

KENTUCKY CAMP HISTORY

In 1874, the discovery of placer gold in the Eastern slopes of the Santa Rita Mountains by a prospector named Smith in what was to become known as the Greaterville Mining District lead to a small gold rush the following year. An Englishman named Fred Hughes located the Kentucky Gulch claims in 1875 and later founded the town of Greaterville. Initially, the Greaterville Camp had about 80 Americans and “some” Mexicans and Indians. The Greaterville Mining district had both lode and placer deposits. Lode deposits are veins of mineral ore deposited between layers of rock. Placer deposits consist of gold mixed with sand and gravel. The placer gold in the Greaterville District is believed to have originated when gold was washed out of gold bearing veins during the erosion of Granite Mountain. The Greaterville area proved to be the largest and richest placer deposit in Southern Arizona at that time. As many as 150 to 200 men worked the area over the next three to four years with the population of Greaterville rising to over 400 people. The Greaterville Post Office was established in 1879.

Between 1874 and 1900, over \$700,000 in gold (with some estimates as high as \$7,000,000) was removed from the Greaterville area placers. The value of the gold produced can be disputed because production figures were frequently “optimistic” in hope of promoting investment and because miners often did not dispose of placer gold in ways that could be readily tracked. A couple of examples of reported gold recovery were that a Mr. Fred Hughes with two helpers recovered \$100 per day in Hughes Gulch and a Mr. Coyne working alone recovered \$50 per day from his claim in Ophir Gulch.

The miners quickly discovered that water was almost as precious as gold. Normally they would wash the sand and gravels with water using rockers and pans to separate the gold but the mountain arroyos were generally dry. One of the nearest more reliable water sources was Gardner Canyon. Miners hauled sacks of dirt to the few running streams or carried water to their claims in canvas or goatskin bags packed on the backs of burros. Mr. James Stetson’s report on mining in the Greaterville Area stated that Kane’s Well was one source of water that the miners used. The rich deposits that could repay these efforts were worked out by 1886 and most miners moved on.

By 1900, hydraulic mining had become well established in the placer fields of California. In this technique, the ground is excavated by means of high-pressure streams of water and the gold bearing gravels are run into a sluice where the gold was extracted by gravity or amalgamation. Hydraulic mining could quickly reach deeply buried deposits or move large quantities of gravel to create economies of scale in working low-value deposits. The development of hydraulic mines required significant investments of capital because elaborate water supply systems had to be constructed.

About 1900, an East Coast millionaire named George B. McAneny bought up a large number of mining claims in the area (some reports said as many as 2,000). A California Mining Engineer named James B. Stetson thought he could solve the water problem. He conceived a grand scheme to channel runoff from the Santa Rita’s spring snow melt into a reservoir system that would hold enough water to last 10 months. The water would be

brought to Kentucky Gulch by a series of canals and pipes. There, the water would make it possible to use hydraulic mining to extract gold from ores too poor to mine by other methods. In a report prepared by Stetson to address the feasibility of hydraulic mining, he estimated that the monetary return would be approximately 47 cents per cubic yard processed for operations in Kentucky Gulch and 47 cents per cubic yard in Boston Gulch. In September 1902, McAneny, Stetson and three other investors formed the Santa Rita Water and Mining Company and built the water system that we can still see the remnants of today.

Construction of the water system was started in January, 1903 and was completed in the Fall of 1904. The system collected water from Big Casa Blanca and Gardner Canyons and transported it to Boston Gulch. The start of the system is considered to be Bear Spring in Big Casa Blanca Canyon although it gathered water from the whole upper watershed of the two canyons. The total water system is about 8.5 miles in length and consists of a combination of dams, intakes, open ditches (about 5.5 miles), pipes, penstocks, tunnels and valves and depending on the source, cost from \$200,000 \$250,000 to construct. The ditch gradient was about 0.25 per cent or 15 feet per mile. This gradient allowed the water to flow just fast enough to reduce siltation of the ditches and just slow enough enough to reduce erosion. The ditches passed through two tunnels, a 925- foot tunnel which connected the ditch in Casa Blanca Canyon to the rest of the system and a 300-foot tunnel on Dead Horse Mesa. The whole system was by gravity flow so pipes were used to transport the water across the canyons and up to the next ridge. A 24 inch pipe was used to cross Cave and Gardner Canyons and a 20 inch pipe from the collector on Dead Horse Mesa across Fish Canyon to the distribution valves above Boston Gulch.. Fifteen and 9-inch pipes were also used to distribute water to the working pits and supply water to the monitors that applied the water pressure to remove the overburden. This water was then collected and used in the ore concentration process. The pipe segments were made of rolled steel sheets that were riveted together to secure the seam. One end of the pipe was compressed so that it would fit into the adjoining segment. The segment interiors were lined with asphalt and the exterior of the pipe was also coated with asphalt to reduce leakage. Indications are that the pipe segments were delivered by rail to the rail siding at Sonoita and then hauled overland to the project. The main distribution line terminated on the ridge just to the West of Boston Gulch where two large gate valves still remain. A valve to bleed air from the pipeline is also located here. From these gate valves, water was distributed to the several placer pits by smaller pipes and hoses. It is estimated that the water pressure at the working placer pits was about 1,000 psi. A 1-inch pipe also delivered water to a cistern located on the ridge between Boston and Kentucky Gulches where it was subsequently distributed to the Kentucky Camp area.

