

The 9-km-long Wagon Track made it possible to transport the final product of mining, lead ingots, from the Braçal mining site to the place where the Mau river flows into the Vouga. Afterwards, the cargo would be loaded onto company boats to go to Aveiro, down the river. In this direction, the wagons went down the track by force of gravity. Whereas to return to Braçal, animals were used to pull them up the hill.

In 1850, works began at the Malhada mine, 700 meters north of Braçal. In 1856, the Coval da Mó mines were discovered. At Braçal, there was a time when up to 700 people, both men and women, worked there. The place was so well electrified (better than the village of Sever do Vouga) that the outdoor lights distributed throughout the complex made it seem, at night, that there was an actual city in the middle of the forest.

Now, we invite you to visit what remains of this former mining camp, which stopped functioning only in 1959, by following the path of the old Wagon Track from Braçal to the mouth of the Mau river, thus connecting this trail with the Vouga Ecotrail. Immerse yourself in the spirit of this place, a place full of history, nature and memories.

BRAÇAL MINING RAILWAY

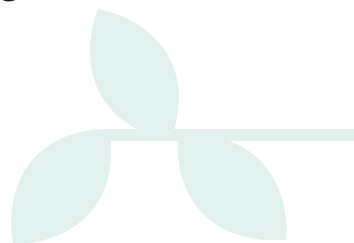
The OLD WAGON TRACK is like the writing of our History. Each sentence is a step of the way.

Come along and go for a pleasant walk, as if you were reading a book and turning the pages of our memory.

Here is Sever do Vouga!



