



Children worked long hours - for low pay - as miners in Germany, Britain and elsewhere. Not only were they cheap labor, children were small enough to move in and around narrow mine spaces.

This illustration, from the UK National Archives, depicts a child pulling a huge load of coal.

In addition to enormously difficult and dangerous work, children were routinely subjected to the cruelty of the miners in charge.

We can use a child's own words to describe what happened during this back-breaking work:

The man I had to work with showed me how to place a leathern belt around my loins, with a light chain attached about a yard long, which was hooked to the front of the small wagon of coal thus pulling from the front while the man pushed behind.

In this way I began my first real work, or slavery, for it was nothing less than child slavery

It was not long before my poor little body was sore with the belt, as also from the stripes laid on the naked back by the hardened cruel miner.

I cannot say how many times I cried that first day - aye, and on many days afterward, but, as is mostly the case, time inures one to almost any kind of hardship. (Story by James Dunn in From Coal Mine Upwards, published by W. Green London, 1910, at pages 9-10.)

Credits:

Image online, via UK National Archives. Quoted passage, as noted above.

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Media Stream



Child Miner - Pulling Coal

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