

YELLOW JACKET GOLD MINE

The Yellow Jacket Mine is located in the Oro Blanco Mining District about seven miles south of Arivaca and is situated on forty acres at the connecting point of Yellow Jacket Canyon and Phoenix Canyon. The mine area consists of two claims, twenty acres in Little Yellow Jacket Canyon and twenty acres in Phoenix Canyon.

It is possible that mining first commenced on an intermittent basis in the area of the Yellow Jacket in the early 1700s under the Jesuit priests but the first American involved in what was to become the Yellow Jacket Mine was Thomas Roddick who located it in 1874. Roddick made an agreement with three men named Robert Leatherwood, John Bartlett and John C. Handy to operate the mine and ore production began. Handy acquired the property from Roddick in 1881 and he and his two partners Leatherwood and Bartlett operated the mine until 1889 when Handy sold it. The property became patented in 1883. Ore production significantly increased by the 1890s and the shaft reached a depth of 250 feet. There were four levels to the mine with a total tunnel length of 1200 feet. Gold and silver were the primary products extracted from a series of quartz veins in a major fault zone. The veins varied from 2 to 30 feet in width with the La Paz vein being one of the largest with a width of about 30 feet. Arrastras were originally used to process the ore until a 20-stamp mill was built in 1892.

After the boom years of the 1890s, production at the mine continued on an intermittent basis. In 1915, a Philadelphia company took over the operation of the mine and after retimbering and refurbishing it made it productive again. During WWI and shortly after the operation became very intermittent. There was a resurgence in the 1930s and up to 25 workers were employed at the mine. Operations at the mine stopped when WWII started and it wasn't until 1959 when C. A. Johnson, the owner at the time, explored the possibility of reopening the mine. He leased the mine to a Canadian Gold mining Company that repaired the old shafts and crosscuts, cleaned out and retimbered the main adit and performed a geological survey. The ore was of good quality but with the price of gold frozen at \$35 per ounce by the government, the operation would not be commercially economical and the company terminated the reactivation of the mine. After the US went off of the gold standard and the price of gold was allowed to fluctuate, the mine was purchased by Charlie Lemons in 1972. Charlie owned and worked the mine by himself until his death in 1997. His widow, Mildred Lemons, sold the Yellow Jacket to Stealth Enterprises of Chicago for \$80,000 in 1999. Stealth Enterprises ran into financial difficulties and the mine was sold at a Santa Cruz County Sherriff's sale to a Hedge Fund for \$15,000. Then in May 2009, Hedge Fund turned around and offloaded the property to Jacob Binson, owner of Binson Pawn Brokers New Jersey for \$2.2 million dollars. Not a bad profit for a property considered to be currently worthless. As of February 2013, there has been no recent activity at the mine.

The Yellow Jacket area contained another resource that over the years was probably more valuable than the ore. Water is a critical resource in the Southwest and the Yellow Jacket had an artesian spring that seemed to flow continuously over the years. It not only

provided water for the mining operation but also facilitated the establishment of the surrounding community and the gardens of the families. During the early era (1890s), a small community evolved in the canyon consisting of a number of houses and also a school and a saloon. The majority of the buildings were of adobe construction. The community size rose and fell along with the fortunes of the surrounding mines (including the unpatented claims) but people still maintained homes there as late as the 1970s. Caryl Marie Brendle Adcock lived in Yellow Jacket from 1972 to 1975 when she and her husband were caretakers of the mine. She described her life there as shown in the following excerpts from a geology paper that she wrote in 2009. “Electricity and Running water were not available.” “We pumped the water with a hand pump while standing on a few planks spanning the 65 foot shaft. The pipe line from this pump filled a barrel... and also the water tank...” “We also pumped 50 gallons a day for the garden...” “While the menfolk prospected and did assessment work on the unpatented claims, the women tended the children and the gardens and took care of the goats.” She indicated that she had returned to the Yellow Jacket numerous times since she had lived there and was amazed at “how fast nature takes a place over after the people are gone.” “Our House spot is unrecognizable...” “The trails and roads often frequented in my time are washed away or covered in vegetation”.



View of the Yellow Jacket Mine Area in 2013 – Photo by Richard Shimanek



Mining Equipment – February 2013
Photo by Richard Shimanek

Summary prepared by T. Johnson, March 2013 from various web sites including a geology paper prepared by Caryl Marie Brendle Adcock. Pictures by R. Shimanek

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