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# Lyon Mountain: A Timeline of the History of a Small Mining Town

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Conservation Biology

### The History of a Mining Town: Lyon Mountain

**1803** - The small hamlet, located in Northern New York, was named after a man named Nathaniel Lyon who was from Vermont and settled at the base of the mountain. From 1868 until 1967, Lyon Mountain was a company owned town. (Bigelow)

**1810** - The largest forge in the region was built in Clintonville.

**1823** - The Champlain Canal opened; allowing iron to be shipped to the Hudson River for distribution to industrial centers in the eastern US. A trapper named George Collins discovered ore at Lyon Mountain.

**1832** - A second dam, downstream of the first one, was built with a power canal.

**1840's** - Local elites pooled their money together to construct a railroad connecting Plattsburgh and the Canadian border, totaling 25 miles. (Waller 1994)

**1845** - The Clinton Prison, in the village of Dannemora, was built. It was halfway in between Plattsburgh and Weed's future iron-rich property. (Waller 1994)

**1850's** - An impurity was found in the Adirondack iron that made it unusable.

**1860's (late)** - More than half of Plattsburgh's population was first or second generation French-Canadian. (Waller 1994)

**1868** - Weed purchased iron-rich land that was located 30 miles west of Plattsburgh. (Waller 1994)

**1873** - Mr. Williams and Mr. Weed formed a partnership, creating the Chateauguay Ore and Iron Company. This company built a 13-mile plank road to Williams's Saranac forge. Two-man teams had to drill by hand in the mines, until the late 1870's when air-powered machines were then used. One held a long iron bar while the other was striking with a hammer. Horse hauled carts for the ore up the inclines to where they were mining. Once the holes got deeper, vertical cable cords helped lift the loads of mined material up. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1874** - A forge was built near Belmont for iron. Iron ore was transferred to the forge via the plank road and a barge. (Panek)

**1875** - The first railroad connecting Albany and Montreal was opened. (Waller 1994)

**1877** - First baseball club in Lyon Mountain was created. Baseball offered a type of release for the miners who spent most of their days underground. It also helped families relax and forget about the dangers of the mines. (Mann et al.)

**1878** - Legislature was asked to authorize the funding for the construction of a railroad from Plattsburgh to the top of Dannemora Mountain. (Railroads)

**1879** - *December 18<sup>th</sup>*: The first train of Lyon Mountain ore was shipped to Plattsburgh. Open-pit mining continues to a depth of 200 feet. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1880** - The Adirondack Region was supplying 84% of the U.S' output of iron.

**1880's** - First Catholic Church of St. Bernard's was built. (Bigelow)

**1875** - Catalan forge opens in Belmont, at the outlet of Lower Chateauguay Lake. Within a few years it produced 15 tons of blooms (blocks of iron) per day. The annual consumption of wood for charcoal tops 20,000 cords. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1883** - **The** population of Lyon Mountain increases to around 3,000 people. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1887** - The railroad from Plattsburgh to Saranac Lake was opened. Six months after the railroad opened, construction began on extending west to Weed's iron mines.

**1889** - Chateauguay Mines for Iron-Ore was located on the north slope of Lyon Mountain, giving the railway stations their names. There were a total of 22 slopes with 2 continuous veins streaming to main vein.

**1800's (Late)** - Iron from the mines was shipped to Pennsylvania and manufactured into armaments used by U.S. troops in the Spanish-American War. (Gooley 2012 Jun 4)

**1892** - The Chateauguay Iron and Ore Company was in trouble financially. (Waller 1994)

**1893** - The Lyon Mountain mining operation and town grew to 3,000 people and produced 60 forges of ore for Clinton and Essex Counties. (Waller 1994)

**1903** - The Delaware & Hudson Company takes over railroad operations in Northern New York. The railroads are upgraded to standard gauge. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1906** - This was the deadliest year in the mines, 12 workers were killed. There was also a 350-man strike for increased wages, which failed. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1907** - Production of ore was at 400,000 tons per year, which was 30 percent of the total New York State output. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1914** - The main shaft was drilled. This replaced the original open-pit mines. Drifts were drilled horizontally into the landscape. (Writer)

**1919** - "Number 1 Shaft" hits a depth of 1,685 feet. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1922** - Electric locomotives got installed along all mine drifts (the underground tunnels were perpendicular to the shaft). (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1937** - Republic Steel Corp. arrives in the North Country.  
When the Model A Ford was at peak popularity, mine manager J. R. Linney said of Lyon Mountain ore: "There is some of it in every Ford car." (Gooley 2012 Jun 4)

**1942** - Seismograph instruments in Toronto record a massive rock burst that occurred in the Lyon Mountain mines. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb)

**1950's & 1960's** - The same ore, from Lyon Mountain, was used in naval and aircraft production. Besides setting the standard for quality suspension cables, Lyon Mountain's high-grade ore has been used for fine cutlery, top-quality scissors and tableware, telegraph lines, wire ropes, hoop skirts, and barbed-wire fencing. (Gooley 2012 Jun 4)

**1967** - The iron mines at Lyon Mountain closed its doors for good. (Gooley and Burdick)  
The final depth of the mine tops 2,000 feet. (Kourofsky 2011 Feb) The town has struggled ever since.

**1990** - The Lyon Mountain Correctional Facility opened.

**1998** - The first five heritage days took place under the "Umbrella" of the Chateaugay Lakes Arts Association.

**1999** - The Friends of Lyon Mountain, Inc. was formed to help purchase and gather things in remembrance of the town's history. (Bigelow)

**2002** - Friends of Lyon Mountain Mining and Railroad Museum placed on National Register of Historic Places. (Gooley 2012 Jun 4)

**2011** - *January 31st*: The Lyon Mountain Correctional Facility closed.

\_\_\_\_\_The mining of iron ore has a large number of environmental impacts. With mining comes the establishment, extraction, transport, and processing. All these processes have an influence on air, water, land, ecologic systems, and nearby communities. Mining on the side of a mountain for iron alters the natural landscape, leads to exposure of soil and further erosion, land use changes, caving in/weakening of land, and destroying plant life. Bodies of water are either removed or created and usually are severely altered, wetlands and streams are lost, aquatic life is affected by these changes, and pollution of water is also a problem. In the atmosphere, temperatures are increased, there is noise and air pollution. Habitats are removed, there is pollution of the air and water which affects the health of animals and humans and the food and water sources for living creatures are largely impacted. Pollutants released through mining are dust, sulfides/sulphuric acid, nitrogen oxides, mercury, mineral fibers, and radon. These all have effects on human and animal health.

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