



Mykonos: The lure of beaches and barite

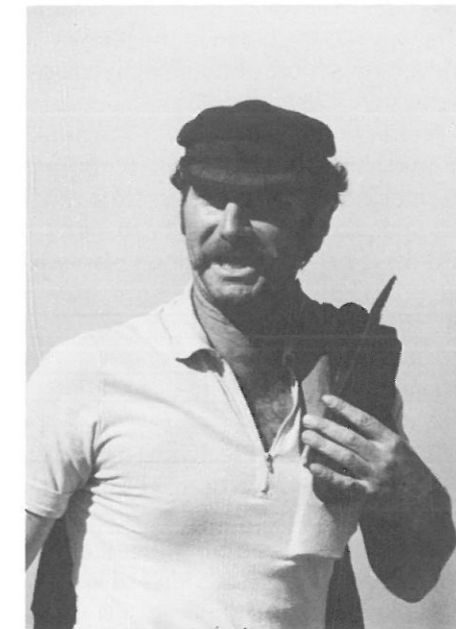
It's people have been primarily sailors, fishermen and merchants since they first occupied the Greek island of Mykonos some 2,800 years before Christ. But today the island's two main industries are uniquely 20th century: tourism (having been designated by the jet-set as one of the "in" places) and the production of barite, an integral yet scarce ingredient of the drilling fluids needed by today's petroleum industry.

Each of these industries claims its own side of the island. On the west is the city of Mykonos, looking as if it were cast from a giant plaster mold. Every building is the same shape (by law) and all buildings and streets have been painted a stark white (also by law) creating a striking, picturesque contrast to the dusty brown hills above the blue-green Aegean Sea below.

It's easy to spot the tools of the trade here: sandals, sunglasses, suntan oil and the ubiquitous straw mats hawked at each street corner for 150 drachmas (about \$3.00) and used as comforters on the pebble beaches. Seekers of the perfect tan start by the crack o' 9:30 each morning fanning out by bus, jeep or Moped to claim a spot on one of the many beaches.

Mykobar Mining Company is on the opposite side of the island, a thirty min-

Tourists to the Island of Mykonos are entranced by its charming atmosphere and quaint buildings.



K. Chalkies, Mykobar Timberman, wears the traditional Greek cap.

ute drive through bare, arid countryside. A single gravel road leads the way up the winding hills, open land crisscrossed with hundreds of squatty stone walls on one side, and a steep plunge to the sea on the other.

Here the tools of the trade are distinctive as well: heavy olive-green shirts and pants, thick black boots and miner's hat, the light on top linked by a single cord to the power supply strapped around the waist. The search is for barite and the most efficient means of recovering the valuable mineral. Work begins promptly at 7 a.m.,

six days a week.

Mykobar was started by Dresser in 1955 under the tutelage of retired Minerals Vice President John Tobler (see *Groupvine* Vol. 15, No. 2, 1981). Since the primary production and exploration in the mid-fifties, the Mykonos mine — Dresser's only underground mine — has supplied barite to the U.S., Nigeria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Libya.

The Mykobar operation starts with the digging of underground tunnels or "drifts" which run below the veins of ore.

"I love the smell of damp wood in here," says Tasso Papadopoulos, General Manager of Mykobar, as he enters drift #5. Papadopoulos, who started out with the company in 1969 as a mine engineer and worked his way up to his current position, was intrigued by the underground atmosphere the first time he walked into a cave and saw stalagmites and stalactites.

"It seemed like magic in there," he says. "I couldn't believe how many different kinds of minerals and crystals there were and how beautiful they were. The whole process of how nature makes them fascinates me."

Only a few steps inside the drift and the light from the outside world is gone, leaving only the beam of light on your head and the crunch of gravel under your feet to give you a sense of up and down. It's cool and moist, with a muffled humming sound in the distance.



Tasso Papadopoulos, (right), Mykobar General Manager, and Fotis Constanes, Mine Shifter, exchange news about the day's activities.



Restaurants overlooking the water are gathering places for Mykonos tourists and natives alike.

"Compressed air," explains Papadopoulos, tilting his head upward to shine his light on the thin pipes running along the cave wall. "Compressed air in a mine is like the blood in the human body. It runs most of the mining equipment."

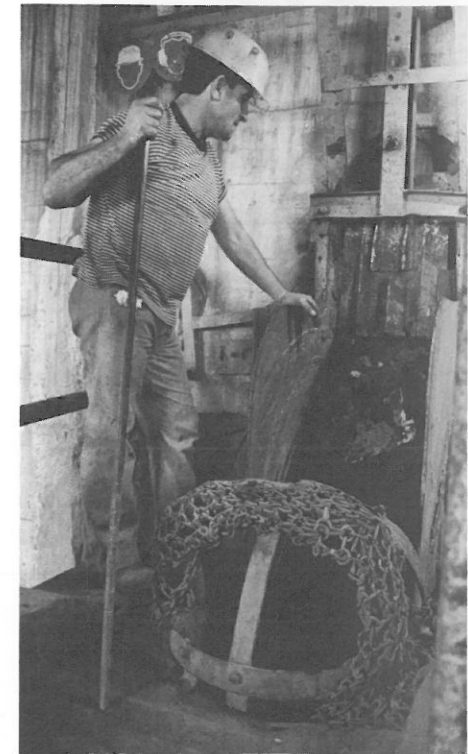
A ten-minute walk and you encounter two miners in the process of drilling 40 small holes into the wall of the tunnel. Special explosives will be loaded into these holes; the resulting blast will extend the drift another 1.5 meters into the mountain. The process is repeated until the desired length is attained, about 1,000 meters for drift #5.

The drifts are connected to the veins of barite above by vertical "chutes" or openings. "It is through the chutes that we pull out the ore from underneath," says Papadopoulos. "It's kind of like milking a cow."

After the ore has been extracted, in come the front end loaders — narrow, low trucks, specifically designed to get into the drifts and haul away the ore.

Now the work above ground begins. The raw ore is washed and run through a series of crushers which break the large hunks into 1/2-inch pieces. These small pieces are then fed into separators which remove the waste from the usable ore. Then the barite is loaded into silos and later carried by trucks to the loading dock.

The Mykobar compound also includes a maintenance shop (where 98% of all the maintenance on vehicles, jigs and equipment is done), an electric shop, welding shop, canteen



After the raw ore is brought above ground, it is fed through crushers and separators before it can be shipped.

and first aid station. "We are very proud of the fact that we are so self-sufficient," says Papadopoulos.

Mykobar even has its own tiny, one-room chapel, similar to the dozens of other chapels that dot the island. This one is dedicated to St. Barbara, the patron saint for explosives. St. Barbara's day is celebrated each December 4 with a party for all Mykobar workers and their families.

As Mykobar moves into its 27th year,