

SMUGGLER MOUNTAIN MINING AREA

(Roaring Fork Mining District)

(Aspen Mining District)

White River National Forest

East of the intersection of Smuggler Mountain Road and Silverlode

Drive

Aspen

Pitkin County

Colorado

HALS CO-9

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### SMUGGLER MOUNTAIN MINING AREA (Roaring Fork Mining District) (Aspen Mining District)

HALS NO. CO-9

Location: East of the intersection of Smuggler Mountain Road and Silverlode Drive  
City of Aspen, Pitkin County, Colorado  
White River National Forest

39.198032, -106.800554 (Center of Bushwacker Mine disturbance on upper bench of Smuggler mountain, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: The Smuggler Mountain mining area produced a significant portion of the silver in the Roaring Fork Mining District, also known as the Aspen Mining District. This district was one of the most important silver districts in the country at its peak in the early 1890s. During that time the Aspen Mining District produced one-sixth of all the silver in the United States, worth \$9,299,300 in 1892.<sup>1</sup> The most important mines on Smuggler Mountain included the Smuggler, the Park-Regent, and the Mollie Gibson.

Description: Smuggler Mountain, east-southeast of the City of Aspen, rises to a peak elevation of 11,932 feet above sea level, on the west side of the Continental Divide. The mountain is approximately 5.25 miles at its widest north-south transect across the base. Smuggler Mountain resides within the Williams Mountains of the Central Sawatch Range and is part of the White River National Forest. The Roaring Fork River flows in a northwest direction from the Continental Divide forming the southern most boundary of Smuggler Mountain. Hunter Creek flows in mostly an east-to-west direction originating in the Williams Mountains west of the Continental Divide and defines the northern and western extent of Smuggler Mountain. The area of historic interest and subject of this report is located on privately held and public open space on the northwest flank of Smuggler Mountain generally described in terms of the 6<sup>th</sup> P.M, T10S, R84W at the approximate coordinates of 106d47m00s longitude and 39d2m00s latitude plotted on the USGS Aspen 7.5' quad map of 1987.

The majority of the historic mining activity is contained on the steep slopes of varying vegetative cover. This is a landscape that transitions from an urban to a rural national forest landscape showing the dominant vegetation types of Aspen forest, Lodgepole pine forest, mountain shrubland, riparian shrublands,

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<sup>1</sup> Rohrbough, Malcolm J, *Aspen: The History of a Silver Mining Town 1879-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), page 172

Aspen/conifer forest, and Douglas-fir forest.<sup>2</sup> The mountain shrubland communities are all found on the steep lower elevation slopes of the Smuggler Mountain Open Space and dominated by Gambel Oak communities at the lower elevations; vegetation communities are dominated by oak brush with strong components of both Utah and Saskatoon serviceberry, sagebrush and bitterbrush. Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) stands are found at the higher elevations and demonstrate some subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*) and Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*) encroachment, whereas other Aspen tree stands appear to be persisting and regenerating without the conifer component. Aspens are a common dominant vegetation community type at Smuggler Mountain and can grow on most soil types, but are most vigorous in areas with somewhat fertile soils and sufficient moisture. Smuggler Mountain demonstrates both successional Aspen stands such as those in the gently sloping area around the Park-Regent and Bushwacker mine sites (Wilkinson area), and persistent Aspen stands such as those found in the upper elevations and some of the steep slopes of the Open Space. Lodgepole Pine (*Pinus contorta*) communities can be found on the north-facing upper elevation slopes, where Lodgepole pine forests are dominant. Some of these Lodgepole pine stands, however, have strong components of Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), subalpine fir, and some Engelmann spruce, likely due to a combination of previous logging, fire suppression, and slight differences in habitat characteristics.

The terrain levels out temporarily at the highest point of the known mining area but Smuggler Mountain continues to rise to the east. Access to the more densely mined areas is via Smuggler Mountain Road, a maintained remnant of the earlier mining transportation. It cuts a bench across the southwestern and western faces with numerous switchbacks, mounds of tailing piles and excavated soil, and depressions marking previous areas of mining activity. Smuggler Mountain Road is also known as County Road 21; it continues to be used by hikers, bikers, cross-country skiers, and motorized vehicle enthusiasts. The Smuggler Mountain Road surface is compacted earth and gravel overlaid on large cobbles to boulder sized rock material. The road averages approximately 14 feet in width, with occasional widening to allow for two-directional vehicle passing. The Road is maintained by Pitkin County. The road can be seen from Aspen Mountain, the town of Aspen, and many other locations throughout the Roaring Fork Valley. The JC Johnson Mine tailing pile is one of the most observable landmarks on the west aspect of Smuggler Mountain just above the Smuggler Mine operations.

