



Monumental prospects

Ancient mine yields new hope for gold that does not glitter

By Steven L. Yarbrough
Of The Tripletate

Water dripped down the back of my neck as I climbed backwards down the inclined shaft. Mud left on the ladder rungs by the boots of miners oozed between my fingers. Drip, drip, drip — down I went.

This was my first trip into a gold mine. I half expected to see a ghost or two of miners long dead, or at least a vein of glittering yellow. Instead, everything was rusty red and wet. The walls of the old Monumental Mine were covered with silt washed in during years of flooding. Most of the mine is still under water.

"We've been pumping all night to keep it down," says Standard Metals Corp. geological assistant Steve Ramsey.

Ramsey, geologist Ron Parker and another crewman are cleaning out the old mine shafts, mapping and taking samples of the hematite iron ore with sulfides — gold bearing rock.

Here and there, the walls have been scraped clean — tiny crystals reflect light from Ramsey's battery-powered hardhat. We're 40 feet below the surface.

'Good material'

"What's exciting working down here, is that every day we find something new," Ramsey says, pointing to a spot on the wall. "Here's a good place. There's good material here."

Ramsey, Parker and the other Standard Metals workers hope there is "good material" throughout the old mine. The New York company, operating through its Denver office, is spending a lot of money to find out

Brickwedel says the whole thing is still a pretty big gamble. The California Mining Journal reports that of 1,000 mining properties it surveyed, only seven developed into profitable ventures. But those that were developed were very profitable, says Brickwedel. That's what the excitement is all about.

"It takes four to five years of exploration to see if this thing's big enough to go ahead with the mining job," he says.

Last summer, Standard Metals had three geologists doing geochemical sampling on the mine area. It also had a team clear 1,000-foot brush lines to enable the geologists to gather samples on the surface.

Brickwedel says the additional 40 claims Standard Metals has staked out cover about 800 acres extending south from the mine.

"So, you see, they've had a pretty good program of exploration," Brickwedel says.

Local couple's prospects

The Brickwedels' interest in the development of the mine is longstanding. They spent more than three years researching and acquiring ownership of the old mine patents and conducting preliminary work at the mine. Their mineral claims include nearly 440 acres surrounding the original mine.

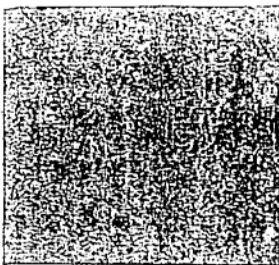
In 1980, Brickwedel and George Ziegler, another Del Norte County man, excavated one of the original mine shafts. It had filled up with debris over the years and the two men hoped to clear it for future use.

The old three-compartment shaft may go as deep as 215 feet — straight down. It was used by the old-timers to take out ore and take in air, men and materials.

"We dug it out (with a crane) until the water started filling in. At about 40 feet we could feel something bouncy — like a wooden platform," Brickwedel says. That's where the two men quit work.

They used a powerful pump to lower the water level in the mine to about 100 feet below the surface.

"At that point we had a cave-in and it started getting expensive," Brickwedel says. It was then that he and Betty decided to lease the claims to a company that had the expertise and financial ability to carry out further exploration.

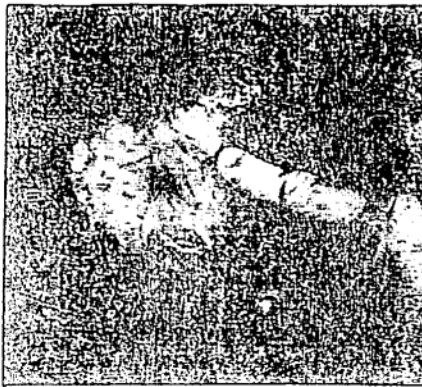


Steven L. Yarbrough photos



r the holidays,

how much good material really exists at the site — on Shelly Creek Ridge, 10 miles north of Patrick Creek Lodge and about 2 miles south of the Oregon border.



