

100 Years of Conservation and Public Service in the Medicine Bows

Copper Mining on the Medicine Bow

Although Ed Haggarty did not make his famous copper strike until 1897, prospecting had been carried on since the close of the Civil War in the Sierra Madre Mountains. In 1864, J.W. Southwick noticed quartz veins running along the surface on what later became the Kurtze Chatterton Mine on Copper Creek. Southwick never developed this property, though several took up claims on it until 1876. In 1874, Harper found copper-bearing float on what became the Doane-Rambler mine. The Bridger mine was located in 1876 on the Continental Divide. No other significant discoveries were made in the district until 1896 when Al Huston and Ben Cullerton discovered free gold in Purgatory Gulch. This strike spurred outside interest which would soon switch to copper.

The Ferris-Haggarty (F-H) Mine was the premier development in the district, and with it rose and fell the fortunes of the Encampment region. It was discovered by Ed Haggarty who had been grubstaked by George Ferris, Robert Deal, and John Rumsey. Haggarty actually discovered the lode on June 20, 1897, but did not stake out a claim at that time due to snow cover. He returned on July 25. Haggarty set up a stake and took possession of a twenty-acre tract of mining land, which he christened in his location notice as the "Rudefeha" lode claim, the name being composed of the first two letters of the name of each of the partners--Rumsey, Deal, Ferris and Haggarty. Rumsey's interest was soon bought out by Ferris.

In the spring and summer of 1898, Haggarty and party worked the claim and stake out others. A wagon road was cut into the area, a more permanent camp set up and development begun in earnest. By Oct 1898, the first load of ore was hauled out to Fort Steele and the railroad. The first railroad car of ore was sent to the Chicago Copper Refining Company and was found to contain 33% copper valued at \$6,664.

In 1899, Ed Haggarty sold his interest in the property for \$30,000 and returned to his native England. George Ferris was killed in a wagon accident in the Sierra Madres. However, the F-H Copper Mining Company had been formed by Willis George Emerson and Barnard McCaffery in Jan 1899, and continued to operate after the departure of Ferris and Haggarty. Emerson was a great promoter and was partially responsible for the rush to the Encampment District. He had an office in Denver to advertise the mine and actually laid out the official Encampment town site, although structures had already been built on the site in a haphazard manner. The mine was developed in a systematic manner. By 1902 a smelter had been built near Encampment on the west bank of the Encampment River to process the ore. A four-mile wooden pipeline was built from a reservoir on the South Fork of the Encampment River to supply water to the smelter.

Transportation of the ore from the mine to mill was streamlined by means of a sixteen-mile aerial tramway, an engineering feat for its time. Buckets capable of holding 700 pounds of ore each and moving at an average speed of four miles per hour were

suspended from the cables. At full production, the tramway could deliver 984 tons of ore per day. 90 percent pure copper ingots could be produced on site.

A number of settlements or camps developed as a result of the mining activity in the Encampment district. Elwood was a transfer point and at the height of the copper boom, had a population of 100 and a post office. Battle town site was laid out in 1898 and contained 40 structures including four general stores, five saloons, livery stables, two hotels, a post office and a newspaper, *The Battle Miner*. Battle is little more than a site today, as the CCC's destroyed the crumbling buildings in the 1930's. The small town of Rambler grew up around the Doane-Rambler Mine. Copperton was named for the related mining efforts in the area. Dillon was a mile from the F-H Mine. The end of the line was Rudefeha, a sizable community that grew up around the workings of the F-H Mine. In 1903, 125 men were employed, and in its peak year, 1904, 200 men were on the payroll.

The F-H Mine went through many different ownerships. In 1909 ownership went to the United Smelters, Railway and Copper Company. By the fall of 1910, the new company went into bankruptcy. The properties went into litigation until foreclosure proceedings took place in 1913. The smaller mining communities became ghost towns while other copper properties languished. The demise of the mine naturally brought about the downfall of the whole region. Failure of the F-H can be traced to poor financial management and disastrous fires in 1906 and 1907 that destroyed the concentrating mill, power house, boiler room and smelter, all of which had to be rebuilt at great expense. Perhaps a more important cause was the wild fluctuations and speculation in the national copper market.

With the decline of the copper industry, the area returned to ranching and pastoral pursuits. The communities of Encampment and Saratoga endured, and today, they attract tourists to the area for fishing, hunting and general recreation.