

Wieliczka and Bochnia Royal Salt Mines (Poland)

37 COM 8B.41

Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The Wieliczka and Bochnia salt mines are located on the same geological rock salt deposit in southern Poland. Situated close to each other, they were worked in parallel and continuously from the 13th century until the late 20th century, constituting one of the earliest and most important European industrial operations.

The two mines include a large ensemble of early galleries which extend to great depths. The residual excavations have been altered, and made into chapels, workshops and storehouses, etc. A substantial ensemble of statues and decorative elements sculpted into the rock salt has been preserved in both mines, along with an ensemble of tools and machinery. An underground tourist route has existed since the early 19th century.

The two mines, which over a long period were combined as one company with royal status (Kraków Saltworks), were administratively and technically run from Wieliczka Saltworks Castle, which dates from the medieval period, but has been rebuilt several times in the course of its history.

Criterion (iv): The Wieliczka and Bochnia Royal Salt Mines illustrate the historic stages of the development of mining techniques in Europe, from the 13th to the 20th centuries. The galleries, the subterranean chambers arranged and decorated in ways that reflect the miners' social and religious traditions, the tools and machinery, and the Saltworks Castle which administered the establishment for centuries, provide outstanding testimony about the socio-technical system involved in the underground mining of rock salt.

Integrity

This serial property consists of all three components historically constituting one royal enterprise Kraków Saltworks: Wieliczka salt mine, Bochnia salt mine and the Saltworks Castle in Wieliczka. Both mines present the diversity of the ensemble, in mining, technical and artistic terms, and the completeness of the evidence of the historically ancient working of rock salt in this region of what is today Southern Poland. The Wieliczka Saltworks Castle, which historically administered the mines and managed sales of the salt for the benefit of the princes and kings of Poland, gives a new dimension for the Outstanding Universal Value of the ensemble.

Authenticity

The property expresses relatively satisfactory mining authenticity. Although most parts of the preserved structure are of the 18th century, the technical testimony relates essentially to the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Technical knowledge about earlier periods stems mainly from historic records, and from the resulting reconstructions, which in some cases are slightly over-interpreted, rather than from direct evidence.

Management and protection requirements

The Wieliczka salt mine is legally protected both as a registered historic monument (N° A-580, 1976) and as the Monument of History (Presidential decree, 1994). The Bochnia salt mine is legally protected both as a registered historic monument (N° A-238, December 1981) and as the Monument of History (presidential decree, September 2000). Wieliczka Saltworks Castle is inscribed on the register of historic monuments of the State Party (N° A-579, March 1988). The protection of the monuments is the responsibility of the Conservator's Office for Protecting Historic Monuments. The application of mining laws and regulations is the responsibility of the Krakow District Mining Office. The system for the individual management of each site has been satisfactorily put in place. Each site can draw on a large number of competent specialists. The functioning of the programmes for the conservation and management of the sites is satisfactory. The mining elements have been fully taken into account, which has led to a lengthy programme of stabilisation of the abandoned galleries, and the selection of the most representative galleries, in historic and heritage terms, for conservation. However, the very recent setting up of a Monitoring and Coordination Team common to the three sites must be confirmed, both in terms of its structure and the way it will function, particularly in order to harmonise the conservation plans and to ensure the involvement of all the partners concerned.