

If you don't liking reading about the rantings and ravings of
an underground collecting trip,

SCRAM!

by Tony Poducek

"I love the smell of rotting sulfides in the morning"...plagiarized/bastardized from Robert Duvall in *Apocalypse Now*...thought you all would like to hear a story of my latest quest for underground glory. Being a rather infrequent contributor to the group, sadly lacking in scruples, and BBs for balls compared to the mondo cajones of Senor Bullbrink, er, uh...Bobrink, let me cut to the chase...it's a long one, so pour yourself a jolt and sit back...

Sheepboy2 (that's me) and my pard got wind of a mine closed about a year ago down near Cananea, Mexico. The mine has been known to a number of mineral collectors for the potential to produce truly great pyrite and chalcopyrite specimens (pyrite cubes to 55 lbs—no caca)were it not for the uneducated collecting abilities of the miners. Opportunity arose in the form of a former Mexican miner from the mine who would serve as liason and guide to arrange access into the underground in exchange for \$100 US and a couple of cans of sardines for the local rancher. That's right—little smelly fish in a can. So we headed out Saturday, passing through the mining artifact barrens of Huachuca City, noting that Mr. Sears had indeed plucked any artifacts from the uninformed grasps of several store owners and left rotting deer hides blown full of holes all over hell's little half acre.

The ride was uneventful except for the constant noise level of my pard who suffers from Turret's Syndrome, a malady that manifests itself in the afflicted party, by a constant barrage of grunts, squeals and throat-clearing audibles similar to some low-life wenches I've associated with in the past.

We arrived in Cananea, found our guide and his two pards, one barely standing after inhaling the better part of a barrel of tequila. Since we had to wait until darkness for our covert insertion into the mine, we needed to kill some time. Noting that the miners in Cananea had been out of work since November 16, a trip to the bar was out of the question...we sure as hell didn't want to turn into the entertainment for a bunch of unemployed miners (Badges? Badges?? We don' need no steenking badges...). Our guide said there was a museum with relics and stuff, so we went there. For a couple of pesos, it was worth the effort. The coin collectors would probably really like it...there was a whole case full of Mexican coins, including silver reales, silver pesos, etc., dating back into the 1800s. Pretty cool, what about rocks and mining artifacts? The rocks ginned up some very low level stirrings in my groin...maybe a twitch and a dribble. Then I saw some medical tools that looked like what Cap Tin trims his nose hair with and a couple of instruments similar to calf pullers (hell, in sheep country, we just used a piggin' string to pull 'em). Finally, I found the mining stuff scattered around, including some mannequins dressed up to look like Mexican miners, with beards blackened by a piss-poor hand with a magic marker. There was a couple of oil wicks (gettin' outa my territory here), such as a George Anton Monongahela (labeled), Justrites and an apparently common candlestick or two—nothing noteworthy. Conditions of stuff in the cases are generally average to below average...in Mexico, stuff gets USED big time until it won't use no more.

The museum was selling some little miniature copper pots, etc. that were as cute as Keith Williams "gimme your million for it" smile. Well, no sooner was I ready for chips and a bowl of salsa served by a comely Mexican lass, than it was time to saddle up for our trip into the bowels of hell with my bud.

My pard and I arrived at the simple and smelly adobe on the ranch near the mine...the little dab of mud and cardboard affectionately known as "the hacienda" to our guide's amigos. Dogs wandering around in the half light/half darkness looked more than just a little like Ed Sullivan's mug with a tail, some bones, and four legs. We grabbed our packs and slapped on the Wheats and adjusted the beam. Luis made a s-s-s-s-t sound and told us to "douse the lights, my friendly American friends" (is that really what pince' cabron means?). I dumped out the 2 tons of chisels, pry bars and chow I pack around and minimized the load in my backpack.

After a seemingly endless time of torture in el hacienda magnifico, with a fire going and El Watchman-o smoking 40 cigs or so, I hoisted my black lung-ridden body out of there when Luis ghosted back down the hill. He said all clear, and we vanished into the dark gray voids between the black shapeless pinons. I made a mental note to walk right up the south side of Luis to avoid the occasional cholla cactus...somewhere in the back of me, I could here Pard gakkinn' and makin' muffled little noises similar to a yak in heat.

Up ahead lay the dark maw of the mine, a giant opening made to take LHDs (load-haul-dump rubber-tired vehicles)and expanded by a near lack of control in mining technique. It was a 12' by 20' opening with a mondo gate attached mostly constructed out of rail track, or at least it seemed so. The inability of the miners to hold a round in the ground tells the story of its lack of stability. The best part of the orebody was lost to a severe cave-in a couple of years ago, in which the levels (only separated by 4 meters of quartz monzonite , kiddos) collapsed like Dolly Parton's Ta-Tas when she removes her bra...the miners had to drive around the cave-in and the operation never fully recovered. Levels 5 through 10 or more were gone forever. Luckily, it happened on a Sunday morning with no one on shift and no injuries, if my pea brain serves me correctly...and so we went...

The decline was cold and the jacket I almost left in the truck felt good. We trucked down and down the spiraling decline on our own power, realizing whatever we brought down was coming back up the hard way—on our backs...saw the tremendous bulkheads and support near the collapsed area—steel I-beams, concrete and massive breastworks of wood and shotcrete. Turning warmer, or is it nerves...hell with it...I broke wind to give acknowledgement to the fact that I had wiped out a couple of cokes, a Tecate with limon' and a bag of Mexican rancho chips, not to mention the double whopper devoured earlier in the US.

