

History of Mining in the Old Woman Mountains San Bernardino County, California

Larry M. Vredenburg
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Beginning in February 1889 articles began appearing in newspapers, describing the immense deposits that had been discovered in the Old Woman Mountains. Captain Bethune who had just returned from a prospecting trip to the range stated confidently "I candidly believe this to be the largest body of mineral in the world." Another prospector was quoted saying, "The ore on the surface is so abundant that it would keep smelting works such as those at Argo, Colorado, busy for fifty years."

The Scanlon Mining District which sprang up here was named after a prospector, Peter Scanlon who had prospected the range for years. In the summer of 1889, Captain Bethune, arrived in Redlands to escape the hot weather and pronounced, "Our mining prospects are grand and... we must have a smelter at Needles." Despite these optimistic predictions, just a year later, in 1890, the Scanlon District was described as being "so little developed as hardly to merit... mention."

Based on numerous not so reliable reports, small stringers of high grade silver and gold ore were found throughout the range. Portions of the Old Woman Mountains have so many mine symbols on the USGS 7 ½ minute topographic maps that the area resembles a pin-cushion. However, production from the Scanlon District was modest at best. A contribution to the low production may be due to the fact that most of the values appear to have been tied up in sulfide minerals, and were not free milling. Silver caused the 1889 excitement but, gold and tungsten were also produced.



Headframe on the east side of the range in the early 1970s. Photo by the author.

On the northwest side of the range about 6 miles from Danby, the Wheel of Fortune Mine was discovered about 1897. Later, in March 1911, Walter G. Pinkett, a Danby saloon owner, owned the mine and had a "force of men" working on a 60 foot shaft on the property. In December, 1913, there was a bunkhouse and a blacksmith shop on the property.

The Warwick mine, owned by Mr. A. W. Warwick of Martinez, Arizona, was located near the Wheel of Fortune. In January 1900 an article stated a 10-stamp mill had been erected, but a year and a half later it was stated that, "the company will start up the mill... soon." Lack of water was the cause of the hold up. By December 1902 it was stated that, "the owners of Camp Warwick... are doing assessment work."

The Silver Wave Mine, high on the west side of the range in Scanlon Canyon, was first worked prior to 1890, but was inactive until late 1899. At that time Milo James Smith a native of West Virginia, purchased the property for \$150. After making a strike of rich ore, Mr. D. Jackson, secured a bond on the property for \$35,000. Between the purchase and March, 1902, \$12,000 had been expended in development. By July the adit was 650 feet long. A five-stamp, steam-powered mill was erected and running about July 1902, and 20 men were employed on the property. In 1909 the mine camp, which was near a spring, was in ruins, and the mill had been dismantled.

The Stemwinder Mine was "doing well" in January, 1900, but it was not until 1905 that this mine, located 20 miles south of Danby (perhaps in Carbonate Gulch), began to draw attention. During that year, the Stemwinder Mining and Development Company, capitalized for a quarter of a million dollars, was developing the mine. In September, 1911, a brief note indicated that the owners were waiting for cooler weather before mining.

