



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Pacific
Northwest
Region

Copper City Mining Company



Naches Ranger District

To many people of today the allure of the mountains is solitude, relaxation, finding peace from the everyday rat race of modern living. Not long ago the mountains, in many cases a vast wilderness of unknowns, drew early explorers, trappers and prospectors in search of wealth. It's hard to imagine the hardships these early pioneers endured. They saw and did things which today would be unimaginable to many. Without them we would not know the beauty of a time long gone and in many cases forgotten.

Copper City, located 70 miles north of Yakima along Deep Creek, 12 miles south of Goose Prairie, Tom Fife's old haunt, was at one time a thriving mining endeavor, but today rests silently below the forest canopy. In 1889, James T. "Cap" Simmons filed one of the first gold claims in the area of Gold Hill. During his early explorations for precious minerals he ventured across signs of copper in the area of Deep Creek. Cap eventually filed a claim near the present site of Copper City, which he later turned over to his son A.B. "Bud" Simmons in 1899. Bud incorporated shortly after he took over the claim in 1899, but it didn't take long for him to become discouraged with the lack of quartz and whether or not the lack of quartz forced him to sell or not, he liquidated his holdings for \$700 around 1905.

Reuben Root who had worked for Tom Fife at his Bluebell claim, was relatively unknown then and now, but was extremely active in development of the Bumping Mining District as well as the entire Bumping area. Exactly when Reuben showed up in this area is unknown, but he was obviously here at the turn of the century having worked for Tom Fife as well as establishing his own claim, the "Clara", near the top of Miners Ridge. Reuben had incentive to purchase Bud's claim for \$700 having filed his claim above Copper City and knowing the potential for mining in the district. Once Reuben had secured his claim he sold shares to purchase machinery. Among those who bought into his endeavor were Mart Schichtol, Dan Sinclair, Si Fletcher, Allan Johnson and the Tuggle brothers. Mart and Dan bought the majority of shares.

Copper City was becoming a reality to Reuben and his partners. In 1906, a sawmill was constructed by Si to manufacture timber for development of Copper City. By 1907 claims located near the top of Miners Ridge were incorporated as the Summit Copper Mining Company, with Dan Sinclair as president. During this period of time in 1907, William Carmack, another early prospector, filed the Redbird claim near the Clara. Within the same area Manley Dunham, William Carmack's son-in-law, filed the Bluebird claim. Things were beginning to happen in the area and Reuben was taking the lead.

It's highly likely Reuben knew of the Natchez and Eastern Railway Companies plan, in 1892, to construct a railway up the Naches and Bumping Canyons to the coal fields at Fish Lake. Telegraph and telephone lines were part of this plan; however hard times eventually led to abandoning this idea. As far as Reuben was concerned railway plans were only put on the side burner. Reuben always believed the possibility of a railway in the future and the reality of a booming mining center still existed. Reuben never gave up hopes of a railway happening and built his dreams around this concept. Copper City, serving 42 active claims from 1907 to 1942, was built to accommodate all the mines and hopefully a railway.

Interest in the Summit Copper Mining District and Copper Mining Company, in particular the Redbird claim, was growing. Bill Carmack, along with John Crosetti and Pat Mullen, a mine promoter from Montana, were making plans to explore the full potential of the Redbird mine. An agreement was reached between the three of them where John would work the mine, Pat and Bill would supply food, tools and equipment. John Crosetti, his son Victor and Pete Bertogilio built a cabin at the Redbird site and spent the winter mining and stockpiling the ore. The ore was hand sorted and in the spring, Ralph Carmack, Bill's twelve year old son, packed out five tons of ore concentrate on horseback. The ore was packed to Goose Prairie, the end of the road then, where Tom Fife insisted on taking it from there to the Naches railhead. From Naches the ore was shipped to Tacoma where it was processed showing a return of \$55 per ton. Exactly what they were looking for is unknown, but we can assume the highest percentage was copper with traces of possibly gold, silver and other metals such as tungsten.

Pat Mullen was highly interested in the results. Once the returns came in, Pat started looking for other investors. Pat had most of his money invested in Yakima hotels so he contacted Charles Congdon, a local cattleman, orchardist and mine promoter from back east. Both men were willing to pool the needed resources to fully operate the Redbird. Unfortunately both men died that winter and Bill Carmack had to make other plans. Because the Redbird and Clara mines were so close, he consolidated with Reuben Root. Both of these mines are located near the summit of Miners Ridge and relatively easy to get to from the Clara cabin today.

