

Truax Mine: Upper Tunnel
Site 5ST1142

The Truax Mine was a substantial operation worked through two tunnels in three episodes. The tunnels, separated by several hundred feet in distance and elevation, were similar in content and scale, and the lower tunnel featured a residential complex. Because the tunnels were distinct operations, they were recorded as separate sites. Both tunnels were driven into the east side of a minor drainage on French Gulch's north side, in the McKay Mining District. The slope is steep and vegetated with an old- and second-growth lodgepole pine forest, and several pack trails provided access to the mine. The tunnels retain archaeological integrity and are contributing elements of French Gulch's historic landscape.

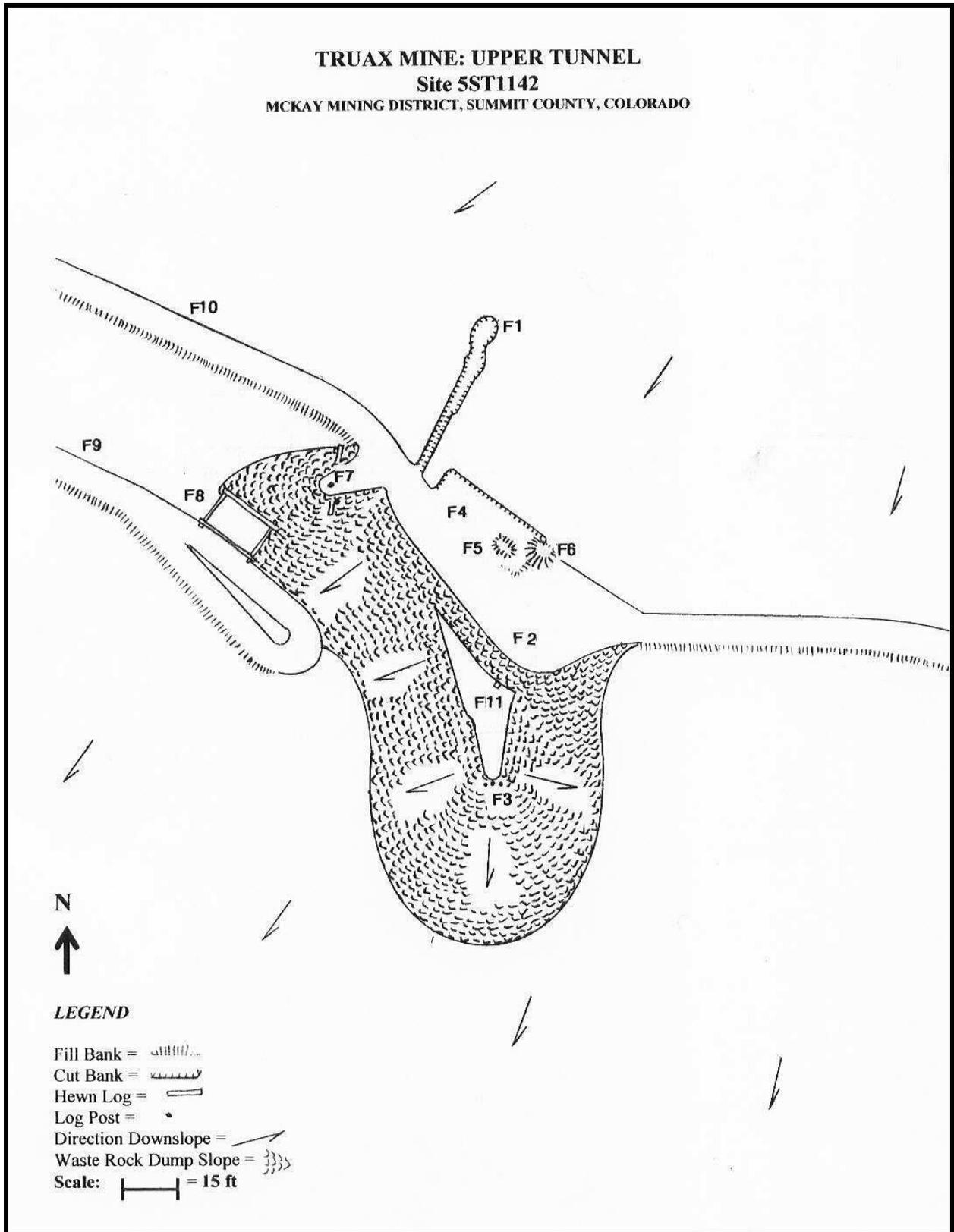


Figure 2.12: Plan view of the Truax Mine's upper tunnel site.