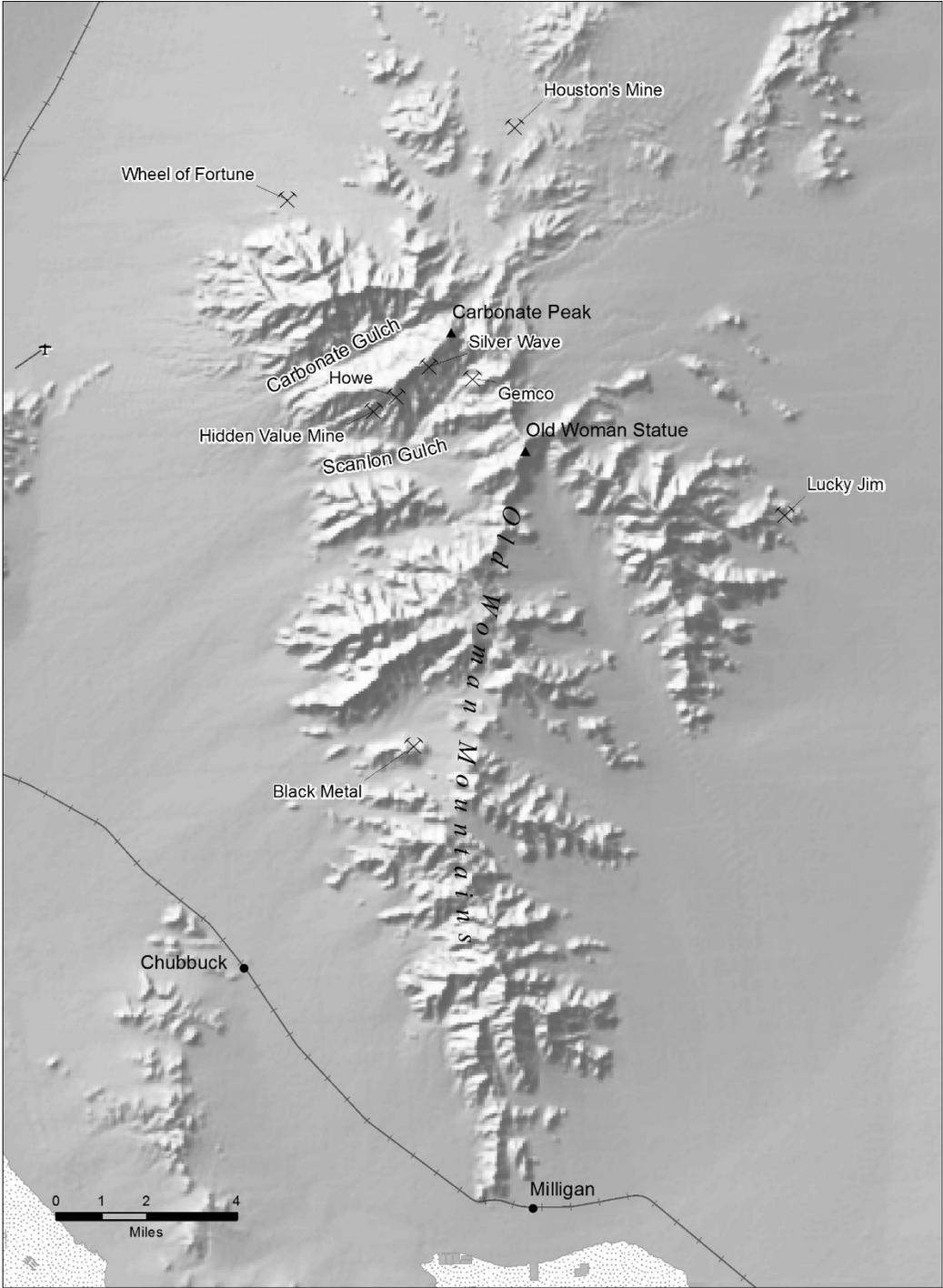
On the southwest end of the range the Black Metal Mine was first located before 1896. It was relocated in 1902 by M. J. Smith and George B. Parks of Barstow. In 1910 they had hoped to lease it to C. H. Scheu, a Los Angeles mining man, for \$30,000. In September Scheu and Parks visited the property, but the deal apparently fell through.

Smith and Parks, in February, 1911, dissolved their partnership in the Black Metal and other property they owned. Parks became owner of the Black Metal and the Desert Butte Group near Kilbeck Siding. In March, 1911, he purchased a span of mules to haul ore from the Black Metal and Desert Butte Group. That April, George Parks and his wife left for the mines with a "carload of goods and supplies." Parks was busy mining during the next two months; his first rail car-load (20 tons) of ore grossed \$27 a ton. In August he was ready to ship another 20 tons of ore. That November (1911) Parks and his wife left the Black Metal, and he pursued general contracting.

The Grass Roots Mine, which was adjacent to the Black Metal, was discovered about 1889 by A. E. S. "Scott" Price. After the Parker branch of the Santa Fe was built, Price, in partnership with A. Bert Day, began working the mine, and were richly rewarded. In November 1910 they brought specimens to Parker, Arizona which assayed 300 ounces in silver, 12 percent copper, a large percentage of lead and some gold. As soon as news was out and, prospectors and mining men from all directions are began to arrive there. Day and Price located a townsite and predicted, "that a camp will be started."

In March, 1911, the shaft was down to 60 feet. In April, they shipped a car load of ore. In June the Garner brothers of San Bernardino purchased the interest of Day. Sinking of the shaft was resumed that August, but was halted in October after Harry Nelson, who was employed sinking a 25 foot shaft, was

killed in a cave in. Operations were idle until September, 1912, when Scott Price and Fred Schmickle, resumed operations. There was plenty of water nearby and they expected, by February, 1913, to put in a large mill, but nothing further is heard about the mine.



