

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF BELIZE

By David B. Doan

Extraction of construction materials constitutes the principal 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 \$575 million in 1994.

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 was produced.

Prior to 1988, the nation's mineral production was largely by private companies on contract to the Government's Department of Public Works. After 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 1990s. Petroleum concessions were held by several British and U.S. companies.

Belize had 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 was utilized extensively.

The geology of Belize comprised 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

sufficient diversity 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.¹

Belize will certainly realize a steadily growing demand for construction materials as the country fosters increased tourism and develops its infrastructure. 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.

¹Bateson, J.H. and Hall, I.H.S. The Geology of the Maya Mountains, Belize, Overseas Memoir 3, Institute of Geological Sciences, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1997.

Major Sources of Information

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

Major Publications

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

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

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Clays	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,100,000	2,200,000
Dolomite	28,000	28,000	28,000	30,000	29,000
Gold	5	5	2	5	5
kilograms					
Lime	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,100
Limestone	300,000	300,000	250,000	300,000	310,000
Marl	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,050	1,200
thousand tons					
Sand and gravel	200,000	300,000	200,000	300,000	320,000

1/ Estimated data are rounded to three significant digits.

2/ Includes data available through May 1, 1996.