

Mine Bell Signs

by Ted Bobrink

It was a cold day in February 1987, as I was about to take my first trip down the 3350 foot Junction Shaft, the deepest mine in Bisbee, Arizona. My good friend Steve Eady, in charge of exploration and development for Phelps Dodge in Bisbee, asked me if I would like to see the pumping station on the 2000 foot level of the Junction Mine. Not being one to turn down a chance of a lifetime, of course I said I would go.

With our hard hat lights and belt mounted battery packs, plus a self-contained respirator, we stepped on to a very open elevator cage. Directly in front of us was a beautiful blue and white porcelain Arizona mine bell sign. Steve reached out and pulled the bell chain three times with a pause then twice followed by six times, then twice again. This told the hoist engineer to lower men slowly, and stop at the 2000 foot level. They should change the word "slowly," for that was like no elevator ride I have ever encountered.

All the way down, the only light was from our hats. Suddenly, a flash of light went by and Steve said that was the 1200 foot level, then again at the 1500 foot level. We were going down so fast, I couldn't make out what I was seeing as each level went by. The levels are 100 feet apart and it didn't take long to go from one to another. Finally the cage started to slow and we came to a stop. The station area was very well lit, and hanging in front of us was another bell sign just like the one at the surface. Hanging next to the bell sign was another sign that read "2000 level for cage ring 6-2."

Steve then showed me the massive pumps that kept all the mines in Bisbee dry, and after a good look, we went over to the call bell and rang for the cage to take us to another level. In a few minutes, the cage came down and we got on. After Steve gave the proper signals, we went up to the 1700 foot level. Getting off on this station was a thrill as not only was there another nice bell sign to look at, but this being a working level, there were about six or eight side dump ore cars full of ore ready to go to the surface.

After viewing the mining operations, drilling rigs, and mucking machines, it was time to head for the surface. After giving the proper signals, the cage appeared and we went up nearly a half-mile to the surface thus ending my first experience with mine bell signs and the actual use of the signals.

The Arizona mine bell sign illustrated here was manufactured by J. W. Stonehouse of Denver, Colorado [see MAC, Issue 4, Summer 1989], and is 18" by 36". The sign is porcelain with white lettering on a royal blue background. The signs I saw in the Junction Mine were also by Stonehouse, but were 46" long as they had signals down to the 3900 foot level. I have also seen this sign done on white cloth with black lettering and the word "Arizona" in red; a very attractive sign.

