

A MINE ABOVE TIMBERLINE:

THE FAIRVIEW

By

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History of the Gunnison Country  
Dr. Duane L. Vandebusch

Western State College  
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## A MINE ABOVE TIMBERLINE: THE FAIRVIEW

Nestled deep within the heart of the Colorado Rocky Mountains looms a peak that rises 13,214 feet above sea level. This mountain, known by the name of Fairview peak, is located approximately four and one-half miles northwest of Pitkin. On the southwest exposure of Fairview peak, above timberline, stands the rotting remains of the once productive Fairview mine. Between 1878 to 1893, the Fairview was one of the many prominent mines in the area surrounding Pitkin, and helped to contribute to the growth and development of Pitkin. With the decline of the mining industry in general, (including the Fairview), the town of Pitkin dwindled and struggled desperately to maintain a meager existence.

"A mine is a hole in the ground owned by a liar," stated the famous humorist Mark Twain. Perhaps Twain was right, but the hearty adventurous prospectors were constantly probing the rugged terrain of the mountains, valleys, and streams searching for hidden riches of precious metals and minerals. Two such hearty prospectors searched the area north of the future town of Pitkin. Having found nothing after two years of exploring, feelings of despair mounted.

By the second summer they were completely disgruntled and while eating lunch one day, sitting on a slab of rock, one of them said: "Ain't anything in this country. Worked it for two years without a strike." As he spoke he struck the rock with his hammer. "Think I'll pack up and



pull out." He continued banging the rock once more. With the second blow a chunk broke off and dropped, but not to the ground, for it was held suspended by wires to the large rock mass. Both prospectors leaped to their feet to investigate this phenomenon and discovered that wire silver was holding the severed fragment securely to the rocky ledge. All plans to leave the region were cancelled that instant. The two men staked off a claim and had their ore assayed. It ran 80% silver.<sup>1</sup>

Jasper Pettigrew and William Davis had just discovered what was to be known as the Fairview mine.<sup>2</sup> Pettigrew and Davis claimed 1,500 by 300 feet 500 degrees northeast and 1,000 degrees southwest from the shaft in January of 1878. Since this was one of the first mines in the area at that time, no mining district was yet organized. The claim was later amended to 250 degrees northeast and 1,250 degrees southwest from the shaft (now in Quartz Creek Mining District).<sup>3</sup>

Other mines were also being discovered in 1878-1879. The Seventy-Eight, Iron Cap, Silver Islet, Silver Age, and Silent Friend were all established in the region around Quartzville--the original name of Pitkin.<sup>4</sup>

The Red Jacket was discovered that same year by Pettigrew and Davis. They built a cabin near the shaft in a broad, level park and thus supposedly "decided the location of the

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<sup>1</sup>Muriel Sibell Wolle, Stampede to Timberline (Boulder, Colorado: The University of Colorado, 1949), p. 179.

<sup>2</sup>Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstract, Gunnison County Clerk and Recorder Office, Book 2, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Harold C. Thurman, "History of Pitkin, Colorado: 1879-1930" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Western State College, Gunnison, Colorado, 1964), p. 4; Wolle, Stampede to Timberline, p. 179; Pitkin Independent, 7 January 1882, p. 1.



flourishing town of Pitkin."<sup>5</sup> Some of the ore taken from these mines was shipped to Leadville via burros with the ores showing good values.<sup>6</sup> Despite the severe cold and weather it was estimated that thirty to fifty men remained in the region during the winter of 1879.<sup>7</sup>

Pettigrew and Davis sold all rights to the Fairview on September 30, 1879 to Nathaniel Slaght of Greenville, Michigan for the sum total of forty thousand dollars (\$40,000). Slaght then sold an undivided one-eighth to F. G. South, Charles C. Peiffer, and R. B. Carpenter for fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) with money set aside to build a road to the mine.<sup>8</sup>

The spring of 1880 marked the frenzied rush to the Quartz Creek region and Pitkin.<sup>9</sup> The mountains were described

... like ant hills, where swarms of human ants are busily employed in delving deep into the earth in quest of riches. Many as they are, there seems always room for others, while the number of more or less promising prospects to be found apparently has no limit.<sup>10</sup>

The roads into the area were few, rugged, and dangerous. Nevertheless, miners flocked into the region during the

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<sup>5</sup>Pitkin Independent, 7 January 1882, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Wolle, Stampede to Timberline, p. 179.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.; A. P. Nelson, Gunnison County Colorado (Pitkin, Colorado: A. P. Nelson Mining, 1916), p. 47.

