Ore Car Tags

by Ted Bobrink

Here is a very attractive solid brass 6x3 "Matteson" ore car tag. These neat ore cars were manufactured by the Joshua Hendy Iron Works of San Francisco, Cal. Mattesons patent was applied to a number of different ore cars that Hendy manufactured. The very first ore car I ever found back in 1971 was a "Matteson Cage Car" and it is very unique. While most early drift cars are around 40" in length and 36" high. This one is very short only 34" in length, and tall 46" high, with special hook ups on each side. It was made this way so it could ride in a small man cage, and be tethered so it wouldn't roll around. The ore car tag shown is the same style as the one on the car now.

You will notice that the ore car is setting on what looks like plain old wood. What it really is, is called "Flat Strap Rail" and this is what was used in the 1880s before the invention of what you now know as "T " rail. To experienced mine explorers, flat strap rail is a welcomed sight. It tells you that the mine, or that level was worked before 1895.

Flat strap rail consist of two 2x4s (called scantling) laid on end with a 3/16 x 1 1/4" flat steel strap nailed to the top with special beveled head nails. This two piece rail is held in place with a 2x4 or 3x4 28" tie. The tie is mitered to hold a wood wedge. You can see these wedges against the side of the wood rail in my photo.

The big problem with using the old flat strap rail was going around a bend in the tunnel or drift. To bend the wood scantling, they had to make numerous cuts (about 100) on the side. Bends of more than a few degrees just could not be done. When they came to an intersection (a 90%turn) there was a large steel plate called a turn plate. The ore car would be pushed off of the rail on to the turn plate, turned 90% and then pushed back on the the rail completing the turn.

To make it easier for the miner to push the ore car back onto the rail after making the turn. There were curved beveled steel bars that look like curved wedges about 8"long called "Track Ramps" riveted to the turn plate.

You can understand now why the use of the new T rail was a tremendous advantage for the 1890s miner and mine owner. It took far less time to lay it down, and it was easy to bend.

Here is a solid brass 6x2 "Skip Car Tag". I found underground at the Noonday Mine near Tocopa Hot Springs, Cal. I had to get it off with a piece of drill steel and a rock. That was in my early days when I didn't carry a cold chisel with me.

Skip cars are ore cars that are used to haul the ore out of an inclined shaft. They are much rarer than drift cars because there was just one per shaft. They look like a box with wheels, and have a 45% opening at one end. I will show you one tomorrow.

This tag says "Automatic Dumping Car" because the larger rear wheels had a smaller diameter extending wheel that caught a second track half way up the headframe. The smaller front wheels caught another track that made the car turn forward As the rear end was being pulled up it made the car dump into an ore bin, while it was being pulled up the headframe.

The M&E 12x5 iron ore car tag (below) is unique to me (I have never seen another) and the largest tag I have ever seen. I found it on the 300' level of the Charlotte Mine in the Banner mining district of Julian, Calif. I ended up pulling the car out about five years later.

The Baker Iron Works tag is also unique to me c1897, and was found on the 350' level of the Little Butte Mine in Randsburg, Calif. It too is iron, and very large 12x4 and came on a Standard front foot pedal dump ore car. The car was in a caved stope, and we could not get it out.

