

REVIEW OF MINING



Editors note: The following is a guest editorial from Lanny Ream, editor of the 'Mineral News', July 1996. The subject of mine closure is a controversial one and I think Lanny's comments and insights will give us all cause to reflect on yet another government adventure.

GOVERNMENT MINE CLOSURE PROGRAM—ANOTHER BLOW TO SCIENCE AND MINERAL COLLECTING

Over the last couple years there have been various reports of the U.S. and state governments' plans to close mines for safety and environmental reasons. Unfortunately, this program is ongoing and is proving to be another big blow to science, and of course to our favorite hobby. Both the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have developed a program. One of leading reasons is safety, another step by our ever growing big government to make the world safe for people who don't think they have to be responsible for themselves. Another reason is environmental; and there are some significant problems here with acid mine drainage and metals leaching into the ground and surface water.

It bothers me that there is no consideration given to science and to mineral collectors or rockhounds. Everyone else seems to have rights, hunters, berry pickers, skiers, bikers and all others, but not us collectors. Yes, it's unfortunate when someone ventures into an abandoned mine and has serious accident or is killed. But why close all mines because of this? Getting national statistics is difficult, but the hazard is quite low. How many have been killed fishing? Many times that in abandoned mines. How many have been killed hunting? Many times that. And the same for skiing, swimming, hiking and climbing, yet I don't see any national push to stop those activities for safety purposes.

The Forest Service program is not fully funded, which is probably the only reason we have any old mines to study or collect in at all. The BLM program is moving slowly too. Some states have funded some major projects and a few important sites have already been lost forever. At this time, the FS program is primarily one of inventorying the mine opening to determine how many and where they are located. From that they will move into a risk assessment based on what can be determined from the surface as to hazards.

Yet, they already are closing some mines. In fact that is what prompted me to write at this time. An article in the local paper-Coeur d'Alene Press-on July 9th covered the closing of some mines in Northern Idaho, in the Clark Fork Mining District, two days later it was reported on the TV news.

Also, Patrick Haynes had sent me a letter (which I received the day before this article) about mine closures in Utah and Colorado. He sent me a copy of an article from the Cortez Sentinel (Colorado) entitled "State to seal abandoned mines around Silverton". The first paragraph reads: "The Colorado Division of Minerals and Geology is beginning reclamation work at more than 250 abandoned mine sites in Colorado, including some in San Juan County. Work will begin this month and continue through the summer and early fall, at an estimated cost of \$588,000."

The article mentions accidents in these mines that caused 17 deaths and 21 serious injuries since 1955. Let's see, for Colorado that's 17 deaths in 41 years which works out to 0.4 deaths per year. Probably about 1\10 th the number from boating or swimming... Perhaps that \$588,000 spent on some other program, such as educating people, or funding a few policeman or taking other actions to reduce violent crimes would save more than 0.4 people per year.

All of us are aware of the many mineralogical discoveries made during those same 41 years by

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A black and white illustration showing a vintage open-top car driving on a dirt road through a rugged, hilly landscape. The car is carrying a large log. In the background, there are trees and a small structure, possibly a mine entrance.

mineral collectors and mineralogists entering those very same mines, by their own choosing. It will be a shame to see such scientific work come to an end in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado.

Haynes also wrote: I recently went to a mine in Utah which I had not visited in about five years. To my dismay, the road was blocked. Some *%#@ had pried down some large boulders from the canyon's sides that the road was located in. So, I hiked into the mine area, only to find the three mine adits blocked by backfilling and some "Do Not Remove" markers from the Utah Department of Natural Resources' Mined Land Reclamation Division stuck into the backfill. Now, I would not have been very irritated except that I had previously found some potential new mineral species in the mine. These critters are now being investigated by mineralogists overseas (Remember those USGS cut-backs last year.)

"In summation: my tax dollars are curtailing the advancement of Geological/Mineralogical knowledge, instead of promoting it. I would rather see an employed Gene Foord, than to see some petty bureaucrats wasting my tax dollars."

Haynes also wrote: "I suggest that people contact their state Department of Resources, or whatever, and find out what is on your local hit list. Our generation may be the last to have the opportunities of making some unusual field discoveries in any quantity. (In the future, we may have to rely on Russia and China for new species.)

