



Province
de Liège



Blegny-Mine

Press presentation

With the support of the Province of Liège, the Commune of Blegny, the Wallonian Region and the EFRO-Program



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Blegny-Mine : more than 40 years in service of industrial heritage

The story of a successful conversion of an industrial heritage: the coal mine of Argenteau into a place of interest

The coal mine of Argenteau is situated in Blegny, in the north-east of Liège, Belgium. Settled in the countryside of Herve, about fifteen kilometers from Liège, on a 100 meters level above the river Meuse, it is the last coal granting in the north-east coal basin.

Contrary to other operational headquarters, the mine of Argenteau is not very deep and some of the layers even outcrop in the neighbouring countryside.

The interest of this setting lies in the conversion into a leisure center and the preservation of the two pits from different periods (19th and 20th centuries). The most recent one is still in use for it gives access for the visitors to the underground galleries on the levels -30 and -60 meters.

1. HISTORY

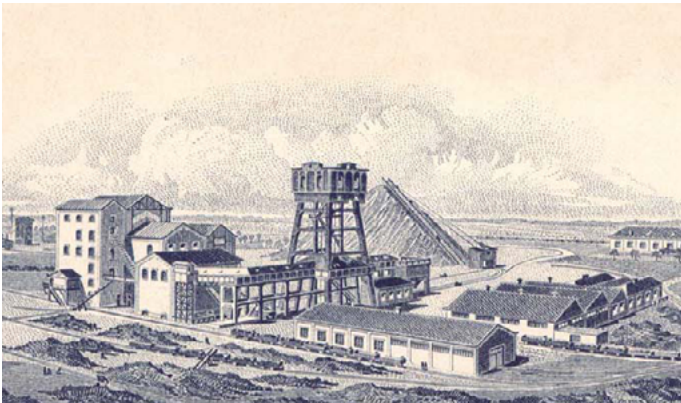
In Blegny, the coal working starts in the 16th century under impulse of the Monks of Val-Dieu, owners of the coal area.

The first granting, Trembleur, is allowed to Gaspar Corbesier in 1799. This marks the beginning of the industrial coal working. Corbesier's descendants get the granting Argenteau which is settled near Trembleur. Both grantings

are put together in 1883 and totalise 2,171 acres. In 1887 the activities stop for 30 years and the company is put into liquidation.

In 1919, a new company is created and the family Ausselet grounds the “Company of Argenteau”. The production grows rapidly and reaches 84.000 tons in 1931 (compared to 10.000 tons before the first closure). During the Second World War, the tour of pit 1 and the coal-washing building are destroyed. Coal extraction still remains by using the “Pit Mary” but consequently with a lower rate of production. From 1942 till 1948 the pit and the wash-and-sorting building are reconstructed.

The production goes on, increases and reaches 232.000 tons for 680 mineworkers. In 1975, the Industrial and Social Ministerial Committee of Belgium stops state grants to coal mines. In the region of Liège, the coal mines close one by one. The latest one “Argenteau” closes on March 31st, 1980. ■



Overall view of the colliery in the 1930^s



The Pit N°1 installations at the end 1970^s

© Paul Donnay

2. CONVERSION

The story could end in 1980 and the coal mine could have become an industrial bur cancer. But the Provincial Authorities and in particular Governor Gilbert Mottard thought differently. He wished to preserve this testimony of the coal miners in the area of Liège.

In 1978, the conversion is decided and the Province of Liège bought the spot in 1980. The first visitors arrived in June, 2 months after the stopping of the exploitation. The visiting tour was heightened because of a problem of pumping water.

The combined actions of the Province de Liège, the French Community, the Tourist Federation of Liège, the council authorities and two local associations lead to the regular growth of the number of visitors (50.000 yearly).

In 1990, the European Fund Federation will even speed up the remodelling of the settings and contribute to the setup of a welcome infrastructure. 100.000 visitors came to Blegny-Coal Mine the same year and in the next years.

In 2011, the site is classified and in 2012, together with the three other major mining sites of Wallonia, is recognized by Unesco as a World Heritage site ■

3. Focus of interest

Blegny-Mine presents one major technical interest concerning industrial archeology.

The site has a rather recent infrastructure “Pit Number 1” with a concrete tour, washing and sorting places Evence Coppée, a tip dating from the Second World War and the old building of the “Pit Mary”.

The Pit Number 1



The Pit Number 1 (system Koepe) is still in use and brings the visitors to the levels -30 and -60 meters. They can discover a coal face and cutting coalmining.

Since 2000 the visit in the underground galleries has been completed with a visit of the authentic coal washing and sorting buildings which have been restored accurately. It is now possible to watch the machines and systems of in-and out-caging of the trucks and to have an overview of the coal treatment process from its extraction in the galleries to the finished product ready to be transported and sold. Nothing has changed in these buildings, and certainly not the lamps which continuously light the patron saint of miners: “Sainte-Barb”. The visitors can follow the visit with the help of an audioguide in English and German.