The buildings at Kentucky Camp were built in 1904 and served as the headquarters for the company. There were five main buildings at Kentucky Camp. The large headquarters building, an assay office, two cabins and a barn. James Stetson occupied the Cabin that has been restored with a veranda. The miners who worked the placer pits lived in a tent camp on a ridge above Boston Gulch to the North of the pipe terminus. It is estimated that 40 to 100 miners were working the operation and occupied the tent camp. Many artifacts have been found on the slopes of the ridge below the campsite.

In 1904, a limited hydraulic mining operation was started in Boston Gulch (to the west of Kentucky Gulch) to show that the system developed sufficient water pressure and to prove the concept. Phone lines connected Kentucky Camp with the Tent Camp and the sluice gate operators in Gardner Canyon to control the release of water into the system. The test ran for about six weeks. The water system evidently worked well as evidenced by the seven placer pits that were excavated in the area. The recovery of gold, though, was another story. It is estimated that only about \$2,000 worth of gold was recovered during the test. Also, the total quantity of gold reported extracted from all the Greaterville placers during the period of 1902 through 1931 was only \$42,756. Before the operation could really get going, however, tragedy struck. On May 21, 1905 at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, James Stetson was killed when he fell from the window of Room 319 on the third floor of the Santa Rita Hotel in Tucson. He had been consulting with the company's attorney and was scheduled to meet with McAneny and G.R. Comings, another investor, the following day. The cause of the fall has never been determined.

After Stetson's death, the financial situation of the Company deteriorated. McAneny had spent as much as \$175,000 on the developments and was continuing to spend about \$1,000 per month. By January of 1906, he had received only \$3,000 from these investments. As holder of a promissory note and a mortgage from the company, he foreclosed in an apparent attempt to become sole owner. In February, 1906, the Santa Rita Water and Mining Company operation was sold at a sheriff's sale. McAneny was able to purchase the property at the foreclosure sale but was unable to continue development. The sale included a large number of placer mines, water rights, water tunnels, mining equipment, telephone lines and virtually everything else connected with the mining operation. About this same time, McAneny's wife filed for divorce and a series of injunctions and restraining orders restricted his ability to put additional money into the mining operation. In 1907, His sister Elizabeth petitioned for guardianship arguing that McAneny had become incompetent to manage his property. The petition was denied in California but granted for McAneny's Arizona property.

McAneny died in August, 1909 and Elizabeth became administrator of his estate. When she died, her interests were willed to her nephew whose attorney, Louis Hummel, bought the property owned by the Santa Rita Water and Mining Company in 1911. This included the town of Greaterville and the Kentucky Camp area. Mr. Hummel, with his wife and children moved into the Kentucky Camp buildings making the large office building their home. However, they didn't stay long. Before the end of 1911, the Hummels had relocated near Sonoita and their daughter, Floss, and her husband Wert C. Fenter moved into the Kentucky Camp buildings and operated the property as a cattle ranch. The ranching phase of the camp's existence lasted until the mid-1960's when Mr. Fenter's eyesight began to fail and the Fenters rounded up their cattle for the last time and retired. After the final cattle roundup and sale, Kentucky Camp was abandoned. The Fenters sold the property to the ANAMAX Mining Company in 1965.

