

The rise and fall of Swedish iron ore mining

By Magnus Ericsson

In this issue we publish the first part of a series of articles on the crisis of Swedish iron ore mining. The aim of this series is to show that the crisis in Sweden can only be understood in a historical perspective and that it must be analyzed as a part of the global restructuring of the iron ore industry. In Lappland we can now see the results of this process, a shut down of a whole industry. But there is also a strong movement to keep the mines alive. In the next issue we will report from this struggle.

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Iron ore has been mined in Sweden for at least a thousand years. Chemical analysis has proved that tools dated before the year 1000 have been made from iron ore of a very special composition. This ore is only to be found in the Utö mines in the Stockholm archipelago. Organized mining dates back at least to the 14th century when king Magnus Erikson gave mining charters to several mining areas as for example to Norberg on the 24th of February 1354. The last mine in Norberg was closed down in spring 1981, after more than 600 years of operation.

The mining districts around Norberg in central Sweden, called Bergslagen, have been one of the economic cornerstones for Swedish prosperity. In 1861 there were 531 iron ore mines in Bergslagen, in 1900 the number had decreased to 323 and in 1960 there were 68 mines in operation. In 1973 there were only 22 left. Out of these 2 are still being worked in 1981, but both of these will most certainly be closed down before 1983.

In northern Sweden, in the Lappland fields, the wheel will turn a full circle

in less than a hundred years, if the present structural crisis is not met with powerful counter moves from unions and miners. Today the only privately owned Swedish iron mine lies in Liberia!

This means that the Swedish iron and steel industry soon will be unable to secure its long term need for raw materials. The industry lacks necessary capital and the economic, political and military state support to make independent investments abroad. Instead Swedish mining capital will have to subordinate itself to transnational mining capital. The result must obviously be a physical elimination of Swedish iron ore mining.

The Swedish historian Olaus Magnus gives us an idea of work in Swedish mines in the 15th and 16th centuries. Barrels with ore or water are hoisted by workers walking in a big wheel or simply by using them as counter weights.





We won't move written in the local dialect has become the war cry of the movement to stop the shut down of the iron ore mines. Manifestation in Grängesberg 11th May 1978. Above.

The people in the mining districts in central Sweden have had to fight for their jobs before. In 1891-92 there was a long strike to stop wage decreases. Soldier keeping »law and order» in Norberg in April 1891.

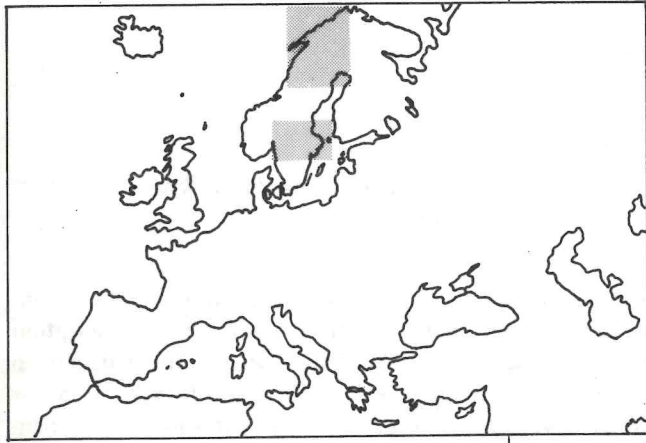
*Closed down mine shaft
in central Norberg 1981.*

