

Death Valley

Historic Resource Study A History of Mining



SECTION III:

INVENTORY OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES THE WEST SIDE

A. Southern Panamints and West Side Road (continued)

16. Trail Canyon Mines

a) History

(1) Death Valley Wonder Mining & Milling Company

The earliest mining activity in Trail Canyon was contemporaneous with the gold discoveries in the Harrisburg and Skidoo areas, taking place during the period from about 1906 to 1907. No information was found describing day-to-day operations in the area, but enough data emerged to establish that at least three mining companies conducted business in the canyon during this period.

On 5 March 1906 Articles of Incorporation were filed for the Death Valley Wonder Mining & Milling Company in Maricopa County in Arizona Territory by Stoddard Incorporating Company of Phoenix. The incorporators were J. P. Branley and James A. Joyce. Phoenix was to be the principal place of business in Arizona, and Oakland, California, the outside base. Capitalized at one million dollars, divided into one million shares of \$1 each, the company began newspaper advertising later that month. Its properties included seven full claims of 140 acres, assaying from \$2 to \$85.73 per ton in gold and silver. Plenty of timber and water on hand ensured easy mining operations. A final attempt to snare the investor was this reminder:

Remember our property is upon a ledge from which ore assaying over \$800.00 per ton has been taken. Who knows but a few more blasts may uncover same results for us. Secure at once what stock you can for it is much better to have a few thousand shares at this price than wish you had. [404]

Not much data was found on the fortunes of the Death Valley Wonder Mine. During the fall of 1906 five men were employed, and development results were considered encouraging. Company stock was projected to rise from its current price of five cents a share to ten or fifteen cents by the first of November. By January 1907 the company stock was being listed on the San Francisco Stock & Exchange Board. Company assets included the Annie M. six-claim group and the Branley in the Wild Rose District. By March 1907 the Death Valley Wonder's crosscut tunnel was in 140 feet. The final mention found of the mine was later in 1907 while a force of men was still working there and the mine was continuing to show good surface values. Mr. Branley was even contemplating the establishment of a company office at Skidoo. [405]

(2) Wild Rose Mining Company

A second corporation transacting business in Trail Canyon was the Wild Rose Mining Company, which owned property about seven miles from Skidoo. E. H. Goodpaster was the company agent in the area, and work started on the claims, which included the Wild Rose Annex and Rush Group, around October 1906. [406] This latter group of claims, located near a Wild Rose Mine, was first discovered by Goodpaster in September 1905 in association with John W. Seller, (a prominent mining man of Goldfield connected with the Bonanza Mountain and Black Spar companies in Rhyolite) and A. V. Carpenter. By the spring of 1907 an eighty-foot tunnel had been excavated with a crosscut running through the ledge and exposing ore assaying as high as \$100 in gold and \$25 in silver. In April 1907 it was reported that the extensively developed Wild Rose Group had just been sold to a Boston . syndicate for about \$300,000. The Wild Rose Annex property was also making a good showing at this time. [407] Goodpaster was evidently dividing his time between Trail Canyon and the Skidoo area, because earlier in 1907 a notice appeared that he had established a camp on the Skidoo Contact property and was starting development of the Doctor Claim there. He had discovered the Gold Ledge Nos. 1-4 and the Doctor claims of the Skidoo Contact Group and the Granite Contact properties himself and had then sold them to the Skidoo Contact Mining Company, of which he became general manager, for \$15,000. [408]

(3) Trail Canyon Mining Company

A third mining venture in Trail Canyon was the Trail Canyon Mining Company, incorporated in the state of South Dakota by three Tonopah, Nevada, and two Pierre, South Dakota, businessmen. The principal place of business was to be Pierre, with a business office closer to the property at Tonopah. Capitalized at one million dollars, divided into one million shares of \$1 each par value, the company was incorporated on 10 November 1906. On 8 December 1906 it was registered as a foreign incorporation in the state of Nevada, designating Tasker L. Oddie as its resident agent. [409] In the spring of 1907 Charles M. Schwab, Oddie, and F. J. Leutjens expanded the assets of the company by purchasing five promising claims in Trail Canyon whose assays were running from \$50 to \$3,000 per ton. [410]

