AS WE APPROACH THE END OF THE TOUR

We hope you have enjoyed your stroll and have learned something about the historic Mammoth Consolidated Mine. There are other points of historic interest nearby, including the site of Mammoth City and the Mill City flywheel. If you'd like more information on these sites and other history of the area, please stop by the Mammoth Ranger Station and the Southern Mono Historical Society Museum.

A REMINDER — if you wish to keep this booklet, please leave $1.00 in the donation tube. Thanks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The concept and development of this interpretive site are the product of the Mammoth Ranger District, Inyo National Forest, the Southern Mono Historical Society and the Town of Mammoth Lakes.

Information was supplied by the John Ott and David Swain families, descendents of A.G. Mahan, and by Gary Caldwell, local historian. The booklet was edited by John Ott and Genny Smith and illustrated by Carol Broberg.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT MAMMOTH'S PAST

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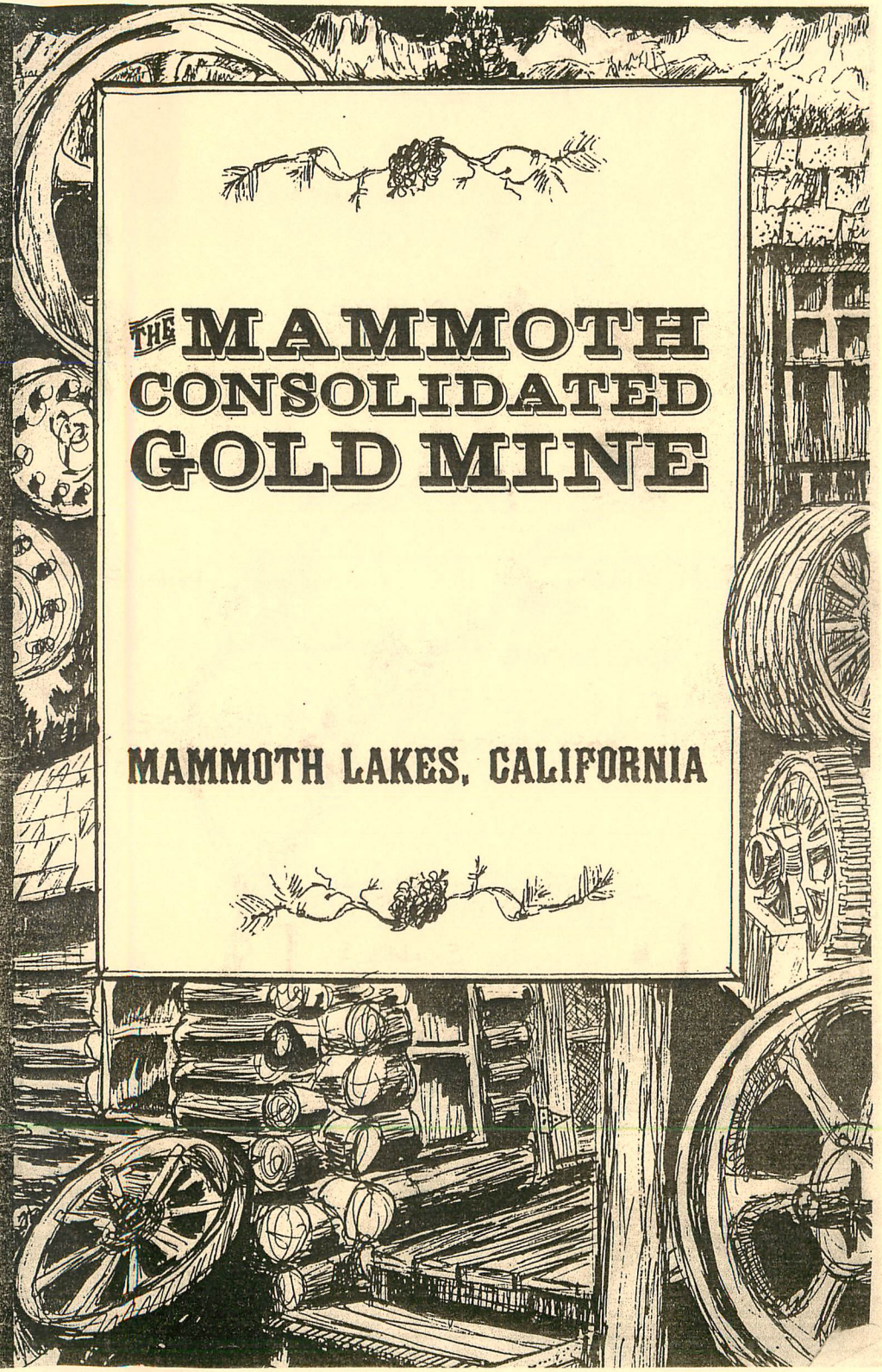
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Inyo National Forest
Mammoth Ranger District

