

**The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University**  
**Ohio State Engineer**

**Title:** The Burning Mines : Ohio's "Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes"

**Creators:** Littlefield, Edgar

**Issue Date:** Nov-1925

**Publisher:** Ohio State University, College of Engineering

**Citation:** Ohio State Engineer, vol. 9, no. 1 (November, 1925), 17.

**URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/33738>

**Appears in Collections:** [Ohio State Engineer: Volume 9, no. 1 \(November, 1925\)](#)

# THE BURNING MINES

*Ohio's "Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes"*

By EDGAR LITTLEFIELD, '28

**I**N 1884, during the great miners' strike of that year, several coal mines in the vicinity of New Straitsville were set on fire, and since then all efforts of man have failed to extinguish the costly conflagration. Millions of tons of low production coal have been consumed by the blaze that has made destitute this section which was so rich in natural resources.

The burning vein is known as Hocking No. 6, overlain by what is locally termed No. 6A. The total thickness of the vein is nine to twelve feet. It consists of a very excellent quality of bituminous coal, probably the best to be found in Ohio, and it lies comparatively close to the surface. As the coal is burned the over-burden breaks off and settles, making sink holes which supply the fire with an abundance of air. This fact explains why it has been so difficult to combat the fire. In the past the State has spent many thousands of dollars in an effort to check the conflagration, but at the present the flames are being allowed to go as they may.

Mining in the district has resolved itself into a race between the operator and the fire. A year ago I passed a mine near Shawnee and noticed that it was in active operation. Four days later the same mine was visited, but the flames were roaring out of the shaft and leaping high into the air.

The coal lies well up in the hills, so that the flame in its course meanders about among the inter-connecting ridges. At the present time various portions are as far apart as three or four miles.



After Man, the Desert



Typical Scenery

Driving along some of the narrow roads that transverse the section, one cannot fail to notice the peculiar appearance presented by the landscape. Here and there can be seen large dead trees, killed by the fire at their roots. Where the over-burden is shallowest the soil is baked to a brick red. Except in those parts where the fire has long since subsided, no vegetation flourishes. Sink holes are everywhere, many of them emitting white plumes of steam and smoke, so that the whole section must resemble to some extent the famous Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, explored and described by the National Geographic Society's expedition to Alaska.

Many interesting things have happened as a direct result of the fire. Wells and springs gave hot water for a time and then went dry; houses settled and in many cases the cellars dropped down several feet. Farm land was so hot in places that ice and snow could not remain on it in winter. When the roof over the burning coal falls in at night the sky is illuminated for miles.

The blaze has caused losses in property, labor, and coal amounting to millions of dollars and the prosperity of the little towns of Straitsville, Shawnee and New Straitsville has suffered greatly. It is thought that the fire will continue to burn for ten or fifteen years.