

# When the sea turned into a lake: Salt Mountain was born in a village in Spain

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Image 1. Interior of one of the galleries in Salt Mountain (Muntanya de Sal) in Cardona, Spain. Photo by: Horacio Villalobos/Corbis via Getty Images

From a distance, Muntanya de Sal looks like any other mountain. However, it is completely different from any other peak in Europe. You see why it is different when you get to its base. Unlike the other mountains, Muntanya de Sal is made of salt.

The mountain is located in the village of Cardona, Spain, not far from Barcelona. Muntanya de Sal means Salt Mountain. It has been an important resource for the people living in the area for centuries. According to historians, locals started taking salt from the mountain as early as 13,000 years ago. They traded it for other goods.

"Later the Iberians, the Romans, people in the Middle Ages and so on kept doing the same," explained Montse Malavé. He is a historian with the Cardona Historical Foundation. The organization preserves the town's historical culture.

### **Salt Was Very Valuable**

Malavé says the salt was so valuable that sometimes people used it as money. "People would go to the marketplace and could pay using a piece of salt. This mountain was like a mountain of money, and salt was called 'the white gold.'"



All these years later, Salt Mountain is just under 400 feet in height. It is one of the highest points in the region. About 40 million years ago, the area was completely underwater. It was covered by the Cantabrian Sea, Malavé says.

### **Upward Pressure From The Pyrenees Mountains**

As time passed, the area to the north got closed and this part of the sea became a lake, Malavé explains. Eventually, it dried out and great amounts of salt settled to the bottom in horizontal layers. Then the salt layers were covered by other matter and rubble. This happened wherever

the land was covered by the sea. "But the only place where the salt appeared on the surfaces is here in Cardona," he said. This happened because of a strong upward pressure from the Pyrenees mountains. Also, pressure came from two tectonic plates crashing together.

The Pyrenees mountains formed about 2 million years ago. They separate Spain from France. According to Malavé, the underground salt layers were pressed, folded and pushed upward. This activity caused a fold of salt underground. The top layer of debris became thin due to erosion. So the salt hardened at the surface.



The mountain continues to grow in height. This is a result of the constant pressure happening below the surface. The Salt Mountain area is one of the few places on the planet where salt deposits sit both underground and on the surface.

### **Popular Tourist Destination**

From 1929 to 1990, Salt Mountain was one of the world's largest salt mines. Agriculture, medicine and food processing industries all used the salt.

Today, the remaining salt deposit is 1 mile deep and 1 mile long. The old mine has become a popular tourist destination. The park offers tours inside the mountain's depths. Visitors can walk through tunnels that sparkle with salt formations.

"The salt walls are in pink/reddish, gray and white colors," Malavé says. "Visitors are completely surrounded by salt."

## Quiz

- 1 Read the section "Upward Pressure From The Pyrenees Mountains." Select the detail from the section that shows that the Salt Mountain is unique.
- (A) Eventually, it dried out and great amounts of salt settled to the bottom in horizontal layers.
  - (B) According to Malavé, the underground salt layers were pressed, folded and pushed upward.
  - (C) The mountain continues to grow in height. This is a result of the constant pressure happening below the surface.
  - (D) The Salt Mountain area is one of the few places on the planet where salt deposits sit both underground and on the surface.

- 2 Read the paragraph from the article's introduction [paragraphs 1-3].

*The mountain is located in the village of Cardona, Spain, not far from Barcelona. Muntanya de Sal means Salt Mountain. It has been an important resource for the people living in the area for centuries. According to historians, locals started taking salt from the mountain as early as 13,000 years ago. They traded it for other goods.*

Which of the following is an accurate explanation of what this paragraph means?

- (A) Salt Mountain has been used by people in Cardona as a source of wealth and prosperity.
  - (B) Salt Mountain was damaged by people in Cardona who took too much salt to trade for other goods.
  - (C) Salt Mountain's value as a trade item attracted the attention of empires like the Romans.
  - (D) Salt Mountain is located outside of Barcelona, Spain in the Pyrenees Mountains.
- 3 If this article were organized using chronological order which section would come FIRST.
- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-3]
  - (B) "Salt Was Very Valuable"
  - (C) "Upward Pressure From The Pyrenees Mountains"
  - (D) "Popular Tourist Destination"

4 This article is MOSTLY organized using cause and effect.

Why do you think the author chose to organize the information this way?

- (A) to demonstrate the importance of preserving the Salt Mountain from exploitation
- (B) to suggest that people have negatively impacted the Salt Mountain
- (C) to show the reader how the Salt Mountain formed and its impact on the community in Cardona
- (D) to explain how the importance of the salt found in Salt Mountain has changed over time