

Junior Explorers Challenge

STORY



Argentina: The Land of Silver and Second Chances



Photo courtesy of Jordan Gush

Long before European fishermen arrived, Indigenous peoples, including the Beothuk and later Mi'kmaq communities, travelled and lived along Newfoundland's **Atlantic** coasts, relying on the rich waters and land for food and trade. Generations later, newcomers came for **cod**, building a small fishing settlement along the rugged, rocky shoreline of what is often called "**the Rock.**" Over time, a new possibility began to take hold, one that reached far beneath the ocean and into the rock itself.

In the 1880s, **prospectors** exploring the cliffs near what would become Argentina noticed streaks of **galena** — a heavy, shiny mineral that is the main ore of lead and can also contain small amounts of **silver**. This caught their attention right away. Miners knew that when hot, metal-rich fluids move through cracks deep underground, they can cool and leave behind minerals in lines called **veins**, often made of **quartz**. If you find galena in those veins, it can be a sign that silver might be hiding in there too.

Exciting Discoveries!

Excitement spread quickly. If silver was hidden in the rock, it could change everything. In the early 1900s, Father **John St. John** helped rename the community Argentina, from the French word **argent**, meaning silver. The name reflected the glimmering hope of a town rich in **mining** potential.

Miners got to work cutting tunnels, called **adits**, into the steep, rocky **cliffs**, following the thin mineral veins through solid rock. This was not a challenge to be undermined. The veins were narrow and scattered, found along cracks in the rock, so miners had to dig through a lot of rock just to find small amounts of ore. Even though galena was there, the silver inside it was limited.



Photo courtesy of Jordan Gush

Challenges and Changes

Getting the silver out was another challenge. It was often **trapped** inside the hard quartz veins, which made it slow and expensive to break apart and process. The **mine** opened and closed several times as different investors tried to make it work, but there just wasn't enough silver to keep the operation going. By the early 1920s, the mining dream had faded.



Reinvention - Again!

A reinvention came during World War II, when Argentia's deep, sheltered **harbour** made it strategically important. The area transformed almost overnight into a major military base, bringing thousands of workers and soldiers. In 1941, just offshore, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met aboard warships and agreed on the **Atlantic Charter**, connecting this once-quiet place to events that would shape the future of the world. After the war, and especially after the base closed in 1994, Argentia changed once again, this time into a modern **industrial port** linking Newfoundland to **global trade routes**.

Still, the story of Argentia didn't end with mining. The search for silver changed the identity of the place and proved that something valuable could lie beneath its rugged surface, even if it wasn't easy to reach.



Lead, a metal found in the mineral galena, is heavy and has a high molecular density. This density works to provide radiation shielding in applications such as X-ray imaging and positron emission tomography (PET) scans, which involve a radiopharmaceutical. Shielding ensures protection and safety for patients and technicians.

