

HISTORY OF MINING IN NORTHEASTERN MINNESOTA



SIBLEY MINE, ELY – 1944

Twin Metals Minnesota is proud to be at the threshold of mining's rich heritage in northeastern Minnesota. In a two part series, Mine Reader will highlight the history of mining and the impact immigration had on the industry and region. Below is a brief historical timeline of the history of mining in the region:

- Commercial iron mining began in northeastern Minnesota in 1884 with the first shipments of iron ore from the Minnesota Mine, later to be named the Soudan Mine.
- Ely, Minn., was incorporated as a village in 1888 in conjunction with the development of the Chandler Mine. Ely's population grew from 200 to 4,000 in just ten years. The Ely area eventually became host to 11 operating iron ore mines.
- With the arrival of the railroad in Ely in 1888, area mines began shipping iron ore to the docks of Lake Superior in Two Harbors. Originally, the bulk of Ely-area mining was from open pits, which later transitioned to underground operations.

- Between 1904 and 1984 more than 106 million tons of ore were mined in the Mesabi, Vermilion and Cuyuna Ranges in northeastern Minnesota. Production of iron ore peaked in the Mesabi Range during the 1940s, when more than 600,000 tons were produced to serve the nation's needs during World War II.
- The last of the Ely-area's 11 iron ore mines, the Pioneer Mine, closed in 1967. The Pioneer Mine facilities are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and currently hosts the Ely Arts & Heritage Center.
- In 1948, Fred Childers, an amateur geologist and lifelong explorer, discovered copper nine miles southeast of Ely, near Spruce Road. This discovery led to an ensuing 60 years of off-and-on copper and nickel exploration by roughly 20 companies.

"For more than half a century, Minnesota's iron ranges supplied the iron ore that fed the nation's steel mills. First mined in the 1880s, the three ranges - the Vermilion, Mesabi and Cuyuna - provided the economic underpinnings of northeastern Minnesota."

— IRRRB

Sources:

Minnesota Historical Society Digital Archives
Minnesota In a Century of Change, Clifford E. Clark Jr., and IRRRB
<http://mn.gov/irrrb/DataCenter/history-iron-range.jsp>

For more information on Twin Metals Minnesota's project, please visit www.twin-metals.com.