

SKIDOO: A DEATH VALLEY GHOST TOWN

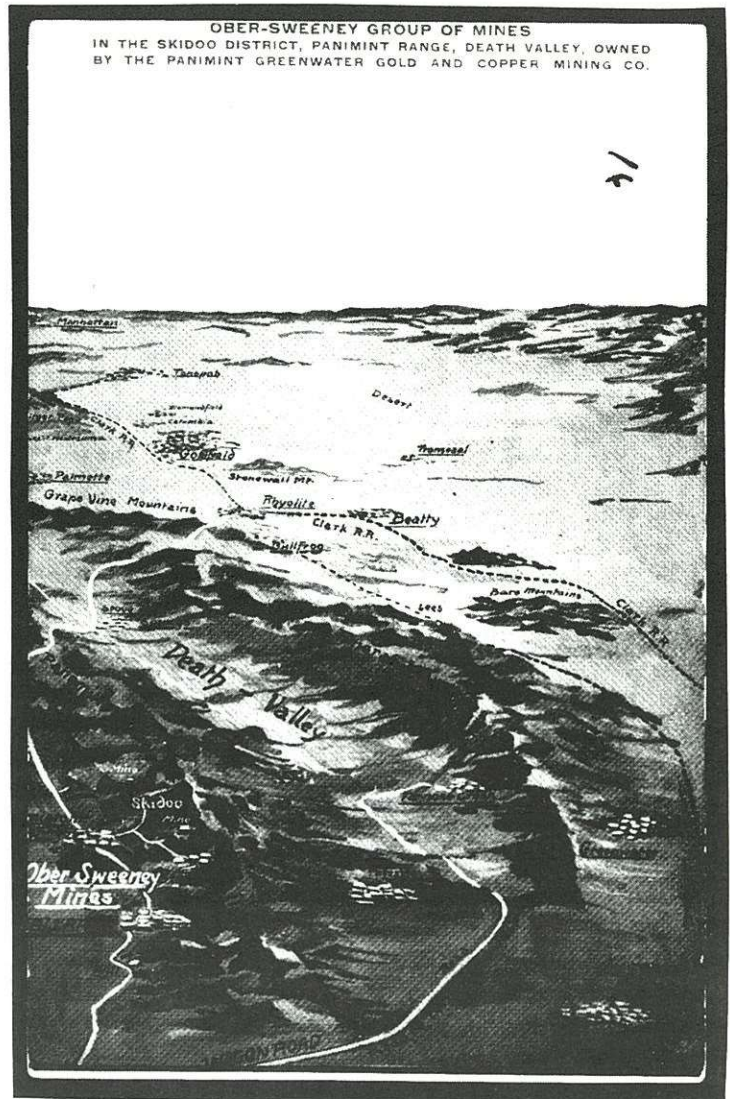
by **Bob Schroth**
Twin Peaks, California

It was a very cold and windy February in 1977, the first time I visited Skidoo. This mining camp was not really that significant in its mineral production, but the history of the miners and their curious ways made it a place that I wanted to visit. No one is sure how the town got its name, and there are several versions of the story. One is that the town was named after the twenty-three mile pipe line that was laid all the way from Telescope Peak. The popular slang expression of the day was "23 skidoo!" Skidoo meant to scam or vamoose, to go away or leave.

Skidoo is located 5600 feet up in the Panamint Mountains in Death Valley National Monument, California. In January, 1906, on route to the new strike at Harrisburg, "One Eye" Thompson and Harry Ramsey got lost in a fog bank and somehow discovered a rich gold ledge. This was subsequently purchased by Bob Montgomery, a Nevada mining tycoon, for \$600,000. News of this new discovery sparked a mild stampede and resulted in the founding of the boom camp of Skidoo. The town, at its peak, had over 500 people, a bank, real estate offices, two stores, a newspaper--The News--five saloons, two barber shops, assay office, restaurants, pool hall, etc. Water was sold to the inhabitants for ten cents a gallon, and mesquite wood sold for fifty-five dollars a cord. The output of the Skidoo mill averaged about \$15,000 a month until 1916, when it was closed due to some legal problems.

