

# THE PITCH LAKE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- The Pitch Lake located in La Brea, Trinidad, is the largest commercially mined natural asphalt deposit in the world, estimated to contain 10 million tons. The lake covers about 100 acres and it is reported to be 250 feet deep. Asphalt is a solidified hydrocarbon used for road and bridge-deck construction and for other industrial uses.



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- General and Aerial Views of the lake





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- ◉ The earliest record of the Pitch Lake is attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh in 1595, when he used the pitch to caulk his ship. He referred to the pitch as "most excellent... It melted not with the sun as the pitch of Norway". The native Amerindians showed Sir Walter Raleigh where the lake was. They had named the black substance "piche", which over time became to be known as pitch.
- ◉ From as early as the 1790s, pitch was tested in Spain and by the mid-1790s a pitch refining works was set up near the Pitch Lake. The Spaniards became the first to produce and export dried asphalt or epure. It was not until 1851 however that the first patent for commercial use of the pitch lake was established. In 1864, J. W. Previte entered business with Lord Dundonald and began commercial activity, exporting globally.



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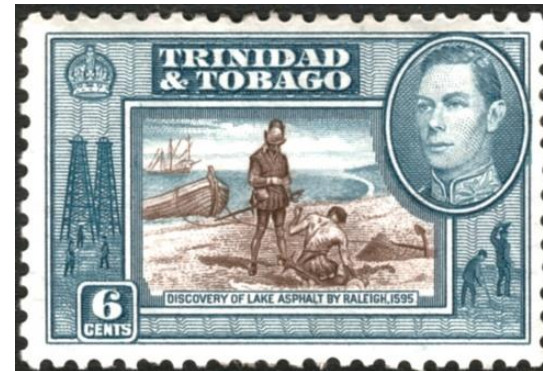
- The production process for asphalt was very labour intensive, involving digging by hand, until the 1950s, when mechanical ditchers and eventually tractors were introduced. After the pitch is excavated, it is taken by truck to be converted into dried asphalt and asphalt cement for export.
- As in the oil industry, which was located originally close to the operations of the Pitch Lake, workers were organized into trade unions. The asphalt workers were involved in the labour riots of 1937 led by Uriah Butler. Presently the Asphalt workers fall under The Contractors and General Workers Trade Union.
- Uriah “Buzz” Butler is included in two stamps:
  - In the 1985 Oilfield Workers Union’s - at right of right hand stamp
  - In the 1988 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Oilfield Workers Union, left hand stamp





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- Trinidad & Tobago has issued four stamps related to the Pitch Lake. The first one in 1936, the 4 cents value of a definitive set, has a picture of Sir Walter Raleigh looking standing at a native, kneeling, picking a sample of tar from the lake. This stamp was originally issued with line perforation 12, but later printings were comb perforated 12.7 x 12.6.
- The second, issued in 1938 has the same image plus an oval to the right, with the face of King George VI; the left border has the two rigs more visible than in the previous stamp and the right border shows two workers collecting tar. It is again a 6 cent value.
- Both the George V issue and the George VI issue also exist perforated “SPECIMEN”.



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- 1936 set, note the inclusion of two oil rigs in the frame, at the left hand side





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- ◉ The third issue appeared in 1953. It used the same image, the only change was the face of the King for Queen Elizabeth II in the oval.
- ◉ Finally, in 1960, one of the stamps of the Definitive Issue, the 35 cent value, shows two workers digging asphalt in the lake. The trucks into which the pitch are loaded, are visible in the background
- ◉ The enterprise is now run by the state-owned Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago, which uses modern technologies to mine, refine and manufacture asphalt related products, for example anti-corrosive black paint, underbody coating for cars, and bitumen emulsion.



# THE PITCH LAKE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Early 1900s  
postcard  
(unposted)  
showing  
pitch  
lake and  
light rail  
tracks



*Pitch Lake, Trinidad, B. W. I.*

Stephens Ltd., Trinidad.



# THE PITCH LAKE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Card  
posted  
1942  
showing  
railcars  
being  
loaded  
with pitch

