



Little Door to the Seventeenth of December

The Erz Mountains (Erzgebirge)

Geographically, the Ore Mountains are located in the German federal state of Saxony and partially in the Czech Republic. The course of the border runs across to the north of the mountain crest. However, before ores were discovered in the region, from which it got its name, the Erzgebirge was called "Mirikwidi" (dark forest or sinister forest).

In the east, the Ore Mountains bump into Saxon Switzerland; in the West, there's the Vogtland and in the South the North Bohemian enclosed basin. It is disputed where the mountains end in the north, which is why geographers prefer to call the region between Zwickau and Chemnitz Ore Mountains Foreland. The largest mountain is Klinovec (Keilberg), measuring 1,244 meters. About a million people inhabit the region, unfortunately, due to the bad economic situation, there's an ongoing downward trend.



Figure 1 - Map from Planet Wissen -> <https://www.planet-wissen.de/kultur/mittelgebirge/erzgebirge/index.html>

History

In the 12th century, mountain farmers discovered silver ores which led to the first settlement wave.

300 years later, more ore deposits were found and for 600 years the people dug through the mountain with hammers and picks.

When the modern procedure of detonations was introduced in the 18th century, it not only took the burden of the miners but also contributed to the end of the mining industry. Another 100 years later, the mining industry was close to extinction. It experienced a short revival post-WW2 when uranium was mined for the Soviet nuclear weapon program. The mining industry may have gone extinct, but the custom of miners has not. Phrases like "Glück auf!" (Good luck!) is just one remnant of an old miner's greeting. Nowadays, artistic craft-work (most famous: the candle arch) and tourism are the main income of the region.