

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY NEWS

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Industrial Archaeology Workshop in Baia Mare, Romania

The fourth International Workshop on Industrial Archaeology organised by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs held over five days in the autumn of 2004 provided a welcome opportunity for around 50 participants to explore the industrial operations, remains and museums of the mountainous Maramures province of northern Romania whilst sharing varied experiences through informal discussion and lectures. The sessions and tours were adeptly coordinated by Irina Iamandescu, a dynamic young architect working for the Department for Historic Monuments.

Sabina Strachan

Based in Baia Mare, literally 'Big Mine', named for the availability and extraction of non-ferrous metals, the conference was formally opened in the Biblioteca Judeteana on the last day of September 2004. The warm welcome was followed by two papers providing an overview of 30 years of TICCIH and the 'Eurocultures' web-based educational facility focusing on tourism-oriented case studies. The nearby Maramures County Museum is housed in an arcaded and balconied smooth-rendered building that predominantly dates from the 1770s and functioned as the Mint (first recorded here in the fifteenth century) and as the Superior Mining Office, restored and extensively remodelled in 1979. Naturally the 1,000 or so exhibits in the new 'History of Mining from Maramures' permanent exhibition focus on mining technology with gold and silver furnaces, lamps and tools from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Our visits to operational industrial sites

began the next day at Romplumb lead smelter, now processing lead dust from Poland into ingots rather than locally-produced minerals; some of the technology belongs to 1960s Russia and some buildings incorporate remains of the 1840s. The company has so far met two out of three targets to reduce pollution emissions and they have secured the investment necessary to meet the third. Until the 'Big Chimney' was built in 1994 lead levels were extremely high and could induce headaches in visitors. A common theme during our few days in Romania is the relative labour-intensity of many of the industries. Next door there are blocks of workers' housing built about 50 years ago, on which is painted a female miner symbolising the Communist ideal of gender equality. We then headed towards the Tiblesului Mountains where the director of the National Precious and Non-ferrous Metals of Baia Mare Company permitted us to visit the Cavnic Mines; extraction here was first recorded in 1511. The operation is the largest of its kind in Romania and we toured the dressing plant, an inclined plane and the above-ground parts of one of the shafts. Currently four out of five shafts are operational—down-sizing in the post-Ceausescu era has caused 212 mines to close between 1989 and 2002, and the desire to join the single-currency in 2007 will be matched by the total removal of state support. The local mayor talked of the potential for tourism; there are already some defunct/disused remains but, as in the UK, the opportunity for developing such as an attraction is often limited.

The focus of the bus tour shifted to subsistence economies with visits to three working water mills in villages of the Cosaului Valley. All combined a fulling cone (where felting



A fulling mill at the Village Museum in Bucharest

Photo: Mike Clarke

COVER PICTURE

Romanian Forest Railways 764 steam locomotive emerging from a tunnel in the Maramuresului Mountains (see this page)

Photo: Mike Clarke