

## ROSEMONT

When you turn west off of AZ 83 onto Forest Road 231, it is hard to believe that 100 years ago more than 200 people lived along the wooded ridges and canyons on the eastern slopes of the Santa Ritas. Rosemont is a classic example of the “boom and bust” history of copper mining. Mining claims, located here as early as 1879 and worked sporadically until 1918, show no significant production of high-grade ore. Old Rosemont was a settlement that was located



*Figure 1. Old Rosemont  
(courtesy Arizona Historical Society)*

along Forest Road 231 between its intersections with FR-4064 and FR-4051 and had a post office that was open from 1894 to 1910. The only remains are a slagheap and some rusty equipment at the smelter site. No relics remain of the popular hotel, store, warehouse and office pictured on the left. In 1901 the smelter, which also had been used by the Helvetia mining area, closed for good.

In 1915 the Narragansett Mines were sold to William Ramsdell and mine production resumed, due to higher prices for copper during World War I. The new group of miners occupied New Rosemont which covered an area from McCleary Canyon Wash west about 1300 feet along FR 4051. Photos from 1918 showed 20 buildings including the mine owner’s house and outhouse, deputy’s house, a company store, a pool hall, a boarding house-diner and several miners’ dwellings. A few of the buildings were made of wood. The others were tents, ramadas, or palm branch sheds. East of camp along the McCleary Canyon Road a son of Juan Lopez, a nearby rancher, owned and operated a dance hall and saloon. No evidence of any buildings can be seen in the area today. By 1918 financial troubles and the low-grade quality of the ore forced the mines to close again. During those 3 ½ years 34,300 dry tons of ore grossed \$835,860.00, averaging \$654 a day.

During that time, at least 6 ranches were within 2 ½ miles around Rosemont Junction. Only Edward Vail’s VR ranch and the Scholefield ranch were legally homesteaded, but the Martinez and Lopez Ranches were well known in the area.

A school existed for children of miners and ranchers from 1899 to 1918, with widely varying census numbers. The largest number of school children were recorded in 1897. Records show that Vail rented a building on his property for the school from 1902-1910.

In 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt established the Santa Rita Forest Reserve. This was a big change for miners and ranchers because Forest Rangers now controlled grazing, woodcutting, and other land uses. By 1904 the rangers occupied the new headquarters of the U.S.



*Figure 2. Forest Service Headquarters  
Ruins. Photo by T. Johnson*

Forest Service built along FR 231. The current remains of the building are shown in the picture above.

In spite of all the inhabitation in the Rosemont area in the early 1900s, only two manmade structures scar the valley: the slagheap and a leaching tank. The leaching tank, which was used in a process of extracting copper from the ore, is in a grassland area on an east-west ridge in the Wasp Canyon Wash drainage.



*Figure 3. Rosemont Slag Heap*



*Figure 4. Leaching tank*

For the next fifty years the eastern slopes in the pristine green desert sky island of the Santa Ritas were undisturbed by mining companies. Then beginning in 1970 and continuing until today, one mining company after another has tried to resume mining. The American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) made an effort to start up a mining operation in the late 1990s but stopped when the price of copper dropped to a point that made the effort uneconomical. Attempts are made to exchange land in the Federal Forest Services surrounding their private lands to provide a large enough territory for active mining. Local governmental bodies and various environmental and conservation groups offer strong public opposition to any land exchange for the purpose of mining. During the ASARCO effort, the GVR Hiking Club met with Representative Kolbe to encourage him to push Congress to update the Mining Act of 1872 and bring it into the modern era. Their request was not well received. A 2004 Open Space Bond Ordinance made it possible to save many properties by providing funds for purchasing private lands within the National Forests. However, Pima County was not able to purchase the Rosemont private property. The Augusta Resource Corporation, a Canadian company purchased the land and established the Rosemont Copper company. Subsequently, Hudbay Minerals, also of Canada, purchased the Rosemont Copper Company from Augusta Resource. The proposed mine would be a mile wide, half mile deep open pit mine that would be located on 900 acres of private land (Rosemont Ranch) but over 2500 acres of National Forest Land would be required to dispose of waste rock and mine tailings. On 8 March 2019, the US Army Corps of Engineers issued the final permit that was required to commence mining operations. This was a direct reversal of their previous position of July 2016 in which the Clean Water Act Section 404 permit was denied. It is presumed that this latest decision will have no effect on environmental groups (like *Save the Scenic Santa Ritas*) efforts to oppose any Forest Service land exchange for waste disposal and will continue to pursue legal action to-stop mine development.“

Prepared by John J. and Bette Bosma, March 2007 from various web sites and pamphlets.  
Photographs in Figures 3 & 4 by J & B Bosma. Updated by T Johnson in 2019.

**Additional Material:** GVHC Library File 63