There are some 30 or more claims made on the northwest flank of Smuggler Mountain covering more than 300 acres (see Mining claims of 1893 map). Dotted the northwest flank of Smuggler Mountain are depressions of various

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<sup>2</sup> City of Aspen and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, *Smuggler Mountain Open Space Management Plan*,

<http://www.aspenpitkin.com/Departments/Parks-Trails-Open-Space/Open-Space/OS-Management-Plans/> (accessed June 12, 2012)

depth estimated to be anywhere from 5 feet to 20 feet deep. The slopes of these depressions are fragile loose soils with herbaceous cover and occasional sapling growth. On the fringes of some of the deeper pits are tailing piles of broken rock fragments. The tailing piles are also of varying dimensions, the larger piles being associated with the Iowa Shaft, Park-Regent, and Bushwacker locations. Smuggler has at least six known mineshafts. These are the: Iowa Shaft, Boulder Shaft, Bushwacker, Park Regent, Drill Rig Shaft, and an unnamed shaft.<sup>3</sup> Pedestrian survey transects perpendicular to defined trails reveal other mining disturbances and scattered resources. These potential resources take the form of lashed timbers, earthen flumes or drainage trenches, outhouse framing and pits, and concrete footers. Currently, the City and County have closed off these areas due to the multiple open mines, mining hazards, and as-yet unidentified resources. A number of resources and identified historical artifacts were collected and catalogued by the Aspen Historical Society prior to a scrap and trash clean up of the Wilkinson Parcel (Park-Regent vicinity).

History: The great Leadville silver boom of 1878 had turned the Colorado site into the most talked about mining camp in the Rockies because of the quantity of ore being extracted. When Ferdinand Hayden's landmark survey of Colorado was published in 1879, a set of the report and maps fell into the hands of a party of prospectors composed of Charles E. Bennett, S.E. Hopkins, A.C. Fellows, and Walter S. Clark.<sup>4</sup> Upon careful examination, the prospectors recognized similar mineral formations near the headwaters of the Roaring Fork of the Grand River west of the Continental Divide to that which had been located east of the divide by Hayden on the Eagle River in the prosperous Leadville Mining District. The Bennett party crossed the Sawatch Mountain Range from Leadville westward in July 1879, following the Roaring Fork River into the Aspen Valley. A month earlier, Philip W. Pratt, Smith Steele, and William L. Hopkins (using similar equipment, guidebooks, and maps) preceded the Bennett party in making the first claims in the valley. Bennett and party began the systematic exploration of the eastern end of the valley. The Bennett claims numbered seven and included claims on Aspen Mountain and on West Aspen Mountain. The last of their acquisitions was an abandoned claim on Smuggler Mountain, rechristened the Smuggler. Smuggler had been originally staked (no known date) as the Arkansas by a man named Fuller, but the required annual improvements of \$100 were not made and Bennett's party took possession, presumably that same year (1879).<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Charles A. Hallam a Cincinnati, Ohio accountant was seeking

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3 City of Aspen and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, Smuggler Mountain Open Space Management Plan,

<http://www.aspenpitkin.com/Departments/Parks-Trails-Open-Space/Open-Space/OS-Management-Plans/> (accessed June 12, 2012)

4 Wentworth, Frank L., *Aspen on the Roaring Fork* (Denver: World Press, Inc., 1950), page 36

5 Barlow-Perez, Sally, *A History of Aspen* (Basalt, CO: Who Press, 2000), page 8

adventure in the West. Charles A. Hallam became associated with and formed an investment partnership with David M. Hyman, an Ohio Attorney. In the fall of 1879, Hallam went west with Hyman's blessing. Hallam's interest in mining and his responsibility for investing Hyman's funds in responsible financial opportunity brought him to the Aspen Mining District and into association with B. Clark Wheeler.<sup>6</sup> Hallam and Wheeler, together invested Hyman's money in seven and one half claims in the Roaring Fork District in January 1880, including the Smuggler. The partners concentrated on the Smuggler, where they explored extensively, did development work and selected some ore for shipment to Leadville to be assayed. The work showed the Smuggler contained huge deposits of low-grade ore, ranging from 15 to 30 ounces of silver to the ton, which could not be profitably mined and packed over the passes to Leadville for processing.<sup>7</sup> The Smuggler, at the base of Smuggler Mountain, was in need of a local smelting plant and a railroad for it to achieve the success to which it was destined.

