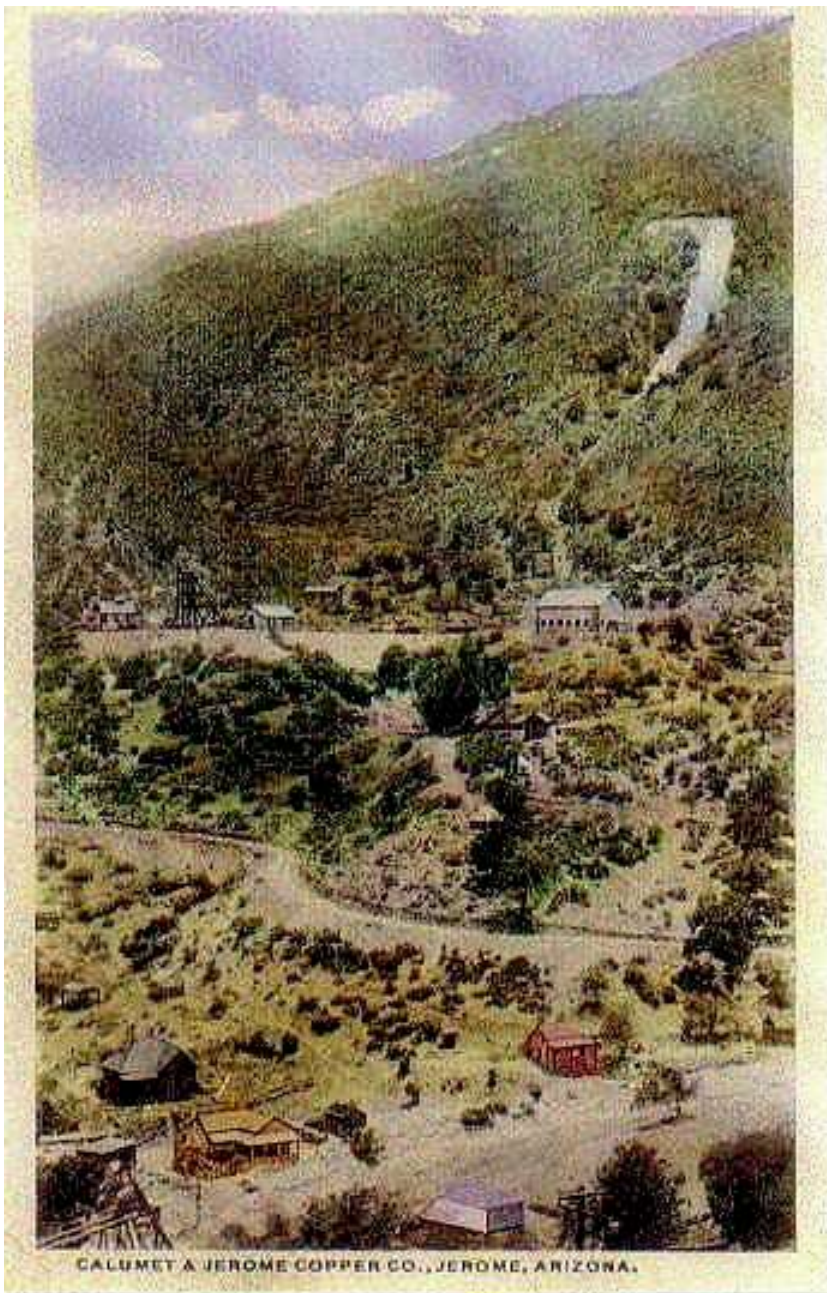


# Into the Calumet and Jerome

by Dave Thorpe

The view seen on this postcard is almost exactly the way Steve Smith and I saw it on February 13, 2002. We stood on the balcony of Blue Boelter's rural home in Jerome, Arizona. This was the Calumet and Jerome copper mine.

