

Rose of Breckenridge Mine ***Site 5ST1144***

The Rose of Breckenridge Mine was a substantial and lengthy tunnel driven to undercut a system of ore veins on French Gulch's north side. Currently, the site encompasses a collapsed tunnel portal, its waste rock dump, a shop platform, and a residential complex. The site lies on the north side of French Gulch in the McKay Mining District. The steep wall of French Gulch, vegetated with a second-growth lodgepole pine forest, rises steeply to the north, and the gently sloped valley floor sprawls outward to the south. Within the last 30 years, squatters lived on the site and impacted the site's historical integrity. Because forest conceals the site, its visual impact is limited.

Rose of Breckenridge Mine Site History

During the mid-1870s, prospectors examining the north side of French Gulch discovered a series of mineralized veins near the rim. At that time, the prospectors were unaware that the veins, which carried gold, silver, and industrial metals, were components of a system that extended northeast for a length of around one mile.

Several individuals staked a group of claims on the west slope of Mineral Hill that included the Rose of Breckenridge, Kathleen, and Tecumseh. To fulfill the requirements of retaining title to the claims, the prospectors excavated several shallow shafts and open-cuts then did little more with the properties. Suspecting that the veins would yield ore upon formal development, Joseph T. Cornforth, who had experience investing elsewhere in Colorado, purchased the properties during the late 1870s.

Because he needed capital for his project, Cornforth interested A.H. Garfield, and Ira W. and J.W. Pendleton, and they organized the grandly named Colorado & New Mexico Consolidated Mining & Smelting Company. The outfit then hired a crew of miners who began driving a deep haulageway to undercut the group of claims at great depth. The tunnel, sited on the floor of French Gulch, featured a simple surface plant that consisted of a tunnel house and a boardinghouse for the crew. As a statement of confidence in the mine, the company paved the tunnel floor with bricks to provide an even and sound footing for trains of ore cars. By 1883, miners pushed the tunnel to a length of 850 feet, where they encountered the sought-after vein system. The brick paving proved to be an ill-founded improvement because the veins did not offer ore in the expected volumes and richness. By 1884, the company suspended operations.¹

Even though the tunnel remained quiet for years, Cornforth and the Pendletons had not given up on the operation. During the latter half of the 1880s, they canceled the original company and established the Rose of Breckenridge Mining Company with new investors. In 1890, a crew of miners resumed work underground and drove exploratory workings along the vein system. According to reports, miners sank a winze (internal shaft) down from the tunnel level and supposedly struck a rich stringer of ore. The stringer, however, offered little pay rock, and Cornforth shut down the operation again for want of capital.²

By this time, it was apparent that the Rose of Breckenridge was no more than a costly failure, although Cornforth and the Pendletons said nothing about this. Instead, over the course of the next fifteen years, they patiently sought a buyer in hopes of recouping their lost funds. In 1896, the partners reopened the tunnel and prepared it for examination by a prospective buyer,

¹ *Colorado Mining Directory*, 1883:865; *Report of the Director of the Mint*, 1884:430.

² "Mining News" *EMJ* 9/12/91, p314.

but no deal was made. By 1905, someone finally purchased the mine and resumed exploration. A lack of further mention in archival sources suggests that the operation was a short-lived failure.³

Rose of Breckenridge Mine Site Description

The site can be divided into two feature complexes. The first includes the tunnel and aspects of its surface plant, and the second encompasses residential features. The tunnel complex retains little integrity because of the impacts caused by squatters who lived on the waste rock dump during the 1970s or 1980s. The squatters erected a yurt on the dump, arranged a large fire ring, outlined walkways with cobbles, gathered together historic artifacts, left small bits of refuse, and parked vehicles on the tunnel house platform. They also excavated several pits for their privy and left the privy building over the most recent one.

³ Foote, 1905; "Mining News" *MIR* 6/25/96 p616.

