

Placer Miner

(1)

Sam Koppenberg

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We went in in 1975. We were leasing on lower Caribou Creek at that time. Later on, in fact, purchased the property from the owner which was - let's see probably 4 years after that I'm guessing.

Fed claims? Yeah, fed at that time.

How get in there w/ equip + fuel?

We had to freight all of our equipment + stuff when it was frozen late winter or early spring. Fuel had to be brought into Kantishna the fall before so it would be available to freight when the conditions were good. So that meant you had your fuel tied up in Kan. over winter.

How far was Caribou Creek fr. Kan.?
I'm guessing about 7 miles or so.

Were you doing OK on Caribou?

That was a good creek, it paid well even at the low gold prices at that time. It paid well.

250 ounce?

The first year we were in there, I think we sold for 90 something in ounce. That 1st year we didn't make any gold so it didn't make any difference.

(2)
(Laughs) we were going to school. It. The price gradually rose after that. Cambou Creek was a good payin' creek. It wasn't a bonanza by any means, but it was good pay.

Have to move a lot of gravel?

It was pretty well distributed, pretty much bank to bank. It was fairly low down in the creek and it didn't make much difference where you mined. You were going to recover about the same amount. It did have a zone of higher pay, but it was minimal.

How much of the creek under claim?

Let's see.... Originally we had a portion of it leased. When we purchased it we purchased the whole creek. Leonard Craigness and I partnered up on it and bought the whole creek. That is, all the existing claim.

Was Kontrahna pretty active then?

Yes, indeed. There were a number of miners in there at that time. There were at least 2 up on Glenn Creek, one on Morse Creek, couple on Friday Creek, I don't remember how many there were all together, but there were several.

Had to use the Park Road?

Yeah. We were restricted for heavy traffic we had to travel at night when there weren't buses to haul our equipment.

Expanding park, did they talk to you about that?

They had a big meeting in Kan. to discuss it. There were 102 people in attendance, I believe, at the meeting. I believe 97 or 98 of the attending people voted to not include in the park. And of course the Park Service had already determined they were going to do it anyway, so they did. The meeting was eye wash. It didn't have anything to do with the Park.

What did they say about in-holdings in the Park?

at that time, they maintained that if the in-holders like myself would do the required paperwork, that we would be allowed to keep mining. That was the big bullshit story which was... outright lies was what it ~~was~~.

Park pressure? Did things start changing?

Yeah, almost immediately there was a change in attitude. They wanted paperwork and permits and so forth.

Fill out Paperwork?

Indeed I did. When they finally after 3 trips to the 9th Circuit, the Park Service

finally had to admit that my paperwork was complete. at that time I had submitted, believe it or not, 50 pounds of paperwork. And they finally admitted, OK, your paperwork is complete. at that point they were trapped because if you completed the paperwork, you could continue to mine. I completed the paperwork and they still wouldn't let me mine. So, that meant they'd stolen my property is what it amounted to.

you went to 9th Circuit Court?

3 Times.

In Anchorage?

San Francisco, home of the greeneries.

what happened after they said you couldn't mine?

They came in - I got a little ahead of myself. when they shut me down, I was mining. They came in in a heli-copter and a SWAT team with armored vests and automatic weapons and the whole goddamned bit and handed me a cease and desist order, and I could not mine any more.

End in?

Yeah. when you're dealing with a bunch of liars and thieves, there's very little

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that can be said. There's no trust involved at all, 'cause they tell you one thing and do something else. They're just a pack of thieves.

We took it to the G.M.C. Beyond circuit count? 3 diff. and lost all 3 times because of... 4th circuit in S.F., what can you expect?

The Park Service actually trapped themselves by saying if I completed the paperwork, I could continue to mine. It took years for them to finally give up and say that my paperwork was complete. When they finally did that, then I had 'em pretty much by the balls. Unbelievable. They kept telling me that as soon as you get your paperwork in, we'll get you back in your ground. You'll be mining by the end of the year. It was all bullshit. They had no intention whatsoever of ever letting me mine.

