

# THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF

# URUGUAY

By Pablo Velasco

The mineral industry of Uruguay was largely dominated by cement manufacture and the extraction of construction materials, dimension stone, ornamental agate, and amethyst. The materials mined include basalt, dolomite, feldspar, gypsum, limestone, marl, quartz, sand, and talc. In addition, amongst Uruguay's best known mineral products are its colored granites. Of special interest are the black granites (microgabbros), which are valued for their brightness and polishing durability.

"Mining forms a small but growing part of the economy as the potential of Uruguay's mineral wealth is recognized. Only 1% of GDP was derived from minerals, although this figure will grow with new developments such as the San Gregorio gold mine in the north of the country. The San Gregorio Mine, owned by Rea Gold Corp., a Canadian-based mining company with properties throughout Latin and North America. Rea's wholly owned subsidiary Minera San Gregorio S.A., operates the mine, 450 km north of Montevideo" (Mining Journal, 1997).

Rea Gold Corp., is also in a joint venture with Southern Era Resources Ltd., from Canada, to explore and develop the diamond potential of properties controlled by both companies in Uruguay (Mining Journal, 1997).

Uruguay's economy remains strongly dependent of agriculture. Although agricultural production accounted for 10% of the gross domestic product (GDP), it constituted more than 50% of exports. The industrial sector, which produces

18% of GDP, is largely based on the processing of agricultural products.

To stimulate growth and reduce its debt, Uruguay depended on its exports, the majority of which were to countries of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) (47%)—specifically, 26% to Brazil, 20% to Argentina, and 1% to Paraguay—the European Union (20%)—of which Germany received 6%—and the United States (7%) (U.S. Department of State, 1998, Background notes—Uruguay, accessed [date unknown] via URL <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/bgn> (see paragraph 2).

For more extensive coverage of the mineral industry of Uruguay, see the 1997 Minerals Yearbook, volume III, The Mineral Industries of Latin America and Canada.

## Reference Cited

Mining Journal, 1997, Uruguay untapped potential: Mining Journal supplement [London], v. 320, no. 8455, November 14.

## Major Sources of Information

Ministerio de Industria-Energia y Minería (M.I.E.M.)  
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TABLE 1  
URUGUAY: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES 1/

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	1994 e/	1995 e/	1996	1997	1998
Aluminum, secondary e/	50	45	45	45	45
Barite	15	15	15 e/	40	65
Bentonite	--	--	58	60	60 e/
Cement, hydraulic	700,000	600,000	685,000	781,000	960,000
Clays, unspecified	150,000	150,000	40,796	59,434	41,371
Coke, gashouse e/	8,000	8,000	8,000	6,000	6,000
Corundum	50	45	--	--	--
Feldspar	3,000	3,000	23,306	3,229	2,940
Gemstones, semiprecious:					
Agate	100	100	154	74	270
Amethyst	100	90	67	62 r/	48
Gold kilograms	300	900	1,000	2,800 r/	1,985
Gypsum	145,000	145,000	130,175	942,755 r/	1,123,376
Iron and steel:					
Iron ore	5,000	5,000	845	5,527	6,618
Metal:					
Ferroalloys, electric-furnace ferrosilicon crust e/	250	200	200	200	200
Steel, crude	36,110 r/ 2/	39,957 r/ 2/	33,555 r/	39,070 r/	40,000 e/
Semimanufactures	36,071 r/ 2/	36,569 r/ 2/	28,376 r/	35,120 r/	35,000 e/
Lime e/	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	10,000
Petroleum refinery products:					
Liquefied petroleum gas thousand 42-gallon barrels	284	350 2/	427 r/	400 e/	425 e/
Gasoline do.	1,386	2,175 2/	2,099 r/	2,250 e/	2,100 e/
Jet fuel do.	50	-- 2/	--	-- e/	-- e/
Kerosene do.	269	411 2/	617 r/	460 e/	500 e/
Distillate fuel oil do.	1,889	3,048 2/	4,500 r/	3,100 e/	4,200 e/
Lubricants do.	--	-- 2/	--	-- e/	-- e/
Residual fuel oil do.	2,259	3,437 2/	3,964 r/	3,450 e/	3,600 e/
Unspecified do.	230	234 2/	288 r/	240 e/	260 e/
Refinery fuel and losses do.	--	-- 2/	--	-- e/	--
Total do.	6,367 r/	9,655 2/	11,895 r/	9,900 e/	11,085 e/
Sand and gravel:					
Sand, common thousand metric tons	1,500	1,500	1,775	2,135 r/	2,753
Gravel	500	500	17,700	40,109 r/	40,192
Stone:					
Flagstone	--	--	3,795	4,502	4,000 e/
Granite:					
Dimension	10,000	10,000	7,552	77,281 r/	23,000
Crushed and broken, alum schist	10,000	10,000	425,585	511,626	450,000 e/
Dolomite	20,000	20,000	21,930	21,847	17,440
Limestone thousand metric tons	750	750	789	1,240 r/	1,516
Marble:					
Onyx, in blocks and broken	--	--	39	123	100 e/
Travertine, in blocks and broken	--	--	10	11	11 e/
Other, unspecified, in blocks and broken	--	--	134	275 r/	340
Marl	10,000	10,000	23,909	44,775	68,810
Quartz	500	500	23	49 r/	52
Other, including ballast thousand metric tons	2,000	2,000	2,104	2,226 r/	2,690 e/
Sulfur, elemental, byproduct e/	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Talc, soapstone, pyrophyllite	1,500	1,000	898	1,133	972
Tuff, tufa	3,500	3,500	975,929	691,151 r/	865,860

e/ Estimated. r/ Revised.

1/ Includes data available through September 15, 1999.

2/ Reported figure.