Relief map showing the principal mines in the Old Woman Mountains

Poker Flat was located in the northern most portion of the range, at what is now named Weaver's Well. Sam Houston was overhauling his stamp mill here in February 1911, and on the Consolidated Mining

Company claims, owned by Walter G. Hopkins, a new strike was made in March, 1911. Houston's mine is shown on the 1910 General Land Office survey of this township.

The Lucky Jim silver mine, situated on the southeast side of the range, was located by P. W. Dayton in 1911. The property was purchased by the Maricopa Queen Oil Company, and by June, 1913, a camp was established here, with water piped from a spring about 3 miles to the southwest (Sec 33 T5N, R18W). In 1914, the camp consisted of bunkhouses, a boarding house, and a barn. The property was active at least until 1916, at that time ten men were employed and silver ore was hauled to the railroad siding of Milligan. During this period of operation the mine is variously referred to as the Dayton or the Maricopa Queen.

In November 1917, David G. Thompson, with the USGS, visited the mine camp which he referred to as Wilhelm Camp. However the General Land Office survey of the township which was underway when Thompson visited, depicts Morath's Mine and shows a house and adit just to the north. This survey also shows the pipe line from "Wilhelm Spring" ending at Morath's mine.

As early as 1921 the mine was owned by Eugene G. Morath of Long Beach; in 1930 it was under lease to F. A. Crampton. Three men were employed at the mine and the camp consisted of 3 cabins and a blacksmith shop. One former miner that was employed here between the late 1920s and early 1930s noted that the main adit was engineered (in the period 1913 – 1916) with a slight slope, so that a full ore car could be pushed out with very little effort. Between 1911 and 1930, about \$35,000 worth of silver, gold, copper and lead were produced.

During World War II, Hidden Value and the Howe produced tungsten ore. These mines are located on the west side of the range southwest of Carbonate Peak. Ore from the Hidden Value was treated in a small mill located in Danby. The workings from both mines were connected with aerial trams. At the Howe a small mill was erected in 1952.

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Parker Post

Oct. 14, 1911 p. I col 5 Cave in on mine in Old Woman Mountains.

6/14/13 p. I col I Ore bucket amputates ear (Old Woman Mts.)

1/22/16 p. I col.3 --Maricopa Queen, silver mine on E. side of Old Woman Mts. 10 men shipping ore to Milligan.

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Mining and Scientific Press 24 Jan 1903 p. 59

A. P. Thompson & C. Colton at the Hunter-Paymaster mines on Old Woman's mountain, near Danby, have a tunnel in 360 feet and a shaft down 90 feet and a main tunnel on which they are working in 260 feet. This tunnel has another 100 feet to run to tap the ledge at a depth of 500 feet. In the Paymaster they have a tunnel in 50 feet and will run 50 more. The Silver Wave mine of the Danby M. & M. Co. on Old Woman's mountain has shut down temporarily and its 10-stamp mill at Danby is idle. S. & W. Heath have six men doing development work on the Manoa.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume XXX, Number 86, 29 December 1902

The biggest mining strike that has occurred among the mines of San Bernardino in many days is reported from the Old Woman's mountains on the desert. The strike was made in the Little Pittsburg mine one of the Pittsburg group owned by G. D. Collins and operated by A. E. S. Price. When the tunnel in this mine had been driven to a depth of seventy feet a body of ore four feet in width was encountered. It is rich with gold and silver.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume 32, Number 239, 28 May 1905

The Stem-Winder Mining and Development company was organized in this city last night, with the following Redondo business men as officers: G. W. Witchelo, president; J. E. Gish, vice president; A. K. Burnett, treasurer; C. O. Dempsey, secretary. The company is capitalized at \$250,000, with a paid-up capital of \$125,000. The Stem-Winder mine consists of seven claims in the Old Woman mountains, about twenty miles north of Danby, and is rich in gold, silver and some lead.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume 38, Number 6, 17 April 1892

MINES AND MINING.

The New Tin Mines Near the Desert.

They Are Located Forty Miles from Danby.

