

Sundown Mine ***Site 5ST1157***

The Sundown Mine was a productive operation near Preston in the Joe Davis Mining District. The mine consisted of a tunnel and a shaft, and each possessed its own independent surface plant, which has been reduced to archaeological features and artifacts. The site, at around 10,130 feet elevation, lies on the high, west side of Gold Run Gulch and on Gibson Hill's northern extension. A steep slope vegetated with a young lodgepole pine forest surrounds the site, and the area features numerous prospects and mines that form a historic landscape. A heavily used recreational trail passes through the site's most sensitive portion, and motorized vehicles are causing damage. At present, the site retains archaeological integrity and is a contributing element of a localized historic landscape.

Sundown Mine History

Little archival information regarding the adit could be found. Several passages in local newspapers mention that Robert W. Foote, J.A. Theobald, George Sharp, and Charles Bridges worked the property during the early 1920s. It seems likely, however, that the mine was initially developed during the mid-1880s when nearby Preston boomed.¹

Sundown Mine Site Description

As noted, the Sundown Mine consisted of a tunnel and a shaft. Miners drove the tunnel to extract ore from the upper portion of a vein and sank the shaft to develop the lower portion. The tunnel extended southwest in sympathy with the area's veins, and its portal (F1) collapsed. When miners drove the tunnel, they ejected waste rock at the portal, forming a lobe (F2) of material 35 by 63 feet in area and 10 feet high. The top-surface features impressions left by rail ties, which reflects deposition of the waste rock with ore cars.

A tunnel house stood at the tunnel portal, and it enclosed a blacksmith shop and work area. The building is now gone but the platform (F3) remains, and it indicates that the building was 18 by 18 feet in area. At center is the remnant of a forge, which manifests as a mound of burned gravel. The platform features a small amount of shop refuse, and duff blankets more.

Workers graded a road down to the northwest base of the waste rock dump so wagons could access an ore loading area (F4). The dump's flank features the remnants of a log retaining structure, which may have supported an ore bin.

Workers lived in a log cabin adjacent to and north of the tunnel. The cabin, now gone, stood on a poorly leveled platform (F5) 15 by 18 feet in area. Workers laid a log foundation over the uneven surface and erected the cabin on the foundation. The cabin burned, evident by charred logs. Structural debris and domestic refuse extend downslope, and buried deposits are unlikely.

¹ *Summit County Journal* 12/30/22.

