# THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF

# BELIZE

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Extraction of construction materials constitutes the prinicpal mining activity in Belize, amounting altogether to less than 1% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Primarily a seacoast agricultural country, the sale of agricultural produce, fish, and lumber amounted to at least 30% of GDP and about 75% of export earnings. The GDP itself was approximately \$597 million in 1995, the last year for which information is available, representing a growth rate of about 3.8% over 1994. Gross exports amounted to \$323 million versus gross imports of \$517 million in 1995 (Hernandez, 1996). Belize's largest trading partner was the United States.

Mining activities were regulated by the Mines and Minerals Act of 1988, which did not include petroleum. Although clays, limestone, marble, and sand and gravel for construction and civil works were the mainstay of Belize's mineral production, a very small amount of gold has been produced yearly by stream panning.

Prior to 1988, the nation's mineral production was largely by private companies on contract to the Government's Department of Public Works. Since 1988, the Government's Geology and Petroleum Office has administered mineral permits, licenses, and concessions. Prospecting licenses for base metals, clays, and limestone were held by fewer than five foreign companies in the early 1990's. A petroleum consortium comprising Petrofina (Belgium), Deminex (Germany), Dover Technology (United States), and Magellan Petroleum (Australia) planned to drill offshore near Glover's Reef, part of a prized barrier-reef system. The project was delayed by controversy over an environmental impact statement and an environmental management plan (Latin American Economy and Business, 1996).

Belize has about 500 kilometers (km) of paved roadways out of a total of 2,710 km altogether, the remainder being gravel or loose-surface roads. Truck transportation is utilized extensively. Serious effort has been applied to improving infrastructure.

The geology of Belize comprises younger limestones for the most part, but with an older inlier ("window") of granites, basalt or dolerite dikes, rhyolites, and sedimentary sandstones and shales, the latter showing some metamorphic alteration. The rock types would seem to represent a diversity sufficient to encourage exploration for base and precious metals. In this connection, aside from the small amount of placer gold extracted from time to time, there have been occurrences of barite and gypsum reported, as well as anomalous values for beryllium, molybdenum, and lead in stream waters (Bateson and Hall, 1977).

Belize will certainly realize a steadily growing demand for construction materials as the country develops its infrastructure and fosters increased tourism. Beyond this, however, is the prospect of new discoveries of base and precious metals and the realization of a greatly enhanced mineral industry in support of a growing economy.

#### **References Cited**

Bateson, J.H, and Hall, I.H.S., 1977, The geology of the Maya Mountains, Belize, Overseas Memoir 3, Institute of Geological Sciences, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Hernandez, Miguel H. Jr., 1996, Decline of the economy arrested; Belize now on its way to recovery: Belize Today, v. X, no. 3/4, March/April, p. 11. Latin American Economy and Business, 1996, Belize, March, p. 6.

#### **Major Source of Information**

Geology and Petroleum Office Ministry of Natural Resources 84-36 Unity Blvd. Belmopan, Belize

### **Major Publication**

Garcia, E. Mineral Resources of Belize, C.A. Transcript of presentation at the Belizean Studies Conference, Belize City, Ocober 26, 1990

#### TABLE 1 BELIZE: ESTIMATED PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES 1/2/

## (Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

	Commodity	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Clays		2,000,000	2,000,000	2,100,000	2,200,000	2,250,000
Dolomite		28,000	28,000	30,000	29,000	29,000
Gold	kilograms	5	2	5	5	5
Lime		1,000	1,000	1,000	1,100	1,200
Limestone		300,000	250,000	300,000	310,000	310,000
Marl	thousand tons	1,000	1,000	1,050	1,200	1,100
Sand and gravel		300,000	200,000	300,000	320,000	320,000

1/ Estimated data are rounded to three significant digits.2/ Includes data available through April 1, 1997.