

The Chuning Mine

*By
Kevin*

The crack was about eighteen inches wide and filled with boulders. He ran the entire distance without any timbering, and all alone. Every foot had to be blasted..... I think it was the most dangerous piece of work I ever saw accomplished by man.

The Bark Notes



Fifteen years ago, that paragraph tweaked the interest of Greg Davis. The dedicated Dutch Hunter was talking to his friend Dan Hopper and Dan was describing a mine Dan's father had shown him many years earlier. Dan's father had worked with Ralph Morris at the Paint mine in the 1950's and apparently Ralph had discovered the location at that time. As they talked Greg became convinced that Dan could very well be describing the Chuning mine. So in 1992 Greg and Dan set out to find it.

Greg believes they found the mine that day, over fifteen years ago. You see, right in the area where Dan thought it would be, a mine *was* found. A mine which fit Bark's description to a tee.

Without flashlights the men explored as much as possible. The trail home soon called and the Chuning mine was again left to the many Spirits of the Superstitions....

Fast-forward thirty years to January 10th of this year. On that day I received an E-mail from Greg. He was going back to the mine to finish the exploration he started long ago. Greg enjoys hiking with other mountain enthusiasts and asked if I'd like to tag along with the group he'd assembled. Luckily, I would be able to set aside the everyday things on that day, so I agreed to go.

A week later we all met at First Water Trailhead at 7:00 AM. This trip included Greg, Randy, Larry, Wayne and myself. The hike started out downright cold with an outside air temperature around 19 degrees.



We were soon off and heading towards the old first water ranch site. Passing the creek bed we came upon the old well pipe.

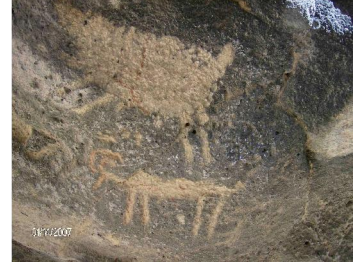
Greg pointed out that when this well was being drilled Brownie Holmes was attempting to mount a skittish horse just as the drill engine was started. The engine backfired, the horse bolted, and Brownie injured his ankle. This injury ended Brownie's ability to search the mountains.

Moving past the ranch area we soon reached the flat of Garden Valley. Moving past the ruins, we took a few moments to look at the pottery shards strewn about and discussed the burial mounds located off in the distance.

We also discussed the possible location of the Rancheria that was attacked and destroyed by Lt. Dubois back in 1866.



We quickly passed through Garden Valley and soon were heading down towards Second Water. Still making good time both Greg and Wayne pointed out the locations of interesting petroglyphs which we all took a few moments to examine.



Greg pointed out many other locations where petroglyphs were to be found, but we were all focused on reaching the mine site. The numerous markings would have to wait for another hike, another time.

Reaching the bottom of the Second Water Canyon at the confluence with Boulder we realized just how cold it was. The creek had iced over in the pools. It was about a quarter of an inch thick and as smooth and clear as glass. Since all of us had been here when the heat was almost unbearable I think we all took a picture.



It kind of tough to see but Wayne is holding a piece of ice as a bundled up Larry looks on.

We continued on and soon reached the area to start the search. After a short break we lightened our load and headed out on the last push towards the site which Greg had discovered over thirty years before.

It didn't take long to find the spot. Greg photographs every hike, coordinating each photo with a topographical view, which includes a detailed direction of the photo.

The mine itself is located under a house-sized boulder, which had fallen, unknown years ago, onto another boulder forming a cave. The opening is located at the extreme back of this cave.

Larry standing at the entrance to the entrance. You have to climb under the rock, back in about thirty feet or so to actually get to the entrance. For the life of me I cannot understand what possessed Chuning to start digging there.

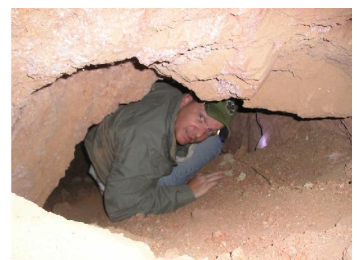


We were kind of strung out at this point so we waited until everyone reached the spot. It's a fairly large area so we all climbed inside to take a look. There was a small amount of debris, which had to be moved aside. Once this was completed Randy was unanimously elected to venture in first, primarily due to his fit and trim presence. A task he willingly accepted. After a flashlight scan for critters, down he went headfirst.



It's a little hairy going into a small hole in the ground not knowing if something else lives

there. Little did we know.

