

***Truax Mine: Lower Tunnel***  
***Site 5ST1143***

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.

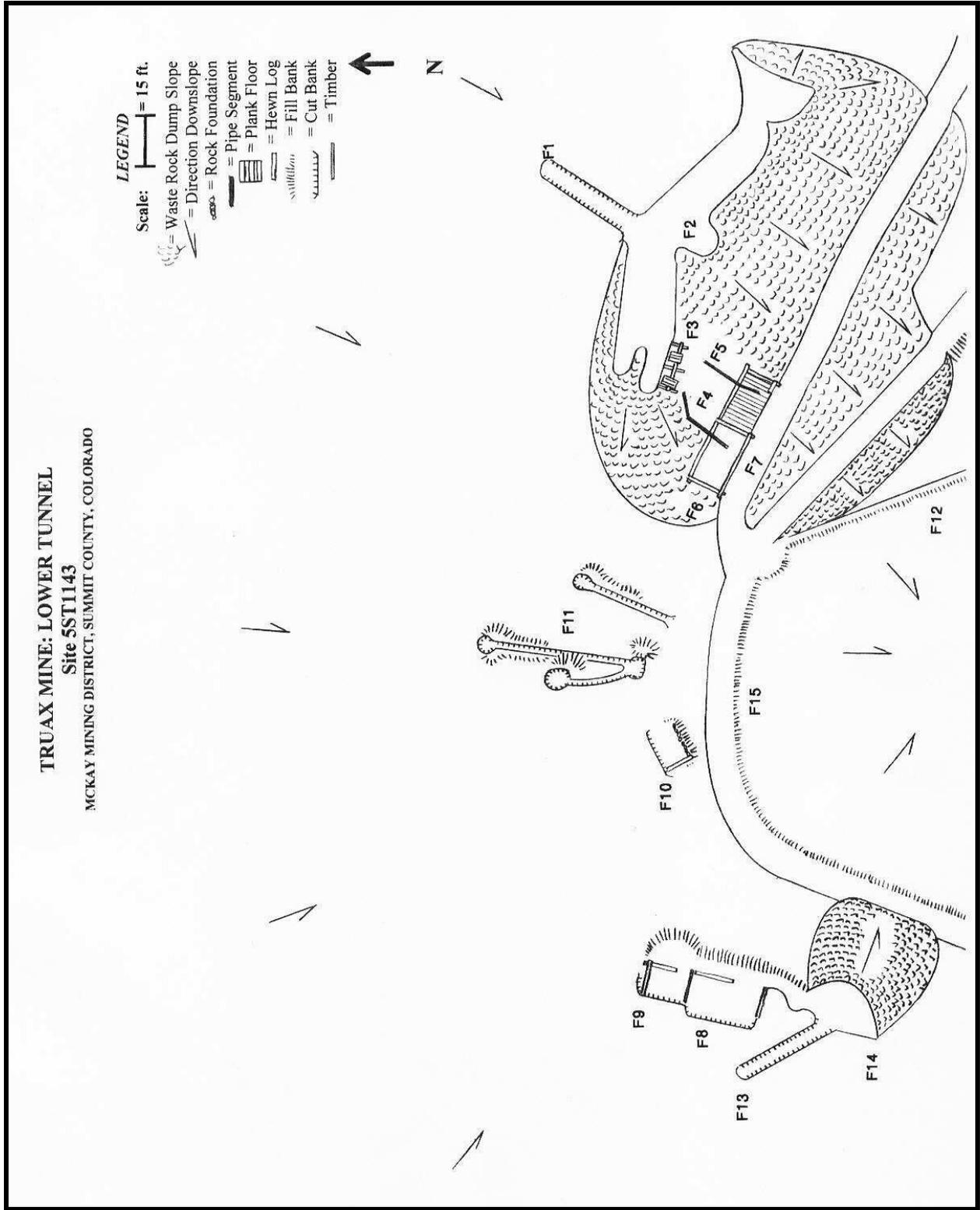


Figure 2.13: Plan view of the Truax Mine's lower tunnel site.

