

COAL MINING AT GRÜNBACH

I. History of the coal-mining at Grünbach

Between 1823 and 1825 professional coal-mining for commercial purposes began around the former shaft house at the *Segen-Gottes* that is still to be seen today. From 1845 to 1850 the first two shafts – “*Richard-Schacht*” and “*Segen-Gottes-Schacht*” were dug.



“Richard-Schacht from the east 1923”



„Der Segen Gottes – Schacht“

Professional coal-mining began at Grünbach.

Before the construction of the Schneebergbahn (railway) the extracted, mostly still unsorted coal, was taken to Wiener Neustadt and from there on the canal to Vienna.

In 1936 **1062 miners** achieved **224,000 tons of coal, the highest output** ever.

In 1963 it was dug down to the **deepest point** of the pit, **1100 m.**

In 1945 the blasting of the pit by German soldiers could be stopped.

From 1946 to 1955 the coal-mine was managed by the Soviets.

In 1950 the work force comprised 1178 people, 800 from Grünbach. The ones who lived out of town got there on foot, by bicycle, train or bus.

From 1955 the coal output went down. Coal was gradually replaced by oil and electricity which became cheaper and easier to handle for the industry.

In **1965**, after 140 years of its existence, **coal-mining at Grünbach finally shut down** for ever.

In **December 2004** the opening of the **Grünbach coal gallery** display opposite the school was celebrated. It had been constructed by former miners.



Coal gallery with exhibits

II. Coal-mine museum

The coal-mine museum Grünbach am Schneeberg

After the coal-mine closed down in 1965 *Herr Th. Krumböck* acquired original pit equipment, shaft and gallery appliances, tools, drawings and sketches and displayed them in his restaurant at the *Neuschacht*.

Thus the coal-mining museum came into being. Due to its originality and rare exhibits it is worth visiting; it has been fitted out with commitment and enthusiasm.

There are to be seen 1000 exhibits and 370 historical documents and notes.



At the coal-mine museum

III. Saint Barbara – Patron Saint of the Miners

The legend of Saint Barbara



At about 1600 years ago there lived a young woman in *Nikomedia*. Her name was Barbara, and she was a trader's daughter.

Her wish was to become a Christian but this seemed impossible since her father was heathen. He locked her up in a small tower that had only two windows.

When the trader went away for fifteen years she was baptized and had a third window made in the wall. It was for God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. After her father had returned, he noticed that and killed Barbara with the sword. Barbara died a martyr. Legend says that after her death a barren tree branch blossomed again. (from K. Englitsch, *St. Moga*, A. Bauer, 2A)

IV. Tradition of the Miners

The “Ledersprung” (“leather jump”)

As a part of the traditional costume the **mountain leather** has become the symbol of the miners’ honour.

The “**Ledersprung**” is a part for the admission ritual into the miners’ status. After answering four questions the applicant empties a glass of beer and jumps from a beer barrel or stool over an “arse leather” which is held by two miners (the oldest mining worker and the oldest mining engineer).

The “Barbarazweig” (“Barbara twig”)

Putting up **Barbara twigs on 4 December** is an old custom in Austria. The cherry-tree twigs are to blossom on Christmas Eve and fulfil three wishes (e.g. wedding).

“Barbarafeier” (“Barbara celebration”)

Saint Barbara is the patron saint of the miners. The miners **celebrate the 4 December** as a class celebration by church-going or Barbara’s blessing, a festive assembly and a banquet with free beer; this day is a paid holiday.

Barbara also became the saint of the bell-founders and artillerymen.

V. Interview of a Miner



Helmut Schwiglhofer was born in 1937 and is a native Grünbacher as used to be his forefathers who settled there in the 18th century. After finishing compulsory school he started a four-year apprenticeship as a “(mountain) surveyor” in the Grünbach coal-mine.

Herr Schwiglhofer, already as an apprentice you used to work at the Grünbach coal-mine. Was the work in the coal-mine tiring or dangerous?

These days you can’t nearly imagine how exhausting a miner’s job used to be. A large number of them had to go to work after hour-long walks from the surrounding communities, even in bad weather. The work in the galleries was noisy, dirty and dusty. Only tough men were able to meet the challenge. The income depended on the output of a team. The more material a team managed to take out of the pit the higher was its income.

Did women also do mining work?

As far as I know they didn’t work in the galleries, but they did so at the conveyor belts and the sorting facilities.

For how long did you work in the coal-mine?

I worked in the Grünbach coal-mine for 14 years, and then in the coal-mine at Höflein an der Hohen Wand.

What kind of work did you have to do?

My job was to do measure works and cartographic works at the farthest spots in the galleries. In my free time I was also kept busy with the history of the Grünbach coal mining and the formation of the hard coal at the depression of Grünbach.

There is a legend that is connected with the discovery of hard coal. While a farmer was tilling the soil he uncovered coal, but did not recognize its importance.

This story is supposed to be true! A journeyman shoemaker took notice of this and drew the farmers' attention to the value of the "black stones". He threw the "stones" into open fire - and they burnt. The people thought this was magic and a piece of devilry.

What effect did the coal mining have upon our region?

In 1938 about 1500 miners did their work in 3 shifts. This brought about some wealth for Grünbach and its surrounding communities. There used to be 32 shops and 15 pubs.

In 1965 the Grünbach coal-mine closed down, why did this happen?

In the early sixties the mining became more expensive, therefore less profitable. Many new buildings were equipped with an oil heating system, the railways were electrified, so the demand for coal was in the decline. Finally the government decided to close down the coal-mine.

Is there anything that reminds us of the coal mining today?

Certainly. Our band proudly wears the traditional miners' uniform, there is a mining museum in the Gasthaus Mohr, and in front of the school building a coal gallery display has been put up. Our coat of arms bears "mallet and iron", which are the symbols of the miners.

Herr Schwighofer, we thank you for the interview!!