

# The Plomosa Range

*by Dave Thorpe*

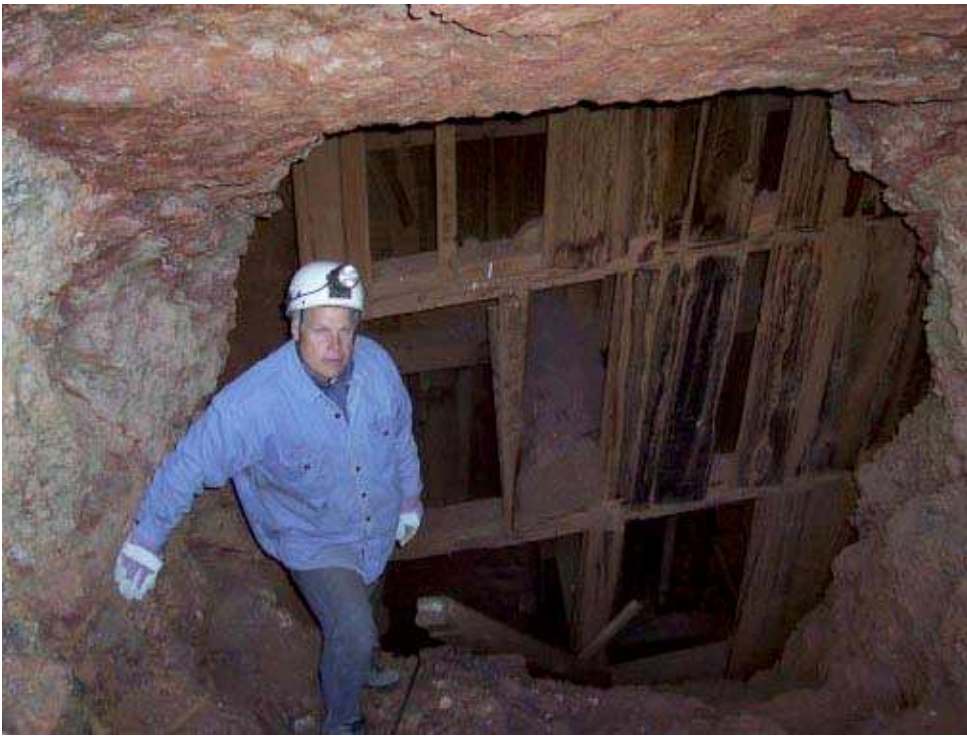
The Sonoran desert in Arizona is a flatland interrupted by small jutting mountain ranges. Some have names like Eagle Tail, Battleship, and Camelback to describe the way they project up with such drama. From the distance of an interstate highway the ranges look remarkably similar to one another. Yet these islands, to which they are compared, have their own isolated ecosystems, thier own individual characters, and thier own abandoned mines. They represent areas where the earth's mineral crust has broken free of its recumbent position and exposed its strata for man to view and to mine. In Arizona, the Copper State, most of that mining took place in the early 1900's. Its remains provide the trails and the playground for our exploration and collecting.

Quartzsite, Arizona is a town of motorhomes. Thousands upon thousands park their rigs here for the winter, some in designated sites within the township proper, others scattered over a radius of twenty miles along makeshift clearings in the desert brush. North of Quartzsite is the expansive La Rosa Plain, stretching some thirty miles to the first island range: the Plomosa Mountains. Even an occasional motorhome can be found in the foothills, but none venture to the heart of this defunct mining district. For this, an ATV is almost required equipment.

On January 18, Roger Becksted, Bob Schroth and I brought our quads to the Plomosas. Modern ATVs are a wonder of engineering. They have full independent suspension, automatic transmissions, and push-button 4WD selection. While 2WD is best for cruising the flat stretches at speeds approaching 60 mph, 4WD is mandatory for the steep and crumbly climbs.

**Roger Becksted stands between an old mine foundation and his ATV, a Polaris 500 H.O. Bob Schroth's Yamaha Grizzly 660 is the blue one. Both are full auto-transmission with independent rear suspension that provides increased ground clearance and extreme comfort.**





Although adits generally outnumber shafts in most areas, the Plomosas offer a number of shafts that we had previously identified on topo maps. The shafts are our only hope of finding an artifact, as every drift and incline has been pillaged long ago by those whose memories remain as empty cans of Mountain Dew and Budweiser. On the day before this journey we had explored shafts in the nearby Bouse area with dismal

results. In these photos, Roger and Bob rig and descend a 200-footer near the Little Butte Mine.



Fortunately for us, we discovered collared shafts within a mile of our journey at the Mudersbach Mine. Here is a view down one of them that we left for another trip.



After identifying two shafts, we used a GPS to direct us to the the next mine, known as the Tough Nut shafts. The two remaining shafts here are actually located next to a dry gully. They are wood collared shafts, but there was evidence that they regularly took water. Roger rappelled 150 feet into one, then down an incline another 100 feet until it was choked with debris. He brought up only a box end that that was stamped: Hercules Powder Co., Hercules California. On the other side was hand written message: "Come down for lunch".

The photo below demonstrates a new technique we have used to check relatively short drops, or to evaluate the first 50 feet of a larger drop. The biggest problem in checking a shaft is changing over from rappelling gear to ascending gear while hanging on rope. Many times it becomes obvious to the rappeller that he must come back up after dropping in only a few feet. We now use a cable winch attached directly to the seat harness. There is a back-

up safety belay rope just in case there is a mechanical problem. The climber can go up or down without ever touching a rappel rack or an ascender. Bob Schroth is checking this 150-footer. After 25 feet the timber was wet, rotting, and collapsing. This is a bad thing....so back up he came...three minutes total time.



Our final destination was to the Southern Cross Mine, deep in the heart of the Plomosas. It sits at the base of Ibx Peak. This mine was known as Lead Camp in 1911, and the expanse of this operation suggested major workngs. A 1/4 mile square area was littered with foundations, stone walls and even the remains of an old stacked stone house. There were at least four good shafts here.

It is incredible how much energy is expended ascending a 200+ foot mine shaft. While some of it is pure nerves, you are parched with thirst after the climb and often shaking with hypoglycemia. Roger experienced both after coming back up this shaft. Seen here, he is on rappel down a short incline that intersects with a shaft in the background.



As much as we have become dependent on ATVs to take us to remote locations, so have we opened many doors with the use of GPS devices. These can be integrated with a laptop computer to give a precise visual on a topo map as to where you are and where you need to be. We use the Garmin eMap as a GPS, and topo programs by MapSource and National Geographic. Below, Dave Thorpe plots the course from the back of a pick-up. Inside the truck is his ATV, a Honda Rincon.

With the data uploaded back into the laptop, and overview of the day's activity can be seen on the folowing page.



Below is the map generated from the trip. You can see the Mudersbach, the Tough Nut, and the Southern Cross Mines...all shafts have been identified and wait future exploration.