IRON ORE MINES IN SWEDEN AFTER 1976

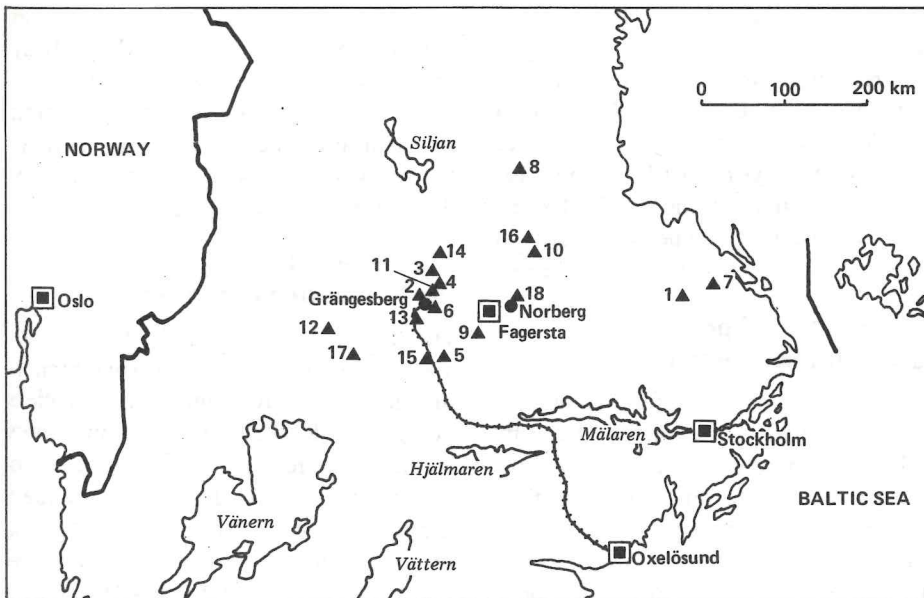
Mine	Company	Location	Shut down
1. Dannemora	Swedish Steel (SSAB) ⁽¹⁾	Östhammar	1983 ⁽²⁾
2. Risberg	"	Ludvika	⁽³⁾
3. Häcksberg	"	"	1980
Ickorrbotten	"	"	"
Källbotten	"	"	"
4. Blötberget	"	"	1979
5. Stråssa Odalgruva	"	Lindesberg	1981
6. Grängesbergs Exportfält	"	Ludvika	1983 ⁽²⁾
7. Ramhäll	Stora Kopparberg	Östhammar	1976
8. Vintjärn	"	Falun	1978
9. Riddarhytte Odalutmål	Fagersta	Skinnskatteberg	1979
10. Smältarmossen	"	Hedemora	1979
11. Bastkärn	"	Ljusnarsberg	1978
12. Värmlandsberg	Stållbergbolagen ⁽⁴⁾	Filipstad	1981
13. Stållberg	"	Ljusnarsberg	1977
14. Idkerberg	"	Borlänge	1977
15. Stripa	"	Lindesberg	1977
16. Vingesbacke Storberg	SKF "	Hofors "	1980 "
17. Persberg Odalfält	Uddeholm	Filipstad	1977
18. Eskilsbacke Mimer Bond Kallmoraberg	Surahammar ⁽⁵⁾ " " "	Norberg " " "	1981 " " "
19. Gällivare Koskullskulle	LKAB "	Gällivare/Malmberget "	
20. Kiirunavaara Nukutusvaara	" "	Kiruna "	
21. Tuolluvaara	"	"	
22. Leveäniemi ⁽⁶⁾	"	"	

NOTES:

- (1) SSAB is 75 percent state owned. Until recently it was 25 percent owned by Gränges and 25 percent owned by Stora Kopparberg but the state has taken over Storas interests, SSAB operates mines and steelworks formerly belonging to Gränges, Stora Kopparberg and the Swedish state.
- (2) The mine has been given two years to show a profit.
- (3) Now operated as an integrated part of Grängesbergs Exportfält.
- (4) Controlled by the Sandvik Group.
- (5) Controlled by the Asea Group.
- (6) Also called Svappavaara.



The Norrbotten ore fields. On the map is also shown the Luleå-Gällivare-Kiruna-Narvik railway and localities mentioned in the articles, as well as in the excerpts from »The men who did it».



The Bergslagen ore fields. In 1981 only the Grängesberg (6) and the Dannemora (1) mines are still operating. The ancient Utö mine is located 50 km south east of Stockholm.