

Wrightwood Roots

A Wrightwood Historical Society Voice

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The Big Horn Mine

Material derived from
Mountain/Hi-Desert Guide, August 1987 by Bobbi Holmes

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Society

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Mine's Location

Perched at some 7,000 feet on the east slope of Mount Baden-Powell, you'll find the Big Horn Mine. Local legend tells us that the mountain man, Charles Tom Vincent, alias Charles Vincent Dougherty, originally discovered the mine, and named it for the big horn sheep he was hunting at the time of the discovery. Yet, another source tells us it was Vincent and another prospector, N.D. Shippy, who originally located and staked the Big Horn, in the fall of 1891.



Mountain Desert Guide

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The Big Horn Mine.

1895 Backing

In 1895 there was great flurry over the Big Horn. During that period an article in the Los Angeles Times stated: "F.V. Layton, until recently general manager of a large Saint Louis syndicate with a paid-up capital at \$3,000,000, operating a large silver mine in Sonora, Mexico, is now manager of the Big Horn Mining Company of this city. It is capitalized for \$2,000,000 and owned by Senator S.M. White, Judge F.M. Ross, L.W. Blinn, J.A. Graves and a few others, all of Los Angeles. He is here gathering good and experienced miners to take up to the Big Horn, as Mr. Layton is doubling the force and pushing the work as fast as possible on the

mine, as well as pushing the construction of a road to the mine. The mine is developed to a depth of 300 feet and has been crosscut in several places for a distance of some 1200 feet in length, showing a body of gold ore of over fifty feet in width between the walls, containing two million tons valued at over \$8,000,000. November 1, 1896, will see a mill of one hundred stamps, capable of crushing 300 tons per day, in full blast on the mine and giving employment to over 250 men, who will all look to Los Angeles for a market. The mill and other machinery will be run by waterpower, as there is over 600 horsepower to be had within one mile of the mine."



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The Big Horn Mine. [1977]

Three Employees

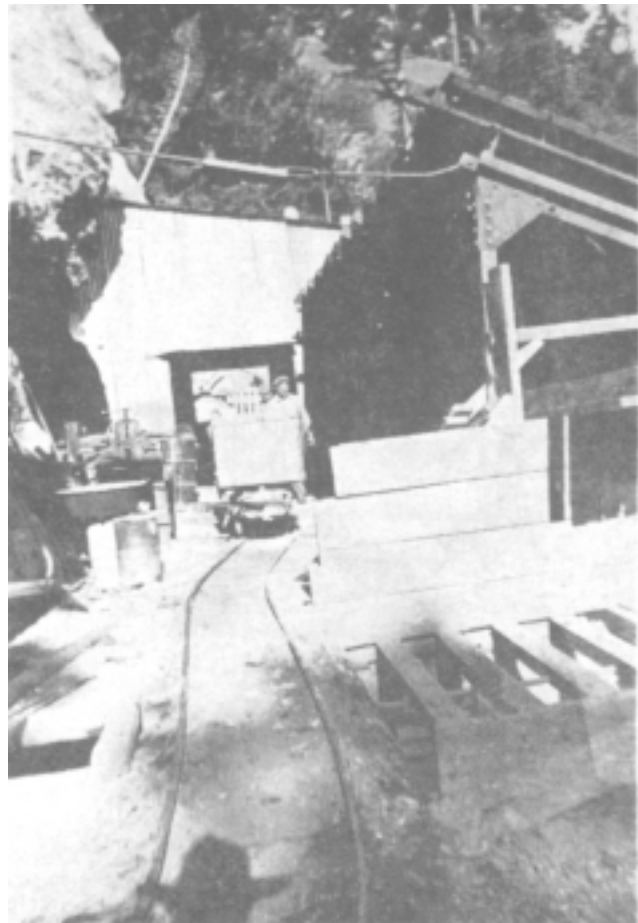
This exaggerated hype lasted a very short time. By the following year only three men were listed as being employed at the Big Horn. They were Vincent, Delaney and J. Lockwood, with Lockwood listed as the mine's owner. According to two sources, since the discovery of the mine, approximately 100,000 dollars worth of gold has been taken from the Big Horn, a far cry from the 8,000,000 dollar estimate.

Little was done at the Big Horn until July of 1901, when Col. F.C. Fenner and his Lowell and California Mining Company, an Arizona corporation purchased the property. They began driving tunnel 5 (tunnel 1 was reportedly dug by Vincent, and tunnels 2, 3 and 4 by the Los Angeles group). They also built a wagon road from the north side of the mountain to the mine.