What seemed to be a promising future for the company did not materialize, however, due to the collapse of the New York stock market in March of that year, followed by similar crises in Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Montreal. The financial panic spread to the west, causing two Goldfield banks to close. Tasker Oddie, who had invested and speculated heavily and rather recklessly in various mining claims and property and mining-related enterprises in Tonopah and the Bullfrog Mining District, was ruined by the economic collapse. Five flimsily-subsidized mining companies of which he was president, including the Trail Canyon Mining Company, failed when Oddie was unable to make good his obligations to the stockholders or to the Tonopah Banking Corporation, which had invested in his development work. [411]

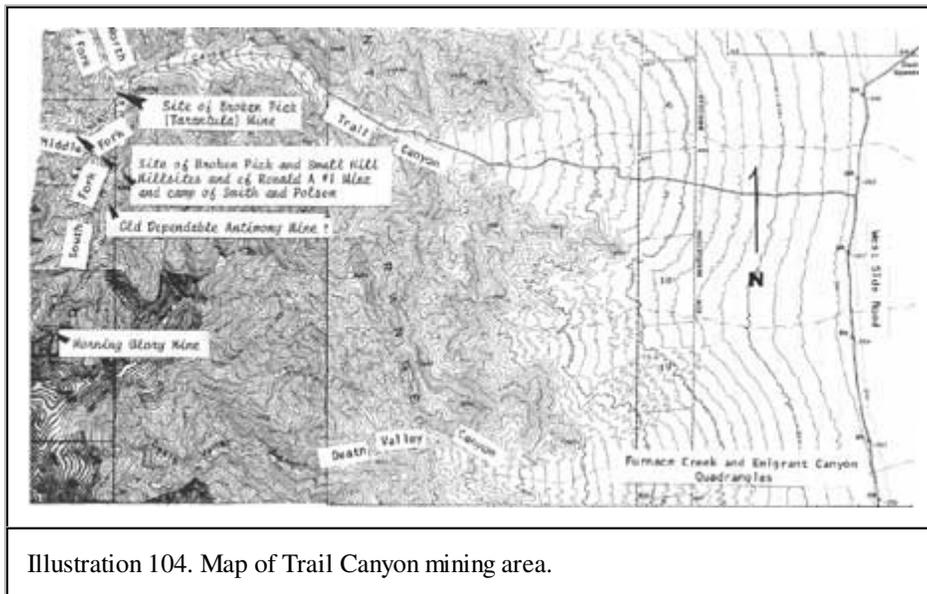


Illustration 104. Map of Trail Canyon mining area.

(4) Old Dependable Antimony Mine

The next phase of activity in Trail Canyon centered around antimony mining. The monument contains two such deposits: the Wildrose Mine, about one mile southeast of the Wildrose Ranger Station, which will be covered in a later section, and the Old Dependable Mine in the South Fork of Trail Canyon fifteen miles southwest of Furnace Creek Ranch. These two areas produced a total of about 2,060,000 pounds of antimony: 2,000,000 during World War I and the rest during World War II.

From 1939 to 1941 the Old Dependable was operated by Brinn W. Belyea, who invested approximately \$50,000 in construction of a road, camp facilities, and mine development. The site yielded around seventy tons of ore showing eighteen to sixty percent antimony. In 1940 an H. E. Olund was in charge of the mine for Belyea Truck Company, and eighteen men were employed in building a modern camp. Operations were discontinued when the war came and Belyea donated the use of his time and the facilities of his trucking, crane, and construction companies to the war effort. Mr. Belyea died in the latter part of 1946; in 1948 sixteen claims were relocated as the Old Dependable Group by his wife, Isabelle Belyea, and were bonded and leased to J. W. E. McCulley of Darwin in January 1949. Drags, picks, and shovels were used in an attempt to rebuild and repair the access road, permitting mining to commence from an open cut in April. However, due to the smallness of the ore body, its remote location, and unfavorable market, conditions during peacetime, the two cars of ore removed from the cut were never shipped, and the property became idle. In 1951 the workings consisted of the open cut, which had produced one eleven-ton pod assaying 60% antimony, and two adits. [412]