In 1989, the old ranch site and 3,000 surrounding acres was transferred to the ownership of the US Government under the management of the Forest Service through a land swap

with ANAMAX Mining for land on the East side of the Helvetia area. In 1991, the Forest Service began stabilizing the buildings. By 1995, stabilization was pretty much completed and preservation and rehabilitation of the buildings commenced under the direction of William Gillespie and Mary Farrell, archeologists for the US Forest Service. By 1999, significant progress had been made in restoring three of the five main buildings. Restoration of the main building and the cabin referred to as “Stetson’s Cabin” was completed first. Stetson’s Cabin has been incorporated into the Forest Service’s “Rooms with a View” program and is used as overnight lodging for Arizona Trail hikers. A new roof has been built on the second cabin and doors and windows have been repaired to prevent continued deterioration but current plans are to leave the rest of the structure unrestored (floors, etc.) to show the condition of the buildings at the time the Forest Service took over. Restoration of the Assay House has been virtually completed. The barn will be left in its current configuration. Two restrooms have been built as conveniences for visitors to the camp. Much of the work was done by the Forest Service “Passport in Time” program volunteers and volunteers from the “Friends of Kentucky Camp”, a private non-profit organization formed in 1993 to provide on-going support for work at the site. Materials and money were acquired as a result of a partnership agreement with the production company filming the television series “The Young Riders” which was filmed in the area in the early 1990s and also through a second partnership agreement with the production company filming the movie “Posse”. The “Friends of Kentucky Camp” organization is providing on-going support to the Forest Service in the restoration and administration of the camp.

The following excerpts from the Arizona Daily Star show the progress of the operation:

January 17, 1903 - “James B Stetson has 40 men employed in the preliminary work of opening a ditch of six foot width and 5 miles length in the Greaterville Placer Mining District. Three miles of 24 inch pipe is being installed and a reservoir of several million gallons will be constructed on the East slope of the Santa Ritas. Fully \$200,000 will be expended before actual working in the ground is begun.”

July 28, 1904 - “Word from Greaterville says that the big dam has been completely filled by the recent rain and will provide sufficient water to work the placers for the next 8 to 10 months”.

August 23, 1904 - “President McAneny and Manager Stetson of the Santa Rita Water and Mining Company returned Sunday to their mines in the Santa Ritas. They made a 10 day run from water in the canyon furnished by rain fall and made a test, sufficient to satisfy the company that a dam should be built at once for the purpose of getting water for placer work. They appeared to be satisfied from the test that they have good placer grounds, for the working of which they can take the chance of putting up a large dam. They are running a tunnel through the mountain to connect with another canyon, through which they will pipe water. The tunnel will be about 1000 feet in length when completed and is now more than half finished.”

Following are photographs of the Kentucky Camp Buildings.



Figure 1. Main Building in 1997 before Restoration.
Photo by T. Johnson



Figure 2. Main Building after Restoration Completion.
Photo by T. Johnson



Figure 3. Interior Room of Main Building before Reconstruction (1997)
Photo by T. Johnson



Figure 4. Interior Room of Main Building after Reconstruction.
Photo by T. Johnson



Figure 5. Stetson's Cabin
Photo by T. Johnson



Figure 6. Partially Restored Cabin
Photo by T. Johnson.



Figure 7. Assay House
Photo by T. Johnson



Figure 8. Ruins of Adobe Barn
Photo by T. Johnson

INFORMATION UPDATE: During the restoration of the camp's structures the decision was made not to attempt any restoration of the adobe barn (Figure 8) beyond some stabilization of the walls. Over the years the weather took its toll and the adobe walls gradually "melted" away and all that remains are memories and pictures. In May of 2012, the Forest Service and the Friends of Kentucky Camp received a pleasant surprise. A monitor that had been removed from one of the hydraulic pits in Boston Gulch by a Tucson resident in the early 1980s was being returned. The monitor has been mounted on the slope below the assay house (see Figure 8)



Figure 8. Monitor

The following hikes of the Green Valley Hiking Club cover different portions of Santa Rita Water and Mining Company Operation: Kentucky Camp/Snyder Mine Loop (A Hike); Arizona Trail/Kentucky Camp (B Hike); Ditch Mountain (B Hike); Arizona Trail to Tunnel Springs (C Hike); Kentucky Camp Loop (C Hike); and Greaterville to Kentucky Camp (C Hike)

Compiled in April 1999 by T. Johnson from Forest Service Literature (including Heritage Resources Management Report No. 15), Friends of Kentucky Camp Literature and data researched by Bob Lund, Green Valley Hiking Club. Updated by T, Johnson in May, 2014.

Additional Material: GVHC Library File 35