Gold in the mine is bonded to the surrounding rock. It's mostly invisible and will require a processing plant to extract the precious mineral.

Standard Metals' board chairman Boris Gresov announced earlier this month that his crew may have justification for its optimism.

Gresov says his company has "encouraging gold exploration findings at the Monumental Mine and, as a result, about 40 additional mining claims have been staked around the original leased area."

Study continues

"Geologic study is being continued," Gresov says. "Of 12 diamond-drill ore samples from along a dilineated gold zone on the Monumental Mine claim, five had intersected gold mineralization averaging about 0.20 ounces per ton over an average width of 13.4 feet.

"The other seven holes all have intersected a sulfide-silica zone with lower anomalous gold values."

In addition to drilling, the company also has completed a program of geologic mapping, geochemical sampling and geophysical surveys during its gold reconnaissance program in Del Norte County, Gresov says.

"Standard Metals has concluded that the results at Monumental are encouraging, as the mineralized zone continues to be quite wide where intersected with our drilling," Gresov says. "While good gold mineralization in the drilled zone is not continuous, only a small portion of the mineralized zone has been tested to date."

Frank and Betty Brickwedel, of Crescent City, own the mine claim patents that Standard Metals has leased at the site. They are not surprised by the findings of the test drillings.

"Zero point one is considered good ... I've had higher — up to over an ounce a ton," says Brickwedel of samples he's taken from the area.

The old-time miners had it best, though. They were probably taking out "visual gold" — glitter you could see in the ore. Standard Metals is after the stuff you can't see — gold that is bonded to the surrounding material. This is much more difficult to extract and would require construction of an ore processing plant.

Highest bid — \$7 million

The claims went out for bid. In June 1982, Standard Metals came in with the highest offer.

The deal the Brickwedels have with the mining company now brings them minimal annual lease payments, but they have eyes for the future. If, at the end of their contract in three years, Standard Metals decides to go into gold production, the Brickwedels will be paid \$7 million.

If the company foregoes development and walks away, the Brickwedels get only the results of the exploration work and whatever permanent developments are in place at the site. All equipment would be recovered by Standard Metals.

Back at the mine, Ramsey says, "We've been pumping all night. We'll be finished today at the 38-foot level."

The lost passage

Ramsey's looking for the "lost passage" — a tunnel which may lead to high-quality gold ore. It's the "last possibility," he says, of his two weeks of "mucking" at the edge of the shaft that could reach as deep as 100 feet.

Deep in the mine, company geologists have been taking ore samples from tunnels sprouting from the inclined shaft where I experienced my first feelings of mine phobia. It's dark down there.

"You can't really predict where the best gold will be," says Ramsey, "it's non-visible."

Brickwedel says, "If they can't find that extension they're looking for (the lost tunnel), the next step is to go to the lower level. There has to be some more work to make it safe, though."

Water, water everywhere

Water is always a problem — there's too much. It filters into everything. On Monday Dec. 12 ten inches of snow fell at Monumental. The place is known as one of the wettest spots in the continental U.S.. As much as 200 inches of rain falls there each year.

The state Water Quality Control Board requires that all water pumped out of the mine shafts match the acidity of the stream. To do this, the miners have set up a lime tank that drips into the waterpipe. They also dug a catch-pond where the water flows before entering the stream.

The crew working at the mine will be conducting further exploration to determine the extent of the gold in Monumental. This will include additional core samples.

Core sampling is done with a diamond drill. Standard Metals' drillers Steve Reep, Mike Beauplant and Bob Schultz live in Cave Junction and drive over the back roads to Del Norte daily.

They operate a drill that reaches up to 200 feet through solid-rock to give geologists a cross-section view at what lies below. The samples come up in rod-like cores that are packed in boxes in exactly the order they come from the ground. This allows the geologists to look at the sample in order.

The company, the Brickwedels and the miners now working at the mine all hope the samples are indicative of an extensive gold field.

As Brickwedel says, "All we know is that there's gold in there." They just don't know how much — yet.