### Truax Mine: Lower Tunnel Site Description

As a historic site, the lower tunnel was similar in content and scale to the upper tunnel. The principal differences were that the waste rock dump (F2) was slightly larger and the surface plant lacked a shop. This latter fact suggests that the miners sharpened their tools and manufactured hardware at the upper tunnel.

The lower tunnel had an ore bin (F6) similar in construction to the bin at the upper tunnel, and it, too, was assembled with a combination of cut- and wire nails. Originally, the bin consisted of a single cell 12 by 21 feet in area and 6 feet high. One of the mine's operators added a second cell 11 by 16 feet in area to the east side. The two cells allowed miners to segregate the ore by grade. Workers assembled the structure with V-notch joints and used split log strips to seal gaps between the logs. Log posts support the western bin, log footers support the eastern cell, and both featured plank floors. The foundations elevated the bins above the adjacent road (F7) so the ore could be easily transferred into a parked wagon.

The mine's last operator installed two chutes that directed ore from the top of the waste rock dump down into the bins. The chutes consist of salvaged boiler smokestacks lashed to log stringers laid directly on the waste rock dump's flank. The chutes featured headgates that received the ore discharged from ore cars. The headgates consisted of logs and salvaged lumber. The heavy use of salvaged materials, including the adaptive reuse of the smokestacks, strongly suggests that the chutes were built during the 1930s.

Whereas the upper tunnel possessed the mine's blacksmith shop, the lower tunnel featured the workers' residences. Two log cabins stood on the west side of a minor drainage opposite the tunnel, and a third building stood in the drainage. All have been reduced to archaeological remnants. The largest cabin, a log structure, stood on a cut-and-fill platform (F8) 20 by 24 feet in area. Foundation elements indicate that the residence was 15 by 24 feet in area and stood elevated almost one foot above the ground. The elevation kept the cabin dry during snowmelt. A second log cabin stood adjacent to the first. The ruin (F9) currently consists of two partially intact log walls on a cut-and-fill platform. The platform was 12 by 18 feet in area, the cabin was 12 by 12 feet in area, and the doorway opened east onto the platform's extension. Workers assembled the walls with V-notch joints and used split logs as chinking. Overall, the construction is similar to the ore bin at the mine. Heavy duff coverage conceals artifacts around both platforms, and rocky soil precludes meaningful buried deposits.

Workers used cut-and-fill methods to grade a platform (F10) for the site's third residence. They laid a log along the southwest edge and a rock alignment along the southeast edge to elevate the building above normally soggy soil. The foundation elements indicate that the building was 12 by 12 feet in area. Shallow, buried deposits are possible, and heavy sod and duff coverage conceals artifacts.

Dateable artifacts suggest that the cabins were built and inhabited during the early 1890s. Specifically, workers used a combination of cut- and wire nails to fasten all woodwork, which dates to around 1890. A combination of hole-in-cap cans assembled with lapped side seams and hand-finished bottle fragments reflects an early 1890s timeframe.

### Truax Mine: Lower Tunnel Site Interpretation

The lower tunnel complex exemplifies the type of simple tunnel mine 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 the ore bins, which represents a minimal capital investment. The

light artifact assemblage reflects the conservation of materials and a relatively brief occupation by a small crew.

The site apparently experienced three different period of occupation. As noted above, the ore bins and cabins were constructed around 1890, and archival sources documented activity in 1906 and 1907. The use salvaged materials for the ore chutes suggest that the mine was last worked during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

#### Truax Mine: Lower 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 lower 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: Lower Tunnel Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest several actions. First, the site should be preserved. Currently, the ore bin stands in poor condition because heavily mineralized waste rock accelerated the decay and failure of the back wall and portions of the east and west walls. As a result, the south wall now leans outward. The bin should be stabilized against collapse by supporting the decayed walls.

Second, the site should be developed as a heritage resource. The site lies along the Minnie Mine trail, which was recently graded for nonmotorized use. Such a location is ideal for public education. 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.