

A Brief History of Gold Mining in the Greaterville Mining District Since 1873

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Background

In the 1540's, the Spanish explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado entered Arizona from Spanish Mexico in search of rumored gold laden Seven Cities of Cibola. Since the rumor of those cities was false, Coronado found no cities of gold; in fact, he did not even find a single nugget! Coronado's failure was costly, he was never paid for the costs associated with the expedition, never given another expedition and died with the reputation of a failure throughout Mexico.¹

Coronado's failure to find even a single nugget is probably due to his staffing of the expedition. It consisted of a few soldiers, some priests, "unlanded gentlemen," and family members of political friends. However, it had no experienced prospectors, miners or others familiar with recovery of valuable minerals. The expedition's failure discouraged further exploration of the region for two centuries and is thought to be one of the prime reasons why southern Arizona was so poorly colonized prior to the Mexican-American War.¹

In the early 1700's, the Jesuit Father Kino brought peace and a missionary development to southern Arizona. Father Kino's interests were focused on conversion of the Indians to Christianity and agricultural development. What little mining efforts the Spanish and Mexican performed during that period was concentrated on silver mining and some placer sluicing. Those operations were concentrated in the accessible part of the Territory near Tubac and Tucson because they were the most accessible and had local labor and materials to support their operations. This prospecting and mining was limited to those areas where the Indians were friendly and water was available. During the 1770's and later, the Franciscans brought renewed interest in mining for precious metals. Small placer gold mines and silver lode mines were operated across southern Arizona.¹

Shortly after the acquisition of the Territory of Arizona by the United States as a result of the Gadsden Purchase and its occupation in 1853 - 54, small pockets of gold mining began, largely the removal and concentrating of gold placers. With the outbreak of the Civil War, U.S. troops were withdrawn resulting in increased Apache raids and the termination of almost all mining operations. During the Civil War, U.S. troops from California entered the Territory. Their entry provide protection for prospectors that discovered rich gold placers at Gila City, La Paz and Quartzsite, followed by discoveries at Rich Hill, Lynx Creek, Hassayampa and Big Bug in the Bradshaw Mountains in the center of the Territory. After the end of the Civil War in 1865, troops were again withdrawn and approximately ten years of renewed Apache warfare ensued. In 1872, large reservations were established for the Indians and the first truce declared. The relative peace provided for renewed mining operations.²

During this period in the 1870's, gold, when compared to silver and copper, was low in price. Silver and copper mining took precedence over gold with the discovery of rich silver mines in the Bradshaws, the Silver King near Superior, and mines in the Globe and Tombstone areas. Copper mines were located near Ajo, Clifton, Jerome, Bisbee and Mammoth.²

In the 1880's and 1890's the U.S. went through a severe deflation, with silver and copper prices falling against a relative rise in the price of gold. In 1893, silver was demonitized, precipitated almost all silver mines to fail and only the largest and richest copper mines to continue operations. The closing of silver and many copper mining operations placed a flood of unemployed miners in search of gold from 1893 to 1900.²

These are the events that influenced gold load and placer recovery operations in what is known as the Greaterville mining district.

The Greaterville Mining District

The Greaterville mining district is in southeastern Pima County at the eastern foot of the Santa Rita Mountains. In the center of the placers was the village of Greaterville. Reportedly founded in 1873, it reached a maximum of 500 residents.³ The founder, an early settler in the area named Greater, gave his name to the town.⁴ A Post Office was established on January 3, 1879 and closed June 30, 1946.⁵

The Greaterville mining district was organized on March 17, 1875, but apparently never recorded. By 1881 much of the mining operations had stopped, some miners left because of operations elsewhere and others left because of problems with the Indians. From 1886 - 1900, Greaterville was almost a ghost town.⁵

The productive gulches in the area were the Boston, Kentucky, Harshaw, Sucker, Graham, Louisiana, Hughes, the Ophir below its junction with Hughes, the upper reaches of Los Pozos and Colorado, the Chispa from the Ezzenberg camp road to Greaterville and the Empire below its junction with the Chispa.³

Reported findings in the Boston Gulch included from its head to a point about half a mile south of its junction with Kentucky Gulch at Kentucky Camp. In the upper two miles of the gulch, gold was found in a channel five feet wide on bedrock, two to four feet below the surface. Below Harshaw Gulch the gold was found in a ten-foot channel in the bottom, five to ten feet below the surface. Below Kentucky Gulch for a distance of half a mile and a width of about fifty feet, the gold was found on bedrock ten to sixteen feet below the surface.³

In Harshaw Gulch, rich placers were found to a width of about four feet on the gulch bottom.³

Findings in Kentucky Gulch were reported throughout its length on bedrock to a width of six to ten feet wide. At the upper end of the gulch the gold was found at or near the surface, but at the mouth of the gulch gold was found about six feet below the surface.³