The meandering dirt road in the lower part of the photo is Allen Springs Rd., which remains a 4WD byway in its journey around and over Mingus Mountain. There are no longer any buildings left, save the foundation of the large one in the center. The tailings seen higher up the ridge are now five times in size. For those who venture into abandoned mines, it is the size of the tailings dump that attracts their interest, for it represents the extent of passage that may be available.



Unmaintained roads in Arizona are vicious on motor vehicles. Our drive up Allen Springs Rd. was done at a creep in low-range, as I imagined lugs of tire tread tearing loose and sidewall lacerations from the sharp serrated rocks. Creosote bushes threatened the truck's body panels with off-roaders' pin-striping. We began on foot at a point on the photo corresponding to the crest of the ridge on the far left.

It would be bushwhacking from here to the top of the tailings pile, and there was not even an animal trail to follow. As everywhere in Arizona, there is no living thing that does not have thorns or claws. Forearms and clothes were soon shredded. It was all uphill, and we were gasping for more air than this mile-high country offered.

At no time could we even catch a glimpse of the workings through the underbrush, but with a lot of luck and Steve's instinct, we emerged exactly on top of the tailings. Our knowledge of this mine was third hand word of mouth that an adit penetrated far into

the mountainside, possibly going all the way through. A raise, or upward shaft from the inside was also mentioned, as well as the possibility of bad air. A partially caved entrance now confronted us.

After a few yards of crawling, the passage opened to a height of 5 feet 10 inches...Steve and I are both just over 6 feet tall. The sound of helmets bashing the ceiling was continuous, as were our comments. The floor was hard packed mud with numerous puddles. There was no track or hardware of any sort. There were numerous panels of sheet metal along the route measuring about 3 by 3 feet, and we still wonder what purpose these served. Also numerous, were wooden pegs in the ceiling that resembled survey markers without the copper tag. An occasional peg had day-glo plastic tape hanging from it with a number written on it. How we wished that even one of these pegs might have its copper tag, for this has recently become a collectible item for some, and even as a souvenir, we would have treasured the find.

Every few hundred feet we found a side passage, but none went more than a hundred feet. before abruptly ending. This was an exploratory adit. After what was estimated to be a quarter mile of tunnel we found the raise. The upward shaft was about 20 degrees off vertical and rose past the point we could see. At the bottom was a sickly pile of wet rotten timbering that had come crashing down years ago. The shaft walls were slick wet and impossible to climb. Still, not an artifact other than shattered wood and sheet metal. Now and again we would comment about the air seeming heavy, ever mindful that a rising heart-rate would mean an immediate retreat. This is the first sign of carbon dioxide, though carbon monoxide strikes without warning. The possibility of bad air was playing scary games with our minds.

We continued on and soon began to see carbon signatures on the walls, maybe a dozen or so, each with a dates ranging from 1926 to 1928. One family name occurred with some frequency: Rabano. Finally, our tunnel just ended. There was no cave in, the work had simply stopped. We headed back, and still had not learned how to avoid head bashing on the ceiling. One particular impact between Steve and the rock caused a snap in his neck that I could hear from ten feet ahead. He stopped to curse and examine the offending rock. There it was: another wooden peg. As if by providence, this one had a copper disc nailed to its end. We had found a survey marker! Though we checked all remaining pegs even more carefully, not another turned up.

There is a strange feeling when emerging from a cave or mine, especially one where there have been certain unknowns and fears. It is sort of a quiet but joyous celebration of just being out. The sunlight and the colors it illuminates are ever so sweeter. Just the open feeling of the atmosphere is exhilarating. Add this to the view we had ignored on our climb up the mountain: the Verde Valley with Sedona's red rock cliffs in the background. We took a few pictures.

There were two options for the descent. A Nantucket sleigh ride down the tailings pile, which Steve opted for, or a reverse of the gauntlet of brambles. I took the latter, and we met back at the truck. We compared our survey marker to two others known in the Jerome area, and thought ourselves pretty dandy for joining this elite club.

Note: Postcard photo, compliments of Blue Boelter.