

# n°10 The Saint-Joseph slate mine

The history of this major mine, the last, along with the *Renaissance* slate mine, to be still in operation in 1971, dates back to the end of the 19th century with an encounter between two mine operators of Belgian origin with a strong local foothold. The first, Joseph Guidard, began his career as a simple slate quarryman in Bertrix before taking over the management of the *Sainte-Marie les Français* slate mine in Fumay in 1862. The second was Count Ernest-Joseph Maurice de Gourcy Serainchamps. This Namur-born investor, who had previously chaired a Parisian banking establishment, became chairman of the small *Bois Chevaux* slate mine in 1883. In 1884, together with a third partner who soon sold his shares, they acquired the concession that would become the *Saint-Joseph* slate mine.

Buoyed by the success of the first boreholes drilled from 1886 onwards, they founded their first company, *Société des Ardoisières Saint-Joseph*, in 1890 to structure the economic operation of the slate mine. This partnership limited by shares was converted into a public limited company a year later.

Four years after the Great War, the company, which had extended its main gallery, was operating thirteen workings. In 1923, the company also built a bridge, replacing the transport of men and slate by barge. This bridge was destroyed by the French army to halt the advance of German troops in May 1940.



Overview of the slate mine at the beginning of the 20e century



Workers and apprentices pose



The slate mine descent