The mine entrances low on the sides of Aspen and Smuggler Mountains had the best access to the railheads when the trains finally arrived in Aspen in 1887. Railroads built feeder lines to the largest producing mines and contributed to the growth of the city and the wealth generated by a few mines. Jack trains (groups of pack mules) moved up and down the primitive roads cut into the side of mountain to carry supplies and a few tons of ore.<sup>8</sup> The Standard Mining Company formalized the Smuggler Mountain Road and deeded it to Park Regent Mining Company in May 1888.<sup>9</sup> Mining activity on Smuggler Mountain increased in the form of exploration and development but only the JC Johnson Mine would be considered a "pay mine" at this time.<sup>10</sup> The mines on Smuggler Mountain had a reputation for large bodies of low-grade ore, not justifying the expense of transportation by jack train across the mountains to Leadville. The boom of Aspen's silver mines began in 1887 with the railroad; in 6 years (1887-1893) eight mines would dominate silver production in the Aspen mining scene, three of which were located on Smuggler Mountain.

At the time, mines were regarded in terms of their proximity to the richer and more prosperous mines, which could increase the claim value of the lesser-known mines without those lesser-known mines ever producing. The Mollie Gibson was just this case, situated south of Smuggler, and drew very little commentary as simply one of several claims adjacent to the more promising

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6 Hyman, David M., *The Romance of a Mining Venture* (Cincinnati: The Larchmont Press, 1981), page 8

7 Rohrbough, page 89

8 Rohrbough, page 171

9 Wilkinson, Wilk, *The History of Smuggler Mountain*, <http://www.ecodesign.com/history.html> (accessed February 5, 2008)

10 Rohrbough, page 177

Smuggler, JC Johnson, and the Lone Pine. The Mollie Gibson became subject to litigation over the boundary of its claim with that of the Lone Pine and eventually resulted in a compromise of consolidating with the Sequoit to the West and Lone Pine to the East.<sup>11</sup> A veteran of the Aspen Mining District was Henry B. Gillespie, and he was able to promote the Mollie Gibson, construct a concentrator plant for all the low-grade ore producers on Smuggler Mountain, and develop the Mollie Gibson into one of the richest silver mines ever discovered in the history of American silver mining (photo available from Colorado Historical Society).<sup>12</sup> The mines on Smuggler Mountain to benefit from the promotion of the Mollie Gibson group were the Park Regent group, the Bushwacker, JC Johnson, Della S., St. Joe, Mineral Farm Consolidated, Iowa and Smuggler. In July, 1889 the Cowenhoven Tunnel Company began the work of cutting a double track mining car tunnel to the principal mines on Smuggler Mountain. This tunnel was to create a more perfect drainage as well as ventilate and transport ores from several mines to the railway for shipment. Its length is about 4,000 feet, solidly timbered throughout, and was completed July 29, 1891.

Logging became an important industry in the mining district. Timber was used extensively in the mining industry to support tunnels, cribbing of stopes (vertical ventilation shafts), mill construction, and in home building. These facilities and the subsequent lumbering industry were products of a successful mining camp town. The population growth of the town of Aspen and physical expansion created a demand for housing and construction industry.<sup>13</sup> Several sawmills, which operated in the valleys, provided the wood but the lumber was harvested wherever it could be taken from and most came from the nearby mountains. Most of the stumps (at a height of about 3 feet) on present day Smuggler Mountain were the result of the lumber being needed during the period of greatest mining activity (1887-1891).<sup>14</sup> The Koch family operated a sawmill on Hunter Creek at the base of Smuggler Mountain and near the St. Joe Mine, which is on the mountain. Jennie Adair and her husband operated a boarding house and sawmill northwest above the Koch Ranch in an area named for her as Widow's Gulch, also at the base of Smuggler Mountain.<sup>15</sup> This valley became a thriving community with ranchers, loggers, miners, two dairies and a school.<sup>16</sup>

In 1893, the crash of the silver market halted Aspen's growth, and all activity on

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11 Rohrbough, page 176

12 Rohrbough, page 180

13 Rohrbough, pages 109-110

14 Parker, Jay, personal communication 2007

15 BLM GLO Records, <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/PatentSearch/Results.PF.asp> (accessed September 27, 2007)

16 Dunn, Edith, "The Saga of Jenny Adair: A fightin', feudin' Aspen Pioneer is fondly remembered," *Aspen*, February 1982, 42-44, 63.