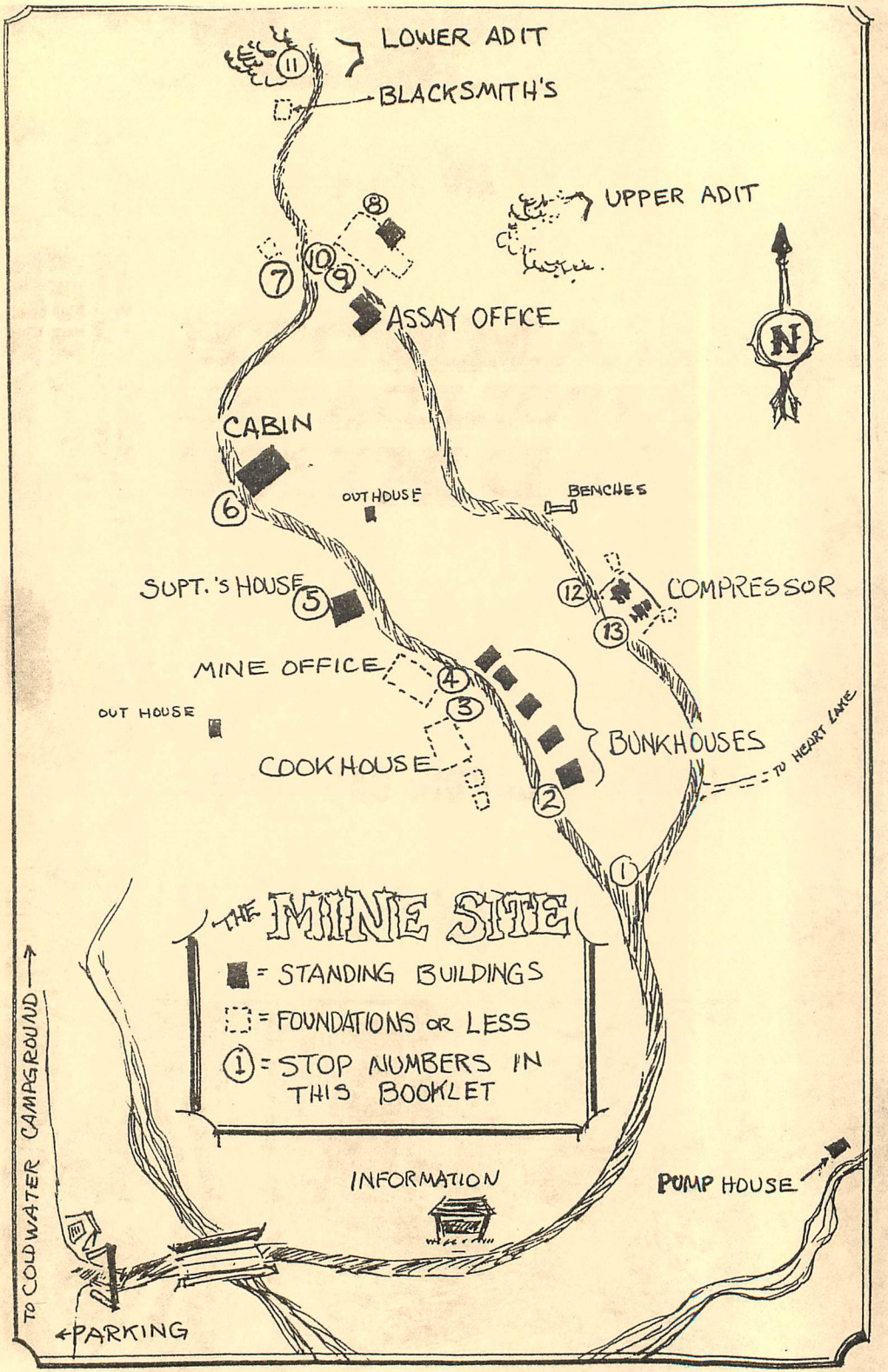
FOREST SERVICE USDA

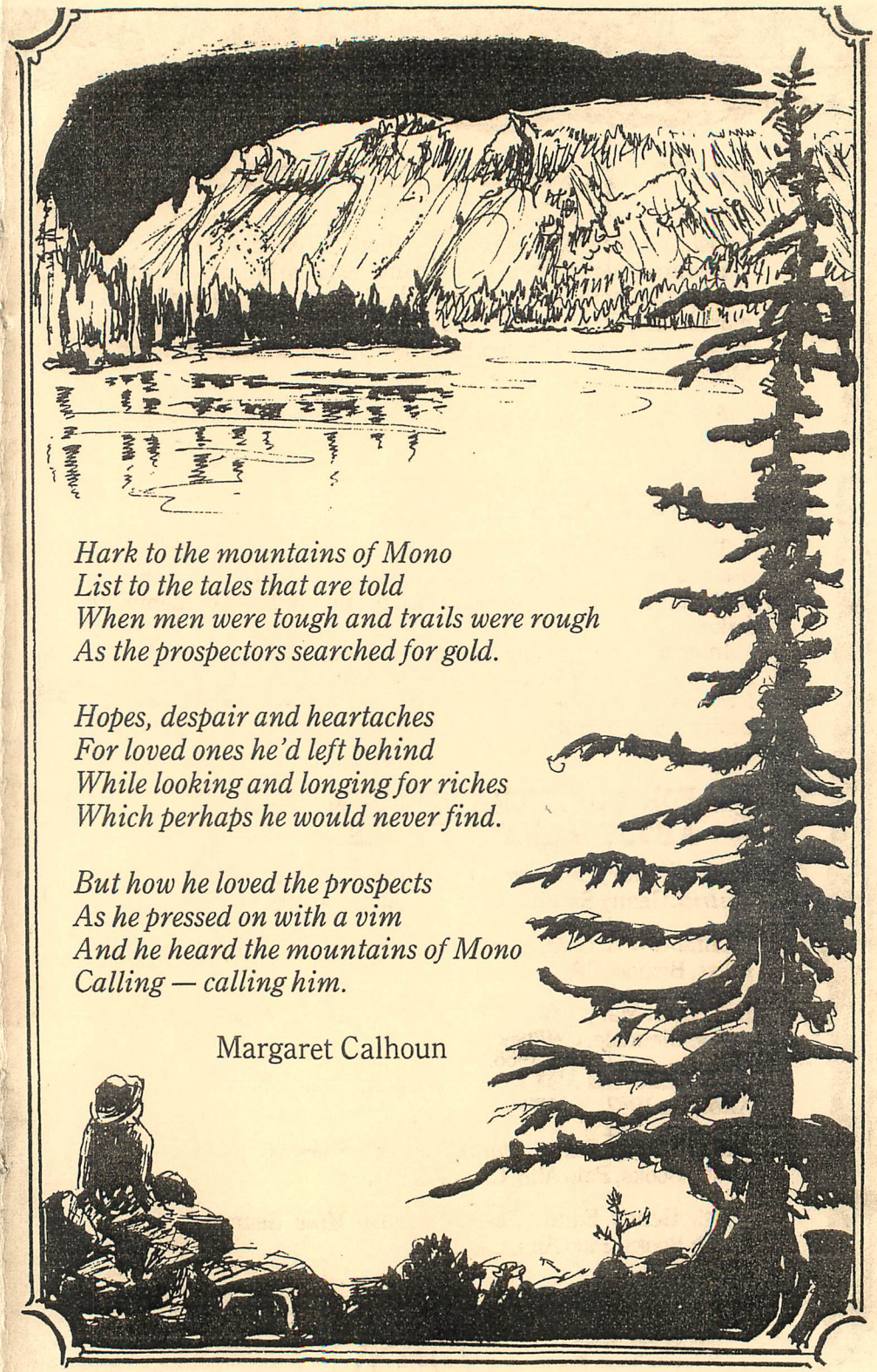
Mammoth Lakes, California

THE MAMMOTH CONSOLIDATED GOLD MINE

MAMMOTH LAKES, CALIFORNIA







Hark to the mountains of Mono
List to the tales that are told
When men were tough and trails were rough
As the prospectors searched for gold.