Mining during the late 1800's, early 1900's was arduous work, not for the meek. Hard rock mining takes endurance and stamina and is not without incidents. The worst incident concerned Reuben. While chipping away at hard rock in the Clara during the winter, Reuben caught a piece of metal from his chisel in the eye. The pain was unbearable and he knew he had to get medical help. You have to keep in mind he was in an extremely remote area nearly 70 miles from the nearest doctor. With help from one of the miners Reuben worked his way down the mountain, occasionally losing sight as one eye became sympathetic with the other. On skis they managed to work their way off the mountain and approximately eight days later arrived in Yakima. There was no saving the eye. Reuben had his eye removed and replaced with a glass eye. He went right back to Copper City and mining the Clara.

Another incident, which didn't have anything to do with the mines, but was the only known fatality, had to do with the camp cook. Tommy Amato had always dreamed of returning to Japan to see his mother and was planning on returning there in the spring. Unfortunately Tommy was killed when snow collapsed the woodshed roof, burying him under snow and wood.

When the miner's returned from a cold hard days work expecting a warm dinner they found instead a cold, dismal cabin. Somewhat disgruntled by the situation they began searching for Tommy and found his body buried beneath the snow and wood. They contacted Ira Ford, Reuben's stepson at Goose Prairie, who took his dog sled to the Clara to take Tommy home. Tommy was placed on the sled and taken to Goose Prairie, laid in a shed for the night and the next day taken to the highway for his final trip home to Japan and his mother.

Between 1905 and 1942 millions of dollars had been spent constructing Copper City and working the mines. Reuben constructed the road from Bumping Dam shortly before the completion of the dam in 1910. Phone lines were installed from Bumping, Goose Prairie to Copper City and from the appearance of wire, from Copper City to at least the Clara cabin, possibly the mines. Things were not simple then, but when you look at what's left you can see the miners were comfortable. The Clara cabin stood in a pristine meadow two and a half miles above Copper City. Originally there was a smaller less inhabitable cabin, but with the increase in mining a newer, more sophisticated cabin was built. In the 30's it would stand as a castle. Close observations indicate an elaborate water system, gravity flow, from the Sunset mine, about a quarter mile past the cabins, of 3 inch jointed metal pipe. All indications are the Clara cabin had plenty of running water as well as a rather sophisticated septic system. All that remains today is a large stack of unused firewood, lots of rotting wood products and a basement pit.

The road to the Clara from Cooper City, although tragically decimated, still has reminders of days long past. Wooden culverts to drain water under the road rather than over still remain, but broken. Diversions or bridges across stream canyons, once works of engineering art are still there, an example of just how ingenuitive men could be. Tailings from the mill were loaded in wagons and dispersed up the road making it better than most gravel roads today.

This entire area is littered with historical construction sites, which leave the mind reeling with visions of what life was like back then and many more sites, which haven't been discovered. Log cabins constructed at the turn of the century are a testament to man's ability to create out of the wilderness a comfortable abode to return to after a tedious days work in the mines. When you stand outside the entrance to one of the mines and look across the valley towards Mt. Aix and in every other direction, you know what brought these men to the mountains and made them stay.

Reuben Root guided the destiny of Copper City and when things began to wane Reuben always managed to re-spark interest and get things going again. Forty-five years having passed, over a million dollars spent in one way or another, the mines closed. When the time came to dig the ore, they discovered the money had been spent with no more coming. In short, insufficient development, lack of definite proof that needed ore was present, caused the eventual closing. When compelled to close, Reuben went back to Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he died two years later.

In 1948, Walter Reddon had all the machinery moved out, part going to Gold Hill and the Keystone mine before it was finally dismantled and sent to the bentonite mine in the Tieton Basin. All that remains of Copper City today is the collapsed bunkhouse and remnants of the mill.

The Copper Mining Company group, totaling 42 claims, was located in 1906 and produced the following amounts of minerals, according to the Bureau of Mines: In 1917, five tons of ore, containing 34 ounces of silver per ton and 1,486 pounds of copper; 1938, 150 tons containing 1 ounce of gold per ton, 99 ounces of silver per ton and 4, 347 pounds of copper; 1940, 650 pounds containing 62.4 percent tungsten trioxide, and in 1942, 5 tons containing 48 ounces of silver per ton and 2,000 pounds of copper. Had the railway been put in, transportation costs cheaper and technology more advanced, Copper City may have paid off. As it is Copper City is only a remembrance of the past.

During the summer of 1998, three horseback tours of Copper City and the mines near the top of Miners Ridge provided participants with an opportunity to experience history. They were able to walk and ride roads and trails established by early pioneers and explore mines dug into the mountainsides by hardy miners. If you would like to learn more about Copper City, the mines and people who worked and lived in the wilderness, contact the Naches Ranger Station.

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