

A DAY BY THE BUFFALO

MINING HISTORY – Rush Ghost Town

The Rush Creek Mining District is recognized as the most important zinc-producing area in the State of Arkansas. This region of northern Arkansas boomed during the late-1800s to become a major mining center. Mining was hard, rigorous work. A resource like zinc caused the development of a whole new industry and its associated impact on the economy.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

The Rush Creek Mining District is recognized as the most important zinc-producing area in the State of Arkansas. In the early 1880s, local residents discovered *zinc* in the Rush Valley. Initially, the prospectors were hopeful that the area also contained silver or even gold. They built a *smelter* to reduce the *ore*, but no silver was produced. Nevertheless, zinc mining continued and more prospectors moved into the Rush Valley. However, high transportation costs made it difficult to turn a profit. During World War I, due to increased demand, the price for zinc skyrocketed and Rush became a boomtown. Numerous *mines* employed hundreds of miners and the population of the valley was several thousand. Rush was the largest city in northern Arkansas during this period. After the war ended, zinc prices fell and people began to leave Rush as quickly as they had arrived. Some mining did continue, but slowly Rush was abandoned. Today the National Park Service preserves the remains of this once-bustling town and tells the story of Rush, the Ghost Town.



CLASSROOM: PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1. From A to Zinc

STATE STANDARD

Social Studies - Strand : Geography

Standard 3. Interaction of People and the Environment

Students shall develop an understanding of the interactions between people and their environment.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- list some of the uses for *zinc* and where it is found.

MATERIALS

- paper
- pencils

ACTIVITY

1. Have students prepare for their trip to Rush by researching zinc. What can they find out about this metal? What is it used for today? What uses might it have had during the early part of this century when the Rush mines were most active? Where does most zinc come from today? Is mining still important in Arkansas today? What are the leading minerals currently being mined in Arkansas?
2. Share pictures of zinc from books or items made of zinc with the class.
3. Have students brainstorm ways that zinc mining at Rush might have affected the local communities and local economies of this part of Arkansas. How might zinc mining have affected the natural resources and scenery of the Rush area? Have your students develop an image of what they think the Rush area looks like today (especially if they have never been to Rush).

NATIONAL RIVER: ON-SITE ACTIVITIES

Activity 2. Rush, the Ghost Town

STATE STANDARDS

Social Studies - Strand : Geography

Standard 3. Interaction of People and the Environment

Students shall develop an understanding of the interactions between people and their environment.

Social Studies - Strand : History

Standard 6. History

Students shall analyze significant ideas, events, and people in world, national, state, and local history and how they affect change over time.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. describe a basic time line for the history of Rush.
2. briefly describe some of the mining practices used in the Rush area.
3. explain why the mining stopped at Rush.
4. list two reasons to stay out of old mines.

MATERIALS

- day packs
- drinking water

ACTIVITY

The miners at Rush dreamed of silver, mined zinc and won gold. On this program, students will learn about these interesting facets of the history of Rush. Touring along with the ranger, they will see the old smelter and the remaining buildings of the Morning Star mine area. Students will explore the remains of the old Morning Star mill and the large tailings pile there. The group will also hike up to the mine level to talk about mining techniques and the dangers of old mines.

Be prepared to spend 1 1/2 hours with a ranger exploring the ghost town of Rush.



CLASSROOM: POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Activity 3. The Value of Natural Resources

STATE STANDARD

Social Studies - Strand : Economics

Standard 7. Choices

Students shall analyze the cost and benefits of making economic choices.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- relate ways in which the introduction of a single resource into the economy might affect an entire community.

MATERIALS

- paper
- pencil

ACTIVITY

1. Discuss how the discovery of zinc turned Rush from a small community into the largest town throughout northern Arkansas. Emphasize how quickly this happened and question the affects this might have had on neighboring communities. Have students question their relatives (i.e. great grandparents, grandparents, uncles and aunts) about Rush, and if they know anyone who was born there.
2. Introduce the concept of how much a single resource can impact an entire nation (i.e., the California Gold Rush, oil in Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico). Compare this to Rush and the discovery of zinc. Break students up into groups and ask them to list ways in which the following things would affect the local community:
 - a. A need for mining equipment.
 - b. Mine buildings.
 - c. A need for wood to heat buildings, provide steam power (oil following WWI) and build structures.
 - d. Miners needed places to live.
 - e. Food was needed for miners and their families.
 - f. A larger community ushered in a need for:

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| 1.) Doctors | 9.) Schools |
| 2.) Midwives | 10.) Stores |
| 3.) Teachers | 11.) Restaurants |
| 4.) Law Enforcement | 12.) Barber Shops |
| 5.) Engineers | 13.) Pharmacy |
| 6.) Carpenters | 14.) Post Office |
| 7.) Blacksmith | 15.) Horses and Mules |
| 8.) Hotels | 16.) Railroads and Roads |

3. Ask students who they think might have gained the most wealth; the person actually extracting the zinc from the earth, or the hotel owner.
4. What are some environmental changes that might have resulted from the discovery of zinc and its subsequent effects upon the community? (i.e. noise, clearing of forests, disposal of waste).



KEY WORDS

zinc, smelter, ore, mines

RESOURCES

Pitcaithley, Dwight T. 1978. *Let the River Be*. Southwest Cultural Resource Center, National Park Service. Santa Fe, NM.