

Standard Mine
Site 5ST1156

The Standard Mine was a small but productive shaft operation in the McKay Mining District. The mine has been reduced to archaeological features and artifacts. The site, at around 10,300 feet elevation, lies on a saddle between Gibson Hill and Prospect Hill. The area is vegetated with a young lodgepole pine forest, and shallow mine workings extend to the west. The site is center to a convergence of recreational roads used by off-road vehicles. At present, the site retains archaeological integrity but heavy traffic is accelerating the decay of both the site and its setting. The site is also a contributing element of a localized historic landscape.

Standard Mine History

The Standard Mine was a product of the early 1880s boom on Gibson and Prospect hills. It appears that Daniel W. Fall, well-known Breckenridge assayer, grubstaked Gustave Meyers and Charles B. Goodrich, who prospected the Gibson Hill area. During the early 1880s, they found a vein on a saddle shared by Prospect Hill and staked the Standard No.1 and No.2 claims. By 1883, they sank two shallow shafts to develop the vein and, probably with Fall's capital, brought the ore body into minor production. Like many of the area's other veins, the Standard featured easily milled gold ore near the surface, which the miners extracted on a limited, intermittent basis through 1888. By that time, the simple ore was gone and only complex material remained, and because it could not be economically treated, the Standard closed.¹

While the Standard was idle, S.B. Wright, who also owned the Lucky Mine, purchased the property. Distracted with the highly successful Lucky, Wright did little with the Standard beyond minor development in 1901. Eight years later, Wright finally turned his attention to the mine and prepared it for production. Wright's relative, M.A. Wright, signed a lease in 1910, began serious underground exploration, and exposed an excellent vein of lead-silver ore in the shallow shaft. The vein was so substantial and rich that it sustained production through 1915, when the Wrights suspended work.²

The Standard remained idle until 1919, when Frank Shearer dispatched several workers to sort through the waste rock dump for low-grade ore. The following year, Shearer's miners went underground and resumed minor production. In 1922, in need of fresh air, they drove a drift over to the Detroit Mine, which created a ventilation circuit. In 1924, Shearer ran out of ore and moved on.³

The Standard saw one last period of activity, although the mine's surface plant remained abandoned. In 1927, the Detroit Leasing Company used the ventilation drift to access Standard ground from the Detroit shaft and extracted low-grade ore. Little ore remained, however, and the operation lasted for only a year.⁴

Standard Mine Site Description

The Standard Mine currently possesses an intact set of archaeological features and artifacts. The shaft (F1) is the only poorly represented feature because the Division of Minerals and Geology plugged it years ago with waste rock. When miners sank the shaft, they dumped waste rock around the shaft, forming a pad (F2) 45 by 83 feet in area and 5 feet thick. As the miners continued work underground, they built an elevated trestle north of the shaft to expand the waste rock dump. By ejecting waste rock off the trestle, they created a lobe (F3) of material 33 by 90 feet in area and around 10 feet thick. The dump, which is 5 feet higher than the main pad, represents the most recent work.

The mine featured a light-duty hoisting system, several aspects of which currently remain. The mine's headframe stood on a timber foundation (F4) that extended west from the shaft. The foundation was 4½ feet wide and originally 45 feet long, but the portion near the shaft was destroyed by bulldozing, leaving a segment 17 feet long.

¹ *Colorado Mining Directory*, 1883:867; "Mining News" *Mining Industry* 6/21/89 p275; "Mining News" *EMJ* 3/6/86, p176.

² "Current News" *Mining Science* 3/3/10 p211; "Current News" *Mining Science* 8/3/11 p118; *Mineral Resources*, 1909:329; *Mineral Resources*, 1915:379; "Mining News" *MSP* 2/5/10 p230.

³ Colorado Mine Inspectors' Reports: Standard; *Mineral Resources*, 1919:786; *Mineral Resources*, 1921:506; Weed, 1925:803.

⁴ Colorado Mine Inspectors' Reports: Detroit.