Notes About Mines

Tributary to Los Angeles. A Talk with a Man from the New Tin Mines—Other Rich Mines—Temescal Valley Finds. Mr. Judson, who has just come in from a trip to the Colorado river country, was met by our reporter this morning, says the Needles Eye, and the following interview speaks well for that part of the country lying northeast of the San Bernardino range of mountains: "Well, Mr. Judson, we learn that you have just returned from the recent rich mineral fields out on the desert. Will you give us some information of what there is in that country?" "Yes, sir, I will. In the first place let me say that these new finds are not on the desert. They are located in well defined mountain ranges, which are at present reached by crossing a desert country forty miles from Danby station in an easterly direction. I think the best way for prospectors to go in would be by way of the Needles; then go down the river, as the Needles, with its great advantages over all other places on the line of the Atlantic and Pacific railroad will be the outfitting point for all the Colorado river country. The recent discoveries of silver mines by some prospectors from Ebbensburg, Arizona, and what I believe will develop into one of the best silver camps in the state, is situated less than eighteen miles from the Colorado river, and forty miles in a southwesterly direction from the Needles. These gentlemen made eight or ten locations in the new camp. The ore is very rich and resembles the rich ore that was taken out of the mines in the Ivanpah camp in its most palmy days. The tin ore discoveries were made about thirty-five miles nearly south from the **Old Woman's mountains**. The veins are very large, being from twenty to sixty feet wide the entire length of five locations. The entire ore body in all the claims carries a very high percentage of tin. While I have a substantial interest in the tin locations, neither myself nor Mr. Edwards made the discoveries. The discovery was made by a well-known prospector one week before we went into the country. The statement as published, that we located this property, was not correct. We went out to examine what is known as the Scanlin group of mines situated twenty-five miles southeast of Danby station, which is silver and gold, and sure to be one of the many new bullion producing camps in that country in the near future."

Los Angeles Herald, Volume 34, Number 265, 23 June 1907

RICH MEN TODAY

Are those who grasped opportunities and invested their surplus, why should you not invest yours and make money? You can buy fully paid, non-assess-able, no personal liability stock of the

TODD COPPER COMPANY.

\$10 — FOR EACH 1000 SHARES — \$10

Many copper stocks have made comparatively small but early investors rich. Copper is in greater demand and worth more per pound today than ever DO YOU WANT TO SHARE IN THIS \$10 PER 1000 SHARE ALLOTMENT? Then buy stock in the Todd Copper company, which has three copper-gold mines in Weaver mountains, Yuma county, Arizona, that has a 12-foot ledge of fine copper-gold ore, and four excellent gold claims in Old Woman mountains, 16 miles south of Danby, San Bernardino county, Cal., that has had considerable development work done and has a complete 2-stamp mill, cabin and full complement of tools. This is a splendid opportunity for an investment. Send draft, money order, check or call at my office for number of shares you want.

CHAS. M. FRYE.

236 Mason Bldg. Los Angeles,

Los Angeles Herald, Volume XXX, Number 26, 28 October 1902

A decision was handed down in the superior court today in the case of J. C. Middleworth against A. E. S. Price, better known as "Scotty" Price. The decision was in favor of the defendant by stipulation, with costs amounting to the plaintiff. The plaintiff was suing for title to a half interest in five mining claims in the old Scanlan district in the Old Woman mountains, fourteen miles from Danby.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume 38, Number 30, 11 May 1892

The following notes are from the Danby district: The Old Woman's mountain mining industries are rapidly coming to the front. The Parker mine is showing up finely at a depth of eighty feet. Its owners have about twenty tons of \$80 gold rock ready for the new mill at the Needles. They expect to furnish at least one carload per week as soon as the mill is ready to receive and work it. The Scanlon mines on the south side of the mountains are soon to pass into the hands of San Bernardino and Riverside capitalists. Peter Scanlon and Royal Courtright, the discoverers of these mines, have worked four years on the property backed by their judgment and a grub stake only, but the immense amount of fine ore they have shown up and the handsome little fortune they are soon to receive show how sensible they have been in braving the hardship and privations of desert life for four long years. Verily they have their reward and they deserve it, and more too. Marcus A. Thompson, the veteran miner of '49, is here and as hardy and full of fun as a boy of 20. He also has some fine property just north of the Old Woman mountains, which is a new discovery, and will in the near future put prospectors on the jump for the precious metals in his section.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume 26, Number 72, 11 December 1896

R. H. Rouse of this city has received a message stating that his father, L. Rouse, had been seriously injured by an explosion of dynamite at the Home Stake mine in the Old Woman's mountains about forty miles south from Needles. The message was sent from Danby station, on the A. P. R. R., and says further that the law will have a hand in the matter.

South Riverside Bee April 16, 1892

It is reported that a rich vein of tin ore has been discovered in the Old Woman Mountains in this county.

Booth's Bazoo, April 16, 1889 p 4.

Last Thursday Mr. Wm. Sandford came in from the Old Woman mountains and knowing to be a reliable gentleman, and a man of vast mining experience, a Bazoo reporter cornered him and proceeded to apply the reportorial gimblet to him

"Mr. Sandford did you see the Bazoo's published interview with Captain Bethune?"

