

# Ozark Mining History

If you use a car in the U.S., you probably rely on lead from right here in Missouri to start your engine. The Missouri Lead Belt produces 70% of the United State's lead, and 84% of Missouri's lead is used in car batteries! The train crosses the Ozark Mining Region between St. Louis and Popular Bluff, riding on rails overlying the richest deposits of lead in the world. The mining industry has played an important role in this area's economic and social fabric for more than 280 years.

The first Anglo settlers in Missouri were attracted by its verdant forests and prairies, abundant wildlife and rivers. They could not know that hidden beneath the rich topsoil were vast quantities of concentrated minerals. Early mineralogical expeditions discovered thick layers of galena, lying just below the earth's surface. This abundant mineral is the primary lead ore still mined today, making Missouri the nation's leading source of lead for more than 100 years. Explorers also found significant quantities of zinc, copper and silver, prompting an influx of prospectors to the Ozarks in the 1700s.

Through extremely difficult and dangerous labor, men removed ore from the earth. Getting the ore to market posed an even more difficult challenge. Spurred by the need to move the heavy ore to buyers, Missouri's mining industry was instrumental in the development of the railway system. The advent of railroads boosted the economy of the region, and guaranteed long-term sustainability of mining towns. Additional technological and engineering advances improved safety and productivity of mining operations, and improvements continue today.

In addition to the miners, many people are employed in transporting and converting the mine products into usable products. No other industry, besides agriculture, has been a part of Missouri's economy and culture from its earliest beginnings. And all across the country, we use Missouri's metals every day in our cars, homes and industries.

## Source(s):

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