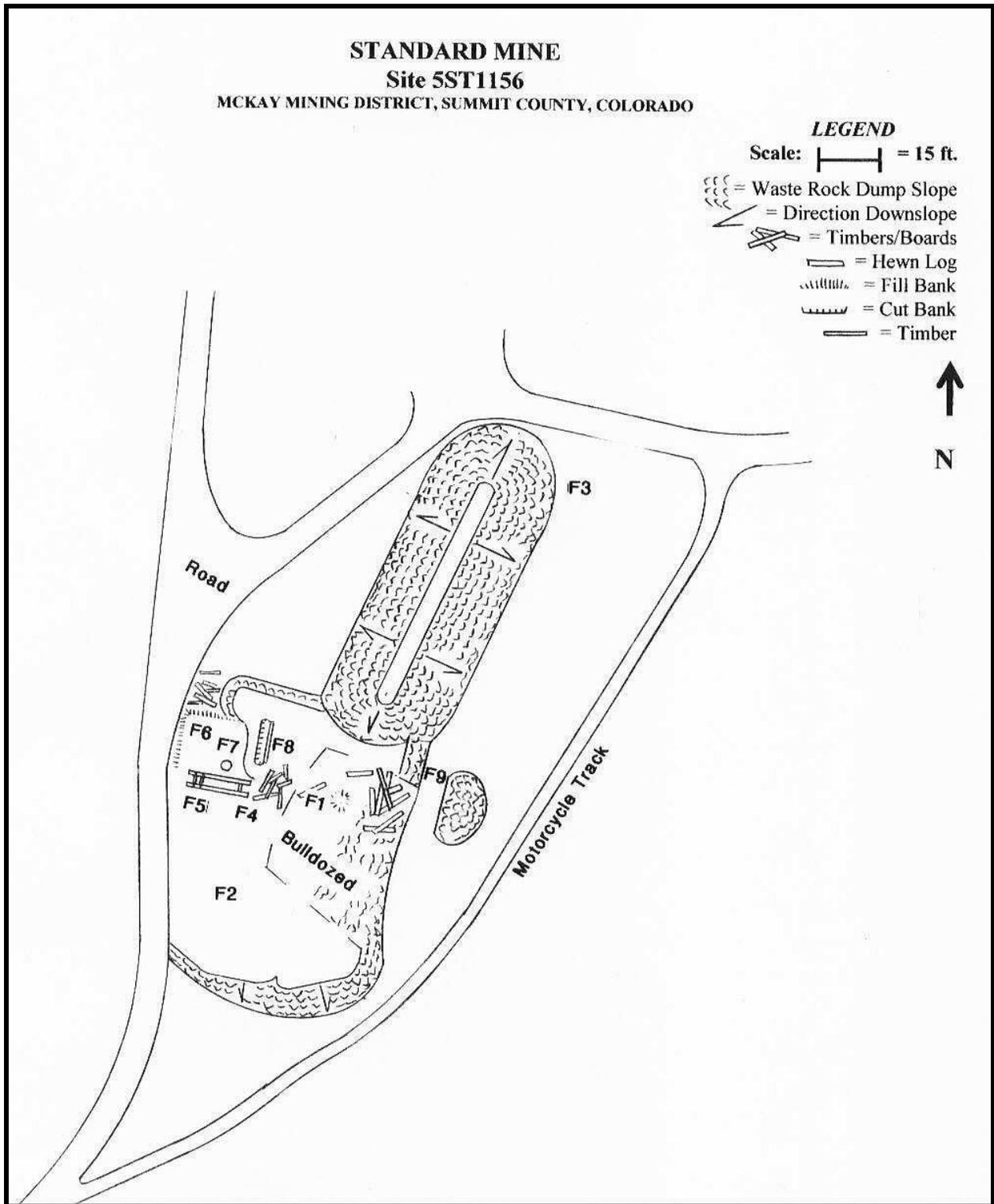


Figure 2.57: Plan view of the Standard Mine site.

A hoist was bolted to the west end of the headframe foundation, and anchor bolts currently remain. Workers added cross-braces between the foundation timbers to provide reinforcement. The footprint (F5) of the mount indicates that the hoist was a 4½-by-4½-foot single-drum steam unit.

