

Chaffee County

Chalk Creek District

The Chalk Creek District lies at the upper end of the Chalk Creek drainage above Mount Princeton Hot Springs. Dings and Robinson (1957) divide the district into three areas - the Browns Creek the the east, Baldwin Gulch, 3 miles southeast of St Elmo, and a 1/2 to 2-mile wide, 10-mile long belt in the northeast corner of the Garfield Quadrangle over Chrisolite Mountain. An excellent summary of the history of the Chalk Creek District is provided in Neubert and Wood (2001) A synopsis of that history will be given here. The first discoveries in the district were made in 1873. Inaccessibility plagued the district - the distance and difficult terrain made transport of ore to a smelter an expensive proposition. Once a smelter was built in 1880, the mines increased output and local towns grew prospered. Later, a new smelter in Buena Vista gave the district mines another boost. The removal of the railroad in 1926 closed many of the mines, although production continued through sporadically till 1954 (Colorado Bureau of Mines, 1954). Neubert and Wood (2001) document attempts to reopen some of the mines as late as the 1960s.

The towns of Alpine, Romley, Hancock and St Elmo grew up in the district. Alpine was incorporated in 1879 and soon boasted two hotels, three banks, a dance hall, 23 saloons and a population of 500 (Aldrich, 1992). Romley grew up around the Mary Murphy Mine, the districts largest. Hancock was founded on the site of a placer mine and grew as a construction camp for workers on the nearby Alpine Tunnel. But by 1904, the post office closed, the last train passed through the tunnel in 1910 and the last passenger train up the canyon ran in 1926 (Aldrich, 1992). St. Elmo is the one town remaining in any form. Incorporated as Forest City in 1880, the the 1890s, the town had a population between 1000 and 1500. The post office remained until 1952 and there are still a few permanent residents along with seasonal residents and some businesses.

Ore in the Chalk Creek District occurred in pyritic quartz veins mostly in the Mount Princeton quartz monzonite. The veins varied greatly in size from inch-wide stringers 50 feet long to some 50-foot thick veins that persist for more than a mile. The mines were considered to be mainly silver mines. The only mention as to the source of the gold is free gold in the oxidized zone (Dings and Robinson, 1957). Silver occurred mainly in argentiferous galena, but Neubert and Wood (2001) cite newspaper articles from the day that mention argentite, pyrrargite, proustite and tetrahedrite, particularly in the Little Bonanza vein.

Vanderwilt (1947) records production in the years 1932 to 1944 (well past the years of prime production) of 5323 ounces of gold, 45,280 ounces silver, 57,735 pounds of copper, 708,950 pounds of lead and 277,700 pounds of zinc. Most of this district's production came from the Mary Murphy (Dings & Robinson, 1975).

Minerals identified in the district are the following:

(Continued next page)

Mineral list contains entries from the region specified including sub-localities

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Anglesite | var: Argentiferous Galena | Pyrrargite |
| Argentite | Gold | Pyrite |
| Azurite | Gypsum | Pyrolusite |
| Baryte | Halite | Quartz |
| Beryl | Kogarkoite | Rhodochrosite |
| Burkeite | Laumontite | Rhodonite |
| Calcite | Limonite | Silver |
| Cerussite | Malachite | Smithsonite |
| Chalcopyrite | Muscovite | Sphalerite |
| Chrysocolla | var. Sericite | Tetrahedrite |
| 'Clay' | Opal | Tennantite |
| 'Copper Stain' | 'Phillipsite' | Trona |
| Fluorite | Proustite | 'Wad' |
| Galena | 'Psilomelane' | |

Mines in the district include:

| | | | | |
|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Allie Belle | California | Hancock | Iron Chest | Mary Murphy |
| Big Bonanza | Blackhawk | Chalk Cliffs | Flora Belle | Kentucky |
| Kickapoo | Little Bonanza | Little Jessie | Matilda | North Pole |
| Overland | Portland | St Elmo Queen | Stanley | Stonewall |
| Tilden | Tom Payne | Tressa C. | | |

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Colorado Bureau of Mines Annual Report, 1954, Bureau of Mines, Denver, CO.

Dings, McClelland G. and Robinson, Charles S., 1957, Geology and Ore Deposits of the Garfield Quadrangle, CO; U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 289.

Neubert, John and Wood, Robert N. II, 2001, History, Geology and Environmental Setting of Selected Mines in the Chalk Creek Mining District, Pike and San Isabel National Forests, Chaffee County, CO; Colorado Geological Survey Open File Report 01-1.

Vanderwilt, John W., 1947, *Mineral Resources of Colorado*, State of Colorado Mineral Resources Board, Denver, CO.