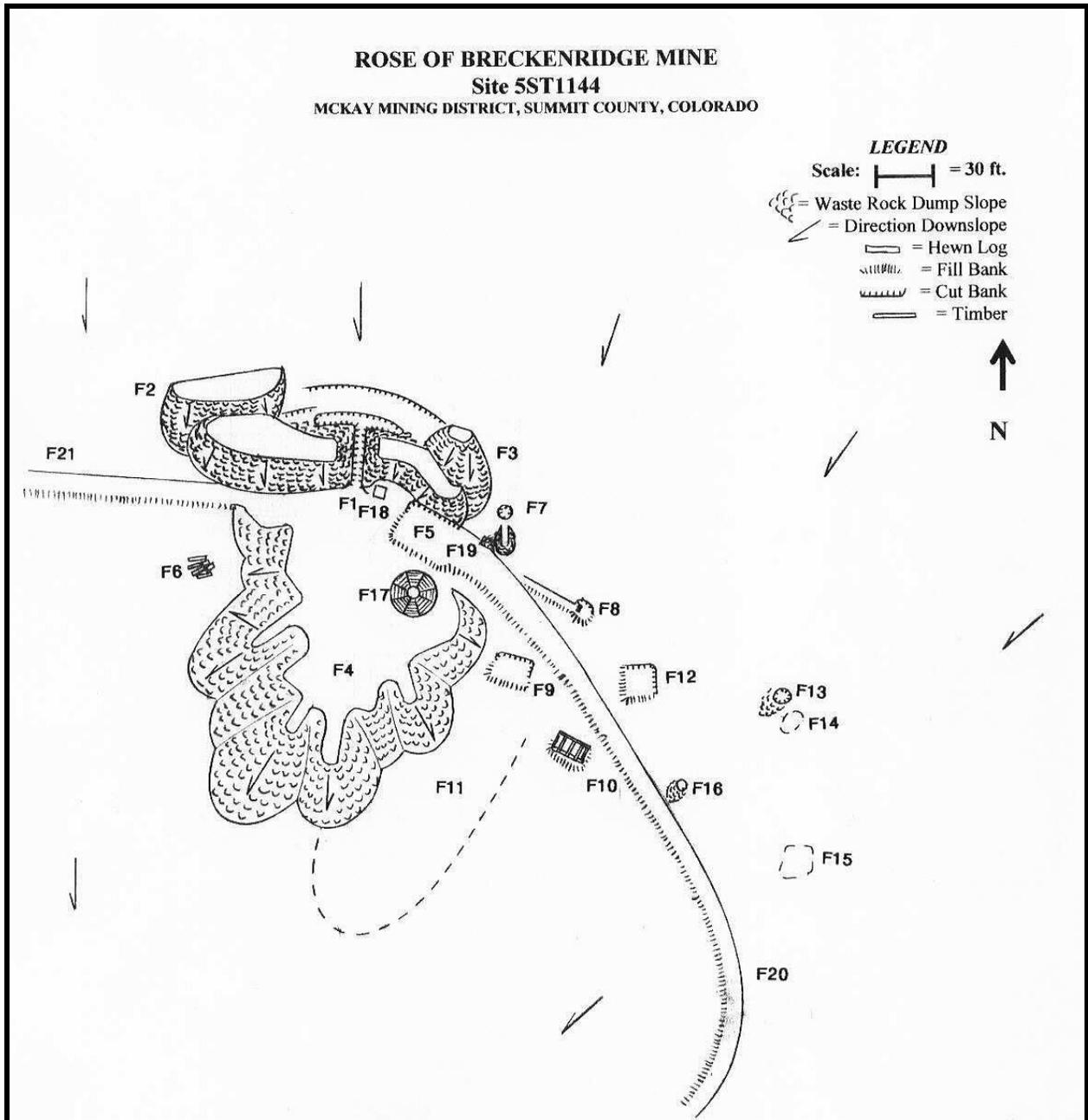


Figure 2.14: Plan view of the Rose of Breckenridge Tunnel site.

The tunnel, waste rock dump, and a historic privy pit are the most identifiable historic features. Workers excavated a deep T-shaped trench (F1) in loose scree to expose bedrock then drove the tunnel from the trench's end. The dump (F2) manifests as a cluster of lobes radiating outward from the tunnel portal. Overall, the dump is 162 by 180 feet in area and 15 feet thick, and miners graded its top-surface flat.

Workers graded a platform (F5) for a shop to the east of the tunnel. They cleared scree off the platform's north half and piled it along the north edge, and used waste rock fill for the south half.

A very distinct foot path ascends around 36 feet northeast from the shop platform to the historic privy pit (F8). The pit itself is 3 by 6 feet in area and outlined with rocks, which probably supported the privy structure. Workers shoveled backdirt downslope and threw domestic refuse on the slope east of the pit. Meaningful buried deposits are possible.

In contrast to the tunnel, the residential complex retains a high degree of archaeological integrity. Archival sources mention one boardinghouse in 1883, and two more frame buildings were erected afterward.

The 1883 boardinghouse stood on a platform (F9) near the mine. The platform's size indicates that the building was around 18 by 25 feet in area. Workers used large scree cobbles for the platform's fill portion, which enhanced drainage underneath the boardinghouse. The platform is currently overgrown, and duff conceals small artifacts. A high proportion of disassembled hole-in-cap cans missing solder suggests that the building burned.

The boardinghouse residents disposed of their solid refuse in the manner common to western mining camps. Specifically, they threw much of their material downslope where it formed a scatter (F11) 36 by 165 feet in area. Most of the artifacts are broken bottles, cans, and miscellaneous domestic items.