In the spring of 1902 the lode was cut by tunnel No. 5, with the results justifying bringing in a 2 stamp mill which operated for some 18 months. In 1903 Tunnel No. 6 was driven to intersect the lode, and a 10 stamp mill began operation in June of 1904. The following June the mill burned down, yet it was rebuilt in September and operated for two more years, with tunnels 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 built during this time.

1937 Report

According to a report included in a 1937 issue of the



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Big Horn Mine Ore Cart & Mine Shaft.

California Journal of Mines and Geology, between July 1904 and October 1906, ore mined and treated in the 10-stamp mill was 15,564 tons, from which there was recovered \$39,720.18 or \$2.55 a ton, with a tailings loss of \$0.35 to \$0.70.

During this period a small community was established, which included a general store, post office and telephone service. Freight and communications were apparently through Palmdale.

A 1906 report stated that a 60-stamp mill was to be built, yet by 1907 the property was in litigation and remained idle until 1914.

Mudd & Wiseman

Around 1914 or 1915 a mining engineer, named Seely Mudd, optioned the property through his firm Mudd and Wiseman. A considerable amount of exploration work was performed, including driving



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Mine Shaft at the Big Horn Mine. [1977]

a new tunnel, known today as the Fenner Tunnel. The option was relinquished in 1916.

When F.C Fenner died about a year later, all work ceased at the mine. Although his widow kept the mine in good standing, it remained idle until 1934, when Mrs. Fenner granted a lease to R. Huffman and his Big Horn Mining Company.

A 1934 issue of the California Journal of Mines and Geology reported on the Big Horn, stating: "Big Horn Mine. It consists of 15 claims, two mill sites (patented) situated on North Baldy Mountain (Mount Baden-Powell), 28 miles of Palmdale. Owner Mrs. F.C. Fenner of Los Angeles. Under lease and bond to R.B. Hoffman of Los Angeles.

Vein Description

The vein of quartz is 25 feet wide on contact between gneiss and schist. The strike is N. 40



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Office & Living Building at the Big Horn Mine.

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Big Horn Mine Graffiti. [1977]

degrees E. to N. 60 degrees E., dip 20 degrees NW. Developed by 3 tunnels at different elevations. The intermediate tunnel, 600 feet in length, cuts the vein 400 feet below outcrop. Lower crosscut tunnel is 1450 feet in length. Average value is stated to be \$4 per ton.

Diesel plant, compressor and 50-ton flotation plant have been installed on the property. Twenty-five men are employed."

The Huffman concern was unable to get into continuous production, thus relinquished the property by 1936. Yet, during their time they installed a permanent camp, installed a power line to the property, built a pilot mill in the original mill building, and cleaned out and re-timbered the workings, along with other development work.

1937 -- American Metals Company

By 1937 the property was optioned to American



Dr. R. Hanson Collection foto8415.tif
Big Horn Mine Outbuildings.

Metals Company, Limited of New York, with Vincent M. Burnhart superintendent. American Metals made an exhaustive examination of the mine, including geological mapping, underground surveying, cutting and assaying of 1060 channel samples and diamond drilling of eight short exploratory holes.

1938 -- Security Industrial Corporation

The Big Horn Mine was purchased in 1938 by H.B. Chessher of Reno, Nevada. It was held by his firm, Security Industrial Corporation, and was transferred to an associated company, Siskon Corporation, in November 1966. Other than general maintenance, little was done at the Big Horn during this time. Exploration and sampling was conducted in 1980 and 1981.

1966 -- Siskon Corporation

Siskon Corporation and all its assets was sold to and became a subsidiary of the Hanna Mining Company in April of 1981. Today the Hanna Mining Company is the M.A. Hanna Company, which is publicly traded. Historically, this company, located in Cleveland, Ohio, mined iron ore in the Midwest. With a desire to diversify, they acquired a dozen or so gold and silver mines in the southwest.

1981 -- Hanna Mining Company

The property, which the Big Horn Mine is located on, consists of 276 acres, privately owned by M.A. Hanna Company. During 1984 and 1985 extensive drilling and exploration was performed, yet at the current cost of gold, it was determined it was not feasible to resume mining the Big Horn.

Today the Big Horn rests silently along the rugged face of Mount Baden-Powell. The possibility of the Big Horn Mine coming to life again will probably be determined by the price of gold. Should it ever fulfill its once promise of great riches? We'll leave this question to the fanciful speculations, which continually inspire local legends.

(Photographs, Big Horn Mine, circa 1930's, courtesy of the Wrightwood Museum, from the Prince Collection & Frances Yarnall.

An ore car, from the Big Horn Mine, is at the Wrightwood Museum.)

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