Hopes, despair and heartaches
For loved ones he'd left behind
While looking and longing for riches
Which perhaps he would never find.

But how he loved the prospects
As he pressed on with a vim
And he heard the mountains of Mono
Calling — calling him.

Margaret Calhoun

No. 13

THE END OF AN ERA

Large-scale work at the mine came to an end in 1933. Because of the Great Depression and bank failure, the Mammoth Consolidated Mining Company could no longer finance the operation.

In 1934, Arch Mahan purchased the resort at Reds Meadows and began packing tourists into the Devil's Postpile region on horseback. This was a significant change in his life. He was now a part of the changing economy of the Mammoth area. The mining era had come to an end. A new era, during which the economy was to be based on recreation, was born.

Through the years the mine property and equipment were leased to various individuals who did only a small amount of work at the site. In 1983, the Mahans regained control of the mine and employed a caretaker to live in the camp.

To preserve the memories and the history of the last significant revival of mining in the Mammoth area, the Mahan family donated the buildings and equipment to the town of Mammoth Lakes. The land is still part of the Inyo National Forest and belongs to the people of the United States.

The town operates this historic interpretive site under the authorization of a special-use permit issued and administered by the Inyo National Forest.

No. 1

GOLD! A REASON FOR BEING HERE

Rumors spread rapidly that gold could be found lying on the ground and that miners were earning at least one hundred dollars a day. Tales such as these were all that was needed to create a stampede of thousands of gold-seekers to the Eastern High Sierra during the late 1800's. The Mammoth Lakes area experienced a major gold rush in 1878-1881 and new mining ventures were launched in the years following, but, disappointed at not finding their dreamed-of fortunes, most of these miners soon abandoned their claims and moved on to new adventures.

Mining was, and still is, an important part of our American economy — a way of life for many men and sometimes their families. For some, mining was a skill, an occupation that provided steady employment and put food on the table. For others, the relentless dream and desire of striking it rich and finding their fortunes in the gold fields of the West was just too much to put out of their minds. Some were successful — others died with no more, and often less, than with what they started.

As you walk through the camp and among the deserted buildings, occasionally stop for a moment and close your eyes. Try to visualize how life was for those who lived and struggled here in the age of the Model A and the wood-burning stove. If you use your imagination, you might just hear the sounds of the machinery and the shouts of the men coming out of the mines and from the bunkhouses and the cookhouse of this old camp.

