

TOTAL WRECK MINE

The Total Wreck Mine was discovered in 1879 by John R. Dillon (or Dilden depending on the source). The mine got its name when Dillon was asked what he planned to call it when he filed his claim. He said he didn't know but that the hill on which the ledge was located looked like a total wreck. The mine was located in the Empire Mining District in the eastern Empire Mountains about seven miles south of the town of Pantano, a regular stop on the Southern Pacific Railroad line. A good road led from Pantano to the Empire Ranch, passed by the Total Wreck Mine and provided excellent access to the railroad.

Very little work was done at the mine until 1881 when the claim was purchased by the Empire Mining and Developing Company. They installed a seventy-ton mill and began operations. A camp was soon established at the Total Wreck and by 1883 the camp had two hundred inhabitants and consisted of fifty houses, three stores, three hotels, four saloons, a butcher shop and a lumberyard. The Total Wreck Post Office was established on 12 August 1881 and continued operating until 1 November 1890 when the town was abandoned. The photograph of the mill site was obtained from the US Geological Survey Photo Collection of 1909.



Total Wreck Mining Camp about 1885
Wikipedia Photo

The Total Wreck Mine Group was owned at times (or in parts) and sporadically worked by a number of different groups and individuals from 1880 to 1940. Initial operations at the mine were rather short lived. By the end of 1884, the mine and the mill were closed and the property sold for taxes to Gates and the Vail Brothers (Edward & Walter). Other owners over the years were Roberts, E. P. Drew, Schley, Adams & Saxby, Gardner & Young, and Torres.



Total Wreck 70 Ton Mill Site - 1909
US Geological Survey Photo

According to the U.S. Bureau of Mines, total production between 1880 and 1940 was 14,000 tons of ore consisting of about 8% lead, 7 ounces per ton of silver and traces of copper and gold. About 8 tons of molybdenum concentrates were shipped in 1918. However, these production figures are highly suspect. The Bureau of Mines admits that little is known of production figures before 1902. Other sources indicate that the Total Wreck Mine was rich in silver and that over a half million dollars in profits were generated between 1883 and 1887. Walter Vail put much of that money into expanding the Empire Ranch.

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Two interesting occurrences concerning the Total Wreck Mine are:

In June 1883, some Mexicans who were hired to cut wood for the mill were working on the west slopes of the Whetstone Mountains when they were attacked by a band of Geronimo's Apaches. The Apaches killed six of the woodcutters and drove off a team of their mules. The woodcutters were the first victims to be buried in the Total Wreck Cemetery.

A strange shooting also occurred at the town. A Mr. E. B. Salsig got into a dispute with another man who drew his gun and fired. Mr. Salsig survived the incident because he had a large package of love-letters in his vest pocket, which stopped the bullet. Mr. Salsig later married the lady who had written the letters.

Summary prepared by T. Johnson from old mining articles. .