<sup>8</sup>Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstract, Book 11<sup>S</sup>, p. 58

<sup>9</sup>Duane L. Vandebusch, The Gunnison Country (Gunnison, Colorado: B. and B. Printers, 1980), p. 178.

<sup>10</sup>Nelson, Gunnison County, p. 85.



following spring of 1881 in greater numbers than the prior spring. Approximately 75 people entered Pitkin a day! Pitkin drew the attention of numerous people; Lake City lifted a leery eye since many discouraged parties left for the hot prospect of riches that Pitkin offered.<sup>11</sup>

The Fairview seemed to typify the prosperity of Pitkin. In October of 1879, Slaght and the co-owners of the Fairview formed the Green Mountain Milling and Mining Company. The company also owned interests in the Green Mountain lode, Lincoln Belle, Rosa, and Blue Bird mines. The company was capitalized at \$500,000 with 5,000 shares at \$100 each. Management of the company was controlled by the directors who were: Nathaniel Slaght, Lee Roy Moore, William H. Green, Charles Peiffer, and Richard B. Carpenter.<sup>12</sup> The vein was showing tremendous promise at one hundred feet with strikes which would run a thousand ounces of silver to the ton.<sup>13</sup> The mine remained open during the winter of 1880, along with the Silver Islet, Chicago, Garfield, Bill Friend, London Queen, Toliver, Chloride King, and the Terrible.<sup>14</sup> This was an incredible feat since the average snowfall is one

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<sup>11</sup>Vandenbusche, The Gunnison Country, p. 178-79; Wollé, Stampede to Timberline, p. 179; Rocky Mountain News, 24 October 1879, p. 3. Taken from Dr. Duane Vandenbusche's private notes on Pitkin, 14 April 1983.

<sup>12</sup>Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstracts, Book 1, p. 351.

<sup>13</sup>Thurman, "History of Pitkin," p. 47.

<sup>14</sup>Georgia Sue Chisholm, "Pitkin, Colorado: The Story of a Mining Town" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Southern Illinois, 1978), p. 28.



hundred and twenty inches with depths of three to five feet of snow accumulating and temperatures as low as minus thirty degrees being common.<sup>15</sup> Optimism was high that year--the Fairview along with the Silver Islet, Silver Age, and Red Jacket--were each valued at over \$500,000. Another reason for optimism was the anticipated arrival of the Denver South Park narrow gauge railroad into the booming town of Pitkin.

The year of 1881 was a busy one for the Fairview. In April of that year the property was producing as well as any in the area with ore breasts of immense extent exposed. Work was in progress in the upper level that displayed a breast of sulfide silver glance ore measuring ten feet wide. One of the directors, Mr. Moore, revealed a "button" worth 6,423 ounces of silver.<sup>16</sup> In July, four samples were assayed with the following results:<sup>17</sup>

<u>number of ounces of silver</u>	<u>value per ton of ore</u>
2,076	\$ 2,317.33
1,132	1,263.59
238*	265.63
113*	126.13

\*average

That same month a large article about the development of the mine appeared in the Pitkin Independent. The report contended that it was the most extensively developed mine in the area with the exception of the Silver Islet. The

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<sup>15</sup>Ray Moretz, Pitkin (Gunnison, Colorado: B. and B. Printers, 1973), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>Pitkin Independent, 2 April 1881, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 9 July 1881, p. 2.



shaft was 180 feet deep on the lower level with 75 feet of drifting and crosscuts. A drift is a horizontal passage under the surface while a crosscut is a level driven across the course of a vein.<sup>18</sup> The second level had 76 feet of drifts and crosscuts at a depth of 150 feet. A vein was discovered at this level along the drifts that headed in a westerly direction at a dip of 45 degrees. The work had temporarily been suspended until the incline could connect to shaft number two. This would provide ventilation to the workings while also facilitating better hoisting and handling of the ore. In the face of the incline and the entire length of the cut, a gigantic body of ore was revealed that measured fourteen feet across the face. The average assay of the ore exhibited 238 ounces of silver. The ore was carbonate in nature and highly impregnated with chlorides. One thousand tons of ore were in bins and sacks. A force of six to eight men were employed at the time. Minor problems with air had burdened the workers previously, but would be solved once the drift had been connected to the air shaft. Great care had been taken in the timbering and arrangement to provide for safety and convenience. The foreman was a Mr. Miller.<sup>19</sup>

Development of a mine is of great importance. If done poorly, it could cause the mine to be a poor investment.