Truax Mine History

Archival sources make little mention of the Truax Mine. The only references indicate that the Truax saw some development, rehabilitation, and production in 1906 and 1907. The fact that the mine was rehabilitated indicates that it had been worked then abandoned at least once prior to 1906.¹

Truax Mine: Upper Tunnel Site Description

The site includes the archaeological remnants of a relatively simple and shallow mine. Like many mines in the Breckenridge area, the tunnel portal collapsed and now manifests as a linear area of subsidence. When miners drove the tunnel, they dumped waste rock at the mouth, at first creating a rectangular deposit (F2) 60 by 120 feet in area and 6 feet thick. As the miners developed the underground workings, they extended a lobe 60 feet to the south. Overall, the dump is currently 110 by 125 feet in area and 9 feet thick, and the miners graded the top-surface flat.

Workers constructed a frame blacksmith shop adjacent to and south of the tunnel. The building is gone but a cut-and-fill platform (F4) currently remains, and its size indicates that the shop was 12 by 32 feet in area. Structural debris and shop refuse is scattered about the platform, and the remnants of two forges lie on the southern portion. The artifact assemblage is typical and reflects several aspects of the mining operation. First, decayed canvas ore sacks indicate that miners directly bagged high-grade ore for shipment, and second, ventilation tubes reflect a blower system that forced fresh air underground.

An ore bin is the surface plant's only other substantial component. The bin is a roofless, rectangular log structure 12 by 17 feet in area. Workers assembled the walls with saddle-notch joints, and they used salvaged lumber and log strips to chink gaps between the logs. The interior is 4 feet high and featured a plank floor, and the west wall featured an opening so workers could shovel ore out into a parked wagon. The bin's downslope side is 6 feet high and the opening is elevated 2 feet above the adjacent road (F9) to ease transferring the pay rock into wagons. Of note, the structure was built over a charred log foundation probably left over from an earlier bin that burned.

The road (F9) is an outstanding example of the type of avenue that mining companies usually graded for wagons. The road forms a tight loop that allowed wagons to enter the site, turn around, and pull alongside the bin without having to back up. Workers graded the road with cut-and-fill methods.

Truax Mine: Upper Tunnel Site Interpretation

The site exemplifies the type of simple tunnel mine that was common to Summit County. The waste rock dump indicates that the workings were relatively shallow, and the open ore bin reflects limited production. The surface plant was remarkably simple and consisted of little more than a basic blacksmith shop, which represents a minimal capital investment. According to ventilation tubes, the surface plant also included a ventilation blower that forced fresh air underground. Since no evidence of motive power exists on the site, the blower had to be powered by hand. The light artifact assemblage reflects the conservation of materials and a relatively brief occupation by a small crew.

¹ "Mining News" *EMJ* 7/28/06, p182; *Mineral Resources*, 1907:274.

The site possesses few clearly dateable artifacts, and those that are present reflect three timeframes. A combination of cut- and wire nails used in the shop and ore bin suggests that the mine was developed around 1890. A carbide drum and a tin for No.6 strength blasting caps reflect activity after the 1910s, most likely during the 1930s when the lower tunnel was worked as well. Archival sources also documented activity in the upper tunnel in 1906 and 1907.

Truax Mine: Upper Tunnel Site Significance

Because little is known regarding the Truax Mine's history, its role in the local mining industry is uncertain. As a result, the site's historical associations remain unclear. The site is, however, a sound example of a small and simple tunnel mine. The site also lies in a sound setting evocative of Rocky Mountain Mining. For these reasons, the upper tunnel is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criterion C.

In terms of Criterion C, the upper tunnel is a sound archaeological example of a small and simple tunnel mine. At one time common, these types of mines constituted the bulk of Colorado's hardrock mining industry and greatly outnumbered the prominent, major operations. The site's archaeological features clearly convey the characteristics of these tunnel mines and the simplicity of their facilities.

The site is also a contributing element of French Gulch's historic landscape. The waste rock dump is prominent, can be seen from afar, and belongs to a group of mines that dot French Gulch's north side. The landscape is an important visual representation of the Breckenridge area's mining industry.

Truax Mine: Upper Tunnel Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest several actions. First, the site should be preserved. Currently, recreationists use the road that passes through the site, and motorized traffic is accelerating the site's decline. The traffic should be barred from either the site or the road. The ore bin stands in poor condition because the log foundation rotted and allowed the structure to shift downslope as a unit. The bin should be stabilized against collapse by repairing the foundation with new logs or rock masonry and also buttressing the walls.

Second, the site should be developed as a heritage resource. Signs can explain the history of the site, the Truax Mine, and the nature of tunnel mines. Signage will also encourage the public to participate in the site's preservation.