

Cincinnati Mine: Lower Workings ***Site 5ST1148***

The Cincinnati Mine, prospected in 1866 and producing by 1873, was among the Breckenridge area's earliest hardrock operations. Prospectors staked several claims over a substantial ore vein on the north rim of French Gulch. During the mid-1870s, an outfit developed the vein through a set of upper workings. During the mid-1880s, another company moved downslope and developed the vein through a set of lower workings. Today, the upper workings manifest as eroded and collapsed excavations and so were not recorded. The lower workings, however, offered enough features to justify recordation.

The site lies at around 10,380 feet elevation in the McKay Mining District. The steep, north wall of French Gulch, vegetated with an aspen forest, surrounds the site, and the Minnie Mine (5ST1145) lies a short distance to the west. As a site, the lower workings retain marginal archaeological integrity due to natural decay. Despite poor integrity, the site is a contributing element of French Gulch's historic landscape because the waste rock dumps are visible from afar.

Cincinnati Mine History

During the mid-1860s, the Breckenridge area languished in the tail end of its first boom, which was based around rich deposits of placer gold. Prospectors still lingered in the area, but they focused on finding more placer deposits and were unaware that numerous hardrock ore veins crisscrossed the region. A few experienced prospectors, however, had enough knowledge to identify and evaluate such mineral bodies. In 1866, one experienced group examining rock outcrops on the north rim of French Gulch discovered a gold and silver vein. They determined that the vein trended northeast-southwest (like most veins in the area) and staked the Cincinnati, Cassiopia, and Greenwood claims along the strike. The prospectors probably extracted small volumes of ore but did little more with the property because they had no effective means of winning gold from the parent rock.¹

When the Breckenridge area's first hardrock boom began in the early 1870s, two parties became interested in the Cincinnati. The first was Speer & Conant, who purchased the mine and began production. The second was G.K. Gooding, who wanted to build a smelter at nearby Lincoln and needed lead-rich ore because it was easy to treat. Speer, Conant, and Gooding came to an agreement in which they cooperated on the smelter provided that the facility received Cincinnati ore. In 1873, the trio formalized their agreement as the Lincoln City Silver Company and erected the smelter, known as the Lincoln City Lead Works. As planned, the Cincinnati guaranteed the smelter with enough ore to sustain operations, and the smelter was then able to accept custom ores from other mines. The operation was a technical success but a cooperative failure. After two years, the participants fell into a disagreement, filed lawsuits, and shut down both the Cincinnati and the smelter.²

The Cincinnati remained idle until 1883, when a man named General Wright was able to break the deadlock and sign a lease. At this time, the mine featured 1,000 feet of workings and plenty of ore in the ground. Wright invested capital rehabilitating critical areas and driving at least one new tunnel, and he brought the Cincinnati back into production. By the end of the year,

¹ "Summit County, Colorado" *MIT* 8/20/91 p90.

² Henderson, 1926:234; Raymond, 1873:299-303.

the mine ascended to the position of the area's most substantial producer. Wright operated the mine into the summer of 1885, when the vein pinched out. Unwilling to invest in a potentially fruitless search, he abandoned operations.³

Wright was wise, because the Cincinnati saw only several periods of intermittent production after his tenure. In 1889, George Perkins leased the mine and produced small volumes of ore through 1891. Perkins canceled the lease after the death of his partner. In 1901, another party leased the mine and gleaned ore from the old workings, then quit when they realized that little of worth remained. The Cincinnati may have been examined in later years, but it saw no further activity of note.⁴

³ "Mining News" *EMJ* 7/21/83, p39; Ransome, 1911:18; *Report of the Director of the Mint*, 1884:429; *Rocky Mountain News* 8/25/85, p.6 c.2; "The Latest Mining News" *RMMR* 6/4/85 p11.

⁴ "Mining News" *Mining Industry* 11/8/89 p187; *Mining Reporter* 3/21/01, p188; "Summit County, Colorado" *MIT* 8/20/91 p90.

