

Prospect Adit
Site 5ST1168

Site 5ST1168 encompasses the archaeological remnants of a failed prospect adit in the Joe Davis Mining District. The site consists of the adit, its waste rock dump, a forge remnant, a collapsed cabin, and several privy pits. The site, at around 9,830 feet elevation, lies on the high, west side of Gold Run Gulch and on Gibson Hill's northern extension. A steep slope ascends southwest, a natural flat area is to the north, and the Middle Flume recreational trail passes along the site's edge. The area features a dense and young lodgepole pine forest, and a wetland lies on the flat area. The site retains a high degree of archaeological integrity.

Prospect Adit History

No archival information regarding the adit could be found. It seems likely that prospectors drove the adit during the mid-1880s when nearby Preston boomed.

Prospect Adit Site Description

Prospectors drove the adit southwest, and the portal (F1) collapsed, creating a linear area of subsidence. Prospectors dumped waste rock at the mouth of the adit, forming a pad (F2) around 33 by 53 feet in area and 5 feet thick. The pad features a lobe extending east, which reflects a dead-end rail line used to deposit the waste rock.

The adit featured a simple surface plant that consisted of little more than an open-air blacksmith shop. Currently, the collapsed remnants of a gravel-filled rock forge (F3) on unaltered ground represent the shop. The forge was originally 3 by 3 feet in area and 2 feet high. Groundcover around the ruin obscures artifacts.

The prospectors lived in a log cabin southeast of the adit. The cabin (F4), prior to the loss of its roof, was a single-story log building 15 by 22 feet in area and around 6 feet high at the roof eaves. Prospectors constructed the walls with V-notch joints and chinked gaps with log strips and mud. For the floor, they nailed planks down to log joists laid on earth. Prospectors erected the cabin on a cut-and-fill platform just large enough for the structure and shoveled a berm along the upslope side to deflect snowmelt. Currently, the roof is gone, the floor is mostly decayed, and the walls lost their chinking. Ground cover around the cabin conceals artifacts, and shallow, buried deposits are likely along the northeast and southeast sides.

The prospectors disposed of their refuse in the manner common to mining camps. Specifically, they relied on a privy for their personal use and threw solid waste downslope from the cabin. Currently, three pits (F5-F7) represent the privy. Each pit was shallow, and when full, the prospectors moved the privy building over a new excavation. Duff and ground cover conceal artifacts, and buried deposits are possible.

The site possesses an intact artifact assemblage, and almost all the items are associated with the cabin ruin. According to cut nails and hole-in-cap cans assembled with lapped side seams, prospectors drove the adit during the 1880s. During the 1890s or 1900s, another party occupied the site and used wire nails to repair the cabin. The members left hole-in-cap cans assembled with inner-rolled and soldered side seams.

