The Blanchard Mine: the little mine that couldn't ore

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—Erin Delventhal

The Blanchard Mine, located in the Hansonburg District in the northern portion of the Oscura Mountains, Socorro County, New Mexico, has earned its place as a classic New Mexican locality through the production of widely available, high-quality mineral specimens - most notably the "Blanchard blue" fluorite (often associated with galena) as well as the discovery of some of the world's largest known linarite crystals. However, the rich mineralization at the Blanchard Mine produces a suite of other minerals that appeal to many varieties of collecting styles.

Fluorite - Ray DeMark: Fluorite on quartz • 21 cm x 10 cm x 8 cm • 5.4 cm edge on large crystal • Across from the ore bin • Ray Demark specimen • Erin Delventhal photograph

The history of the Blanchard Mine reaches into Indigenous Peoples and Spanish colonial history, but large-scale development began in the early 1900s. Numerous attempts were made to develop an economic source of lead at the Blanchard, but all were victim to the trials found in mining in a harsh and remote desert. Throughout the years, the Blanchard has been utilized as a "collector's dream," with visitors arriving from around the globe to be lead through the property by characters such as Ora Blanchard ("The Lady on the Mountain"), Sam "Rattlesnake" Jones, and, in present times, Ray DeMark, Mike Sanders, and Brian Huntsman.

The Sierra Oscura Mountains consist of basement Proterozoic granites and gneisses with overlying Pennsylvanian formations of marine limestone and shale with interbedded arkosic sandstone. Mineral deposits at the Blanchard Mine are concentrated as open-space fillings in fissures, fault breccia, and solution cavities that are primarily concentrated in the Council Springs limestone. The Blanchard Mine and the Hansonburg District have been the subject of numerous academic studies as one of the most prominent of the Rio Grande Rift deposits.

Ora Blanchard at the rock shop in Bingham, circa 1967. Photograph by Vera Jones, courtesy of Vera Jones and the New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, Historic Photograph Archives, Socorro, NM 87801.

View of Western Mineral Product Co.'s mill looking north, circa 1916. Photograph courtesy of Wally Clark, St. Joe American Corp., Tucson AZ, New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, Historic Photograph Archives, Socorro, NM 87801.

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