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Ohio State Engineer

Title: The Miners Go Inspecting : The 1927 Trip

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Issue Date: Oct-1927

Publisher: Ohio State University, College of Engineering

Citation: Ohio State Engineer, vol. 11, no. 1 (October, 1927), 11, 31.

URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/34240>

Appears in Collections: [Ohio State Engineer: Volume 11, no. 1 \(October, 1927\)](#)

THE MINERS GO INSPECTING

THE 1927 TRIP

By LAWRENCE T. POSTLE, '29

ON Sunday morning, June 12, 1927, ten men, eight students and two professors, left on the annual mine inspection trip. The object of the trip was to visit some of the more important and larger mines in Missouri and Illinois. Our first day's ride took us to Ironton, Missouri, a little town in the Ozarks. Pilot Knob, about a mile from Ironton is one of the oldest sources of iron in this country. It has been mined both by underground drifts and open cuts for a long time. The remains of an old pre-civil war blast furnace with its ten foot thick limestone walls and its iron tie rods is still in a good state of preservation. We did not come here prepared to go underground but on finding the portal of an old abandoned mine, everyone wanted to go in. With one lamp the party crawled over fallen boulders to find some very spectacular timber work — solid tree trunks, fourteen feet long with iron bands around them still in place although there has been no underground mining here since 1877.

That afternoon the party went to Iron Mountain, about ten miles from Pilot Knob. Both of these places hold a great deal of Geological and Mineralogical interest being among the oldest rocks in North America. At Iron Mountain the hematite has been mined by extensive open cuts,

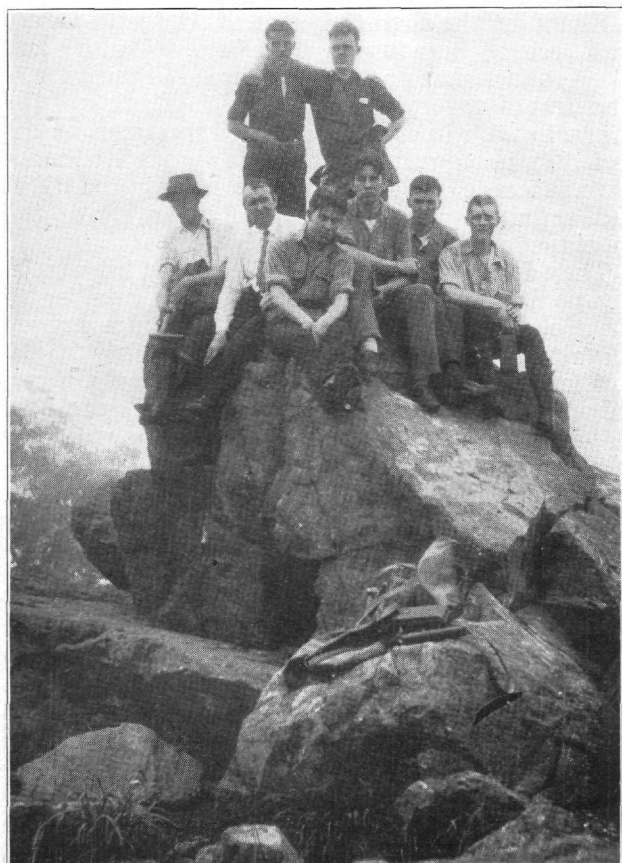


OUT OF THE IRON MINE

but at present a shaft has been sunk into a secondary ore body and most of the work is done there. They are doing a great deal of prospecting for an underground primary ore body with very encouraging results. This shaft was very wet and by the time the bottom was reached the men had the appearance of having been under Niagara Falls. As shown in the picture slickers were the most important thing to have for this. Mine drift driving is made difficult by the hardness of the Porphyry Country rock. To advance a seven by nine drift face six feet, it is necessary to drill eighteen holes and to load each hole with eight sticks of forty per cent gelatin dynamite. Several attempts were made to make some pictures underground but the results were not very good.

From Iron Mountain the party journeyed to Elvins. This is a lead mining town in the Flat River district. The lead is disseminated through a great amount of limestone and the mines are operated on a very large scale. It is possible to travel for miles underground from one property to the next. One thing of considerable interest was a complete railroad shop and yards underground. Another feature of this mine was that most of the ore is loaded by mechanical shovels of which several types are used. In the most of the places the ore is only fifty or sixty feet thick but in one place visited the excavations extended one hundred and ninety-two feet from bottom to top. The top is supported by cylindrical pillars of ore spaced fifty or sixty feet apart. When the ore reaches the surface, it is crushed, ground and the galena is extracted by tabling and flotation in a large mill with a capacity of five thousand tons per day. When approaching the lead mines the thing that impresses one is the huge white piles of chats. This is the residue from the mills and as this is a very old district some of the piles are like small mountains.

The galena was followed from the mills to the large smelter and refinery at Herculaneum, where the metallic lead is recovered from the ore. After a week in the wilds everyone took a night off in



AT PILOT KNOB

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INSPECTION TRIP

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St. Louis. However, everyone was out bright and early the next morning to visit a zinc smelter and sulfuric acid plant in east St. Louis. The distinguished Charles Lindbergh arrived in St. Louis just as the party was leaving and two of the boys were so interested in watching him that they missed their train and had to travel all night to catch up.

About noon, Saturday, Rosiclare, Illinois, was reached. This is a quiet little town on the Ohio River, but one of the most important sources of fluorspar in the United States. The afternoon was spent in going through a concentrating mill and in hunting minerals. The latter are very abundant around the old tailing piles and Professor McCaughey almost forgot to eat. Later, when making a trip underground some more interesting mineral specimens were found. Mr. Reed carries a scar on his arm obtained in getting a very large calcite crystal out of a cavity in the wall. At this place they were mining vertical veins, something new to most of the men. While at Rosiclare one of the old Ohio River "show boats" pulled up to the dock and gave a show, very melodramatic but virtue won out in the end and they lived happily ever after.

The next and last stop was at the New Orient coal mine. This is the largest coal mine in the world and when working at full capacity can produce thirteen thousand tons of coal in eight hours. The coal lies about six hundred feet below the surface and is reached by shafts. This mine is very gassy and a safety lamp must be used for illumination. This mine is in Williamson County, not far from Herron, and as there was a strike on, some excitement was expected but nothing happened.

On the whole the trip was a huge success and everyone got his moneys worth.