... the developing process is the most particular and important. When skill is not displayed in the development of a mine, a very rich ore is oftentimes made a bad investment. In this department of mining, both a complete theoretical and

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 16 July 1881, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



practical knowledge is required.... The whole process in mining is to develop and do that properly. Development fixes the value of the property.<sup>20</sup>

In August 1881, some shipping was begun since no works to treat the ore had yet been built. Once when a wagon from the mine appeared in Pitkin to be assessed, a large crowd gathered in the streets to look at the ore. When it was assayed, a small portion of the ore contained 3,000 ounces of silver per ton. Development work continued along a vein eight feet wide with a total of 600 feet in development of shafts and drifts. The vein contained silver, copper, and lead.<sup>21</sup>

Ore from the Fairview along with ore from the Silver Islet were shipped east for treatment by a new process of reduction, in hopes of finding a process that would work on the ore.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, an attempt to persuade the Denver Rio Grande to construct a branch line into Pitkin failed. An adequate and economical mode of transportation was needed to link the mines with the mineral markets. A railroad line would end high freight costs and would provide a cheap and easy route of transportation in and out of Pitkin.<sup>23</sup>

The Fairview remained open during the winter of 1881-1882. The Denver Republican issued an annual New Year's

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<sup>20</sup>The Pitkin Mining News, 28 October 1881, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup>Pitkin Independent, 27 August 1881, p. 3; 10 September 1881, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 17 September 1881, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>Chisholm, "Pitkin, Colorado", pp. 45 and 52; Vandebusch, Gunnison Country, p. 181.



supplement on January 1, 1882 and described the Fairview. It was then reprinted in the Pitkin Independent. The article stated that the Fairview was the best developed mine in the area with 800 feet of development. The ore was galena (a heavy mineral and the principle ore of lead) and carbonates of lead (impregnated with carbon dioxide). The seams of silver ran throughout the ore at different angles. Small quantities of ore were assayed and valued \$115 of silver per ton. Large quantities of ore were already located on the dumps.<sup>24</sup>

A patent was applied for by the owners of the Fairview in early 1882; the actual patent was never approved until November of 1883. It was patented Mineral Certificate number 582.<sup>25</sup> The mine was producing ore yielding 4,700 ounces of silver and upward per ton in June of 1882.<sup>26</sup>

The Denver South Park entered into Pitkin in July of 1882. It was greeted by a large crowd, a band, blasts of powder, and--of course--barrels of beer. At last the long awaited railroad which would end high transportation costs had arrived.<sup>27</sup>

During the summer of 1882, the Fairview had a large

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<sup>24</sup>Pitkin Independent, 5 November 1881, p. 3; 7 January 1882, p. 1; Thurman, "History of Pitkin," p. 52.

<sup>25</sup>Pitkin Mining News, 24 February 1881, p. 1; Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstract, Book 45, p. 132.

<sup>26</sup>Pitkin Independent, 24 June 1882, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 15 July 1882, p. 2.



vein of ore exposed in a contact of lime and porphyry which was highly impregnated with chlorides. The ore was valued at \$200 per ton. One thousand tons of ore were in the dumps, and output of twenty five tons daily was expected. By December of 1883, eight tons per day was delivered at the depot.<sup>28</sup>

During the winter month of February 1883, a geologist by the name of John K. Hallowell travelled through the Quartz Creek region. According to Hallowell,

the rock formation was mostly metamorphic (heading northeast from Ohio City) which changes to granite and cretaceous rocks shortly before arriving in Pitkin. These rocks comprise the mineral belt of Pitkin and in many instances gives the opportunity for contact veins, very large, strong, and well mineralized.

Hallowell claimed that "during the year 1882, Pitkin attracted more attention than any other camp in Gunnison."<sup>29</sup> Hallowell also stated that there were many "very promising properties, showing large bodies of ore in proportion to development. Among which might be mentioned the Silver Islet and Fairview, and later the 'Way Up' mine, is acquiring a good deal of prominence."<sup>30</sup> Some of the metals and minerals found in the regions around Pitkin included: graphite, lead, marble, molybdenum, nickel, onyx, stromtia-

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 29 July 1882, p. 2; 1 December 1883, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup>John K. Hallowell, Geologist, Gunnison, Colorado's Bonanza County, (Denver: Colorado Museum of Applied Geology and Mineralogy, 1883), p. 125.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 126.



nite, tungsten, and zinc.<sup>31</sup> Pitkin, however, was basically a silver area and was among the richest districts in all of Colorado.<sup>32</sup>

By 1883, the vein was only five feet wide with a pay streak from six inches to three feet. The value was down to sixty ounces of silver per ton.<sup>33</sup> This was the beginning of a slump which lasted from 1884 to 1890 that affected many mines. The Fairview, however, continued to produce ore during this time.<sup>34</sup> Optimism remained high despite the dreary outlook.

