

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A MINING MUSUEM IN GHANA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Mining in Ghana, formerly known as Gold Coast, has gone on for many centuries. The history of gold mining in Ghana goes as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B. C. when the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians sailed along the coast of Africa exchanged their goods for gold. Historical records Indicate that in 1482 Fernando Gomez, a Portuguese, opened a gold mine in Arobi Hill, a few kilometres north of Komenda. The first large mine was opened in Awodua, near Tarkwa in the Western Region. Since then several gold mines have been opened and closed in areas like Tamso, Effuanta Abosso, Prestea, Dunkwa and Bibiani. Diamonds were also discovered in Ghana in 1919 at Abomosu and since then, the mineral has been mined in several localities in the country. The country has also been associated with the mining of manganese for over 60 years. The first bauxite deposit in the Gold Coast was discovered in 1914 at Mt. Ejuanema in the Eastern Region. Concessions for the mining of bauxite in Awaso were obtained in 1926 and since then the ore has been mined. Over the years, Ghana has witnessed a huge transformation in the mining industry. Mining and mineral equipment, artefacts and sites of huge historical importance have been generated. Ironically however, no national mining museum has been established to perpetuate this rich history.

Taking into consideration this rich and long history in mining, this paper examines the need for the establishment of a national mining museum and consequently a mining heritage in Ghana, specifically in Tarkwa. In this discourse, it is posited that a mining museum will boost not only tourism in Ghana, but will be of immense economic and socio-cultural significance. In addition it is discussed that such a museum will not only serve as a valuable resource centre for the various educational institutions in the country, but also for the mining and allied industries.

## **1. HISTORY OF MINING IN GHANA**

Mining in Ghana, formerly known as Gold Coast, has gone on for many centuries and the history of gold mining in Ghana goes as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B. C. when the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians sailed along the coast of Africa exchanged their goods for gold (Kesse, 1985). Ghana has produced and exported minerals, especially gold for many centuries. In pre-colonial periods, the present-day Ghana was the source of gold that reached Europe through the trans-Saharan trade route. Most gold mining before the mid-nineteenth century was alluvial, miners recovering the gold from streams.

The first large mine was open in Awodua, near Tarkwa in the Western Region. Since then several gold mines have been opened and closed in areas like Tamso , Effuanta Abosso, Prestea, Dunkwa and Bibiani. The Precambrian auriferous Tarkwa conglomerates of Ghana were developed in a modern way during the period 1876-1882 by Pierre Bonnat, the father of modern gold mining in the Gold Coast. In 1895, Asanti Goldfields Corporation began work in the Obuasi district of Ghana, developing the Ashanti and other mines, which have produced the largest proportion of gold since 1900 in the Gold Coast. In 1895, Ashanti Goldfields Corporation began work in the Obuasi district of Ghana. Modern gold mining that plumbs the rich ore deposits below the surface of the earth started about 1860, when European concessionaires brought in heavy machinery and started working in the western parts of the present-day Ghana (Kesse, 1985).

Diamonds were also discovered in Ghana in 1919 at Abomosu and since then, the mineral has been mined in several localities in the country. The country's has also been associated with the mining of manganese ore for over 60 years. The first bauxite deposit in the Gold Coast was discovered in 1914 at Mt. Ejuanema in the Eastern Region. Concessions for the mining of bauxite in Awaso were obtained in 1926 and since then the ore has been mined (Kesse, 1985).

## **2. THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL MINING MUSEUM**

Over the years, Ghana has witnessed a huge transformation in the mining industry. Mining and mineral processing equipment, artefacts and sites of huge historical importance have been generated. Ironically, no national mining museum has been established to perpetuate this rich history. Mining equipment and artefacts, which can serve as excellent museum

pieces are either left to rot on the mine, in the forest, in rivers (Fig. 1) or sold to scrap dealers who also sell them to steel processing companies. Others like the collar of a shaft built in the early 1900s at Nangodi which has now been destroyed by “galamsey” activities (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1 An old dredge lying in the Ankobra River at Dwira Bansa in the Western Region



Fig. 2 The collar of the shaft at Nangodi which has been demolished recently by artisanal and small scale miners

It is quite obvious that one day the minerals resources of the country will be depleted. With a rich mining history spanning more than 15 centuries, members of this generation would be doing the future generation a great disservice if these relics that are empirical evidence of Ghana's mining history are not collected and preserved to tell their own stories about the country's rich mining heritage. It is in the light of this that it is advocated that a Ghana National Mining Museum be established. The significance to the country is outlined in this discourse.

### **3. THE GHANA MINING MUSEUM**

The term museum in Latin means a place for learned occupation. Webster's New Explorer Encyclopedic Dictionary (Webster, 2006) defines a museum as an "institution devoted to the procurement, care, study, and the display of objects of lasting interest or value; also: a place where objects are exhibited." Therefore, the Ghana National Mining Museum will be an institution which will procure, care for, study and display of artefacts of mining and its allied industries which are of lasting interest and value in the country.

The mission statement of the Ghana National Mining Museum will be to keep mining alive through the collection and preservation of the country's industrial rich mining heritage. The Museum will pursue the following objectives:

- To help in the education of the public in the history of mining in Ghana by the provision and maintenance of a national mining museum in the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa
- The continued identification, collection and preservation of significant historical mining sites (both underground and surface) and artefacts
- To collect, interpret and preserve documents relevant to the country's rich mining history in order to facilitate understanding and involvement with mining and Ghana's mining history
- To create social awareness and access to the Museum and its collections through consultations
- To make provision for education and lifelong experience relevant to the country's educational curriculum

- Advise about activities best suited for groups and individuals and help plan visits to meet the expectations, social experience and learning requirements of these groups and individuals
- To play advisory role by guiding and supporting other organisations and institutions with reference to mining in Ghana

The Ghana National Mining Museum, which would also be known as the Mining Village, would be located on the new site of the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa. Such a location will be of immense historical significance in the country. It will be closer to Awudua, which is said to be the centre for the first formal mining activity in the country. It will also be within the confines of the only mining University in the country, whose personnel are going to oversee its activities. Added to the above critical observations is the fact that Tarkwa has been a major centre of mining activities for so many decades.

