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[Borax in] Chile

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Chile.—(By Benjamin L. Miller and Joseph T. Singewald, Jr.) Chile continues to hold its place as the foremost foreign producer of borax. In some years the Chilean production has exceeded that of the United States and no doubt for many years to come the two countries will continue to lead the world and will produce approximately equal amounts.

The western range of the Andes of South America, known as the

Cordillera Occidental, extending through Peru, Bolivia, Chile and into Argentine, contains many lofty volcanoes, recently extinct, and from some of which sulphurous gases are still escaping. About the bases of these mountains that rise to altitudes of 15,000 to 19,000 feet are a number of large borax lakes at elevations of 12,000 to 13,000 feet, sufficient to supply the world's demand for borax for several centuries to come. These white encrusted areas extending for miles, as well as the bordering volcanoes that have yielded the borates, are prominent objects of interest to the traveller in the Antofagasta-La Paz Railroad. As yet few of them have been worked. While many of these are owned by the various governments mentioned, or in some cases by individuals, the industry is dominated and controlled by the Borax Consolidated Co., Ltd., owned by English capital. For many years this company has concentrated its efforts at Lake Ascotan, Chile, near the Bolivian border. The Antofagasta-La Paz Railroad skirts the irregular-shaped lake that is about 10 miles in length and approximately 3 miles in width. In certain places there are often pools of water and elsewhere water occurs beneath an encrustation of salts similar to the covering of ice in a pond. In places the deposit consists of practically pure ulexite ($\text{NaCaB}_5 \times \text{O}_9 - 8\text{H}_2\text{O}$) in other places mixed with salt and earthy material containing gypsum and glauberite. The purest material is dug, loaded into small cars and hauled to the plant at Cebollar where it is first sun-dried, later more thoroughly dried by steam heat, and then sacked for shipment. When the treatment plant, which is located on the border of the lake at Cebollar, was erected the difficulty of obtaining fuel caused the company to construct an aerial tram several kilometers in length to a locality where the supply of yareta, a moss-like highly resinous plant growing in rocky slopes, was especially abundant. This was, however, soon exhausted and as the yareta is of such slow growth, new plants have not reached a size sufficient to be collected, and the tram is now idle and fuel must be brought in by the railroad.

Although the borax deposits near Arequipa, likewise controlled by the Borax Consolidated Co., Ltd., are of great promise and Bolivia also possesses a number of borax lakes, it is probable that the demand for South American borax for many years to come will be mainly met by the production from the Ascotan region.