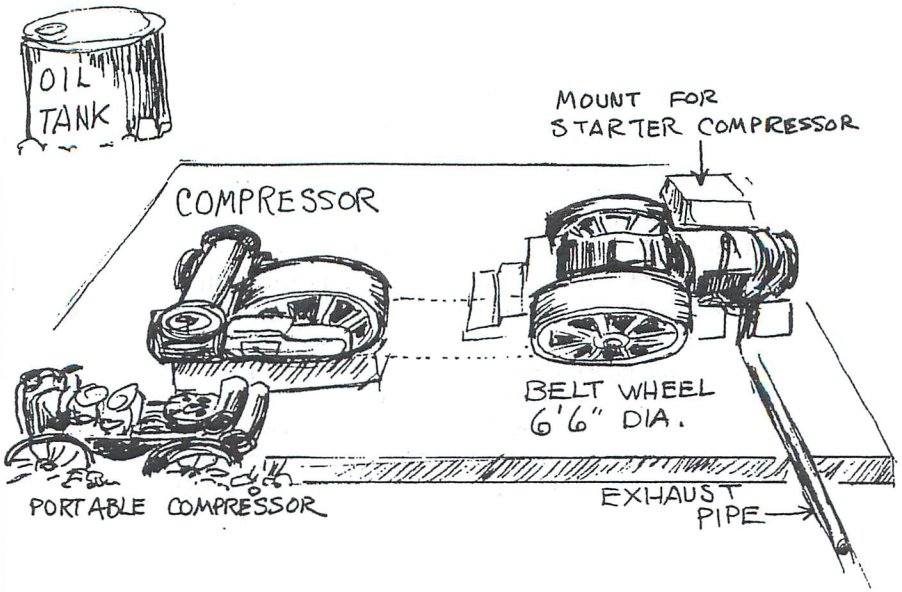
No. 2

THE BUNKHOUSES

In 1927, A.G. Mahan, Sr., his son Arch and several partners purchased several promising claims on Red Mountain, formed the Mammoth Consolidated Mining Company, and began construction of this mining camp. These buildings still retain their original appearance.

Four of these tar paper-covered buildings constructed around 1927-1931 were used to house the workers. Cast-iron wood stoves provided heat. There was no electricity or running water. Often, when the miners got up in the morning, they had to crack the ice in their washbasins. Pocket windows and kerosene lanterns were all that they had for interior light.

The number of workers in the camp varied with the season but seems to have ranged from six to fourteen. The jobs included: cook, assayers, truck driver, blacksmith, superintendent and, of course, the miners. The miners were paid $5.25 per day and were charged $1.25 a day for bed and board. It was a good wage for the time, but there wasn't much to spend it on in Mammoth.



No. 12

THE AIR COMPRESSOR PLANT

Sometime during 1935, fire destroyed the wooden structure protecting the air compressor and the 100-horsepower diesel engine from the weather. (It was rumored that the fire was set by an embittered partner.) The portable air compressor on the trailer was brought in as a replacement.

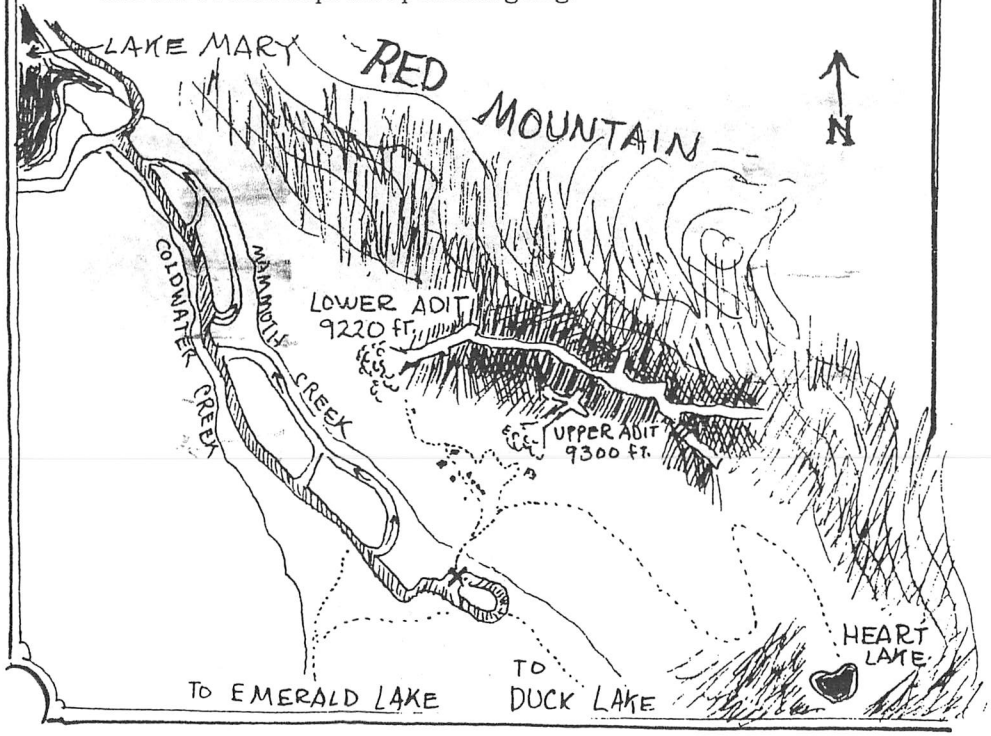
Compressed air was piped to the air-powered drills in the mine tunnels. The drills were used to bore holes into which dynamite was placed to blast and shatter the rock. The ability to handle the dangerous dynamite, to drill and set the right pattern of charges to fragment the rock into workable size and extend the tunnel evenly in the right direction was a highly prized skill, one that separated the professional miners from simple unskilled workers.

