



History of Mining in the Tucson Mountain District



When hiking the trails of Saguaro National Park (West) you will frequently notice the remnants of past mining activity. There are a variety of size and shape of excavations. Some were just a check on mineralization and /or to establish a mining claim. There was a century of on and off mining activity prior to this area becoming a National Park.

The Number of Mines

There are 149 mining excavations in Saguaro National Park West (SNPW). There are over 200 in the Amole Mining District which includes all of the Tucson Mountains. 127 of these mines, in SNPW, are reported as shafts, that is, vertical or near vertical excavations. No mining activity went into wealth-producing production although a few did provide some return on the investment.

The First Mine

The first mine in the Amole Mining District is actually just outside what is now the southeast boundary of SNPW. It was called the Nequilla. The claim was staked in 1867 and during the same year raids by Apaches resulted in the death of one of the hired hands and loss of stock. In 1871 Lee and Scott purchased the property and by 1875 they had sunk a shaft to a depth of 120'. They concentrated on Silver ore as other minerals had little value. There were only trace amounts of gold. This claim was patented in 1872 and it is believed to have been the first patent in the Arizona Territory. (Arizona became a territory in 1863 and a state in 1912.) A mining claim was required to have at least \$500 in improvements and proven ore to be patented which gives property ownership along with mining rights.

They hauled their ore to Guaymas, Mexico for shipment to a San Francisco smelter. The mine closed in the 1880s after reportedly producing \$70,000 in silver. It should be pointed out that a decent day's wage was about \$2 which equals an annual income of less than \$700 per year. (\$70,000 is then equal to 100 years wages!) The great amount of time and effort spent to achieve this result is difficult to comprehend and their actual profit is not known.

Other Early Mines

Many other claims were staked and discovery excavations made as required by the Mining Act of 1872. They showed mostly copper ores (having little value) and many of these claims were just held for speculation. The railroad came to Tucson in 1880 which increased interest in the local mining.

In 1880 the Silver Moon claims were worked on a location adjacent to the Nequilla Claim and partly inside SNPW. Two shafts were sunk 100' and 50' in depth. The claims were patented in 1881 and 1885 so it is assumed they had ore but production is not known.

The Old Yuma Mine claim, just inside SNPW eastern boundary; was filed in the 1880s and extensive exploration work was done. Reported life production is about \$5000 in lead and \$5000 in silver. It was shut down in 1918. The Brichta brothers claimed to have gold on their claims (which are within the SNPW on the north side) in 1893, but this never materialized. By 1900 there was a new interest in copper as the world became electrified. The Brichtas sunk several shafts to 25' claiming extensive rich copper ore and managed to sell many of their claims. No production followed.

THE MILE WIDE MINE

The major story of the Amole Mining District is the Mile Wide Mine located at the head of King Canyon and entirely within SNPW. It was started as the Copper King Mine in 1914 by Martin Waer who sunk one shaft to 86' and found "very valuable" copper ores. In 1915 an investor named Reineger took an option with Waer for \$1000 down and \$74,000 due in four years.

Reineger organized the Mile Wide Copper Company so named for the width of 31 claims involved. Five million shares of stock were issued at \$1 per share. After promoting \$40,000, Reineger started a new shaft uphill from the old one and hired 50 men. They found 4% copper ore at a depth of 95'. Reineger promoted more shares of stock through the Singer Co. of Pittsburgh. By 1917, the Arizona Star in Tucson reported discovery of a sensational chalcopyrite (copper pyrite) deposit of remarkable purity. Reineger built a haul road and used six trucks to haul ore to Tucson for rail shipment to SASCO (Southern Arizona Smelting Company). He built four houses, a work shop, mess hall-bunk house, rock crusher, hoist house and truck loading facilities. The shaft was sunk to over 400' with working levels at 100' intervals.

By 1918, ore assays showed little value and by 1919 when the \$74,000 option became due, Reineger could not be found. In 1920 stockholders filed suit and in 1921 Reineger's dealings became public. He had taken half the stock money for himself. In 1923 the court ordered Reineger to pay \$134,000 plus \$15,000 attorneys fees plus endorse all stock and property to Union Copper Company of Pittsburg who auctioned all equipment for \$3000. The total production of the Mile Wide Mine was \$10,000 in copper and \$15,000 in silver. Several hundred thousand dollars changed hands and produced only \$25,000.

Today nothing remains except a few concrete foundations and the open shaft. All iron scrap was salvaged during the scrap drives of the early 1940's for World War II.

THE GOULD MINE

S.H.Gould established the Gould Copper Mining Company on 19 claims in 1906 during the period of greatest rush to stake claims in the Tucson Mountains. By 1907 the shaft was 165' deep. He obtained a mortgage for funds and by 1908 reported a depth of 375' with a vein 35' wide of chalcopyrite at the 100' level which widened to 60' at lower levels. The Arizona Star reported assays of 4% copper. There seemed to be some general belief at this time that a mine would find greater amounts of ore at greater depths so it was speculated that they would be just as productive as the Silver Bell Mine when they reached a similar depth of 1200'. (The Silver Bell Mine was well known, located about 25 miles to the west.)

The Gould Mine, however, had to shut down after 1908 and ceased all shipments except from surface stockpiles until 1911. By 1915, Gould was in bankruptcy. Reportedly 45,000 lbs. of copper, valued at \$9,000, had been taken from this mine. This mine was leased but no further work was done. In 1957 Banner Mining Co. requested from the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) 7600 acres for an open pit over the Gould Mine area. Public outcry stopped further development. The area became part of Saguaro National Monument in 1963. All mining rights expired in 1975.

The Gould Mine is the best known mine in SNPW as it is visible from Kinney Road.

WARNING!

A warning to all mine, mineral or curiosity seekers. There are fences around the most dangerous open shafts but some are bent from efforts of someone trying to see inside. It cannot be overemphasized that any old mine is extremely dangerous.

A fall into a shaft could be fatal. Even shallow excavations can contain carbon dioxide resulting in death once entered.

Throw a rock into the shaft if you want to hear it fall (you will anyway) but DO NOT ENTER!