He is correct, we need to take steps to help stop this; we don't seem to have any group working on such locality preservation and must do it individually. Unfortunately it looks like we are constantly being forced to notify some bureaucrats of our interests and scientific needs. One problem is the agencies lack of knowledge—they just don't know, and thus don't consider the importance of mineralogy, or even the hobby interest. Thus, we all should determine if our state has a policy to close abandoned mines, and if

so, notify the state agency of the importance of them remaining open to scientific study, and the popularity of mineral collecting and other rockhounding activities. Also you need to notify your local National Forest Supervisor and the Washington DC office. It may also be helpful to notify your Congressman that you don't want to see your tax dollars wasted on this. These closures shouldn't just consider safety and environment, science and recreation are important too, or maybe we don't have rights anymore.

Otherwise, we may all end up being micro collectors—that may be all that's left... just a few mine dumps and road cuts with a few tiny crystals. ✕



Drawing from the Boston Mokelumne Mining Company stock certificate, California — 1930.

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We've had great response from the first issue of the 'Review'. Thanks to all those who have subscribed and hopefully we can enlist even more enthusiasts after this non-complimentary issue is sent out. Please don't loan out this issue-make your friends get their own subscription and your copy will stay in good shape.

One of the best ways to stay up on the world of artifacts and mining history besides the 'Review', is Miningcollect, the collective E-mail network consisting of about 45 members. When you post a message on the network it is received by all the other members who can then reply. It's a great way to distribute information and generate interest with other people. Unfortunately it can sometimes turn into a "lampgasm", my term for an overly detailed and extensive exchange of mining lamp information at the expense of all other things related to mining. Occasionally things get a little exciting when some personal laundry gets aired or some 'good natured' ribbing occurs (flaming a competitor).

Last month there was considerable interest among lamp collectors to develop a top ten list of desirable lamps or at least an idea of what to pay for certain lamps. No consensus was reached but several lists were submitted. One list had as its top ten the following: Standard, Anton round, H. Gall, Snell, Klun, S.E. Simmons, Union Carbide, Red Star, W.D. Roof, and Balco. There was also the usual banter between Larry Click and Dave Johnson whereby they exchanged some interesting barbs and trading information. Unfortunately Larry sets himself up for much 'good natured' ribbing from the wits on miningcollect who won't let him forget things like mule tail lamps. Len Gaska has a chat room-like operation going called IRC. Internet Relay Chat is like a conference call using text instead of voice, you see what the other types in real time. Bob Schroth always has plenty of posts usually trying to sell or trade his lamps or cap tins, and is the unofficial master of enthusiasm. There's always an off-color joke or tale of adventure in his quest for artifacts and to be your only friend in the world. There have been discussions about

identifying rare oilwick lamps, removing lamp bottoms, and all sorts of interesting subjects that you'll have to subscribe to enjoy.



Your editor, beer reviewing the 'Review', at the home office near Wabuska, Nevada

As I sit here thinking of the many things we have done at the 'Review' I can't help but wonder what all these great artifacts would look like if they were reproduced in color. There are stock certificates in all the colors of the rainbow, lithographed paper candle box ends that are works of art, or just any artifact would look better if it were copied by a good color process. Now, I know that if I drank enough beer I might be able to envision their color likeness but it also might be a little blurry. Why not put the money we would have spent on beer into a fund to help finance a color issue, there are several rock and mineral magazines that do this. I propose that the 'Review' establish a fund to finance the publication of a color issue at least once a year, I'll keep you posted at the Review of Mining on how we're doing. Send any contributions or comments to the Collectors' Mining Review and specify that it's for the color issue; as a contributor you will receive a thank-you letter acknowledging your tax-deductible donation and your name will appear in the 'Review' along with others that have contributed.

You will notice that there are a couple of flyers placed in this edition advertising upcoming meetings this spring and summer. These sound like very interesting events and seem to reflect

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the increasing awareness and popularity of mining history and artifacts today. The Tucson event is in conjunction with the mineral show which is an unbelievable gathering of every type of rock, fossil, bead, and mineral enthusiast the world has to offer. The dinner, auction and swap meet sounds like a necessary addition to this carnival of earthly treasures. The Phoenix show will be in April and will be hosted by the Arizona Mining and Mineral Museum. April sounds nice and warm in Phoenix and there will be all sorts of mining displays and mineral specimens for viewing, you might even find H. Mason Coggin waxing poetic. I would fill out the registration form for the Black Hills-Rocky Mountain convention in Frisco, Colorado immediately because I think this will be the most popular of all the gatherings. I used to work in this area as an exploration geologist and can attest to the scenic beauty as well as the thin atmosphere (I wonder if Alma's Only Bar is still there?). I hope everyone will end up attending at least one of these meetings and slap some backs and tell some lies, see you there! ...Lane ✕

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