No. 11

THE LOWER ADIT

This adit (mine tunnel opening) is located 9220 feet above sea level and has been dug about 729 feet horizontally through solid rock, following a rich ore vein. Just southeast and about eighty feet above us is another tunnel which runs somewhat parallel to the lower tunnel, cutting the vein at a higher level. (The upper entrance has collapsed.) The two tunnels are connected by a vertical shaft called a raise. The ore was dug out of cavernous rooms called stopes off the upper tunnel and dumped through the raise into a bin in the lower tunnel. From there it was transported by ore carts to the mill. During the winter, if it was too cold to work outside, the miners would stockpile the ore for processing the next summer.

How rich was the ore? A sample taken early in the mine's development indicated six-tenths of an ounce of gold and one-fifth of an ounce of silver per ton of rock. That meant about $12.70 per ton at 1927 prices. However, the gold was chemically combined with iron sulphides — the same minerals that give the rock on Red Mountain its reddish-orange color in places — making it expensive to extract. It's doubtful that the mine ever paid for itself — it's more likely that the dreams of the investors and the owners kept the operation going.



No. 3

SITE OF THE OLD COOKHOUSE

There's no longer anything remaining of the old cookhouse with its long table covered with a brightly colored tablecloth where the miners ate three hearty meals a day. Imagine the breakfast-time aroma of fresh hot coffee brewing and the sound of eggs and bacon sizzling on the grill. The men were also served hotcakes, fried potatoes, and toast with homemade jam. Mrs. Pemberton, the cook, always gave them plenty to eat. She was a large woman and sometimes not too friendly. As you can imagine, no one complained much about the cooking.

No. 4

THE MINE OFFICE

Destroyed by the tremendous weight of winter snow, the building that once stood here had three rooms: the mine office, where business was discussed around an old pot-bellied stove, and two bedrooms. One of the bedrooms was used by A.G. Mahan, Sr. — the other was a guest room reserved for visiting dignitaries, chiefly stockholders and potential investors.

No. 5

HARSH WINTERS AND DEEP SNOWS

Winter weather in the High Sierra can be quite severe. Winds with velocities of 50-60 miles per hour often blow across the landscape creating blinding snowstorms and temperatures of 30-40 degrees below zero. Snow depths in the camp are sometimes as great as 25 feet. Avalanches are a constant danger. The winters here are long. According to Mark Twain, who once visited the area, "There are two seasons, the end of one winter and the beginning of the next."

Those who spent the winter in camp were effectively cut off from the outside world. Arch Mahan made his way in from Los Angeles every few weeks, traveling the last thirty miles or so by ski and snowshoe carrying the mail, payroll, and tobacco. Local residents, Bill Lewis and Tex Cushion also brought supplies to the mine by dogsled.

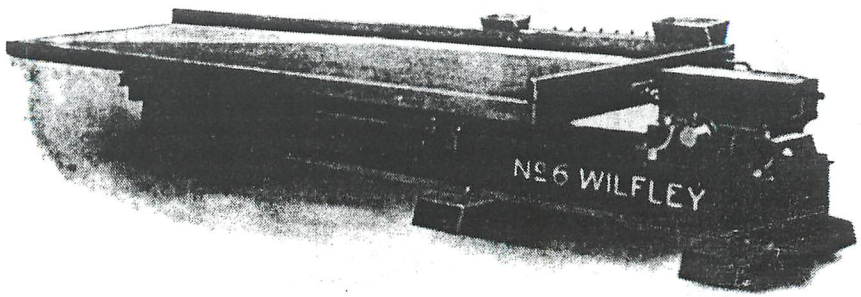
No. 10

WILFLEY TABLES

The remaining sand particles were then washed onto two slanted, riffled tables that sat on the lower floor of the mill. These Wilfley tables, named after their inventor, constantly vibrated back and forth sorting the lightweight waste material from the heavier mineral-rich concentrated ore. This remaining reddish-brown concentrate was shipped to Salt Lake City, Utah, for further processing to remove the arsenic which was used to make paint — the gold was returned to the Mammoth Consolidated Mining Company.

