

# The Copper Queen Mine Warren Mining District, Bisbee, Arizona

by Steve Eady

The story of the Copper Queen Mine of Bisbee, Arizona started in 1877 when an Indian tracker named Jack Dunn was leading Lt. Anthony Ricker and a group from the cavalry on a search for Indian marauders. They camped in a canyon of the Mule Mountains where they found a spring. The water turned out to be bad, so Dunn went looking for another spring. After finding one, he began working his way back to the group when he found some pieces of malachite (copper ore) which had washed into the canyon. Copper did not interest him, but his trained eye detected the presence of silver. Later, he and Rucker located the first claim in what was to become Bisbee some years later. Dunn was too busy to work his claim, so he grubstaked a prospector named George Warren to do the job for him. Warren eventually went to the area and found rich outcrops of copper and the possible presence of silver. He filed eleven more claims, but none in Dunn's name. Now that claims were filed, the occasional prospector came into the canyon. Two of these prospectors "jumped" the Halcro claim which Warren had located and in 1878 they changed the name to the Copper Queen since more copper was present than silver. The Copper Queen claim changed hands several times before 1880. It was finally bought by a San Francisco group, Bisbee, Williams and Company which formed the Copper Queen Mining Company and began to produce copper. While others were competing for the Copper Queen, George Warren, the original locator, was living a lazy life in the valley, sleeping and drinking. Through a roundabout fashion, he had reacquired a ninth interest in the "Queen." On one Fourth of July, when his patriotism had been augmented by alcohol, he bet a friend that he could run to a post some hundred yards away and return faster than the other man could cover the distance on a horse. Both finding themselves short of cash, Warren staked his interest in the "Copper Queen" against his friend's horse. Amid wild cheering from the spectators, Warren led around the post, but the horse slowly gained and passed him on the home stretch. The ultimate value of Warren's staked was to be estimated at \$20,000,000. Pity was taken on Warren and with a small pension from the mining company, he spent the rest of his life sweeping saloon floors and cleaning cuspidors. He died about 1895 and was soon forgotten. Today we remember him because the entire mining district has been named for him, the Warren Mining District.

In 1881, Dr. James Douglas, a mining engineer, came to town to investigate the areas. He later returned on hire with Phelps Dodge & Co. of New York to acquire the Atlanta claim immediately adjacent to the Copper Queen. He did so and when the title cleared in 1883, mining began. After 2 years of looking for ore, Phelps Dodge finally struck a huge ore body of malachite (25% copper). During that same 2 years, the ore on the Copper Queen had dwindled and finally disappeared, after producing 90,000 tons and paying dividends of \$1.25 million in a four year period. At almost the same time as the Phelps Dodge discovery on the Atlanta, the Copper Queen found the same ore body. They were, however, now on the Atlanta claim. With the prospect of litigation over apex laws and the debt of ore mined by the Copper Queen on the Atlanta claim, negotiations were begun to combine the two companies. In 1885, a new company, the Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Co., was formed and consolidated the Copper Queen Co. claims and the Phelps Dodge claims.

Many other mining companies came and went during the 100 years of mining in Bisbee. Phelps Dodge eventually bought them all. Almost 2000 miles of tunnels were driven. Over 7 billion pounds of copper, 355 million pounds of zinc, 324 million pounds of lead, 3 million ounces of gold, 100 million ounces of silver, and 11 million pounds of manganese were produced from the district. Mining from the open pit was intermittent from 1920 to 1974. Underground copper mining went on continually until 1975. Contract gold mining continued until 1985. When the underground mining stopped, it was not for a lack of ore. The high price of labor associated with antique mining methods which rendered the mines uneconomical. Much ore remains to be mined and much more to be found in Bisbee, the queen of the copper camps.

See the article titled "Mine Bell Signs" by Ted Bobrink in MAC issue number 5, Fall 1989 for a description of a private tour of one of the Bisbee mines.