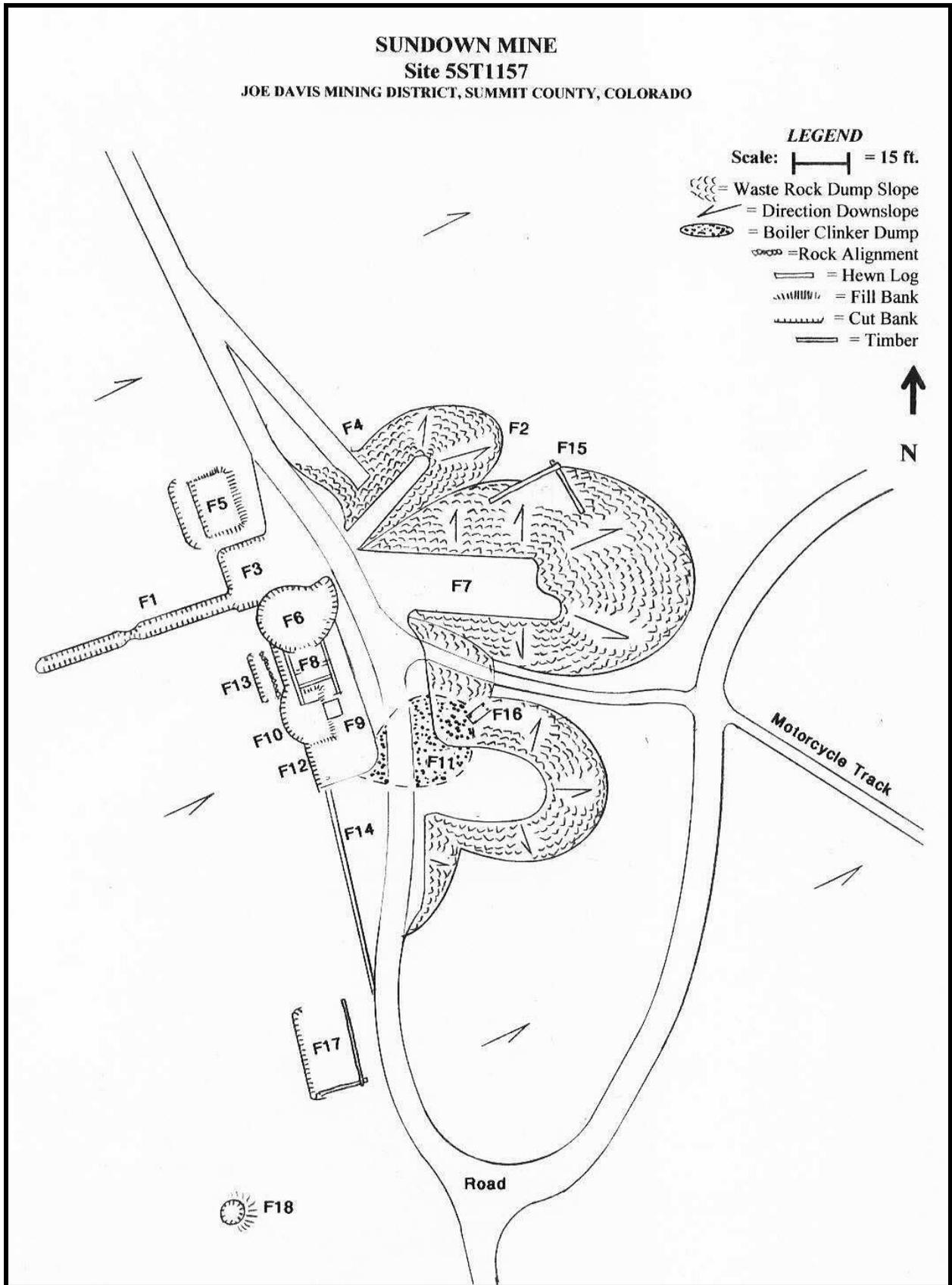


Figure 2.56: Plan view of the Sundown Mine site.

The shaft was located adjacent to and southeast of the tunnel, and its collar (F6) collapsed into a funnel of subsidence. When miners sank the shaft, they first dumped waste rock around the opening, forming a bench 30 feet wide and 108 feet long. As they continued work underground, the miners extended the dump to the east, creating two lobes of material. In total, the dump (F7) became 108 by 135 feet in area and 12 feet thick, and the miners graded the top-surface flat. A few artifacts lie on the flanks.

The shaft was equipped with a formally engineered surface plant that included a steam hoisting system. Like most shaft mines, the Sundown's hoisting system included a headframe, which is gone. Aspects of the timber foundation (F8) remain, and it was 12 feet wide and around 24 feet long. Workers buried the timbers with waste rock ballast to hold the structure in place. Over time, the timbers decayed, leaving impressions.

The mine's hoist, now gone, was directly aligned with the shaft and at the end of the headframe foundation. The hoist was bolted to a timber foundation (F9), which decayed and left an impression. The footprint indicates that the hoist was a single-drum steam unit 5 by 5 feet in area.

A boiler provided the hoist with steam, and it stood adjacent to the hoist. Currently, the collapsed remnants of a brick setting (F10) are left, and they manifest as a rectangular mound 7 by 14 feet in area. The boiler shell, hardware, and most bricks have been removed, and duff blankets the mound. The ruin indicates that the boiler was a return-tube unit.

A frame shaft house, now gone, enclosed the hoisting system, boiler, blacksmith shop, and shaft collar. Workers graded a cut-and-fill platform (F12) for the structure, and impressions from the wall footers indicate that the building was 22 by 55 feet in area. The shop was located in the northwest corner, evident by a concentration of shop refuse. Numerous artifacts are scattered around, and duff covers additional items.

When the mine's boiler tender cleaned ash and clinker out of the boiler's firebox, he dumped the material outside and east of the shaft house. Over time, this resulted in a deposit of clinker (F11) 30 by 30 feet in area with a minor amount of depth. Shallow, buried deposits are likely but probably mirror the surface artifact assemblage.

A log ore bin stood at the north base of the waste rock dump to store pay rock between shipments. The structure (F15) was an open, flat bottom bin around 12 by 18 feet in area, which workers assembled with logs. The walls collapsed, waste rock eroded into the interior, and the remnants of a trestle for inputting ore lie on top.

The remnants of a privy stand on the waste rock dump's east flank. The structure (F16) consists of four plank walls that supported a privy building, which is gone. The pit is currently 3 feet deep, and buried deposits are unlikely because the pit is shallow.

A cabin south of the mine provided housing for some of the miners. A log foundation (F17) currently remains on a platform 20 by 25 feet in area. Workers poorly graded the platform, and its upslope, west edge features a berm and ditch to deflect snowmelt. The cabin's subframe stood on both the logs and on rocks arranged along the berm's rim. Small artifacts lie along the downslope side, and large items extend farther down and east. Thick ground cover and duff conceal additional items, and buried deposits are unlikely.

The residents relied on a privy for their personal use. The pit (F18) is 6 feet diameter and around 2 feet deep, and it was excavated into an abandoned pack trail. Buried deposits are unlikely because the pit was shallow.