Smuggler Mountain ceased except that of the mine operations maintained by David Hyman. Smuggler continued to produce marketable silver well into the 1900s and produced more silver between 1910 and 1920 than any time previously.<sup>17</sup> However, as Aspen began to decrease in population, and decline in its socioeconomic structure, mining was no longer its future and the town entered into the “Quiet Years” (1895-1935). The next phase of Aspen’s revival came in the form of snow.

Smuggler Mountain played a very limited role in the “Quiet Years” period, however it could be said that the views from its flanks inspired the towns transformation as veterans returning from World War II remembered traversing into the town of Aspen via Smuggler Mountain’s shoulders during their training days. Of note, the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment, later to become the 10th Mountain Division - America's soldiers on skis, continued to perfect their mountaineering training with only one documented account indicating a route down Hunter Creek.<sup>18</sup> The route became known as the Trooper Traverse that approached the Williams Mountains and descended a steep and rocky gully (Trooper Couloir) into the timber areas of Hunter Creek. The rest of the route into Aspen followed logging roads and skirted the west flanks of Smuggler Mountain.<sup>19</sup>

Little changed for the mountain during the later half of the 20th Century, mining continued as old claims were further explored by sale and lease agreements. Stefan Albouy took out a 100-year lease on the Smuggler Mine in 1982.<sup>20</sup> George Wilkinson and Charlie Baker continued to operate the Bushwacker and Park Regent Mines on Smuggler Mountain and during their own mining endeavors significantly disturbed or removed much of the earlier mining history. This disturbance took the form of installed water lines, embedded freight storage containers into mine openings, and surface grading with large equipment. However, in 2005 the city and county jointly paid Wilkinson \$15 million from open space funds to protect the 170 acre core of Smuggler Mountain in what remains the largest purchase ever made by local government for open space. In 2006, the City of Aspen bought an additional 24 acres from Wilkinson’s wife and later in 2007 the city and county acquired the mineral rights from the Wilkinson estate. Today, much of the area is owned and managed by the City of Aspen and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails. These lands are also protected by conservation easements held by the Aspen Valley Land Trust and surrounded by lands under the administration of the USDA Forest Service. With this level

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17 Markalunas, James, personal communication, 2007

18 Rucker, Richard, *Annotated Condensed and Lightly Edited Account of the Trooper Traverse, Leadville to Aspen, 1944*, edited by Louis Dawson, [http://wildsnow.com/articles/trooper traverse/](http://wildsnow.com/articles/trooper%20traverse/) (accessed October 26, 2007)

19 Rucker, Richard, *Annotated Condensed and Lightly Edited Account of the Trooper Traverse, Leadville to Aspen, 1944*, edited by Louis Dawson, [http://wildsnow.com/articles/trooper traverse/](http://wildsnow.com/articles/trooper%20traverse/) (accessed October 26, 2007)

20 Parker, Jay, personal communication 2007

of supervision, Smuggler Mountain will continue to dominate the eastern edge of the City of Aspen and serve as a reminder of her earlier glory as the richest silver mining town in the United States, if not the world.

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1893 Birds eye view of Aspen with Smuggler Mountain in the background. The J[C] Johnson Mine and the Regent Mine on Smuggler Mountain are listed in the key (LOC Geography and Map Division, Augustus Koch, G4314.A72A3 1893 .K6)





West aspect of Smuggler Mountain as viewed from Aspen Mountain. JC Johnson Tailing pile in center of photo (B.P. Kelly, Bios-LDR, September 23, 2011)



Smuggler Mountain Road, as seen traveling North. Compacted dirt and gravel surface typical of entire length (B.P. Kelly, Bios-LDR, September 23, 2011)



An example of the many mining depressions, which exist on Smuggler Mountain. These depressions are the remains of collapsed adits, stopes, or shafts (B.P. Kelly, Bios-LDR, September 23, 2011)

Other historic images which can be obtained through the Colorado Historical Society (CHS) or Denver Public Library Western History Collection (DPL/WHC):

Mollie Gibson and Smuggler Mine, Smuggler Mountain Road shown ascending mountain right to left. (DPL/WHC, H.H. Buckwalter, CHS-B1502)

Smuggler Shaft House at base of Smuggler Mountain (DPL/WHC, H.H. Buckwalter, CHS-B1507)