We figured we would hit the bottom which Luis thought should be the target for crystal pockets, and then we would work our way back out of the decline. Just short of level 18 we drew up abruptly at the edge of a growing lake of water. Well, duh, ya knothed, where did you think all that water flowing down the decline was going?? Shit, the first target was screwed, so we turned around to begin checking the ribs and any stopes we could scare up on the way out. Not too far up the decline, we found a drive off the main and checked it out...some quartz crystals with the fuzzy black tourmaline attached in the muck. Pard saw a black hole going down that we later regretted not checking out—could it have something to do with the loose granitic slab hanging over the hole and the black pond of water laying at the base of a 60-plus

degree slope of muck? Nah....I scrambled up 40 feet of ladders and hit a scam level that led over to a mondo areal with up to 40-foot backs. Quartz and massive sulfides in the ribs with little copper—mostly pyrite. Molybdenite and with the aid of a black light...the tell tale glow of scheelite chunks.

We spent the next while fartin' around in the stope, collecting some material, although the danger was there with the unstabilized ribs and back leaving tails of waste sloughing off everywhere. Pard ripped me a new one for starting to work an area that had a widowmaker hanging about 10 feet over my head. Mumbling my heartfelt thanks to Scroteface for ruining my good time by keepin' me alive, I went elsewhere with my pride bleedin' all over the place.

After about 2 hours, I came back with some collected goods to note that our paid companeros were gainfully sleeping ...what an energetic bunch of swines, although Luis was working over in a hollowed out area in an effort to come up with enough stuff to have us come back with another \$200...where was Pard, the Man of a Thousand Noises? Rounding a corner of the stope, I found him digging away with a nice pile of quartz and the fuzzballs...something familiar about this place..."Hey, most exulted collecting buddy (shitweed), you are working under that nasty widowmaker you warned me about earlier (you got caca for brains, Culo?)..." Pard looked up and went a couple of shades of white...the crack had opened with his sledge hammer pounding, but it had held. He mumbled abject nothings to me as I had done to him, and I knew he had totally become consumed by the hunt and truly forgot the location of the overhang—hell, I've been there before, too. It was about 2:00 a.m. and time to ! check some more works on the way out.

We ran a couple of dry headings on the way back out of the decline. Not much was showing on the faces, although the amount of copper stain dripping from the ribs increased...right up to the cave-in area. Wouldn't ya know it—things looking real good and then the collapsed area...Pard and I noticed our Mexican companeros had vamoosed up the decline out of sight...just like cows heading home with a snootful of home smell in their snot horns. We finally caught up to them at one of the upper stations; real cold now because we're up near the top of the decline again. Pard quizzed Luis on how to access any areas around the massive cave-in. Yes, there was one way...after the cave-in, the miners drove around the cave-in and accessed some areas down around level 5, where the great chalcopyrite crystals came from the stopes. It was just up ahead and backfilled, so the back was actually only 3 feet or less above the backfill. Did you ever duckwalk or crawl for a LONG way? Loads! of fun, I'm here to tell you...well, up the muck heap and over...

The heat was oppressive less than 5 feet from the freezing decline! No air circulated in the small space between the fill and the back; in combination with rotting sulfides and timbers, the situation was dicey at best. "Luis, how far does this continue??" I swear, for every 10 feet of crawling, the temperature shot up another 5 or 10 degrees, until I figured the temperature hovered around 130 degrees or so...it sure felt like the stopes in the Magma mine near Superior, Arizona, where stope temperatures pushed 140 degrees prior to getting refrigerated air vented into 'em. We stopped to recon the situation...Luis figured several hundred feet of this and then voila! Access into the rather small 5 Level...Pard said the back was bothering him and what did I think? I took the opportunity to clearly verbalize my thoughts; "Nuf of this shithole, pard...it's deep enough." I told him that the back was shakey enough let alone my worst fear—carbon monoxide. We had all the ingre! dients for the odorless killer and nothing

to monitor the atmosphere. Pard reluctantly agreed. Luis had visions of greenbacks in his sorry eyeballs and thoughts of a big lard-soaked bean burrito at el grande hacienda on his mind, I could tell. Bumming big time, we reversed our crawl back towards the direction of the main decline.

We had to be out of the mine before daylight; otherwise we would have to stay down until it got dark Sunday night. Pard and I figured that we killed the better part of the mine (and the night) in our search for crystal pockets and we had satisfied our curiosity that the big strike wasn't hanging wide open for some dumb-luck sledge pounder to discover.

We ghosted back through the pinons and headed to el grande hacienda surrounded by the half-starved Ed Sullivan dogs. I noted that puddles of water that lay at the entrance of the mine were now frozen. We entered the little room and noticed one of our companeros had amazingly transformed himself into a pariah of energy, busily opening up a can of refried beans, stoking up the stove, slathering a big wad of lard into an awaiting fry pan while pouring hot steaming coffee from a blackened pot. While my pard and I would have rather been on the road for Arizona, we patiently waited for the very lively companeros to stuff their faces with burritos, coffee and inhale a carton of cigarettes. Finally, the momentous occasion came when one companero cranked out an adobe-splitting fart and announced that it was time to vamoose. And we promptly did, thus ending our enchanting mining excursion south of the border.



Spoon handle, (Dave Johnson collection)