Endeavour Inlet Antimony Mine

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Little remains of the antimony mine settlement at Endeavour Inlet, Marlborough Sounds. The Department of Conservation interpretation signs on the Queen Charlotte track direct visitors towards the ore treatment plant site and mining remains. The track becomes steep after the treatment site and after passing a number of horizontal mine shafts (also called drives or levels) culminates at the 'number one cut' on the saddle between Endeavour Inlet and Port Gore. Not all of the mines are visible from the track.

What is antimony?

Antimony (Stibium, Sb) is a metal produced from stibnite (antimony sulphide, Sb_2S_3) ore. The lead-grey ore is usually found in quartz rock associated with gold. It was used in manufacturing pewter, ammunition and print type and is still used in lead-acid batteries and solder.

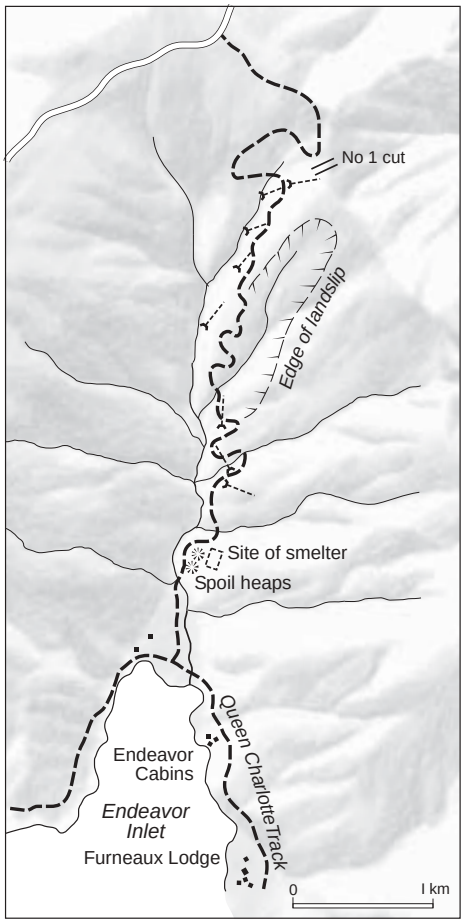

Figure 1. Endeavour Inlet mining remains and track.
Map: Chris Edkins.

Discovery of antimony ore in Endeavour Inlet

In 1873 ore containing 60% antimony was discovered in a landslide near the saddle between Endeavour Inlet and Port Gore. It was found during prospecting of the Queen Charlotte Sound Goldfield proclaimed in October 1872 and within a line of mineralisation running from Titirangi Bay through Endeavour Inlet to Resolution Bay. The discoverer may have been John Ashworth, who had settled at Endeavour Inlet. There has been some mining activity at Resolution Bay and on the east side of Endeavour Inlet; however, the only significant stibnite production came from mines associated with the lode at Endeavour Inlet.

Mining history

John Ashworth and a local syndicate formed the Marlborough Antimony Company Ltd. Mining started in 1873–74 almost 2 km from the coast but within a few years the smelter failed and the mine was closed. Ashworth unsuccessfully attempted to resurrect the mine in 1877.

In 1883 a small syndicate headed by Houston Logan of Wellington (and including Ashworth) established the Endeavour Inlet Antimony Company. The high prevailing antimony price facilitated raising capital to find the main ore body. This syndicate mined the number 1 level at the saddle and two lower levels. An extensive processing works, including a smelter, was established 500 m inland from the inlet (Figs 1 & 2). A fall in the price of antimony, low-grade ore and smelting problems forced the syndicate to seek English capital. The New Zealand Antimony Company was registered in London in 1888. This company developed levels 4–7 but found no source of high-grade ore. New Zealand Antimony was forced into voluntary liquidation in 1892.

A smaller New Zealand syndicate took over the mine and formed the Star Antimony Company in 1892. This operation survived until July 1901 when it too foundered. Several groups then attempted to revive the mine up until 1908 but failed. There has been periodic exploration since then.

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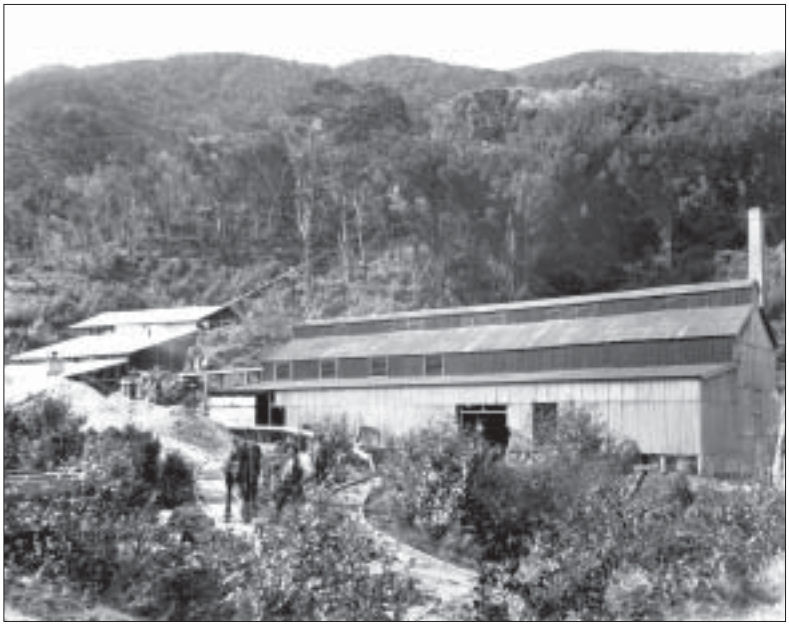

Figure 2. Stibnite ore dressing shed and smelter about 1890. *Photo: Tyree Studio Collection (Tyree 179109/30), Nelson Provincial Museum.*

The mine settlement at Endeavour Inlet

From 1885 until 1892 the coastal settlement contained 50 men and some families. There were enough children to sustain a school until 1895. Jaketh Wearne—the mine manager from 1888 until 1891—remained in the district and attempted to re-establish the mine. At 67, having recently lost a court case over the mine, he committed suicide at the mine's assay room by swallowing concentrated hydro-chloric acid.

Present day site description

The initially flat track from the beach soon becomes quite steep. The most prominent features on the site today are the remains of the treatment works and smelter adjacent to the waste rock pile, drives (mine tunnels, shafts or levels) that can be seen from the track and, finally, the number one drive in the cut on the saddle between Endeavour Inlet and Port Gore (Fig. 3).

Warning

Do not enter old mines. Accumulation of mud and/or poisonous gasses make them dangerous. There is also the risk of rockfall. Hidden shafts make the **No. 1 cut area** unsafe for exploration.

Further reading

Mike Johnston, 1992: Gold in a Tin Dish: The History of the Eastern Marlborough Goldfields, vol. 2, (Nelson, Nikau Press), pp. 349–376.

Figure 3. Miners outside one of antimony mines, Endeavour Inlet, exact date not known. *Photo: Tyree Collection (G 425 10×8), Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa.*