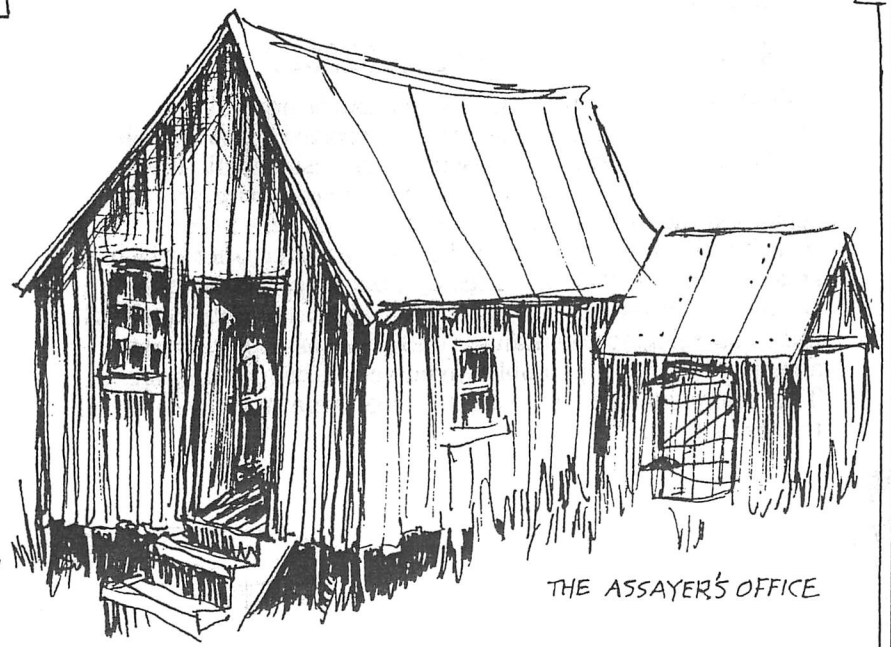
ALLIS-CHALMERS MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Cut No. 13916.



No. 6 Wilfley Table (Right Hand) with Improved Self-Oiling Head Motion and New Type Rocker Bearings.