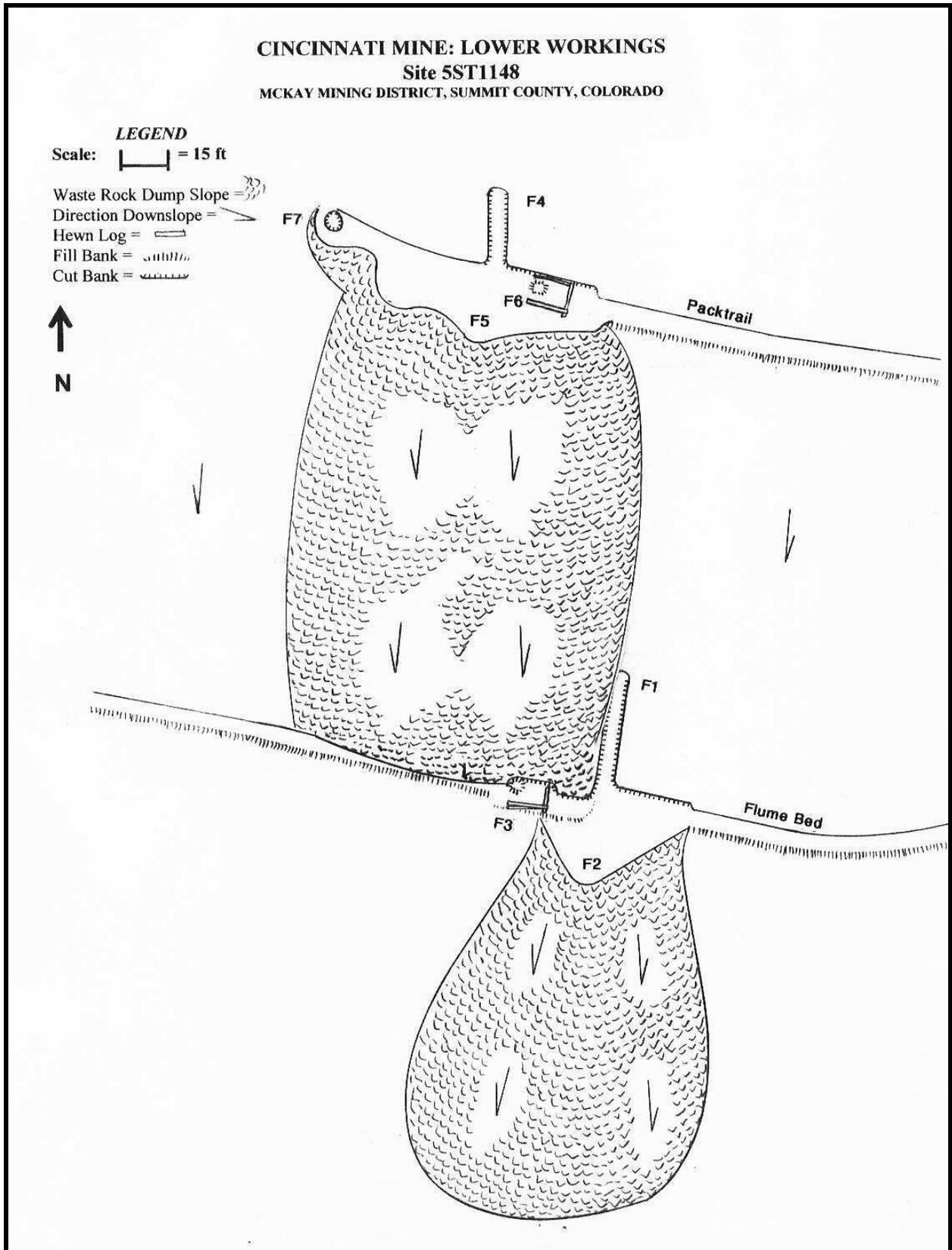


Figure 2.18: Plan view of the Cincinnati Mine's lower two tunnels.

