

ELY'S MINING HERITAGE: PIONEER MINE

In a five part series, Mine Reader is exploring Ely, Minnesota's mining heritage by recounting the history of the five iron ore mines which were actively mined for nearly 80 years: Chandler, Pioneer, Savoy, Sibley and Zenith mines. These mines all resided within a one and a half mile radius in the eastern Vermilion Iron Range. Today the history of these mines is told along the Trezona Trail, which circles Ely's Miners Lake. In the final installment of the series we explore the story of perhaps the most well-known of these mines, the Pioneer Mine.

The Pioneer Mine began operation in 1888. Shafts No. 1 and No. 2 were replaced in 1909 by Shafts A and B. Shaft A was used to lower men, timber supports and equipment into the mine, while Shaft B was used for hoisting ore from within the mine to the surface, where it was transported by rail car to the port of Two Harbors on Lake Superior. At one time, Shaft B was the tallest structure north of Duluth, Minnesota. At the mine's closing in 1967, it was operating at 1,626 feet below the surface. More than 41 million long tons of ore were mined during the life of the Pioneer Mine.

When the Pioneer Mine closed, its water pumps were shut off and groundwater rose, causing the underground mine to collapse and form Miners Lake, a trout-stocked



recreational lake in the heart of Ely. The Dry House of the Pioneer Mine, where showers and lockers for workers were located, was renovated in 1994 and is now part of the Ely Arts & Heritage Center.

Sources:

The commemorative mine signs around the Trezona Trail were made possible by a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society to Ely Greenstone Public Art, with assistance provided by the City of Ely. The Trezona Trail was created by the City of Ely and the Mineland Reclamation Division of the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board.