(5) Tungsten Mines

A second mineral commodity sought during World War II was tungsten. As early as 1937 the world demand for this product was increasing substantially, due mainly to business recovery and expanded uses for the metal, and the advancing prices occasioned by higher production costs were promoting development in the United States of hundreds of mines and prospects. Estimates were made that in 1937 the world production of tungsten would equal the 35,000 tons produced during World War I. [413] Small tungsten deposits within the monument have been found at the Sheepshead-Victory Group in Trail Canyon, near Goldbelt Spring at the Shorty Harris Prospect, and in various locations east of Skidoo. Much of this work was done in

the 1950s, domestic tungsten mining having, been encouraged by the U.S. Government as late as 1958. [414] The Sheepshead and Victory tungsten groups are situated at about 4,000 feet elevation in the middle fork of Trail Canyon. In 1951 they were owned by Milton L. Knapp of Palm Springs, California, and Floyd R. Bekins, of Los Angeles. Several prospect pits were opened and one ton of high-grade ore shipped in 1943. Poor road conditions precluded further exploration on the property, which was idle by 1951. [415]

Only brief mentions of other tungsten mining endeavors in Trail Canyon were found in the monument files. These included the Morning Glory Group of four claims in the South Fork of Trail Canyon, owned by Morning Glory Mines, Inc., of Albuquerque, N.M., Abram H. Kreider, president; Ronald A Claims of Jack Smith and John Polson, in the Middle Fork of Trail Canyon, which had been the scene of several mining attempts over the years, but which soon reached a static state due to lack of investment capital and of any appreciable quantity of high-grade ore. This operation involved five people in residence; All Mine and Lucky Find Claims and Millsites #1-2 of a Mr. Dotson and Page G. Brady in the South Fork of Trail Canyon. These millsites were a relocation of the old Morning Glory Mine camp. Evidently these claims involved only promotional work, with no very active mining. Products obtained were silica and ornamental rock; AA Placer Claims composed of 137 160-acre group placer claims filed by Al Anderson and worked in 1958 over a total of 21,920 acres; Blackwater Mine of several hundred claims, worked in 1959, containing low-grade tungsten; and the Tarantula Mine (old Nichols Mine and Millsite) in the North and Middle Forks of Trail Canyon, worked in 1958. According to notes in the monument mining office this was probably the only profitable tungsten operation in Death Valley during the 1950s boom era, and was responsible for attracting others to the Trail Canyon area. This region evidently soon resembled the land around Skidoo, with hundreds of claims being filed on and a vast network of roads scarring the hillsides. (The operator of the Tarantula Mine built the road stretching from Trail Canyon, to Aguerberry Point--now only a rough jeep trail.) Quite a lot of false stock promotion was also prevalent. At the height of the craze some of the miners tried to drum up Washington's support for a bill to abolish Death Valley National Monument!

The Nichols Mine and Millsite were later relocated as the Broken Pick Mine and Millsite. The Small Hill Millsite was a conflicting relocation of the old Nichols Millsite filed in the same year as the Broken Pick Millsite relocation. Information was also found that a certain Joseph Harris of Yuma, Arizona, who had been involved in various mining activities in Death Valley since the 1930s, in addition to leasing the Skidoo Mine from 1938 to 1939 and operating the Keane Wonder Extension from 1949 to 1955, had run a tungsten mine in Trail Canyon in 1960. [416] As late as as 1971 some tungsten mining was being undertaken in the South Fork of Trail Canyon as evidenced by a request from the claimants for permission to use dynamite on their remote scheelite mine. [417]