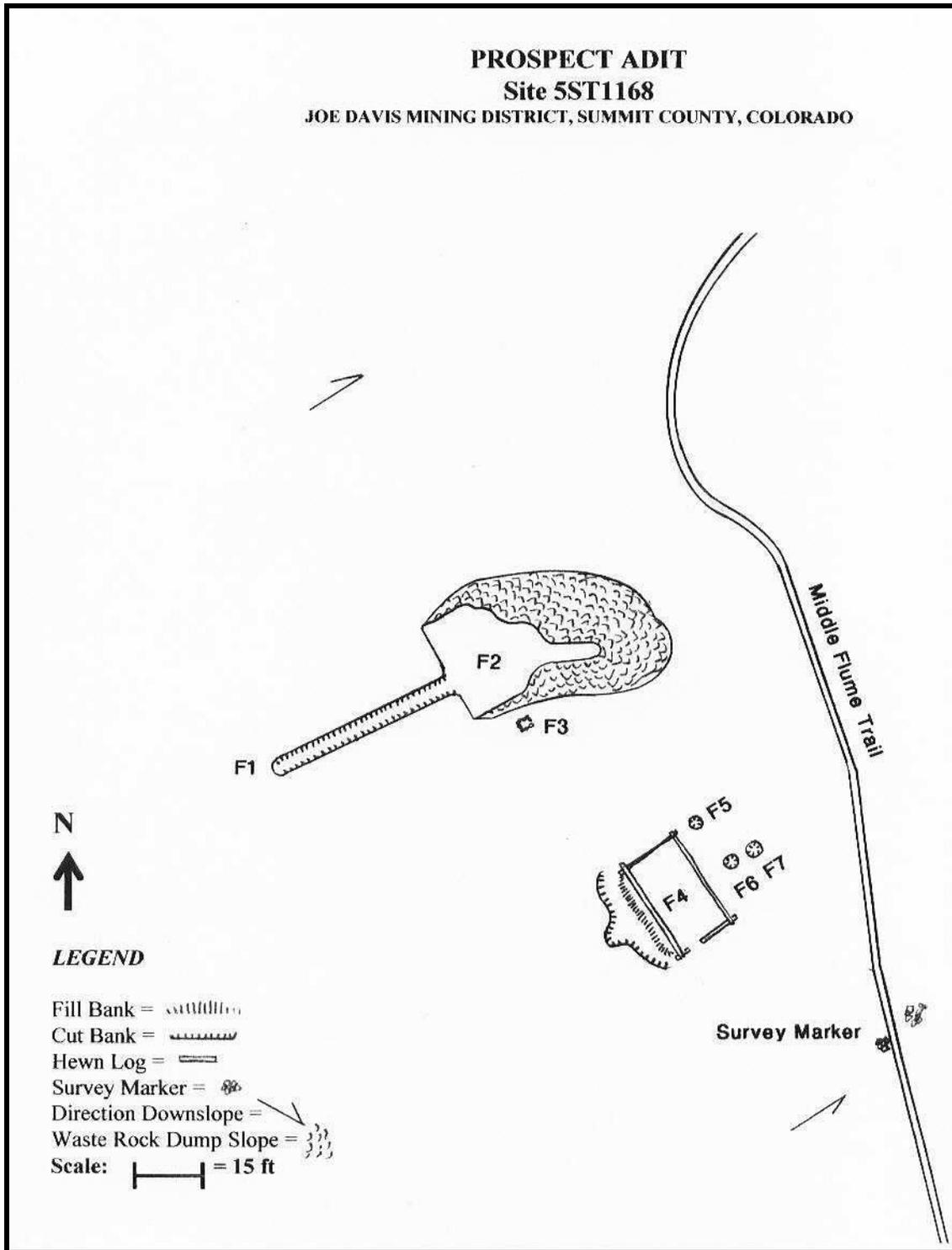


Figure 2.55: Plan view of a prospect adit site on the north side of Gibson Hill.

Prospect Adit Site Interpretation

The adit was a failed attempt to find a mineralized vein and sample its content at depth. Prospectors drove the adit southwest along the strike of a vein but found little of worth. The waste rock dump contains a limited amount of material, indicating that the adit was short. The prospectors installed a simple surface plant that was typical of minor exploratory operations. The surface plant represents a minimal capital investment, and the lack of an ore storage structure on site indicates that the adit was unproductive.

The site's domestic refuse allows us to draw several conclusions regarding the prospectors. The artifact assemblage lacks items representing fine and costly goods, indicating that the prospectors were men who belonged to a lower socioeconomic status. They consumed a diet of almost exclusively preserved foods and ate little fresh food. Such a diet was typical of prospectors living in remote areas. The prospectors also drank little alcohol and enjoyed sound health according to few identifiable liquor and medicine bottles.

Prospect Adit Site Significance

The site encompasses the remnants of a prospect adit and an associated log cabin ruin, which were developed during the 1880s. The site now retains a high degree of archaeological integrity relative to the above timeframe and lies in an undisturbed setting. Because the site retains integrity and is likely to offer meaningful information, the site is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criteria C and D, and for the SRHP under Criteria C and E.

In terms of Criterion C, the site is an excellent archaeological example of a prospect adit. According to archaeological features, the operation consisted of the adit, its waste rock dump, an open-air blacksmith shop, and a log cabin for the prospectors. With such a feature assemblage, the site typifies many circa 1880s prospect adits in Summit County and greater Colorado. Prospect adits were fundamental to the success of Summit County's and Colorado's hardrock mining industry because they were one of the principal means that prospectors used to find economic ore formations. While the adit complex is a common site type, it is recommended eligible because the site is an outstanding archaeological example. Further, the artifact assemblage possesses enough materials to represent the socioeconomic status, diet, and consumption of alcohol typical of 1880s prospectors.

The site is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criterion D and the SRHP under Criterion E because it is likely to yield important information upon further study. Specifically, three privy pits and the area around the cabin ruin probably offer buried archaeological deposits. Testing and/or excavation may exhume artifacts capable of enlightening the current understanding of the demography of prospectors. The artifacts may address questions regarding socioeconomic status, ethnicity, diet, health, and substance abuse, which are topics that received little attention by the records-keepers of the past.

Prospect Adit Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest several actions. First, the site lies along the heavily used Middle Flume recreational trail. Given this, the site has a high potential for educating the public regarding the area's mining history, the concept of prospecting, and how prospectors explored for ore. Explanations can be accomplished through signage or publications.

Second, the site should be preserved. Signage will inform the public that the site is valued and should be preserved. The cabin ruin should also be stabilized against further collapse. The walls can be reinforced with support posts or buttresses.