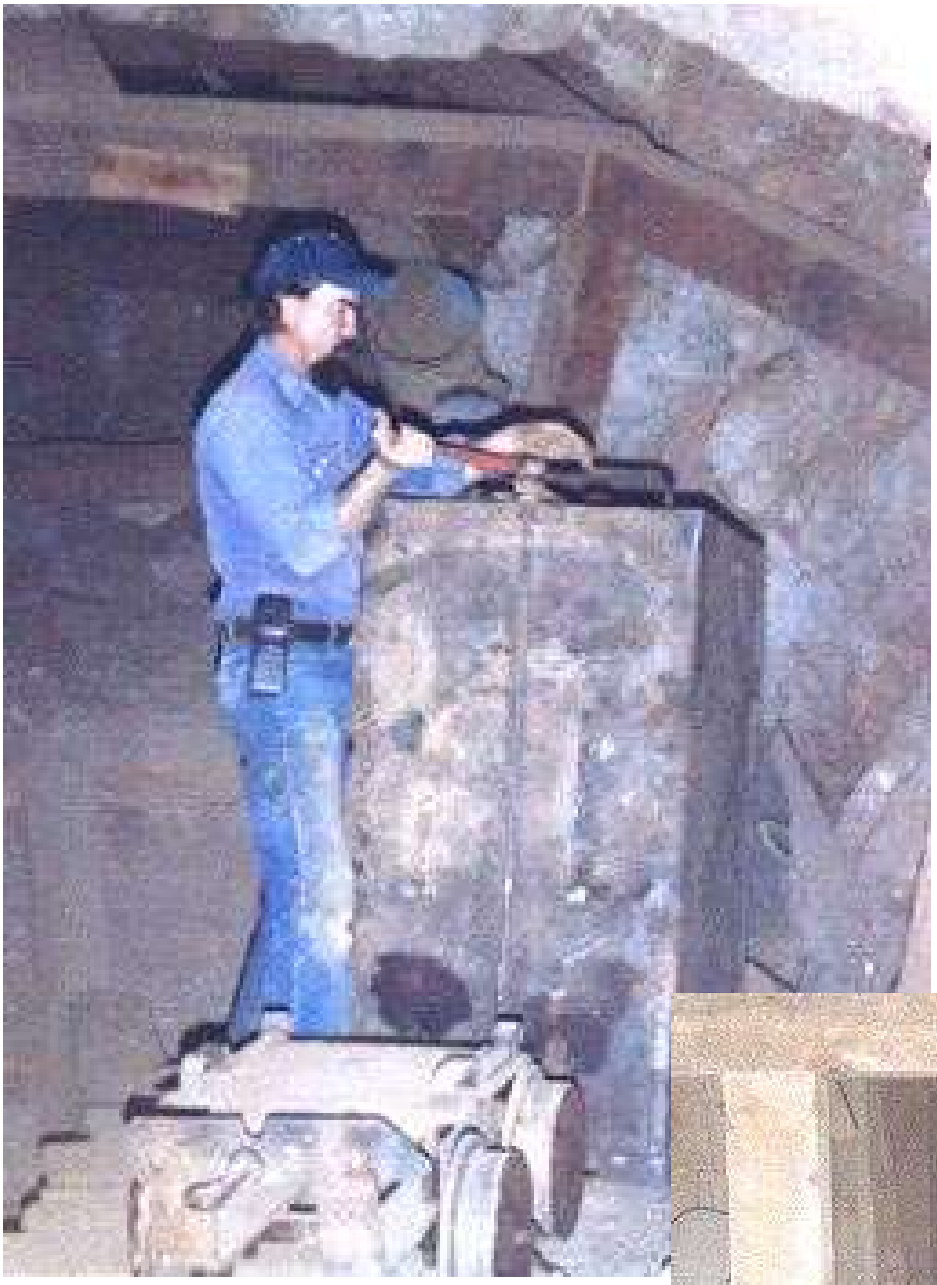
Here is a rare oval solid brass Truax Ore Car Tag. Most of you have seen the round Truax tags with all of the patent dates, and I know of six different ones. I believe this to be the earliest of the Truax tags that I know of, and it is the only oval Truax tag I have ever owned. It is very thick, and measures 4 1/4"X2 1/2"

This is the 2nd earliest round brass Truax ore car tag that I have. It is 4" across, and it is on one of my ore cars. It says "Geo E. Truax's Silver State Ore Car" and has the name Truax MFG Co in Denver, Colorado where they originated. The rectangular brass tag below it is from the company that sold the car and it says "CARLSON-LUSK-HDWRE CO MINE SUPPLIES BOISE IDAHO"

Here is a later 4" solid brass Truax ore car tag that is convexed (earlier tags are flat) with only just the name "THE TRUAX" as the heading. Truax must have sold his patent rights to The Globe Iron Works of Stockton Calif and that is why I think these are the later tags, but that is just my guess. These are very detailed attractive tags. The background has little textured dimples. One thing that I noticed about these tags is the lower the serial number the more detail in the letters. I have often wanted to make a belt buckle out of one of these tags, but now they sell for to much $$$.