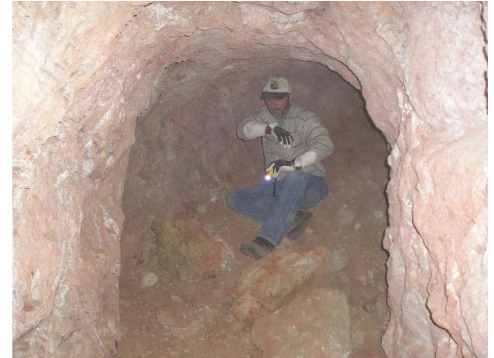


Randy gave the all clear and down we went by twos. Randy soon met the present owner of the mine. "SKUNK", was heard from the hole, but little more, as it was soon discovered that for a Skunk he was a rather tolerant fellow. Scared but tolerant. So two by two we each took turns sharing his warm home for a few moments.

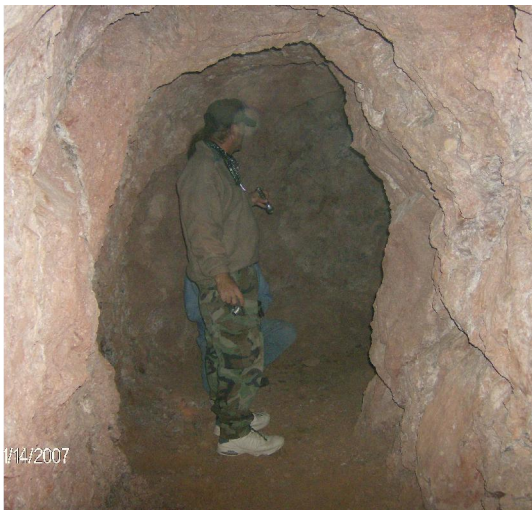


The mine itself was an incredible piece of work for a man by himself. It extended back about twenty feet, made a 90 degree turn, and extended another thirty in. Cut entirely into a hard form decomposed granite. We couldn't actually walk right up to the end of the tunnel since the present

owner was occupying that portion of the mine. He put up with us, but in that small area, none of us wanted to get too close.



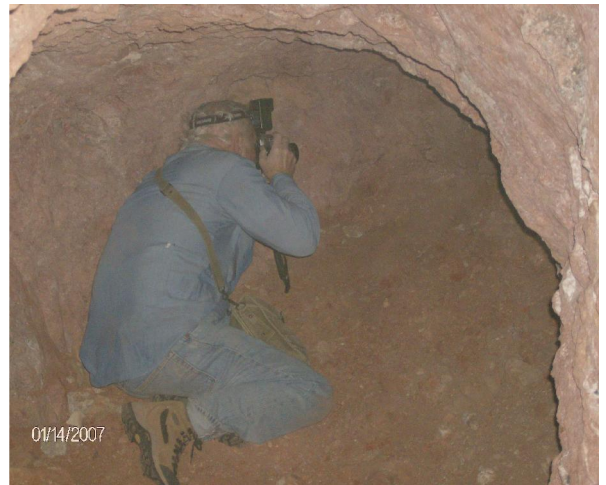
Here's a picture of me doing my skunk impersonation. Actually I was climbing down inside.



Wayne is keeping an eye on the critter while Greg is setting up behind him to take a picture.

Surprisingly, at least to me, there were no remnants of the mining activity left in the mine. No broken bits, candle holders, or even an old can.

This is Greg getting that one last shot past the 90-degree bend. At the end of the



mine where, 100 years ago, Chuning finally said, "Enough is enough."

All to soon it was time for all of us to say the same and leave the mine to it's present owner. On the way back to a



rendezvous point we all chose our own course and each did a little exploring in the area. While doing so I stumbled upon what appears to be one of Chuning's claim markers. It was located roughly 200 yards away from the mine.

I was hoping to find a can with a claim inside (at which point, I would have had to pack out the trash) but no dice. Looking between the

monument rocks revealed nothing.

Here's a sample of the material Chuning was working.



We all converged a short time later and had lunch in a wonderfully scenic spot. We reminisced on what we had found and seen on this hike. We talked of what it must have been like for John Chuning, alone in this desolate spot, working his mine. We also spoke of hikes past, the memorable friends, acquaintances, places and things. As we talked and ate I couldn't help but think of Greg. The innumerable places and people he was lucky enough to have done this very same thing with over the years.



At right: Greg Davis at home in the Superstition Mountains

All too soon we were on the trail, heading back out of the mountains. Past the Paint Mine, up Boulder Canyon, the long haul through Second Water, the welcome flat of Garden Valley, and finally back to First Water Trailhead. A great hike not soon to be forgotten.

