

# Aritfact Hunting in Arizona *by Dave Thorpe*



*Standing in front of the Grand Pacific, near Superior, AZ. Picket Post Mountain in background. From left: Todd Town, Stephen Nevarez, and Dave Thorpe. Photo by Roger Becksted.*

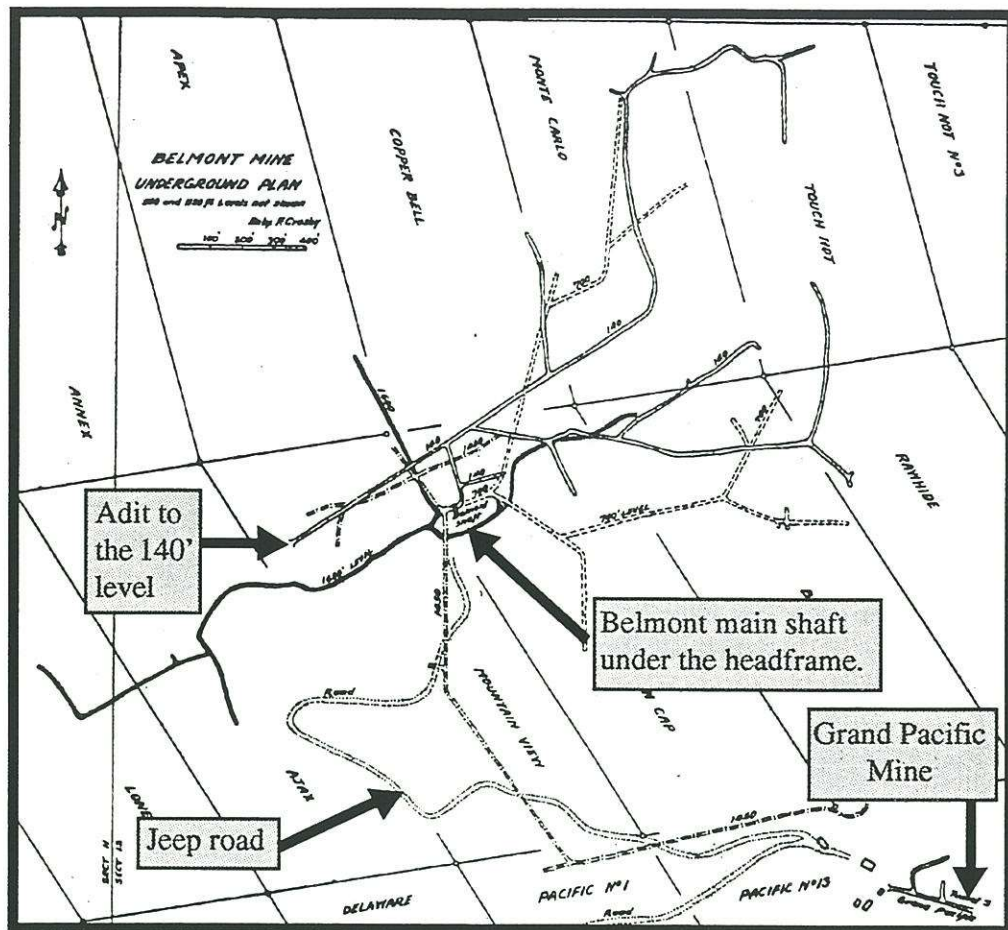
The desert hills in Arizona are loaded with rattlesnakes, and the single most likely place you'll find them is in the entrance of a mine. Fortunately, they do not come out of hibernation until May. With this in mind, Todd Town, Roger Becksted, Bob Schroth, and I made several trips to mine camps near Superior, AZ during April of this year. The area has many defunct mining camps and ghost towns. Most of them are not listed in the tourist books, and finding them is a hit or miss operation of driving up dusty jeep roads. One day while driving a road towards Apache Leap (a cliff named after a band of renegades who jumped to their deaths rather than surrender) I happened upon the sight of a massive steel headframe with two dilapidated buildings nearby. As we would later learn from Andy Martin, this was the Belmont Mine which had seen no activity since the thirties. Next to the headframe was the hoist house with

