

Coal exploitation along the Lena River (Portugal): a significant impact on the region's economy (1854-1956)

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ABSTRACT

The existence of coal deposits in the Lena valley has been known since the late 18th century. However, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that systematic search and exploitation began, albeit in an intermittent fashion and with no economic impact until the middle of the First World War.

The foundation of *Sociedade Mineira do Lena* (Lena's Mining Enterprise) in the early 1920's, that included the majority of the concessions owned by various entities, was the starting point of an important period of regional industrialization based on mining activity. Despite all its difficulties it worked, until mid 1950's, in partnership with other high economic and social impact industries in the district of Leiria.

The uniqueness of Lena's coal industry, in the overall picture of coal national industry, stems from the fact that the most important concession owners invested in other business areas, such as the construction and exploration of a mine railway line open to the public and the production and distribution of electricity, concomitantly with the mining activity. Although these businesses aimed to boost coal exploitation, they became an impediment to the development of mining activity, which was already debilitated by the poor quality of the lignite and marketing difficulties.

This work provides a chronological summary of some of the high moments of life at *the* mining camp in an attempt to counter the apparent weakening of the collective memory towards this important industry.