The minig cage to go down in the galleries © Blegny-Mine



View of one of the gallery © Blegny-Mine



View of the coal washing and sorting building © Blegny-Mine

The “Pit Mary”



The “Pit Mary” dates 1849. Basically it was used as main pit till 1887 then as back air pit till 1983. It is 234 meters deep and is overhung by the classical shaft tower (metal frames). The “Pit Mary” is surrounded by technical buildings kept in remarkable condition. Ventilators, showers, lamp places, compressors are located there.

It is now a permanent exhibition with wealthy collections coming from other museums, the University of Liège, coal mines and private donations. The visit is guided for groups from min. 15 persons. and with the help of fourlingual panels for individuals and families.

Some other installations also deserve a particular attention:

- The carpentry;
- The small sorting place used during the Second World War;
- The washhouse where the miners changed their clothes;
- The open-air museum;
- The exhibition devoted to the immigration, showing a small house where foreign coal miners were located.



Actual view of the mining-museum
(the “Pit Mary”) © Blegny-Mine



The open-air museum © Blegny-Mine



The open-air museum © Blegny-Mine



Center of documentation

The Blegny-Coal Mine owns a center of documentation about the coal industry which has two objectives: to put together written, visual and recorded documents about the coal mines of the area of Liège, to create a data bank about the coal relationship.

A “collective memory work” has been done, including interviews of all the people who have been part of the miner’s hard work. It is extremely important to keep alive or mining past and down the souvenirs of its witnesses and actors to the next generations.



Hotel facilities

Next to the site is located the football training center. It includes a hotel facilities for 56 persons housed in double rooms + 2 single rooms and also a closes parking for cars and restaurants.



The slag heap biotope

The slag heap biotope: audioguided hike in english presenting the life on, and around the slag heap. This visit will changed your view of nature and the role that our slag heaps now play in it. They are part of the Réseau Nature network set up by Natagora.



Playgrounds

Blegny-Mine has three free access playgrounds, one for 6-14 year olds, one for 3-6 year olds and one for the very young, located near a small animal park.

The Road-Train Excursion

These trains will transport you through the orchards and the pasture land of the “Land of Herve countryside” (new trains and new trip).



The “Apéro-Mines” and the “Gourmet Mines”

1. **The “Apéro-Mines”:** Blegny-Mine invites visitors to explore the underground galleries of Blegny-Mine, 30 and 60 metres down, lit only with personal lanterns! This unique experience has two gourmet stops, where visitors can enjoy local produce such as the cheeses, sausages and beers. This programme is open to individual visitors and groups of at least 20 persons.



The “Gourmet Mines”: After a welcome drink, visitors discover in small groups, with a guide, the underground galleries of Blegny-Mine interspersed with gourmet stops (2 cold verrines and 1 hot). The meal then continues on the surface at the restaurant «Le Chalet». This program is proposed to groups and companies between 15 and 80 people.

Exhibitions

Blegny-Mine proposes a programme of exhibitions, focusing on three themes: the mines in the past, the mines nowadays, and energy, to be held in the new exhibition halls opened in 2010; these exhibitions take a wider-ranging look at these two themes, which are inextricably linked with our social aim. They are presented in two exhibition rooms located at the foot of the wash and sorting installations. This also where the art collections of the non-profit organisation are also conserved and exhibited ■

Blegny-Mine is a member of the Route du Feu au Pays de Liège (the Liège Fire Route), the non-profit organisation Pays des Terrils, the Maison du Tourisme du Pays de Herve (Tourist Office), Wallonie-Belgique Tourisme (Wallonia-Belgium Tourism), the non-profit organisation P.I.W.B. (Patrimoine Industriel Wallonie-Bruxelles – Wallonia-Brussels Industrial Heritage), the non-profit organisation MSW (Musées et Société en Wallonie – Museums and Society in Wallonia), the Association des Musées Industriels dans l'Euregio Meuse-Rhin (the Association of Industrial Museums in the Meuse-Rhine Euregio), the PISTE (Patrimoine Industriel, Scientifique et Technique – Industrial, Scientific and Technical Heritage) networks, ERIH (European Routes of Industrial Heritage).

The site adheres to the online booking platform ORC.



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



• **Major Mining Sites of Wallonia**
• inscribed on the World
• Heritage List in 2012
•

RECOGNITION UNESCO

Since July 2012, Blegny-Mine and the 3 others major mining sites in Wallonia (Grand Hornu near Mons, Bois-du-Luc in La Louvière and Bois du Cazier in Charleroi) are recognized by Unesco as a World Heritage site. The 4 sites have developed in close collaboration with the Administration of the Heritage, the Walloon Heritage Institute, and all the concerned authorities a management plan for the next fifteen years which joins the guidelines of the Walloon Committee of World Heritage.



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