"Yes sir, and was much pleased with it. However it is impossible to convey by published interviews or printed statements the exact situation of affairs out there."

"What do you think of the ledge?"

"Well sir, there is the biggest body of carbonates in the world, so far as known. I say this without fear of contradiction, and I assure you I know what I am talking about too. Yes sir, the biggest body of carbonates yet discovered.

"But it is reported here Mr. Sandford that the ore is refractory because of the zinc which is found in it?"

"It is eh? Well you tell the man who reported it, that he doesn't know what he is talking about. The ore, except a very small quantity which we throw away is entirely free from zinc, and it is not at all refractory; on the contrary it is the very best kind of smelting ore."

"And you think the Scanlon District will come to the front do you?"

"Come to the front? Why man that camp will howl before long, you mark my words; why it is the greatest thing of the kind on earth. All that is needed now is a smelter and then the camp will boom."

"What do you think of Needles as the point for the establishment of the smelter?"

"The very place on account of its shipping facilities. Yes, Needles is the place."

Mr. Sandford kindly left a supply of specimens with the Bazoo, which will in due time be forwarded to the San Bernardino Board of Trade to be placed on exhibition there with the other mineral exhibits.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume 33, Number 53, 23 November 1910

OLD WOMAN MOUNTAINS SCENE OF SILVER STRIKE

PARKER, Ariz., Nov. 22.—There has been considerable excitement in mining circles the past several days over a rich strike reported to have been made in the **Old Woman mountains**, sixteen miles from Milligan, a station on the Parker division of the Santa Fe railroad. About a dozen outfits have already left Parker for the scene of the new discovery, and it is said prospectors and mining men from all directions are beginning to arrive there. The original discovery was made about two weeks ago by A. B. Day and Scott Price, two well known prospectors from Nevada. Both formerly lived at Searchlight, and have been connected with a number of the more prominent camps of the Sagebrush 'State. About a week or ten days ago Day and Price came to Parker and had shipped to Milligan about four tons of camp supplies. They exhibited rich specimens of ore while here, but did not tell where they found the ledge from which the samples were taken. According to assays made in Parker the ore carried nearly 300 ounces in silver, about 12 per cent copper, a large percentage of lead and some gold values. Mr. Day says the ore

averaged approximately \$200 a ton, and that there was a big ledge of it outcropping on the surface several hundred feet in length and from six to eight feet in width. The country, he said, was highly mineralized for miles around the original discovery. It is learned that Day & Price have located a townsite and that a camp will be started in the vicinity of the strike. A. P. Bowers recently returned from the new strike. He says the original discovery is a rich proposition, the ore shoot being exposed for 200 feet in length and eight feet in width.

Desert Magazine 1940, December, 1940, vol. 4, No. 2, p. 36

Desert Place Names

CALIFORNIA, OLD WOMAN MOUNTAINS

San Bernardino county This range, southeast of Danby, on U. S. Highway 66, was so named by the Pahute and Chemehuevi Indians, who are identical in race and language, writes Charles Battye. They called it No-mop'-wits, which means literally "old woman." There can be seen, from a certain point of view, a tall, columnar rock, a monolith which bears a resemblance to the form of an old woman. Another range several miles north of the highway is known as Old Dad mountains, and this name is certainly not of Indian origin, Battye declares.

The Desert Magazine Feb 1980 p. 55

THE TUNNEL-DRIVING WILHELMS

Sirs: The article on the "Lost Bullhide" treasure in your August 1979 issue fascinated me and brought back many memories because from 1928 to 1930 I worked in the Lucky Jim Mine in the Old Woman Mountains. I was told the mine was first developed around the turn of the century by the Wilhelm family.

The outstanding thing about the Lucky Jim was the engineering of its adit, or tunnel, which was driven over 500 feet into the side of a high spur. Many times I pushed a one-ton ore cart into the tunnel, loaded it with ore or rock, and started to push the cart out. I soon found it took very little effort to push the loaded cart. There were times when I could get a good start, hop aboard, and ride it for 100 feet or more without any pushing. Even the professionals marveled at the superb job the Wilhelm brothers did in driving that tunnel.

Thomas M. Cooper
Los Angeles, Calif.

Mr. Cooper asks that anyone knowing anything about the Wilhelm brothers or their descendants please write him at 627 So.

Gramercy Place, Los Angeles, CA 90005. Ed.