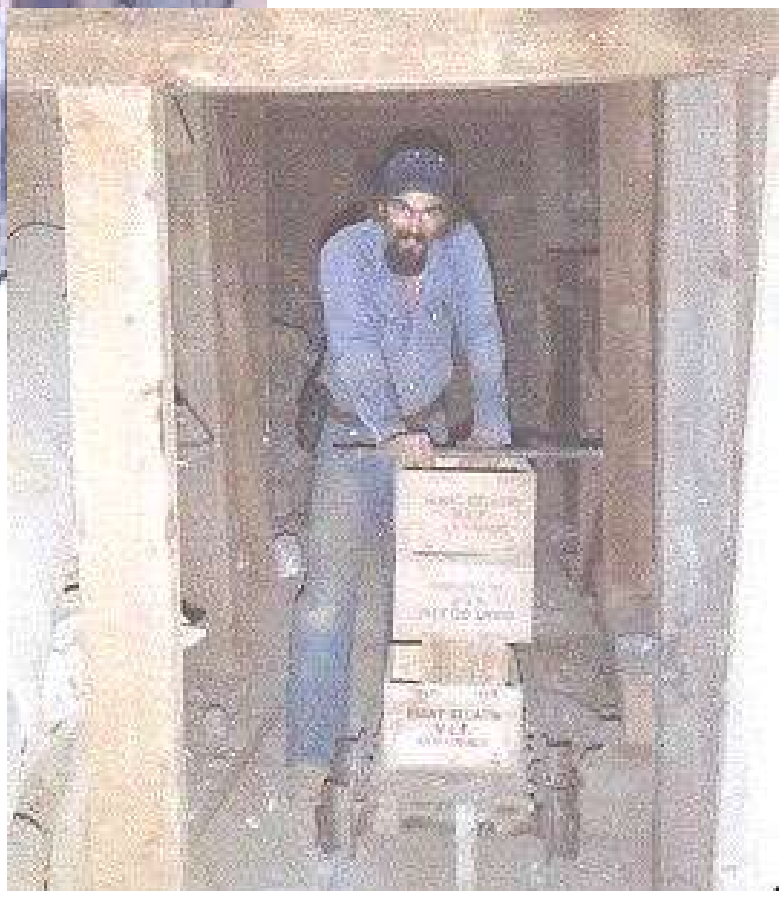
Here is a iron 9x4 ore car tag from the Fulton Engine Works of Los Angeles, Cal. It is on a really nice ore car I found on the 200' level of a mine near Tacopa, Calif. The photo below shows the ore car just as we found it sitting on the 200' station back in 1976. That was when I was skinny, and had hair. When I first found this ore car, a guy named Jim DeMayo and I had climbed down a 45% inclined shaft to the second level of a mine we new had five levels. There were two Fulton ore cars about twenty feet apart. One in the drift, and the one with this tag sitting on the station. The drifts went left and right so we took the right one first. After about three hours we had found about 20 Giant, Hercules and Vigoret dynamite boxes, 2 candle boxes, 1 wood California 1000 blasting caps box, and more California cap tins than we could carry. Instead of exploring the drift to the left. Jim and I decided to make one trip to the surface with as many boxes as we could carry, and grab a bite to eat before taking one of the ore cars out.

That turned out to be a really big mistake. After we ate dinner it was getting dark (about 7:30 PM.) and we started back down the 200' incline to get the ore car. Just the two of us worked until after mid night (over 5 hours) making two trips getting that ore car up the inclined shaft. We went to bed very dirty, and dead tired in our tent. In the morning at around 9a.m. we went back down the shaft to explore that drift to the left, and get the other ore car. We took that drift on the 200, and guess where it went? You guessed it...It was a tunnel that went about 800' right out the side of the mountain, and we could drive



our 4 wheeler right up to the adit. We could have pushed that 700 lb. ore car all in one piece on the track, right to the back of our car. We did just that with the second one loaded with boxes and cap tins.

The photo (left) showing me taking apart the Fulton ore car shows something kind of neat. If you look over my head, and to the left. You will see a piece of light colored wood about 14" long nailed to the cross beam (cap). This was an ore car counter, and it has 24 1/2" holes drilled into it with a wood peg. It is hand made, and says Noonday Mine written in pencil with all the holes numbered up to 16. I do not know why they stopped at 16. These boards were used to count how many ore cars were loaded into the skip car before it was hauled to the surface. Perhaps the miners were paid by the car or maybe they had a quota. The fact that it stopped at 16 always made me think of that song "Sixteen Tons" by Tennessee Ernie Ford.



Remember that drift I told you about that went right out the side of the mountain. The photo (above right) of me hauling 3 Giant dynamite boxes and 1 Goodwin candle box plus some other junk on a really neat hand made flat car. I sure am glad we found that exit before we hauled it all up the incline.