

MINE TALES

Old site in Tucson Mountains was active for a century



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Today we introduce a new column that explores Southern Arizona's rich mining history.

There are more than 100,000 active and defunct mines in the state, and a good portion of them are in our neck of the woods.

The column's writer, William Ascarza, is an archivist, historian and author of five books: "Southeastern Arizona Mining Towns," "Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum" and "Tucson Mountains,"

all published by Arcadia Publishing; and two self-published volumes: "Sentinel to the North: Exploring the Tortolita Mountain Range" and "Zenith on the Horizon: An Encyclopedic Look at the Tucson Mountains from A to Z." The books are available online at Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com, as well as at Antigone Books, Cat Mountain Emporium and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.

Look for this column every Monday in the Star.

The most successful mine in the Tucson Mountains was the Old Yuma Mine, which was both the last active mine in that area and one of the first in what was known as the **Amole Mining District**. It also served as the hideout during a famous kidnapping. But more on that later.

Located near Picture Rocks Road, the Old Yuma Mine dates to **1872** and is in what's now Saguaro National Park West. The mine, which was a minimum of 300 feet deep, mostly produced lead, which was shipped to Globe to be amalgamated with silver.

The Old Yuma Mine operated sporadically until the early 1980s and became one of the three principal mining operations in the Tucson Mountains, along with the Gould Mine and the Mile Wide Mine.

The Old Yuma also produced molybdenum, which became profitable in the 1910s because of its potential manufacturing capability. Molybdenum's potential for hardening steel made it important during wartime.

Col. Epes Randolph, one of the mine's investors, foresaw the marketability of this metal shortly before the United States entered World War I. A mill that could process 100 tons of ore a day was established on the mine site, but it lasted only two years since it was too costly to run. A smelter operated at the site until the 1920s.

About a decade later, on Feb. 4, 1932, Cliff Adkins kidnapped prominent Tucson banker Gordon

Sawyer. The next day he and his accomplices sent Sawyer's bank, Southern Arizona Bank and Trust Co., a demand for \$60,000 in exchange for their abductee's life.

Tucson deputies discovered unusual tire tracks at the scene of the abduction. They followed them to the ranch and found Sawyer, alive, in an abandoned well. The abductors escaped, and the bank offered a \$5,000 reward for their capture.

The Tucson Mountains swarmed with armed townsmen inspired by the promise of reward money.

Several caretakers of the Old Yuma Mine came forward with information about the whereabouts of Cliff Adkins. He had been hiding out at the mine, forcing its owner, "One-Eyed" Joe Baker, to feed him. Tucson police and Border Patrol officers promptly apprehended Adkins, who was later sentenced to 40 years in prison. Because he was a model prisoner, he eventually received an early parole.

After 1947, the Old Yuma Mine remained abandoned until Consolidated Mining & Milling Ltd., owned by Richard Bideaux, attempted to resume operations.

Bideaux acquired the property and attempted to extract gold through cyanide leaching. That drew the ire of environmental and anti-mining interests because of the mine's proximity to residential areas.

Legal battles continued throughout the 1980s between Bideaux's mining company, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, the then-Saguaro National Monument and the Tucson Mountain Association. Mining operations were blocked until the federal government bought the land in July 2001 from the Arizona Exploring and Mining Co. for \$558,000.

Saguaro National Park West has since acquired the land, and the mine is now the property of the U.S. government.

Sources: Clemensen, Berle A., 1987, "Cattle, Copper and Cactus: The History of Saguaro National Monument"; National Park Service Denver Service Center; Historic Resource Study Saguaro National Monument; Kinnison, John E., 1958, "Geology and Ore Deposits of the Southern Section of the Amole Mining District, Tucson Mountains, Pima County, Arizona," thesis, University of Arizona.; Svejcar, Bob, "Gold mining firm kept from private road," Arizona Daily Star, June 20, 1985; Weadock, J.F., "Desert Notebook," Arizona Daily Star, Feb. 1, 1965; Wells, Susan J. and Stacie A. Reutter, 1997, "Cultural Resources of the Tucson Mountain District, Saguaro National Park"; Western Archeological and Conservation Center National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior; Publications in Anthropology 69. Email William Ascarza at mining@azstarnet.com