THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF SWAZILAND

By George J. Coakley

Mining has been an important part of the history of Swaziland and a small but important factor in its present economy. Swaziland contains the world’s oldest known mine at the Lion Cavern site (also known as Bomvu Ridge) in the Ngwenya Mountains where carbon-14 dating studies estimated the date of earliest mining of hematite (libomvu) and specularite, which were extracted for cosmetic and ritual uses, from 43,000 B.C. to 41,000 B.C. These ores could have been mined until at least 23,000 B.C. (Swaziland National Trust Commission, undated). Mines of Malolotja—Iron mines, accessed April 1, 2001, at URL http://www.sntc.org.sz/cultural/ironmine.html). In fiscal year 1999-2000, mining and quarrying generated revenues of about $19.4 million; these revenues were estimated to equal 1.3% of the Kingdom’s gross domestic product, which was $1.49 billion. Mining and quarrying revenues for fiscal year 1999-2000 were comprised of asbestos ($9.3 million), coal ($8.5 million), and crushed stone ($1.6 million) (Central Bank of Swaziland, Annual Report 99-00, accessed April 27, 2001, at URL http://www.centralbank.sz/report2000/ar2000_04.html). Fewer than 1,000 Swazi’s were employed in the mining sector. An estimated 1,000 Swazis processed timber that was exported to mines in South Africa, and 10,000 to 15,000 Swazis were employed in South African mines. Wage repatriation from miners in South Africa contributed to the Swazi economy; the collapse of international gold prices and subsequent downsizing of the South African gold mining labor force, however, resulted in layoffs of a number of Swazi miners and reduction in miner remittances back to Swaziland. Asbestos, coal, and crushed stone remained the country’s main mining products (table 1). Diamond mining ceased in 1996. Small-scale gold mining has taken place in the past within an extension of South Africa’s well-known Barberton greenstone belt into Swaziland; no gold was officially being produced. Swaziland Greenstone Quarry, which was a Taiwanese company, was examining the potential for developing a green chert operation in the Malolotja Nature Reserve in the Hhohho region.

Government Policies and Legislation

In 1998, the Investment Promotion Bill of 1997 became law. The legislation, which is part of the Swazi Economic and Social Reform Agenda, was developed to promote local and foreign investment in Swaziland. The Swaziland Investment Promotion Authority, which is a one-stop service center for investors, opened in 1999. In October 2000, the Government announced new tax incentives to attract new foreign investment. The new

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1Where necessary, values have been converted from Swazi emalangeni (E) to U.S. dollars at the rate of E7.1=US$1.00 for 2000 and E6.11=US$1.00 for 1999.

**Stone, crushed.**—The production of crushed stone for road building and construction stone decreased sharply by 55% from 1998 to 1999. Although final data was not available, it was expected to rebound during 2000 with the approval for construction of the Nhlangano-Lavumisa highway, the Ngwenya-Mbabane highway, the Siteki-Mhlumeni road, continued work on the Mbabane-Manzini highway, and the Maguga Dam.

**Major Sources of Information**

Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy
P.O. Box 57
Mbabane, Swaziland
Telephone: (268)-46-244
Fax: (268)-42-436

Geological Survey and Mines Department
P.O. Box 9
Mbabane, Swaziland
Telephone: (268)-42-411
Fax: (268)-45-215
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asbestos, chrysotile fiber</td>
<td>metric tons</td>
<td>26,014</td>
<td>25,888</td>
<td>27,693</td>
<td>22,912</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coal, anthracite</td>
<td>thousand metric tons</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>426</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diamond</td>
<td>carats</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stone, quarry products</td>
<td>thousand cubic meters</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1/ Reported data from Swaziland Geological Survey and Mines Department or Central Bank. Includes data available through April 2001.*

*2/ In addition to the commodities listed, modest quantities of crude construction materials (brick clay and sand and gravel) and pyrophyllite are produced, but output is not reported quantitatively, and information is inadequate to make reliable estimates of output levels.*

*e/ Estimated. -- Zero.*