

Costilla County

Grayback District (aka Russell District)

The Grayback District lies due east of Blanca Peak in northern Costilla County and has produced gold and iron. It is named for Grayback Mountain, which also called Iron Mountain because of the iron deposits on its western slope. The District sits within the Trinchera Estate of nearly 1/2 million acres - a land grant from the Mexican government in 1843. The Trinchera grant and the larger Sangre de Cristo land grant to the south came into the possession of Colorado Governor Gilpin.

The Grayback District is probably the location of the first mining activity in the State. Discussed in Parker (1974), soldiers from Fort Massachusetts appear to have been the first miners. The fort was established in 1852 on Ute Creek, approximately 6 miles north of the present-day site of Fort Garland. Soldiers worked the gravels of what has since been called Officers Bar in Placer Creek. Later, Chinese miners reportedly had success at the site.

The Trinchera Estate (on which the District occurs), received no income from the mining, so they closed the estate to all activity in 1877. Later, with procedures in place to permit mining on the land grant, mining resumed in 1896 and a company brought in a large steam shovel in 1898, but with little success. In 1910 the Colorado Gold Dredging Company introduced a steam dredge for Placer Creek capable of 2000+ tons per day. According to US Mine records reported in Parker (ibid), the dredge produced \$21,454 in gold at the prevailing price, recovering 25 cents per yard.

Not much activity occurred from 1911 until the 1930s. In 1939 the district produced 19 oz of gold and 1 oz. of silver. Additional references are Dunn (2003) and Vanderwilt (1947).

The rocks of the Grayback District are Precambrian, mostly granitic gneiss. A steeply-dipping contact, roughly parallel to Placer Creek, is overlain by sedimentary rocks to the west. These are intruded by sills and dikes of porphyritic monzonite and felsite. Some contact-metamorphic iron ores have been mined in the district. The iron ores contain low-grade gold. Evidence indicates the presence of additional iron deposits in the area (Patton et al., 1910). Thin veins contain auriferous pyrite and chalcopyrite.

One of the more interesting aspects of the District is that the gold telluride *calaverite* (AuTe₂) has been found in the gravels of upper Grayback Gulch (Patton et al., 1910). Did most of the abundant gold in the Grayback placers come from the low-grade iron ores or is there a yet-undiscovered source of richer gold-bearing telluride ore?

Mines listed in the district (mindat.org) include:

- [Badger State Placers 1-5](#)
- [Climax 1 and 2 Claims](#)
- [Copper King Claim](#)
- [Copper Queen Mine \(Russell No. 1\)](#)
- [Denver Placers 6-8](#)
- [Excelsior Tunnel Occurrence](#)
- [Giant Gulch Placer](#)
- [Hidden Treasure Claim](#)
- [Homestake Tunnel Occurrence](#)
- [Hub Hall Claim](#)

- John Moore and Lucky Claims
- Last Chance Mine
- Last Chance Placer (Last Chance No. 3)
- Lizzie G. Group (Claims: Lizzie G.; Lizzie G. No. 1; Lizzie G. No. 2)
- Lone Star of the West Mine
- Lower Star of the West Mine (Stoddard Mine)
- Magnolia Group
- Mamarth Claim
- Merrimac Claim
- Midnight Group (Pride; Red Bird)
- Millie G. Claim
- Mineral Ridge
- Monte Christo Mine (Snow Flake)
- Mountain View Tunnel
- Otero Placers 1 and 2
- Paul H. and Daisy Claims
- Placer (MRDS - 10142028)
- Rico Claims (Rico and Rico No. 1)
- Rock and Rye Claim
- Silver Tip Mine
- Spanish Basin Placer Company Claims (Claims: Alpha No. 1; Beta No. 2; Beta No. 1; Omega No. 1; Omega No. 2; Alpha No. 2)
- Star of the West Mine (Ainsworth; Upper Star of the West Mine)
- Sunnyside Tunnel
- Willow Gulch Placer
- XTC Claim (Rico; Blue Jay; Blue Bird Mine)

Also, the website "geozone.com" discusses a legendary lost mine - the Veta Mine - as possibly occurring in or near the Grayback District.

Minerals listed in the district (mindat.org; Patton et al., 1910) include:

Andradite	'Chlorite Group'/Chlorite*	Kaolinite*
Anthophyllite	Epidote*	Limonite*
Apatite*	Feldspar (Microcline,	Magnetite*
Augite*	Orthoclase, and Plagioclase)*	Malachite*
Biotite*	Galena*	Pyrite*
Calaverite*	'Garnet'*	Quartz*
Calcite*	Gold*	Silver*
Chalcocite	Hematite (specular)*	Sphene*
Chalcopyrite*	Hornblende*	

*Listed in Patton et al., 1910.

References:

Dunn, Lisa. 2003. Colorado Mining Districts: A Reference. Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colorado.

Parker, Ben H. Jr. 1974. Gold Placers of Colorado. Colorado School of Mines Quarterly, 69 (3).

Patton, H.B., Smith, C.E., Butler, G.M., and Hoskin, A.J. 1910. Geology of the Grayback Mining District, Costilla County, Colorado. Colorado Geological Survey Bulletin 2.

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

www.geozone.com, accessed July 2015.

www.mindat.org, accessed July 2015.