

## MINING

## Traps That Have Caught the Unwary

Something About the Salting of Mines, Showing that the Only Safe Way for the Buyer Is to Employ an Engineer.

Mine salting and mine swindling are as old as Ophir. Aside from a few improvements added by modern science, they are pursued in much the same way as when Hiram was King of Tyre. But because the lure of gold hidden in the earth is almighty and everlasting, those who would get rich quickly continue to toss caution to the winds, blindfold their reason, and gag the voice of their common sense. If it is gone about with reasonable care, however, there is not much more risk, proportionately, in buying a mine than there is in buying a grocery store or any other business. Protection and ordinary safety are within the reach of any investor.

The mining engineer stands in the same relation to the prospective purchaser of a mine as the expert accountant does to one who is looking into a business that he is thinking of purchasing. The greater the skill and experience of the person making the examination, the better he can estimate the future possibilities of the property. Yet even the most eminent engineers are not infallible. They err now and then. Sometimes their mistakes are costly; sometimes their very blunders bring great riches to those who employ them.

The successful mining engineer has to be the wariest and most suspicious of men. He can trust no one. At any moment he may find matched against him the wits of the cleverest of swindlers, alert to take advantage of an instant's faltering of his concentrated watchfulness.

The mining engineer represents the men who have money to invest, and he moves with caution. He knows both the theory and the practice of mining, from a scientific and a practical point of view. He has every advantage to start with. One of his greatest assets is honesty. His duties are to survey the claim, take samples of the ore, make assays, ascertain the best treatment necessary for the ore, figure the cost of reducing it to bullion, and to determine the actual value net to the purchasers of the ore actually in sight. He reports on what he can see—not what cannot be seen.

Suppose the swindler decides that he will endeavor to deceive the mining engineer. How does he go about it? The procedure is something like this: He tells the engineer to "cut out" his samples of ore wherever and in whatever way he pleases. That means that the engineer may either "shoot" out a face of ore, and sample what is dislodged by the blast, or cut his samples from the new face of rock that has been exposed. "Cutting" samples means, in this case, that every five feet the engineer will dig out with a prospector's pick a thin streak from one wall to the other. He will put these pieces of rock in a sack. In this sack he will place a slip of paper with a number, and will jot the same number down in a book, together with the description. He will also note it on a rough map that he has made. Then he makes another cut five feet away, and so on, until he has sampled all the ore in sight.

If this rock is barren of precious metal there is only one way to deceive the engineer, and that is to give the samples, surreptitiously, a fictitious value. This may be done by dropping gold dust or rich ore into the sack before it is tied—a difficult thing to do—or by giving it a "shot" of chloride of gold by means of a hypodermic syringe inserted in the sack of samples when the engineer's back is turned. In order to carry through the fraud successfully practically every sack must be "doped" most carefully. If it is not, the engineer will detect the fraud when the samples are assayed, for there will be a suspicious difference in richness among them. In any event, if the engineer exercises caution he can tell exactly what sacks have been doctored.

Some crooked mining owners prefer to coat the face of a vein with a solution of chloride of gold prior to the visit of the engineer. This is put on with a whitewash brush. They do this with the hope that the engineer will "cut" some of the face in sampling. Therefore the most experienced engineers prefer to blast out the rock themselves and get at the virgin ore beyond. In this case the engineer uses dynamite cartridges, which he himself has purchased. He is suspicious of those that might be furnished by the seller. It is possible to "doctor" the explosive also.

The mining expert takes an inventory of the property, just as a business expert would of a stock of goods. He scrutinizes not only everything under ground, but everything on the surface as well. He verifies by his own surveys the boundaries of the property. He inspects the title and goes over the records to ascertain whether the law has been complied with in every respect. He employs a lawyer to search the title and find out if the property is clear. All of these things take a great deal of time and cost considerable money, but they are the safeguards with which every prospective purchaser of a mining property should surround himself. The man who invests in a salted mine, or who is trapped by a swindler, has only himself to blame, because there are so many avenues of information open to him. If he is not in a position to join with others to protect himself, he will rarely make a mistake if he declines to invest. He should never take the seller's say-so as to the present or prospective value of the property, for the seller will always overpraise what he wishes to dispose of. The old principle of common law, that "the buyer should beware," never should be forgotten for a moment.

Mine salting and other devices to dupe the unwary generally flourish in new camps, where people are carried away by the excitement. Owing to the astuteness of the engineers, it is not nearly so prevalent as it was in the good old days when any hole in the ground looked like a promising place to throw money into. The mine salter reached the acme of his prosperity in the days of the Comstock lode, and in the placer diggings of California, where there was an abundance of rattlesnakes. When a mine salter wished to do his work then he would suddenly discover a rattlesnake—previously killed and deftly posed by a confederate. He would immediately "kill" the serpent with a charge of gold dust from a shotgun. This would reappear in the pan when the sand was washed in a near-by stream, and the dupe would consider it conclusive evidence of the value of the placer or the richness of the surface indications.

The favorite methods of salting in hard-rock mining have been previously indicated. There are many other ways which have been resorted to from time to time which are among the famous tales of the old-timers of the West. Some idea of the extent to which the fake operations were carried in the early days may be gathered from the fact that in the 60's and 70's, in the region of the Comstock lode, more than \$800,000,000 is said to have been literally thrown away. Claims were staked for miles and miles in all directions, and the majority of them proved valueless except to those who sold them to the gullible. The Comstock lode itself, however, yielded nearly a billion dollars. It was the same way in Leadville. At least \$500,000,000 was invested there before there was a shaft in the district down to a depth of 100 feet. Less than that sum has been taken out of Leadville to date. It is only fair to state that in both these districts there were only a number of enormously rich bonanza mines. It was on the strength of these that the hundreds of millions of dollars were scattered over the outlying districts. In this the investors showed the same judgment that would be displayed in buying town lots ten miles from the centre of a community that had only 5,000 population.—The Annalist.