two huge spools inside. The control levers were still intact and we moved them back and forth. I imagined that this was how a wreck diver would feel. Todd pointed out the worm-screw level marker that indicated the depth the cage would be lowered to. We noticed that the cable was entirely paid out...to the 1600 foot level! Roger would later find a map of the mine showing this to be the ultimate depth. In another building we found hundreds of core samples and crucibles that suggested assaying had been done here. Laying on the ground were five mine cages all of varying ages. The earliest was simply two wooden platforms conected with an eight foot pipe. Others were more sophisticated with heavy metal "saloon" doors. Some had gear-tooth dogs near the roof which were the safety brakes. They were spring loaded so that in case of a cable breakage, they would snap tight against the wooden rails in the mine shaft.

Roger pointed out to us that special wood had to be used for the shaft rails with an extraordinarily straight grain. We examined a section of rail, and he was right!

A steel ladder ran up the headframe, and who could resist the challenge. It seemed stable. The two wheels were a massive eight feet in diameter. Roger spun the one without cable, it must have weighed three tons.

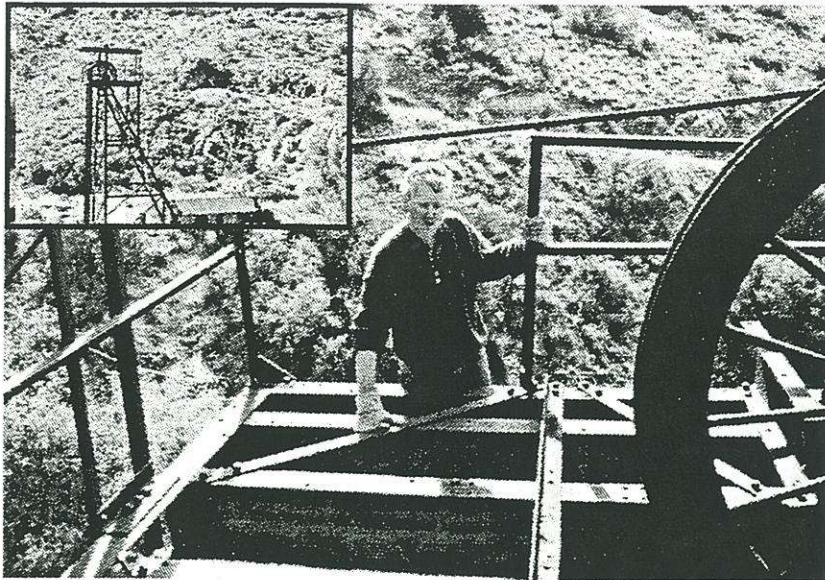
After this trip we did some research of the Belmont Mine. Operations began in 1913 by John C. Greenway, whose fame as a developer/entrepreneur in Arizona is memorialized in a brass bust in the Smithsonian Institution. The mine changed



*Preparing equipment for underground: rapping gear and extension ladder.  
Photo by Roger Becksted.*

hands several times, never producing large quantities of ore. Most operations had ceased by the late twenties, though some activity at the 140' level carried on into the 40's. At its peak in 1925, it extended to a depth of 1600 foot level. An Arizona Bulletin of Mines report in 1943 indicated that it was flooded to the 700' level, and the shaft station at 500' was caved.