Dateable artifacts confirm that the boardinghouse was inhabited during the early 1880s, as well as several times afterward. Cut nails, crude bottle fragments, applied bottle finishes, and cans assembled with lapped side seams date to the 1880s. Hole-in-cap cans assembled with inner-rolled and soldered side seams, a continuous thread bottle finish, and some of the hand-finished bottle fragments date to the 1890s and mid-1900s, when the mine was briefly reopened.

A second boardinghouse stood above the 1883 structure, and its cut-and-fill platform (F12) currently remains. The platform's size and footprint suggest that the building was 15 by 20 feet in area. The platform is now partially overgrown, and duff obscures small items. A few artifacts were recorded downslope, and buried deposits are unlikely due to the surrounding rocky soil. A combination of wire nails, hole-in-cap cans assembled with lapped side seams, and hand-finished bottle fragments indicate that the building was erected during the mid-1890s.

The third residence stood downslope and was the most recent. The foundation (F10) currently remains, and it consisted of thin logs on a platform just large enough for the structure. Duff currently blankets the foundation interior and surrounding edges, which conceals artifacts. A few items lie scattered around, and shallow, buried deposits are possible downslope. The artifact assemblage is different from the other residential features and consists of a few sanitary cans, upright pocket tobacco tins, and little else. Such an assemblage reflects a timeframe postdating the 1910s.

Several refuse scatters and prospect pits lie to the east of the residence platforms. The scatters represent isolated dumping episodes by the site's residents, and the prospects may have been used as privy pits. Because all the scatters' cans were assembled with lapped side seams, it seems likely that the scatters date to the 1880s.

Rose of Breckenridge Mine Site Interpretation

Only a few broad interpretations can be reached regarding the mining operation because the tunnel complex lacks a sound assemblage of features and artifacts. In general, the large waste rock dump indicates that the tunnel was lengthy, which archival sources confirm. According to the lack of distinct machine foundations and building platforms, the surface plant was simple and consisted of little more than a frame tunnel house. The absence of an ore storage structure such as a bin reflects a lack of meaningful production.

In contrast to the mining operation, a rich feature and artifact assemblage allows us to draw a number of conclusions regarding the workers. First, material evidence reflects the demography of the workers. Decorative porcelain tableware and several women's boot soles indicate that one of the residents was a woman. She could have been wife of the superintendent or the hostler who ran the boardinghouse. Most of the other residents were miners of a low socioeconomic status. However, clam shells, oyster tins, and a bottle of Dutch gin represent an individual with disposable income such as the superintendent.

Second, diet and the consumption of substances of pleasure can be determined. A high volume of cans indicates that the crew consumed a diet based on preserved foods. The canned goods included stews, soups, meat, vegetables, fruit, and fish. However, the workers supplemented this with fresh foods when available. According to butchered bones, the crew ate beef ribs, roasts, and stews, as well as game and pork. In addition, a baking powder can indicates that the crew also prepared baked goods. The crew openly and liberally consumed alcohol. The libation of choice was liquor, and fragmented bottles represent at least fifty-four vessels.

Third, the artifact assemblage hints at the health of the workers. Approximately thirty fragmented medicine bottles were scattered throughout the site, and this is an unusually high number. Of these, four were Warner's Safe Kidney Cure bottles, which was a concoction intended for gastrointestinal illnesses. Overall, the bottles may reflect two trends. One is that some of the workers suffered chronic illnesses such as silicosis contracted from mining or gastrointestinal problems from polluted water or food. The other is that some of the workers may have been addicted to the medicine's opiate contents.

Rose of Breckenridge Mine Site Significance

Due to substantial disturbance, the mine complex is recommended as a non-contributing element of the site. The existing features and artifacts no longer clearly represent the nature of the mining operation. The residential complex, however, is a contributing element because it retains a high degree of archaeological integrity. Further, the residential complex possesses a high potential to yield information regarding the demography and behavior of residents on Colorado's mining frontier. For this reason, the residential complex is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criterion D and for the SRHP under Criterion E.

Testing and excavation of the privy pit at the mine complex may reveal artifacts and other data that can contribute to the current body of knowledge regarding the mine as a workplace. Miners may have accidentally dropped items into the pit, or intentionally disposed of artifacts there. Studies of the buried deposits may reveal what types of equipment miners carried on their persons, workplace diet, levels of substance abuse, and other matters. Similar treatment of the residential platforms and possible privy pits may contribute to the understanding of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, diet, health, and substance abuse on Colorado's mining frontier during the early 1880s.

Rose of Breckenridge Mine Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest two actions. First, the site lies on a recreational trail that Summit County Trails and Open Space intends to develop for heritage tourism. The assemblage of residential features provides a sound opportunity to explain to the public aspects of miners' lifestyles and housing. This can be accomplished through signage or pamphlets. Second, the buried deposits can be tested and/or excavated in conjunction with an academic study of social issues within the Golden Horseshoe.