Skidoo's most famous incident was the lynching of a drunken saloon keeper named Joe "Hooch" Simpson. The headline in Skidoo's newspaper read: "MURDER IN CAMP. Murderer lynched with general approval. Joe Simpson shoots Jim Arnold and is hanged by citizens."

That hanging on the night of April 3, 1908, made Skidoo the most advertised mining camp in the West. Twenty-four hours after Simpson had been interred on Boot Hill, a Los Angeles Herald reporter arrived in town. He had come all the way from Lone Pine in a livery



A prospectus post card for Skidoo. (Ted Bobrink collection)

rig to get the story of the hanging. The folks of Skidoo were right proud of such notice and set out to show their appreciation. They disinterred poor Simpson's corpse and hanged him a second time just so the reporter could take a picture.

There's not much left of old Skidoo today. When the ore ran out, so did the need to stay. The twenty-three miles of pipe was dismantled and hauled off for scrap during World War I. Anything useful was hauled away to other camps.

Remember, if it were not for underground mine explorers, you would not have mining artifacts!

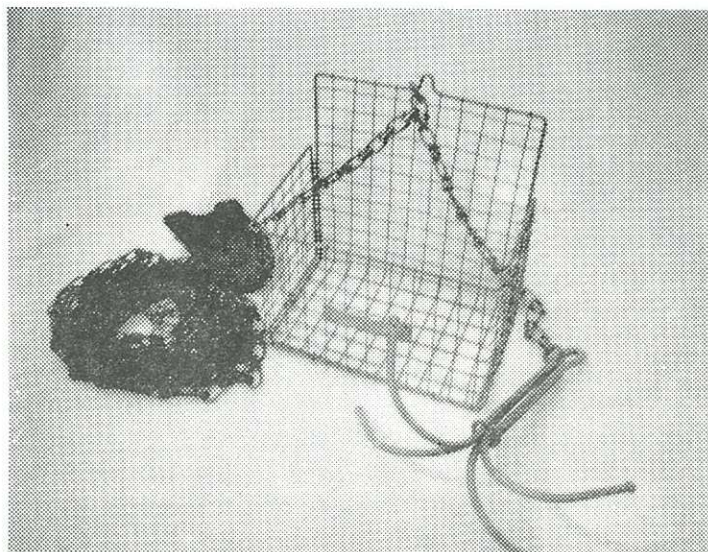
I recently returned to Skidoo and was saddened by the sorry shape the old stamp mill was in. This was the only standing building left. Also, all of the mines in the area have been covered by a steel net to keep explorers out. This has been done in just the last few years by the Park Service. I don't blame the Park Service because they are liable for anyone getting hurt--usually always those without the proper equipment and inexperienced in mine exploration. Most all of the mines in the National Park system are now getting closed, netted or gated. Most of these mines have had heavy traffic anyway, so there is not much in the way of mining artifacts left to find.

I still enjoy the adventure of going out and finding these old camps and seeing where and how the miners of old lived. All of these camps had some unique history and tales in their short lives, and these old towns and camps are vanishing very fast. I hope to video tape what is left of all the ghost towns and mines that I explore in the future so I will have some visual record of what is left. Many mines, like their towns, have their own unique history. In video taping these mines, I hope to record the mining techniques--such as timbering, drilling and hauling methods--the tools and equipment used, and their inner, underground beauty.

UNION SANITARY CLOTHES HANGERS

by **Jim Steinberg**
Pasadena, California

If you have ever seen a photograph of a miners' changing room, you may have noticed a forest of clothing suspended from the ceiling high above. These are the miners' clothes hangers in use.



The hanger that is shown in the photo--and advertised on the front cover--measures 8 1/2 inches tall at the back with a small loop at the top where the hanger is suspended from a chain. The front and sides of the hanger measure 5 1/2 inches high (the depth of the basket), 8 inches from side to side, and is 5 1/4 inches from front to rear.

The basket has a 19 1/2 foot chain. Attached to one end of the chain is a four-pronged hook made of 1/4 inch rod with 3/8 inch round knobs on the end of each prong. The hook assembly is held together by a steel ring towards the base of the hooks. The top of the basket is attached to a link in the chain about a foot above the hooks.

At left is a photograph of the Union Sanitary Clothes Hanger from the James H. Shannon Manufacturing Company that is illustrated in the ad on the front cover of this issue of the MAC. (Author's collection)