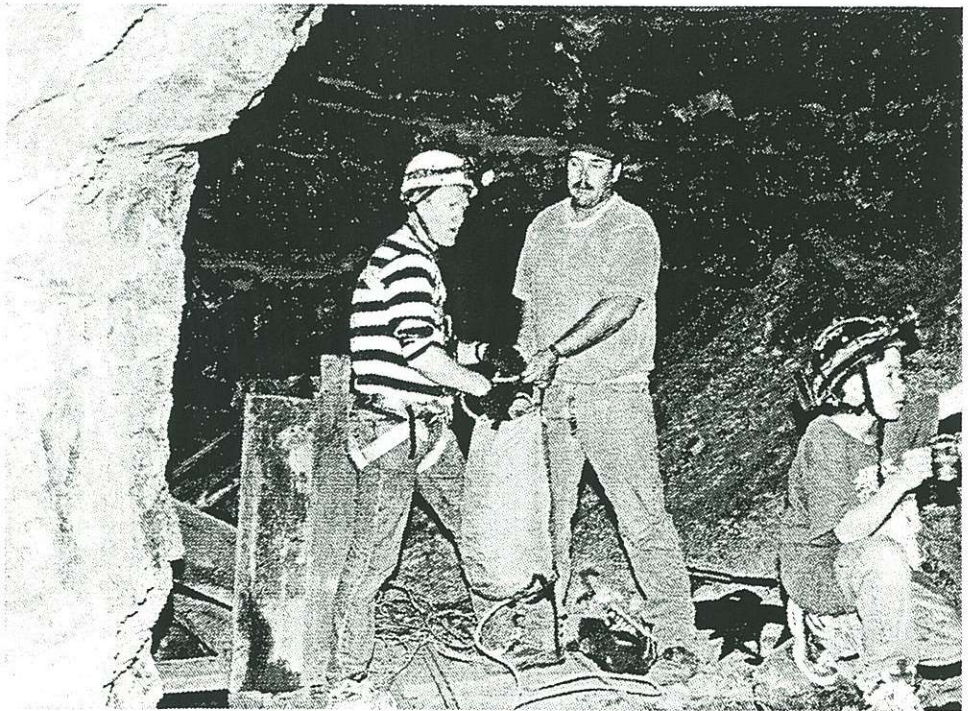
We returned to the Belmont with our hardhats and lights. Down the hillside (actually a large tailings



*Dave Thorpe at the top of the 150-foot headframe of the Belmont Mine. Photo by Roger Becksted.*

dump) we found the entrance to the 140 foot level. This level was the most recently worked section. We squeezed through a small hole that had washed open on the hillside to enter walking passage to find a big steel door, which swung open. Roger's old map, which he found at the Tucson Gem and Mineral show, guided our way. We hiked around for what seemed like over a mile of passage. Occasionally a chute would open to an upper level where things were considerably less stable. We brought in an aluminum extension ladder to access these areas. In other areas, chutes took off downward. I rappelled into two of these and both times they choked out in passage of smaller dimensions.

We located the main shaft that reached up to the headframe. The same lone cable ran down, and penetrated an area fifty feet below blocked with wood debris. From our reading, the next level down (the 500' level) was "caved", and below that, the mine was flooded. There could be no hope of a rapell down this shaft. The tail end of a wooden ladder hung in space some thirty feet



*Dave Thorpe and Todd Town restuff the rope sack after a rapell into a side chute. Stephen Nevarez signs his name with carbide soot. Photo by Roger Becksted.*

above and I felt lucky I had not climbed down from above. Standing there next to the shaft, we realized we were in a room that was filled with heavy pumps and large plumbing.

Later in the day we explored the Grand Pacific Mine, a smaller operation about a quarter mile south of the Belmont. A cool breeze blew throughout this passage leading us to a shaft heading straight up. Shining our lights up, there was a wooden ladder running alongside an ore chute. Etched in carbide soot near the shaft were the words: "Dangerous Climb". We left.

Back on the surface Todd poked around and found a wire candleholder. It was crude, but real. Later, with a metal detector he located a reflector for a Wolf hand lamp buried a foot under the soil.

Disclaimer: The authors and editors note that old mine exploration is dangerous and discourage this activity.