The three small heads of Sucker Gulch, southeast of Granite Mountain yields productive gravel placers to a point just below its junction with Ophir Gulch. Productive gravel placers were found from the head of Sucker Gulch to the mouth of Graham Gulch six to nine feet wide and three to twelve feet below the surface. From Graham and Louisiana gulches the gravel placers averaged from twenty to fifty feet in width and twelve feet deep at Graham Gulch to about 25 feet at Louisiana Gulch. Below the mouth of the Louisiana Gulch the gold placers were found on bedrock about 100 feet wide, but with significant overburden.³

A short branch of Sucker Gulch is called Graham Gulch. The lower end of this gulch had productive gravel placers at a width of 100 feet on bedrock about twelve feet below the surface. The upper end of Graham Gulch had gravel placers at a width of about ten feet that were covered by only six inches of overburden.³

A quarter of a mile south of Greaterville is the head of Louisiana Gulch with placers near the surface. The mouth of Louisiana Gulch, about a mile below, had placers at a depth of ten to twelve feet with a width of about six feet.³

Two miles west of Greaterville is Hughes Gulch, which extends north of Granite Mountain. Its placers were only about six feet wide and about two to six feet below the surface. Two small gold bearing tributaries of Hughes Gulch are the Nigger and St. Louis Gulches. The Nigger Gulch is west of Granite Mountain, while the St. Louis Gulch is east of the mountain.³

Ophir Gulch is reported to contain no placer deposits above its junction with Hughes Gulch. However, below Greaterville, a channel 200 feet wide was found as far down as the mouth of Sucker Gulch. In this area the bedrock is reported as "rather deep."³

Northeast of Greaterville is the Los Pozos Gulch with reported workable gravel placers in its upper 3,000 feet.³

The Empire Gulch was found to contain gold placers only in the mile and a half below the mouth of the Chespa Gulch. Placers found were about two feet thick on bedrock under about sixteen feet of overburden. Near the mouth of the Chespa the placers were about 300 feet wide, but at the lower end they were about 1000 feet wide. The Chispa Gulch is southwest of the Enzenberg Gulch, with the lower three-quarters of a mile of the gulch yielding placers five to ten feet in width on bedrock about ten feet below the surface. Another short branch of the Empire Gulch is the Colorado Gulch, about half a mile north of the Los Pozos Gulch. For a distance of about 2000 feet near the head of the Colorado Gulch, gold placers were found at shallow depths.⁶

The Gold

Several lode deposit mines operated in the Greaterville area, including the Yuba or Inghram, the St. Louis, and the Quebec. These mines bore more or less free gold, with the Yuba producing "wire" gold.³ Another reference, cites lode deposits mined at the Golden Gate mine and Gold Ledge claim with "excellent small specimens of wire gold collected by Dewey Keith about 1955."⁷ Greaterville placer gold is mostly bright and coarse, sometimes found with bits of quartz or galena adhering.

Considerable black sand is found in the placers and some gold is iron-stained. The flakes most often recovered are about one-tenth of an inch in longest diameter.

Nuggets ranging in size from 1/20 to ¼ oz were commonly found. The largest nugget reportedly found weighed 37 ounces.

Mines reported in the Greaterville mining district included⁸:

Arrastra	Golden State
Billy Sunday	Ironwood
Boston	Juniper (Belmont, 1934)
Buckhorn	Laura
Comstock Group	Madgalena
Conglomerate	Royal Mountain
Copper Valley	St. Louis
Delner	St. Patrick
Depression	Santa Rita
Fortuna	Silver Dime
Gold Bell	Silver Queen

Mineral Rights and Current Placer Mining Claims

Most of the placer areas in the Greaterville mining district are under claim. Over 25 placer mining claims have been filed; one patented claim has been filed. It appears that no lode mines are currently in operation.

The Desert Gold Diggers claims include⁹:	Gold Prospectors Association of America claims include⁸:
Great Hope #'s 1, 2, & 3 (new) each 160 acres in Fish Canyon	Fantastic, Lucky Strike & Golden Tattoo, each 160 acres in Fish Canyon
Gold Duster, 80 acres below Louisiana Gulch	R Double J, 70 acres below Kentucky Gulch
Diggers Delight, 70 acres at the head of Louisiana Gulch	Friendship, 160 acres straddling Ophir Gulch
Isolation ¹⁰ , 156 acres down Enzenberg Canyon	

Total estimated and recorded Greaterville mineral production 1874 - 1972⁴:

2,000 tons of lode ore containing about 390 ounces of gold
 13,000 ounces of silver
 170 tons of lead
 20 tons of copper
 16 tons of zinc
 29,000 ounces of placer gold production
 6,000 ounces of placer silver production

