

CHUQUICAMATA COPPER MINE - CHILE

General Information

Location: In Codelco, 15 km north of the city of Calama, Atacama Desert. 250km north-east of Antofagasta, 1,200km north of Santiago. (22° 17'S 68° 54'W)

Classification: open pit copper mine

Dimension: Size of pit: L=4,500m, W=3,540m, D=800m. Production: 650,000 metric tons annually. A=2,800m a.s.l.



*Aerial photograph of one part of the Chuquicamata copper mine
(the worlds largest copper mine, and one of the largest open pit mines in the world)*

Geology

The Atacama Desert in the north of the country contains major reserves of copper, gold, silver and industrial metals, it is the heart of Chile's mining industry. Chile's copper mines provide over 30% of the world's mine production of recoverable copper, according to statistics of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Chuquicamata is an opencast copper mine, where a relatively poor copper ore is mined in impressive huge amounts. Modern mining and smelting technology allows the usage of such deposits at unrivaled low costs. The ore contains only between 1,13% and 1,18% metals, most of it copper, but also molybdenum and selenium in a very low proportion.

Description

The name **Chuquicamata** is a word from the Aymara language and refers to the **chuco** or **chuqui** Native American Indian group. They worked the copper deposits here in pre-Hispanic times to make their weapons and tools.

The opencast was the biggest pit in the world during the nineties. But it has lost its foremost position and the new **Escondida Copper Mine** is today the world's largest producing mine with 750,000 metric tons of production which was 5.6% of the world's production in 2000.

In the nineties Chuquicamata produced annually 600,000 to 650,000 metric tons of copper, and in 2000 this was 4.9% of the world's production. The mine also produces around 13,500t of molybdenum every year.

The visit of the mine is a popular trip and part of most tour company schedules. But the mine is a working mine, and so the visits are more or less a kind of promotion visit of the mining company.