
CoalHeritage: Exploring and Revitalizing Europe's Coal Mining Heritage

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Résumé

CoalHeritage is an EU co-funded initiative aimed at conserving and promoting the cultural and geological legacy of coal mining regions across Europe, particularly those undergoing economic and environmental transition. The project has four main objectives: (i) to identify the processes for designating coal sites as heritage sites; (ii) to improve the management of transitioning coal mining areas while minimizing environmental impact; (iii) to develop a European Visual Map Journal; (iv) to disseminate knowledge and build a European network for coal heritage.

France, with a three-century-long industrial mining history, has seen a gradual decline in coal mining. In response, the French government has supported the conversion of former mining areas, both regionally significant (e.g., Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Lorraine) and locally important (e.g., Vendée). These efforts include preserving mining heritage through dedicated institutions. Three key examples illustrate this approach:

The Centre Historique Minier de Lewarde: Located in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais basin, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it has preserved mining culture since 1984. It houses 15,000 artifacts related to mining techniques, miners' daily lives, and geological collections. It also raises awareness about energy issues and future energy challenges.

The Parc-Explor Wendel: Situated in Lorraine, it is one of Europe's most comprehensive mining complexes. It features a museum, reconstructed galleries, and mining towns. Through objects, models, and multimedia, it highlights the history of coal mining, miners' lives, and the social policies of mining companies. It also includes a significant geological and paleontological collection.

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The Centre Historique Minier de Faymoreau: Located in the small Vendée coalfield, CHMF opened in 2000 after the mine's closure in 1958. It preserves mining memory through relics like miner towns and a headframe. The museum emphasizes geology, particularly coal formation.

These institutions, chosen from over 20 coal museums in France, illustrate the importance of preserving and promoting the coal mining heritage. They also provide a different perspective on the coal-bearing Carboniferous basins that formed at the end of the Variscan orogeny, by linking geology/geological heritage to industry/cultural heritage.

Mots-Clés: coal, heritage, late Variscan basins, Carboniferous, mining historical center, France