THE WILFLEY CONCENTRATOR



THE ASSAYER'S OFFICE

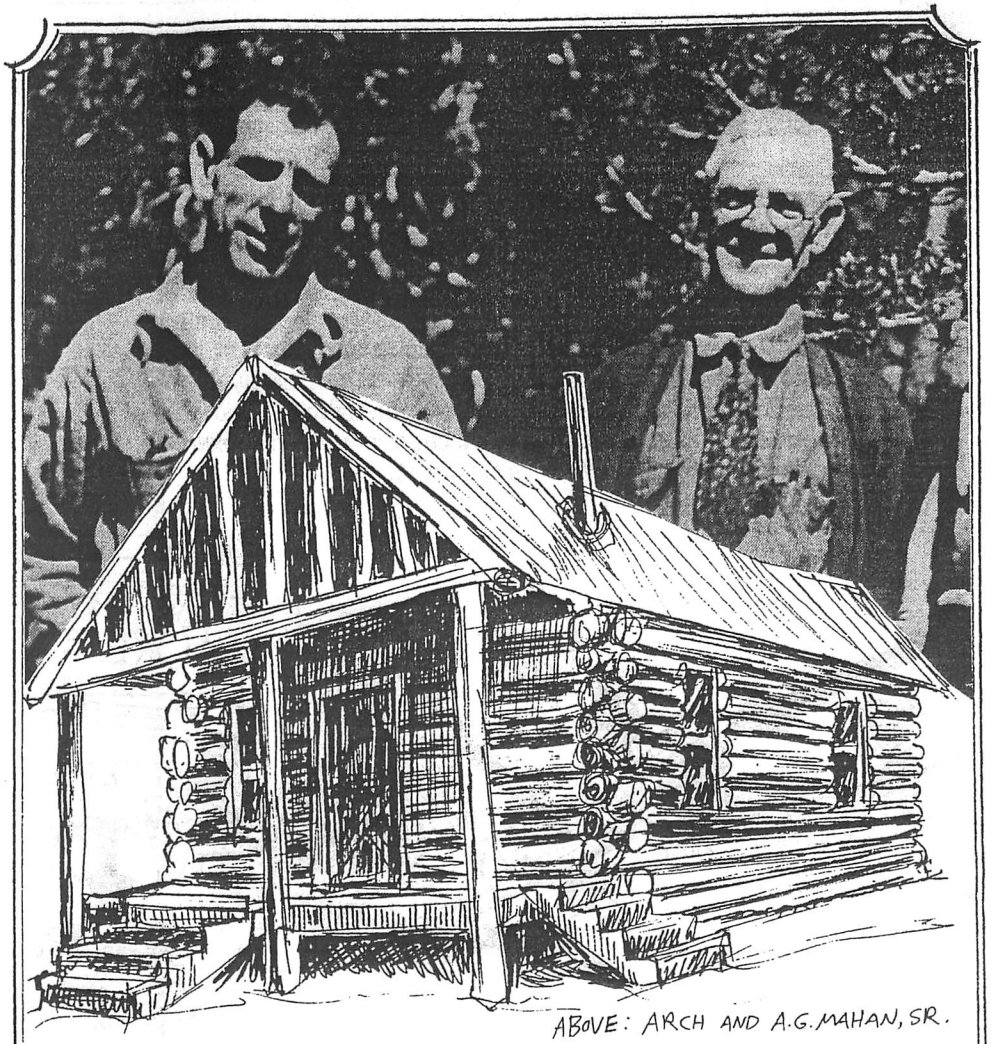
No. 9

AMALGAMATION

The sand-like product of the ball mill was mixed with water producing a mixture called a slurry from which the larger sand grains were separated by a trough-like device with mechanical rakes called a Dorr classifier. The largest sand grains were recycled back through the ball mill.

The tiny particles of ore were pumped onto a twelve-foot slanting table covered with copper plates that had been coated with mercury (quicksilver). The mercury dissolved the gold from the minute sand particles creating a liquid gold-mercury mixture called an amalgam. Later, the mercury was separated from the gold by heating the amalgam in a small furnace that was located in the assayer's office across the trail.

Besides the furnace and retort used to process the amalgam, the assayer's office also contained the chemicals, scales, and other equipment used to determine the gold content of the ore. It must have looked like an alchemist's lab.



ABOVE: ARCH AND A.G. MAHAN, SR.

No. 6

THE MAHAN CABIN

Constructed around 1929 from lodgepole pine trees, this log cabin was the summer home of Arch and Gladys Mahan and their family. During the winter months, the Mahan family moved to Southern California where the weather was more comfortable and the children could attend school.

The indoor plumbing, such as the toilet, is a relatively recent addition. Privies were placed at several strategic locations throughout the camp.

No. 7

THE ORE PROCESSING MILL

During the 1940's, avalanches destroyed the wood frame structure that housed the 110-horsepower diesel-fueled engine and the equipment that it powered.

The large iron wheels, called flywheels, were used to maintain a smooth and continuous operation of the big single-cylinder engine. The smaller wooden bullwheel drove a leather belt twenty inches wide that was connected to the largest of the pulleys on the rusty shaft that once was supported twelve feet off the floor. From there the power was distributed by other belts and pulleys to the various other pieces of machinery used to process the ore extracted from the mine.

No. 8

HOW THE ORE WAS PROCESSED

Ore is rock containing metal which can be profitably extracted. Ore from the mine was transported by carts pushed by the miners along a tramway to the processing mill. It was dumped onto a large, coarse steel grate called a grizzly which separated the rocks by size — the smaller chunks fell on through, the larger pieces rolled off into a jaw crusher to be made smaller. The ore was then lifted by a bucket conveyor to the storage bin. From the bin it was fed in small amounts into a ball mill, a barrel-shaped container five feet across in which fist-sized steel balls constantly tumbled to pulverize the rock into sand. The concrete pillars on the old mill floor were once the supports for the ball mill.