Cincinnati Mine: Lower Workings Site Description

The lower workings currently feature two tunnels that Wright drove in 1883 to develop the vein at depth. Both complexes are similar in content and scale. Each features a tunnel that collapsed into a linear area of subsidence and a waste rock dump that cascades downslope. The dumps are slightly different in dimension but possess similar volumes of material. The lowest tunnel's dump (F2) is 90 by 128 feet in area and 6 feet thick, and the midlevel tunnel's dump (F5) is 66 by 160 feet in area and 7 feet thick. Miners graded the top-surfaces flat but were able to create only small leveled spaces because most of the waste rock slid downslope.

Both tunnels possessed almost identical surface plants. The lowest tunnel featured a log blacksmith shop on the west side of the portal, and the midlevel tunnel had a shop on the east side. Both buildings were 10 by 12 feet in area, featured gravel-filled wood box forges, and were equipped for elementary work. They are currently reduced to foundation logs on cut-and-fill platforms.

The site's artifact assemblage is relatively light, and most items are concentrated around the shop platforms. Dateable artifacts reflect at least two distinct periods of occupation. Cut nails and segments of strap rail represent the 1880s. Ordinarily, mining outfits preferred to use factory-made steel rails for their ore cars because such rails were durable. During and prior to the 1880s, some outfits in remote areas made their own rails by pinning steel straps to the edges of 2x4s. These types of rails were inexpensive and could be fabricated by a blacksmith but had short lives because the 2x4s rotted.

According to material evidence, the lowest tunnel was also worked during the 1930s, although archival sources make no mention of this. Dateable artifacts include wire nails, carbide drums that contained lamp fuel, and selenium window glass. It should be noted that, during the Great Depression, individual miners and partnerships often gleaned low-grade ore from historic producers without notifying the local mine inspector. They did so in hopes that their production would remain clandestine and unreported.

Cincinnati Mine: Lower Workings Site Interpretation

The Cincinnati's lower workings were remarkably simple given the mine's notable record of production. The waste rock dumps are substantial and indicate that the tunnels were fairly lengthy and featured development passages underground. The surface plants were unusually austere relative to the extent of the underground workings and levels of production. A typical surface plant for an operation like the Cincinnati often included an ore bin and a tunnel house that enclosed the tunnel portal, a blacksmith shop, and a work area. By contrast, the Cincinnati's two surface plants featured small and cramped blacksmith shops, and little else.

According to the simple surface plants and several other aspects, Wright and subsequent operators invested minimal amounts of capital in the operation. One of these aspects was the strap rail, which cost much less than factory-made rails. Even when factory-made rails were finally installed, they were 12 pound weight, which was one of the lightest and least expensive gauges available. Another aspect was the complete lack of mechanization, such as ventilation blowers used to provide the miners underground with fresh air. The last aspect was the small volume of artifacts. This trend indicates that the operators spent little capital on supplies, which required that the miners conserve the available materials.

The absence of ore bins at the tunnels is curious given the Cincinnati's record of production. The upper workings (not recorded) could have featured a bin, but it appears that the miners in the lower workings sacked the ore on site for shipment.

Cincinnati Mine: Lower Workings Site Significance and Management Recommendations

Historically, the Cincinnati Mine was one of the Breckenridge area's most important operations. The mine was brought into production during the early 1870s, placing it among the area's first to yield ore. Further, that ore directly supported the Breckenridge area's first smelter, which the owners helped build at nearby Lincoln. During the early 1880s, when the Breckenridge area experienced its first significant hardrock boom, the Cincinnati ranked among the area's most voluminous producers.

Even though the Cincinnati was very important, the two lower tunnels are recommended ineligible and no longer significant. The site retains marginal integrity due to natural decay and is not an outstanding example of an 1880s mine. The tunnels are difficult to discern and their waste rock dumps are heavily revegetated and blanketed with erosional deposits. The shop platforms are poorly preserved and do not clearly reflect the shop facilities. The site's artifact assemblage is limited, incomplete, and does not clearly reflect the materials commonly associated with a mine as large as the Cincinnati.

No further actions are suggested for the lower tunnels. However, because the Cincinnati was historically important, the upper workings should at least be assessed for their viability as a significant site, if not fully recorded and evaluated for their significance.