A chronology of Greaterville gold operations:

- 1874 A. Smith is reported to have discovered placer gold in the Greaterville district.¹¹
- 1875 – 1878 Over 200 miners worked the Greaterville district placers. These gravel deposits were reported to have been so rich that each man recovered \$10 or more daily by rocker operated on water packed in 4 or more miles by burros at a cost of 3 cents per gallon.¹²
- 1880 – 1886 Declining sluicing activity - apparently nearly ceased by 1886.
- 1887 The Santo Domingo mine reportedly produced about 75 tons of smelting ore, averaging 42 ounces in silver and \$4 in gold, or “a total valuation of \$3,000 silver and \$300 gold.”¹³
- 1874 – 1883 Greaterville placers reported yearly production estimated at \$12,000.⁶
- 1900 Reports of limited sluicing in Kentucky Gulch.⁶
- 1902 El Oro Mining Company owned extensive land.
- 1905 Santa Rita Water and Mining Company operated about 2,000 acres of patented ground that included a system of 8 – 10 miles of ditch and pipe lines from a group of dams in Gardner and South canyons. Later this property was acquired by Gadsden Purchase, Inc.⁶
- Early 1900’s Another, unnamed company had sluicing operations at the junction of Kentucky and Boston canyons from an 8 mile pipeline through the first canyon south of Gardner Canyon.⁶

Just below Enzenberg Canyon in Empire Gulch another, unnamed company set up a 1 ton steam shovel, screens and conical concentrating tank, but ceased operations because the placers, some 16 feet or more below overburden, were not rich enough to warrant the overburden removal.¹

- 1924 A nugget, valued at \$228, was found in the Greaterville district.⁷ *N.B. Gold was then valued at about \$20 per ounce.*
- 1925 – 1932 The Jones store in Greaterville reported purchasing about \$3,500 in placer gold during this time.²
- 1932-33 Ten to twenty men carried on small-scale placer mining with an average daily return of \$0.50.
- 1948 Pima Placers worked properties on Louisiana Gulch with a dragline shovel and washing plant and recovered almost \$30,000 in placer gold.¹
- 1934 – 1948 U.S. Mineral Resources reported the Greaterville placer output to be a little over \$30,000.

During the Second World War, significant efforts and incentives were made to recover scrap iron. Those efforts terminated many small operators' access to the mining equipment they needed to carry out their placer operations. After the war, new or replacement equipment was not available at any price.¹ These events brought much of the placer mining operations to a standstill from 1945 – 1950.

After 1950, little commercialization has been reported in the Greaterville area. Most mining operations currently occurring are limited to gold clubs, individuals and small operations. However, there are still interesting and rewarding gold finds by individuals utilizing metal detectors and small placer recovery equipment throughout the Greaterville area.

Nobody gets it all! Good prospecting!

¹ H. Mason Coggin, A History of Placer Mining in Arizona, in History of Mining in Arizona, Canty, J. M and Greeley, M. N., Editors, Mining Club of the Southwest Foundation, American Institute of Mining Engineers, Tucson Section, and Southwestern Minerals Exploration Association, Tucson, 1987

² University of Arizona Bulletin, Arizona Bureau of Mines, Mineral Technology Series No. 45, Bulletin No. 160, Arizona Gold Placers and Placering, Fifth Edition, Revised, January 1952.

³ Thomas P. Terry, United States Treasure Atlas, Volume 1, p. 68

⁴ Keith, S. B., Index of Mining Properties in Pima County, Arizona, Arizona Bureau of Geology and Mineral Technology, Bulletin 189, 1974.

⁵ Barnes, W. C., Arizona Place Names, Granger, B. H. revision, The University of Arizona Press, 1960.

⁶ Schrader, F. C., Mineral deposits of the Santa Rita and Patagonia Mountains, Arizona: U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 582. 1915.

⁷ Anthony, J.W., Williams, S.A., Bideaux, R.A., and Grant, R.W., Mineralogy of Arizona, The University of Arizona Press, 1977.

⁸ Welty, J.W., et. al., Mine Index for Metallic Mineral Districts of Arizona, Arizona Bureau of Geology and Mineral Technology, Bulletin 196, 1985.

⁹ Tremethick, B., Greaterville Area – Santa Rita Mountains, map and descriptions, 1997

¹⁰ Desert Gold Diggers, Claim Name and Topo Map Reference Number.

¹¹ Raymond, R. W., Statistics of mines and mining in the states and territories west of the Rocky Mountains. 1870-1875.

¹² Hinton, R. J., Handbook of Arizona. San Francisco. 1878.

¹³ Report of the Director of the Mint Upon Production of the Precious Metals in the United States During the Calendar Year 1887, Government Printing Office, 1888.