Did your equipment stay on the ground? Yeah. Everything stayed there until - because they kept telling me I could mine, so - soon as we get this done, then you can go back to work. I had all my equipment back there all tied up. million payments

There was
 ^ No income. They broke me. The Park Service did
 in fact, break just about all the miners
 in the district because nobody could
 afford to go through the court system.
 Berta and I borrowed a whole bunch of
 money and expanded the Kan. Roadhouse
 in order to generate enough income to
 fight the Park Service. And we were
 fortunate enough to do that. We
 spent everything we had and every-
 thing we could earn to fight the Park
 Service, but ultimately - you could say
 we won. We did not win because of the
 attorneys fees and so forth. We about
 broke even after spending 100s of thousands
 of dollars.

Go to Supreme Court? No

Gave up Claims + Resurgence?

The Natl Park Service finally cut me a
 check for. I forget just how they
 worded that, but it was for the claims,
 and they contracted with a 3rd party to
 move my equipment out of the mine
 site to Kan.

You liked it on Carbon Lick?

It was - good payin' creek. Access was
 difficult but I had the equip, specialized
 equipment to deal with that access. That
 wasn't a real problem for me,

Probably the most difficult was the fact that we had to bring our fuel in in the fall and store it overwinter in order to wait for the mines to freeze so we could haul it into the mine. That was very expensive to inventory that much fuel over winter for nothing.

Retire on?

I thought I would be there indefinitely. But, I should have realized dealing with the govt that it's not gonna work. They're going to fuck you one way or another.

Small mining community - now large tourist. Now, the Park Service is saying that we should have allowed some mining in there - it would have been a good tourist attraction. (Pst) yeah.

You comply w/ regs?

I have from the get-go, I was recycling and doing clean water long before it was required by any regulation. I attempted to get the rest of the miners in the district to clean up their act and because I could see the writing on the wall. The Park Service was allowing these miners that weren't in compliance to continue to operate knowing, goddamned well the Sierra Club was going to sue them.

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So the Sierra Club and Park Service were sleeping together. The PS was allowing the degradation of the water as the Sierra Club had license to sue which they did. It was pretty damn obvious, it was a seven.

[I think I got enough] end of interview

Sam Koppenberg

1975 leasing on lower Carbon Ck

Later on purchased prop. from owner

feet claims

had to freight all equip when frozen - late winter

early spring

fuel had to be brought in -

how far? 7 miles

That was a good creek. It paid well even w/ low

1st yr. '90 something - going to school

price grad. rose -

It was a good creek -

pretty well dist. went to bank

Originally - leased - purchased whole creek

Leonard Cragness + I partnered - bought

all the existing claims

Kantishna - numbered miners in there

at least 2 up on Glenn Ck

, on Moose Ck

Coyote on Friday Ck

Park Road? - heavy traffic at night

Expanding Park?

B & J milling in X. ~ 10,200 people

97 or 98 of people voted not to incl in Park

~~marketing~~ was eye wash

at that time - in holders would do reg. papers

we would be allowed to keep mining - plus

change in attit - they wanted permits

after 3 trips to the 9th circuit - had to

admit my paperwork was - \$0.16c

John paperwork is complete - they were trapped.

GF 4th circuit court -

after said couldn't mine -

when they shut me down - I was mining -

SWAT Team - arrested - cease + Desist order
fuel in there? yeah -

Lions + thieves ~ no trust

we went to 4th Cir - 3 y/mos - lost - 5K greenies

Park Service trapped themselves - if I
completed paperwork - I could mine.

furrowed brow

Almond beard

blue eyes

50 yrs old

receding hair

They had no intention to let me mine -

equip - park there - no income - they

nearly broke me -

afford to go through the court sys, ^{nobody could}

Bert + I borrowed - expanded R. advice

we spent everything we had -

attorneys fees - broke even -

compensation? NPS cut me a check -

for the claims - and they contracted

with a 3rd party to move my equip - to K.
Carlow like - a good playing creek - access

diff - but I had equip to deal w. that -

Had to bring fuel in and store it

I thought I'd be there indefinitely

now, P.S. saying we should have allowed
some mining in there ~ ~ ~ tourist attraction

Regs - I have from the pit go - I was regy.
before it was reg. by any regul. I have
the miners to clean up their act. The FS
was allowing miners that weren't in compliance
knowing the Internal Club would see them -
degradation of water -