#### **4. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

The museum's importance is expressed in its primary responsibility of procuring and preserving mining artefacts of monumental significance. Mining artefacts like those in Fig. 3 and 4 must quickly be procured and preserved. These are locomotives utilised by the African Manganese Company in the early 1900s and currently on the premises of the Ghana Manganese Company at Nsuta. These artefacts have become, in biological terms "endangered species." This is as a result of the increasing activities of scrap dealers' purchase these artefacts for sale to steel making companies.



Fig. 3 A locomotive engine used by African Manganese Company Mine in 1914, now on the premises of the Ghana Manganese Company, Nsuta



Fig. 4 The last of the haulage buckets for the 1914 locomotive engine in Fig. 3

The museum project will acquire specific mining sites like the abandoned Fante Mines in Fig. 5, repair and use them for underground excursions. It is necessary for efforts to be directed towards the planning, procuring and preservation of these priceless mining artefacts so as to celebrate them as a significant part of the nation's history. Procurement in this context could mean liaising with powerful institutions like the Ghana Chamber of Mines, the Ghana Museums and Monument Board, the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry Mines and Energy and the Ministry of Culture to convince the mining companies to donate these artefacts. In certain situations, such artefacts could also be purchased from individuals who have them. The preservation of the artefacts may include the restoration of certain missing parts, painting and hosting them in some protected environment for exhibitions. Such an exercise will require significant monetary commitment and some funding agencies and stakeholders will be consulted for assistance.

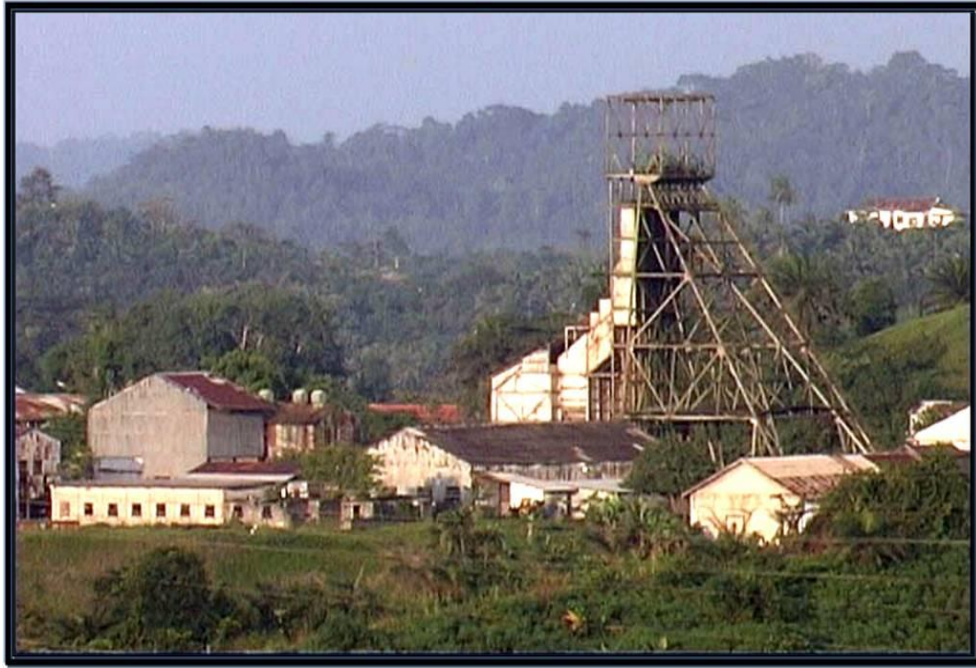


Fig. 5 An abandoned Underground Shaft at Fante Mines, Tarkwa

## **5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MINING MUSEUM**

### **5.1 Education**

The museum will also serve as a valuable source of education for all levels of students in and outside the country who will visit the place. The museum's educational goals will be tailored to answer the nation's curriculum demands. It will present or offer a very stimulating and practical way of not only studying the history of mining in the country, but science as well. The museum will house documents, models, pictures and other illustrations that would serve as reference materials for scholars, future mining companies and allied industries. Documents on the key players in the mineral industries of Ghana, mining companies past and present, mineral production and revenue would be displayed. Other learning materials would include the minerals and mining laws, maps and samples of minerals to help in the study of mineral deposits in the country, rock resources. Figure 6 is a sample of high grade manganese oxide ore commonly known as Nsutite as it is found in its purest form at Nsuta. Such ores have been depleted on the mine site.





Fig. 6 High grade manganese oxide ore, commonly known as Nsutite, which has been mined in Nsuta since 1914

## **5.2 Tourism and Employment**

Another significant role of the mining museum is that it will help boost tourism in the country, especially domestic tourism. School pupils, students, workers, institutions and individuals can arrange to visit the museum and the preserved sites for both academic and non academic purposes. For example the abandoned shaft in Fig. 5 could be refurbished and utilized for purposes of tourism.

Such activities in the museum will eventually serve as an avenue of employment in the country. As more mining artefacts are collected throughout the mining towns in the country, several people and companies will be employed to haul these artefacts to the location in Tarkwa and to man the museum.

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