The site possesses a full and rich artifact assemblage. Structural materials lie scattered throughout the site, and industrial items are concentrated around the tunnel house and shaft house platforms. These two features also contain some domestic refuse, although most is associated with the residential platforms.

Dateable artifacts reflect two general periods of occupation, which may have overlapped. It appears that the surface facilities were built during the early 1890s, evident by wire nails and hole-in-cap cans assembled with lapped side seams. The mine was then worked during the late 1890s and early 1900s, as suggested by upright pocket tobacco tins, hole-in-cap cans assembled with inner-rolled and soldered side seams, and a single vent-hole can.

Sundown Mine Site Interpretation

The Sundown Mine was a moderately capitalized, productive operation with two openings. Both the tunnel and the shaft featured independent surface plants that were typical of such mines. The tunnel's surface plant was limited to a small shop building, and the shaft's facilities were more substantial. A formally engineered hoisting system served the shaft, and it was enclosed in a substantial, frame shaft house. The hoisting system was intended to minimize initial costs while serving the needs of the work underground. The headframe and hoist met what engineers of the time defined as temporary-class duty, which was actually intended for deep prospecting. In general, temporary-class equipment was relatively inexpensive but inefficient and slow, which limited ore production. The boiler, by contrast, was a production-class return-tube unit.

On a broad scale, the mine was formally designed, and the tunnel and shaft were integrated. As a reflection of this, the tunnel, its surface plant, and the shaft's hoisting system all shared a common orientation. Such an arrangement indicates that the engineer sought order and surveyed the facilities according to a master datum line.

Evidence indicates that that vein's lower reaches required more development work than the upper portion. As a result, the shaft's waste rock dump is considerably larger than that at the tunnel. Miners had to conduct relatively little work to access the vein's upper portion and penetrated the ore body after a relatively short distance.

Material evidence allows us to draw a few conclusions regarding the workforce. First, most but not all the residents were men who belonged to a working-class socioeconomic status. This trend is reflected by the general absence of items representing fine and costly goods. A woman lived in the southern cabin, and she may have been employed as the hostler. Corset stays directly confirm while decorative tableware suggests her presence.

Second, the size of the crew can be estimated from the total floor space of the residential platforms. In general, unmarried workers required at least 60 square feet for bedding and personal possessions, and given this, the available floor space should reflect the number of occupants. Independent households, however, had a common area for domestic activities, which must be accounted for in the calculation. The northern cabin could have accommodated three workers while the southern cabin housed as many as five, including the woman who was probably accorded a private room.

The crew consumed a diet common to western mining camps. Numerous cans reflect an emphasis on preserved foods including soups, stews, vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, and preserves. Because the mine was near the developed town of Preston, where supplies were available, the crew probably also consumed baked goods and fresh food. This is not, however, reflected in the artifact assemblage, much of which is obscured by duff.

The workers largely refrained from drinking alcohol on site, suggested by an almost total absence of liquor and beer bottles. This may have been due to company policy and because Preston's saloon was a short walk from the mine. The crew also enjoyed sound health, evident by the presence of only two fragmented medicine bottles.

Sundown Mine Site Significance

The Sundown Mine was a gold producer that operated between the late 1890s and around 1905. The site offers a complete assemblage of archaeological features and artifacts that retain integrity relative to the above timeframe. The site possesses ambiance relative to mining during the 1890s and 1900s, and it lies in an undisturbed setting. During its operating timeframe, the Sundown was important to Breckenridge's mining industry. For the above reasons, the site is recommended eligible for the NRHP and the SRHP under Criteria A and C.

In terms of Criterion A, the Sundown was important to both Breckenridge and the nearby town of Preston during the late 1890s and 1900s. At this time, the area's mining industry experienced a significant boom, and the Sundown was a direct participant. The operation provided employment to Preston residents, contributed to the regional economy through its gold and silver production, and helped to sustain the area's culture of mining. In addition, the Sundown and similar mines contributed to the region's boom. The operation proved that deep ore formations could yield profits through substantial investment and formal engineering, which helped to inspire confidence among investors.

In terms of Criterion C, the Sundown is a sound archaeological example of the type of deep hardrock mine common to the Breckenridge area during the late 1890s and 1900s. The building platforms, machine foundations, and artifacts represent a formally engineered, capitalized, deep shaft mine. In addition, the Sundown is a contributing element of a historic landscape around Preston. The landscape includes aspects of Preston and other mines and is evocative of mining during the 1890s and 1900s.

Sundown Mine Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest several actions. First, two motorcycle trails converge on the site, and heavy traffic is accelerating the site's disintegration. The trails should either be closed to motorized use or routed entirely around the site. Second, because the site lies on a recreational trail, the site provides an excellent opportunity to educate the public regarding deep hardrock mining around Preston. This can be accomplished through signage or pamphlets. Signage will also help preserve the site because it will make the public aware of the site's value and importance.