**NATURE
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by Sever do Vouga

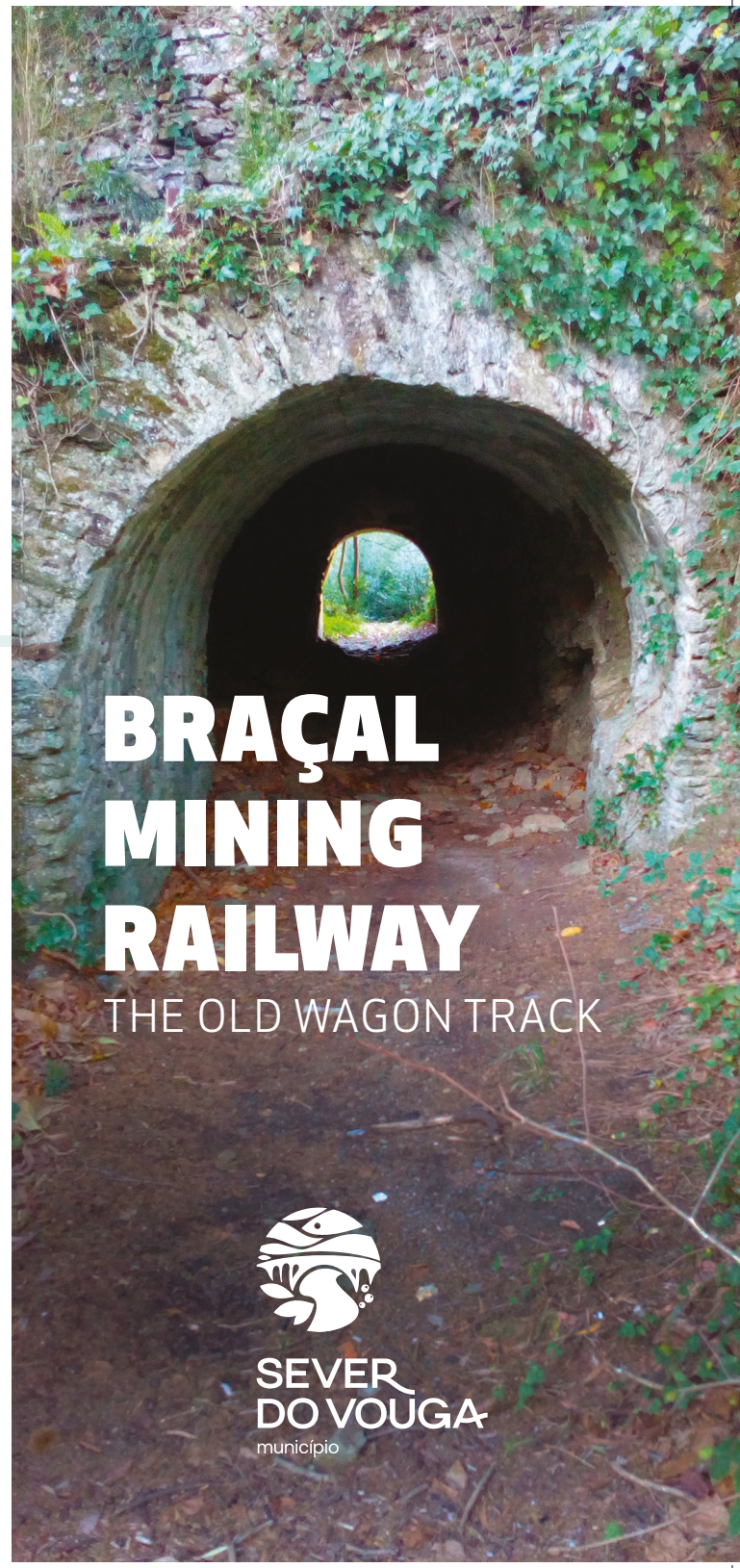


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BRAÇAL MINING RAILWAY

THE OLD WAGON TRACK



**SEVER
DO VOUGA**
município



1. Malhada mines
2. Braçal mines waterfall
3. Braçal mines
4. Gretão bridge
5. Ruins of Ponte Velha
6. Figueira valley
7. Murta valley
8. Waterhole
9. Folgoso platform
10. Viralonga platform
11. Tunnels



SEVER DO VOUGA STORYTELLING...

The contract for the construction of the old Wagon Track, also called the American Train Track, dates back to 1867, and it was laid to serve the big mining complex of Braçal. The railway was a huge improvement in the exploration of these mines, compared with the time of its concession, which had been granted three decades earlier, in 1836. It had been the first concession of its kind in Portugal.

AMERICAN TRAIN

The old Wagon Track, as it is now called, was an American-type railway which was laid between the Braçal mines and the mouth of the Mau river. In other words, it was a track built specifically for cargo wagons, which would go downhill by force of gravity carrying lead ingots, and then were pulled back up to Braçal by animals, bringing in useful goods to the life and work in the mines. At the river, boats were already expecting the incoming lead in order to move it down the Vouga river to Aveiro. Although it has been dismantled, the American train track cleared the way it was laid on, thus opening a path we can now travel.

COMMERCE

Between the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the Vouga river was still the main means of communication and transport in this region. As to the Braçal mining complex, the concessionary company owned two boats, each with a 10-ton freight capacity, which went down the Vouga river to Aveiro. From there, the lead was then moved to Lisbon and Oporto to be sold on the national market or to be exported to Germany and England.

MAU RIVER

Starting in the Arestal mountains, the Mau river flows through 12 km in the north-south direction before joining the Vouga river. At the upper course, it is actually called the Bom river ("Good" river) because its waters are calm there. In the roughest part, to which the river owes its name "Mau" ("Bad"), there can be seen the 25-meters-high Cabreia waterfall and the shorter Braçal mines waterfall. The Mau river used to supply the Braçal mining complex. The old Wagon Track followed the river valley transporting lead ingots to its mouth, which flows into the Vouga.



POÇO MATIAS

The main entrance to the Braçal mining complex was called the Poço Matias. It was equipped with a kind of elevator, which descended to the various floors of excavated galleries, more than 100 meters deep. The galleries had a combined length of tens of kilometers. Miners went down early in the morning and worked with pickaxe and jackhammer all day long, deep inside the darkness of the earth. Their need to earn their bread would overcome fear and exhaustion, and so they would keep the mine running continuously.



PRODUCTION PROCESS

At the Braçal facility, the ore would go through several processes, from extraction to ingot production. In its raw state, the ore was first crushed and then sent to the washer, where the lead was to be separated from the other elements with which it was mixed. Afterwards, the lead was calcined and smelted with sulfur in large furnaces, and finally poured into ingot molds. An internal rail system with small wagons helped transport this material from one process to the next, and from the warehouses to the American train, which would take the ingots down to the river.