b) Present Status

Because the road up Trail Canyon from West Side Road has been washed out and at best is considered a difficult four-wheel drive road that should be navigated only by experienced personnel, the writer did not visit these sites. The current status of the road from Aguerberry Point into Trail Canyon is unknown, although about fourteen years ago it was a steep, one-way downhill grade from the Point, and was also subject to washout problems. About nine miles west into the canyon from West Side Road, the trail branches, one arm continuing west into the Middle Fork for about 1-12 miles and ending near an abandoned mine camp. Monument photographs taken by a ranger in 1962 indicate that at least two small mine camps remained in the Middle Fork at that time: the Broken Pick and Small Hilt Millsites (two conflicting

relocations of the old Nichols Millsite), and the Ronald "A" Mine and camp of Smith and Poison. These both consisted of corrugated-metal and wood frame buildings in the residential and work areas, and wooden chute remains at the workings themselves.

The South Fork road ends after about 2-1/2 miles at a cableway leading to the Morning Glory Mine, whose associated camp was relocated as the Lucky Find Millsite #1 and #2. The Old Dependable Antimony Mine lies along the South Fork Canyon road also, at about 4,800 feet elevation, a site marked in the early 1960s by a large open pit on the east side of the road. This may be the camp designated by the row of buildings on the USGS Emigrant Canyon quad. According to Park Ranger Warren H. Hill, the North Fork of Trail Canyon contained the Broken Pick Mine, the relocation of the old Nichols, or Tarantula, Mine, whose workings consisted of a wooden one-chute ore bin, several adits, and other miscellaneous mining debris.

c) Evaluation and Recommendations

The writer is unwilling to present any recommendations for preservation, restoration, or reclamation in regard to Trail Canyon resources because the area was not personally visited. It is not known whether any remains of the Skidoo-period operations can still be found. Most of the mining activity evident dates from the tungsten craze of the 1950s, although the Old Dependable Antimony Mine ruins would date from the late 1930s and early 1940s. It was the later of the two antimony concerns in the Monument, produced fairly low-grade ore except for occasional rich pockets, and produced less total yield than the Wildrose Mine. It does not possess the qualities of significance necessary for inclusion on the National Register. None of the later Trail Canyon mines had a production rate or associative significance that made them important in the monument's history, and the only pictures found of mining activity in this area do not reveal any structures of apparent historical or architectural interest.

Because Trail Canyon was not explored during the 1975 LCS Survey or by this present project, and therefore no recent pictures of it have been taken nor a reconnaissance of remaining cultural resources made, it is imperative that further examination and evaluation be made before any sites or individual buildings are destroyed. The Morning Glory Mine tramway ruin should be followed, photographed, and mapped--its present condition is uncertain. The entire extent of archeological resources in the Trail Canyon area is also unknown, although at least one cave site with a smoke-blackened ceiling was found at the head of Trail Canyon over fifteen years ago. Because this canyon provided passage for Indians between the lower valley and higher mountain ranges, there should be vestiges of their occupation and peregrinations remaining. [418]



Illustration 105. Ronald "A" #1 mine and camp of Smith and Poison. In middle fork of Trail Canyon, 1962. Photo by Park Ranger Warren H. Hill, courtesy of DEVA NM.



Illustration 106. Scar of mining exploration for tungsten, now Ronald "A" 14 mine of Smith and Poison. In middle fork of Trail Canyon, 1962. Photo by Park Ranger Warren H. Hill, courtesy of DEVA NM.



Illustration 107. Broken Pick Millsite and Small Hill Millsite in middle fork of Trail Canyon, 1962. Photo by Park Ranger Warren H. Hill, courtesy of DEVA NM.



Illustration 108. Broken Pick Mine, north fork of Trail Canyon, 1962. Photo by Park Ranger Warren H. Hill, courtesy of DEVA NM.



Illustration 109. Lucky Find Millsites #1 and #2, relocation of old Morning Glory Mine camp, South Fork of Trail Canyon, 1962. Photo by Park Ranger Warren H. Hill, courtesy of DEVA NM.

[<<< Previous](#)

[<<< Contents >>>](#)

[Next >>>](#)