Mine Reclamation and Mineral Specimen Recovery Operation,July 2013, Blanchard Mine, Socorro County, New Mexico

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In July 2013, Blanchard mine claim owners Ray DeMark, Mike Sanders, and Brian Huntsman joined forces with Arizona-based mineral specimen miners and mineral dealers Mark Kielbaso and Bruce Barlow for a three week mine reclamation and mineral specimen recovery project at the Blanchard mine.

The Blanchard mine is located approximately 5 miles south of Bingham, in Socorro County, New Mexico. The mine is located on the west side of the Sierra Oscura mountain range and is surrounded on three sides by the White Sands Missile Range. The mine is located on Federal (U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management [BLM]) property. Therefore, prior to the start of operations mining permits were obtained both from the BLM, and from the State of New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, Mining and Minerals Division (MMD). MMD regulates provisions and requirements specified in the New Mexico Mining Act. Permit requirements included paying a permit application fee to MMD, posting a land reclamation bond to the BLM, and backfilling and restoring the project area to pre-mining conditions to the degree possible at the end of the operation.

The goal of this project was two-fold:

1) A Blanchard mine underground working known as the Portales tunnel was opened to the surface and was actively caving in. It was considered to be very hazardous, and posed a substantial safety and health threat to unauthorized persons who chose to enter the underground workings. It was therefore determined that the Portales tunnel portal needed to be sealed to prevent unauthorized entry into the underground workings.

2) Previous specimen mining work indicated that the potential for high-quality fluorite and galena on quartz mineral specimens existed in and around the Portales tunnel portal, but the formerly productive ground had become buried by the collapsed rock and sloughed material that had collected at the portal entrance. It was therefore concluded that this sloughed material and overburden would be temporarily removed to uncover potentially productive ground, mineral specimens if found would then be recovered, and finally the Portales tunnel portal would be backfilled and sealed with sloughed material and previously-mined waste rock in the immediate vicinity of the portal.

Operations commenced in early July 2013, and were completed approximately three weeks later. Equipment utilized for the operation included two track-mounted excavators (trackhoes), portable rock saws and drills, mining hand tools, specimen packaging materials, etc. One of the trackhoes was equipped with a bucket (hoe), and the second machine was equipped with a large hydraulic rock-breaking hammer, utilized for removing fractured rock and for breaking up large slabs, etc.

This was a successful and enjoyable operation. Mine closure and reclamation costs were recovered as part of the potential value of mineral specimens that were obtained. The three mining claim owners and the two Arizona mining partners also obtained multiple boxes of high-quality mineral specimens that were “highgraded” from the general specimen material produced during the operation. The Portales underground workings were also closed and backfilled which eliminated that hazard and potential liability at the property. Equipment problems were minimal, and no accidents or injuries to project personnel occurred during the operation. Project participants were also treated to some spectacular July monsoon rainstorms that passed through the area during the project, and impromptu card games during the day and evening also helped pass the time!

The talk will focus on the various techniques and equipment utilized to extract mineral specimens, and complete the mine reclamation and land restoration work at the property. A representative sample of some of the high-

quality mineral specimens recovered during the operation will also be shown.

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