A frame hoist house, completely collapsed, enclosed the hoist, boiler, and a simple blacksmith shop. Workers erected the building on a cut-and-fill platform (F6) 20 by 25 feet in area. Currently, the building footprint is evident, and artifacts lie scattered around. Among the artifacts is a bowl-shaped chunk of concrete, which belonged to a blacksmith forge.

An ore bin stood on the east side of the shaft, and miners used it to store pay rock between shipments. The bin (F9), totally collapsed, was an open, flat-bottom structure with plank walls and a louvered gate. The bin was damaged during the shaft closure, and debris lies scattered over a 10 by 20 foot area.

The site possesses one feature that is anomalous with the timeframes of activity documented by archival sources. Specifically, someone buried a fifty-five-gallon drum (F7) in the shaft house platform as a water reservoir. The water was probably used for a boiler during the 1930s, although archival records make no mention of activity at this time.

The site possesses a sound artifact assemblage, most of which is concentrated on the main waste rock dump and around the hoist house platform. Sanitary cans, a catsup bottle base, selenium bottle glass, and a carbide drum appear to date to the 1930s, which is in concert with the fifty-five-gallon drum. Aqua window glass and a stoneware jug predate 1920, when the mine saw its most significant period of production.

Standard Mine Site Interpretation

The Standard Mine was a typical small, marginally productive, and poorly capitalized shaft operation. The mine was equipped with a simple surface plant designed to meet basic needs at little cost. The hoist was intended for deep prospecting and not ore production, and its foundation was temporary. According to mine inspectors' reports, the shaft was 4 by 6 feet in-the-clear, which was a size that mining engineers of the time deemed adequate only for prospecting. A boiler provided steam for the hoist, and because it was a portable unit, the boiler left no evidence. Mining engineers considered portable boilers inefficient for ore production, but the unit met the needs of the Standard operation. Overall, the Standard's surface plant was light in duty, which restricted the volume of ore brought to the surface.

Evidence strongly suggests that the Standard was worked for a brief time during the 1930s, although archival records make no mention. It was not uncommon, however, for production to go unreported during the Great Depression for fear of taxation and, hence, loss of needed income. In general, Depression-era operations tended to be simple due to economic constraints, and the Standard's surface plant is a sound example of this trend.

Standard Mine Site Significance

The shaft was a short-lived industrial metals producer that operated during the 1910s and 1930s. The site offers a nearly complete assemblage of archaeological features and artifacts that retain integrity relative to the above timeframes. The site also possesses ambiance relative to hardrock mining and lies in an undisturbed setting. Because the shaft participated in important local trends and exemplifies a 1930s mining operation, the site is recommended eligible for the NRHP and the SRHP under Criteria A and C.

In terms of Criterion A, the shaft participated in a revival of mining that swept the Breckenridge area during the latter half of the Great Depression. At the beginning of the depression, the area's economy was devastated because the mining industry collapsed. By the mid-1930s, increases in metals prices stimulated a major revival of mining, which improved the economy, created jobs, and interested investors in the local industry. Most of the mines that were brought back into production were small, short-lived operations like the one at the site. Cumulatively, these small mines, including the one on the site, constituted the area's Depression-era revival.

In terms of Criterion C, the site is a sound archaeological example of a typical Depression-era hardrock mine. The site's archaeological features clearly represent how the surface plant was engineered and equipped. In particular, the features indicate that the operation relied on steam power, in essence reversing technological advances in the mining industry. In general, steam power became obsolete by the 1910s, but because used steam equipment was available at little cost during the Great Depression, mining outfits reverted to the power source.

The site is also recommended eligible under Criterion C because it is a contributing element of a localized historic landscape. The area features other mines including the Detroit Mine and numerous shafts and waste rock dumps on the Detroit Placer claim.

Standard Mine Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest several actions. First, the site is center to an area that is heavily used by off-road vehicles, and their traffic is accelerating the site's decline. Recreational roads and trails should be routed around the site and barricades erected to block traffic. Second, the site should be developed for heritage tourism because it lies in a heavily used recreational area. The site provides an excellent opportunity to explain hardrock mining and the industry as it was during the Great Depression. This can be accomplished through signage or pamphlets. Signage would also educate recreationists regarding the site's value and importance.