

Death Valley

Historic Resource Study A History of Mining



SECTION III:

INVENTORY OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES THE WEST SIDE

A. Southern Panamints and West Side Road (continued)

8. Warm Spring Camp (Gold Hill Mill Site)

a) History

In the early 1930s when the Gold Hill Mine was under lease to Louise Grantham, it was rumored that she intended to build a mill at Warm Spring, about four airline miles southwest of Gold Hill. [264] This was not the first attempt at utilizing the waters of this desert oasis for mining purposes. A Notice of Appropriation of Water, recorded 27 May 1889 stated the intention of the claimants (Frank Winters and Stephen Arnold) to take water from the spring, develop it by ditches, pipes, and flumes, and use it for mining and milling purposes connected with their claims in the Butte Valley Mining District. [265] By at least the 1880s and 1890s the spring area, with its dependable water supply and lush vegetation, was undoubtedly considered a comfortable home base from which to conduct mining exploration in the surrounding hills. The Gold Hill Mill Site was located on 5 February 1933, immediately prior to establishment of Death Valley National Monument. The Gold Hill Mill itself was evidently built in the late 1930s, although no information has been located on the structure or the machinery that was put to work processing the gold ore brought down from nearby Gold Hill. By the time the mill was a going concern, Mrs. Grantham was becoming involved in talc mining in the vicinity.

As a result, she proceeded to establish a camp on the Gold Hill Mill Site Claim to serve her Grantham Mine. It is included within the boundaries of what appears on the USGS Wingate Wash quadrangle map as Indian Ranch (Bob Thompson Indian Allotment). The superintendent of Death Valley National Monument reported in 1955 that

Mrs. Grantham has undoubtedly the finest mining camp of any in the Monument. Her residence, the mess hall, shop, and generator building are all of substantial cement block construction and there are four frame buildings including a dormitory and two small houses. There are eight employees at present and this number may be increased to twelve or fifteen. The buildings are equipped with flush toilets, estimated at six, and shower baths. There is a community mess. . . . [266]

One confusing remark in this letter states that

Mrs. Grantham does not have a mill at present but it is understood that she plans to install a small mill for processing gold ore on the millsite across the road from the camp At present she is mining only talc. [Underlining added] [267]



Illustration 68. CCC spike camp at Warm Spring, 1934. Photo courtesy of DEVA NM.



Illustration 69. Grantham mining camp at Warm Spring, view to south. Photo by Linda W. Greene, 1978.

b) Present Status

The profuse waters of Warm Spring have created a very pleasant environment in Warm Spring Canyon. For a number of years an irrigation system has fostered the growth of wild grape, giant reeds, oleander bushes, and fig trees planted just above the camp. There is also plenty of water for domestic purposes and for leisure activities such as swimming. The mining camp located today on the Gold Hill Mill Site consists of two houses, a mess hall and office, and a powder house and garage across the entrance road. Further north are the gold-processing mill ruins. The Gold Hill Mill Site No. 2, contiguous to the No. 1 on the south and incorporating the spring site, also supports a water entrapment system serving the mining camp and the mines. [268]

A plastic pipeline transports the spring water to the mines where it aids in dust control and will be used for drilling purposes as outlined in the proposed Plan of Operations. The only residents of the Warm Spring camp at this time are a watchman and his family. Under current proposals the majority of miners employed at the Big Talc would live at Shoshone or in other areas outside the monument; only two watchmen and their families would actually reside at Warm Spring. The millsites will continue to house the mine office and provide facilities for vehicle

storage and maintenance. [269]

The old mill ruins are located adjacent to the Warm Spring Canyon road on the south side as it continues west toward the Montgomery (Panamint) Mine. A date imprinted in a cement slab at the mill site would seem to indicate that the complex, or at least part of it, was built in November 1939.

The mill setup contains a power-driven arrastra; an oil-burning hot-shot engine that drove an elaborate arrangement of flywheels, a belt and pulley system, and drive shafts that operated the mill machinery; a Blake jaw crusher; a cone crusher; bumping and concentrating tables; a cylindrical ball mill; an ore bin and chute; an unloading platform; a conveyor system; and other related mining paraphernalia. Immediately west of the mill are the concrete foundations of a mill house.

c) Evaluation and Recommendations

This mill and arrastra supposedly served the Gold Hill Mine from the mid- or late 1930s on, although neither its exact construction date nor the duration of its activity is known. The proposed Plan of Operations for the Big Talc Mine states that within six months after termination of mining operations the company "will remove all man-made structures from THE (GOLD HILL MILL SITE) and GOLD HILL NO. 2 MILL SITE Claims la Later in that report, however, it was pointed out that historical studies had not yet been completed and that the Plan of Operations could not be approved or cultural clearance granted before this was accomplished. [270] It is strongly recommended by the writer that Recommendation No. 21 as set forth in the "Environmental Review and Analysis, Big Talc Mine" be adopted, namely

That the stone arrastre and other remnant [sic] of the old mill located on THE (GOLD HILL MILL SITE) claim be specifically excepted from the requirement for removal of structures under the approved plan, and its physical integrity preserved until a determination of its historical value is made by the National Park Service. [271]

The mill ruin is considered to be of regional significance and warrants nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. It is important because of the combination of old and newer technological processes displayed, and is a prime example of an early ore-processing plant. As such it possesses both historical and technological significance. Although specimens of individual components of the unit may be found in other areas of the National Park System, so far as is known this is the only complete example of a large-scale gold-processing operation.

None of the other structures on the Warm Spring campsite are historically significant.



Illustration 70. Warm Spring Canyon mine camp. Note gold ore-processing mill in foreground. Mill house foundations are seen to right of machinery. Photo by Linda W. Greene, 1978.



Illustration 71. Hot-shot diesel engine and ore bin, Gold Hill Mill site. Photo by Linda W. Greene, 1978.



Illustration 72. View west of arrastra, Gold Hill Mill site, Warm Spring Canyon. Photo by John A. Latschar, 1978.



Illustration 73. Blake jaw crusher, Gold Hill Mill site. Photo by John A. Latschar, 1978.

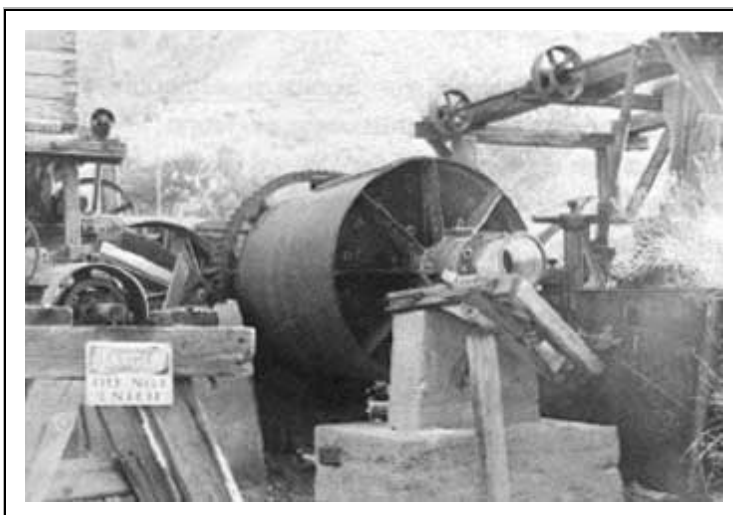


Illustration 74. Cylindrical ball-mill, Gold Hill Mill site. Photo by Linda W. Greene, 1978.



Illustration 75. Cone crusher, Gold Hill Mill site. Photo by John A. Latschar, 1978.

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Last Updated: 22-Dec-2003