

Open-Pit Mining

Look around you. Do you see anything made of metal, rock, or clay? Many things we use every day are made of materials from Earth's **crust**. Extracting these materials often involves mining, or digging into the ground to get at the resources.

Miners have different methods of extracting materials. Some involve digging deep underground, and others involve getting materials from close to the surface. One type of surface mining is called *open-pit mining*. When rocks and minerals are located near Earth's surface, open-pit mining is a convenient way to extract them. But it does change a landscape in dramatic ways.

WOWSER!

The Bingham Canyon Mine in Utah is one of the world's biggest open-pit mines. It is more than 4.4 kilometers (2.75 mi.) wide and 1.2 km (.75 mi.) deep. You can see it from outer space!



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Each line in this pit shows a layer of earth that has been removed.

To dig an open-pit mine, miners first remove the top layers of the land. Then they take off more layers until the valuable rock or mineral is on the surface. Miners keep expanding the size of the pit until all the valuable material is removed or until the rest of it is too buried to get at. When mining ends, a huge hole in the ground remains. Most open-pit mines end up being turned into landfills—places where a city throws away trash. After a landfill is covered with dirt, you might never guess that it was once a huge hole in the ground.

✓ Brain Check

- Why do we dig minerals out of the ground?
- What is an open-pit mine?
- What happens to an open-pit mine when all the valuable rock or mineral has been removed?