin regulations, according to which the Schreckenberger, a silver coin from the Annaberg mines, was valued against the Rhenish guilder (seven Schreckenbergers equaled the value of one gold guilder). As of 1500, the pewter and silver coins brought about a new currency: the silver guilder.

Sources:

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A4chsische_M%C3%BCnzgeschichte

From then on the miners began to dig deeper underneath the two mountains, Schreckenberg and Schottenberg, carving tunnels out of the ore-bearing rock (the Organ Tunnel; the St. Anna Tunnel, later renamed Markus Röhling Tunnel; and the Frohnau Grubenaue). Silver mining meant very hard work that consumed the strength and ruined the health of the miners. They were exposed daily to the dangers of toxic ore dust, oxygen shortage, flooding, and collapsing tunnels. At the same time the profession was regarded as very honorable. It was a new profession that developed in tandem with the technical innovations in mining, and the associated pride and combative spirit of the miners has been handed down to this day.

Sources:

<https://www.roehling-stolln.de/>

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In 1521, the miners of St. Annaberg demonstrated their professional pride when they donated what became known as the Mountain Altar for the Saint Anna Church. The altar scenes, created by the panel and glass painter, Hans Hesse, display in detail the individual steps involved in extracting the silver ore. The founding myth of mining is also depicted. The altar also allows us a view of the massive changes in the landscape caused by medieval mining practices. The altar is one of the earliest and most valuable documents of mining history and the labor involved in mining.

Sources:

http://www.mosapedia.de/wiki/index.php/Annaberger_Bergaltar

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Anne%27s_Church,_Annaberg-Buchholz

The years of extensive silver exploitation were from 1523 to 1559, and during that time the mathematician, Adam Ries, lived in Annaberg. Often called the “father of modern arithmetic” Ries employed the Hindu-Arabic numbers, as we use them to this day, instead of the Roman numerals that were still commonly used in Europe. Ries made his living as a bookkeeper for the ore mines. He also created the “Annaberg Bread Regulations,” a regulatory tool to protect miners against usury and inflation on the food market.

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Ries

From 1733 to 1857, the Markus Röhling Tunnel saw a second blossoming. As the most lucrative pit in the Annaberg mining region, the “Erstneuglück Flache” was expanded by a new main lode. Once again 15.4 tons of silver were extracted here, in addition to 51,326 hundredweights of cobalt ore. The latter served for the production of valuable cobalt blue pigment and was extracted through a mine shaft 303 meters below the Markus Röhling Tunnel and 361 meters below the bottom of the Andreas Tunnel. The ore was transported via a surface shaft that was 90 meters deep and extended to the Markus Röhling Tunnel. Here there were wheel rooms with water-wheels that pumped water out of the tunnels. Today the nine-meter tall wheel is one of the main attractions of the Markus Röhling Tunnel Museum Mine. The ore extracted back then equalled a value of 4,290,700 Mark. Mining in the Markus Röhling Tunnel came to a standstill in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Sources:

<https://www.roehling-stolln.de/>

<https://www.montanregion-erzgebirge.de/en/world-heritage-discover/background/the-erzgebirge-a-mining-cultural-landscape.html>

Beginning in 1948 the Wismut Mining Company again started tunnel mining, this time in search of uranium ore. A one thousand-meter long adit, or underground horizontal path, served to drain a second shaft. However, hopes of finding valuable ore for mili-

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tary purposes (for use in atom bombs) and civil purposes (for energy supply) were not fulfilled. After about ten years, mining inside the Markus Röhling Tunnel again came to an end. While in operation, the Wismut Company (later called Wismut SDAG = Soviet-German Corporation) was one of the biggest producers of uranium worldwide. Uranium extracted and treated in Saxony and Thuringia provided the raw material for the Soviet nuclear industry. Contemporary witnesses have reported that in the GDR the Wismut Company existed as a “state within the state” and strictly monitored the way of life of its workers. There were Wismut child nurseries, schools, vacation homes and stores. Today, as an enterprise of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Wismut Company is responsible for the restoration and re-cultivation of the massive damages caused by mining throughout the cities and the countryside of Saxony.

Sources:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wismut_\(mining_company\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wismut_(mining_company))

<https://www.wismut.de/en/>

In 1990 the Markus Röhling Tunnel Association came up with the idea to make part of the extensive, decommissioned mining area accessible to the public and was able to open a mining museum in July 1994.

Members of the association rebuilt the waterwheel according to the original plans and it was fully functioning by 2006. By 2018 eight-hundred thousand visitors had visited the impressive pit construction. They saw evidence of silver and cobalt mining as well as of uranium exploitation. At the same time they learned about what from today’s perspective are considered inhumane working conditions in the cold, noisy, and noxious mining environment, as these conditions have been made transparent at the museum site. An 800-year history of workers has been displayed alongside an impressive technological and broader cultural history.

Sources:

<https://www.roehling-stolln.de/>

To this day mining in the Ore Mountains has characterized the history, technology, and people on both sides of the German-Czech border. The Markus Röhling Tunnel is part of the cultural mining landscape Ore Mountain/Krušnohoří that currently is applying for recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In taking this step, this region that has been structurally weak for so long seizes the opportunity to make itself known in the future as a significant part of transnational heritage of mankind in the middle of Europe.

Sources:

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