Pitkin is a mining camp which may be expected to boom in the course of the next few years. It is in the center of a good, but not very extensively developed, mining region, and like more than one other, it has been slow in passing from the stage of discovery to that of large production.<sup>35</sup>

The co-owners of the Fairview sold the mine for the ripe sum of five million dollars to the Silver Islet Mining and Milling Company in March of 1890. This also encompassed the following mines: Silver Age, Silver Arrow, Silver Islet, Silver Nugget, Silver Urn, Silver Cord, New Dollar, Mattie

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<sup>31</sup>Nelson, Gunnison County, pp. 48-50.

<sup>32</sup>Daily Rocky Mountain News, 14 September 1890, p. 21. Taken from Dr. Duane Vandebusch's private notes on Pitkin, 14 April 1983.

<sup>33</sup>Colorado Mining Directory and Mining Laws of 1883, p. 331. Taken from records at the Colorado State Historical Society.

<sup>34</sup>Vandebusch, Gunnison Country, p. 186-87.

<sup>35</sup>Gunnison Review Press, 6 July 1889, p. 6. Taken from Dr. Duane Vandebusch's private notes of Pitkin, 14 April 1983.



No. 1 and No. 2, Pitkin Belle No. 1 and No. 2, Tempest No. 1 and No. 2, and the Rover No. 1 and No. 2.<sup>36</sup>

The new owners immediately sank a shaft 340 feet with drifts of 960 feet. Ore shipments of 750 tons were valuable enough to pay for improvements and development, as well as insure adequate profits.

In November of 1891, twenty men left their jobs at the Fairview since they were dissatisfied with the boarding boss. When the foreman James Preston made complaints for the men, he was promptly fired. Therefore, the men also left.<sup>37</sup>

The Denver South Park railroad had ceased running the line to Pitkin in 1889. This was due to the towering costs of clearing the track of snowdrifts and ice. (The line reopened in 1895 during the summer months. It officially closed down in 1912). The Denver and Rio Grande serviced the area until it too pulled out in 1929.<sup>38</sup>

The Fairview was operating during the winter months of 1893. Under Superintendent James A. Preston, fifteen men were doing development work. A load of high grade ore was eventually shipped to Denver for smelting. The mine was beginning to recover from mismanagement that had gutted the mine of mineral.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstract, Book 34, p. 373.

<sup>37</sup>Chisholm, "Pitkin, Colorado," p. 35-36.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 53-56.

<sup>39</sup>The Pitkin Bulletin, 6 January 1893, p. 1.



On February 3, 1893, the biggest strike in the Pitkin region was discovered at the Fairview mine. At a depth of 600 feet on the east side of the sixth level, a ten inch vein of copper stained, silver glance ore was unearthed. The ore was appraised at 10,000 ounces of silver to the ton! Good shipping ore was exposed in several places. The mine had twenty men employed doing development work. Piping was being installed for purposes of better ventilation.<sup>40</sup> The body of ore improved itself with additional development. It was eighteen inches of solid silver glance with numerous smaller streaks through the entire chute. Over five feet was exposed between walls. It was evaluated at 200 ounces of silver, and was 30% lead to the ton.<sup>41</sup> Another big strike of a rich ore chute appeared at the fifth level west at a depth of 500 feet. The vein was sixteen inches wide and was assessed at 115 ounces of silver per ton. One hundred thousand dollars worth had previously been extracted from the same chute at the second and third levels by former management. The force of men employed increased to twenty-five.<sup>42</sup>

A total of thirteen car loads of ore were shipped from the Fairview and Cleopatra mines in March of 1893, while only four car loads were shipped in March of 1892. Ore

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 3 February 1893, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 10 February 1893, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 24 February 1893, p. 1.



continued to be shipped in June of that year.<sup>43</sup>

Disaster for the mining industry struck in the summer of 1893--the silver panic of 1893. With the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Acts and the Bland Allison Act, the price of silver plummeted. In short, the government no longer was on a bi-metallic standard--it reverted to backing up paper dollars with only gold. As a result, the demand for silver decreased which brought the collapse of many silver mines.<sup>44</sup> The newspapers and miners were shocked:

Silver at 53! What a terrible calamity... hundreds and thousands of miners... thrown out of employment! Nearly every silver mine shut down and the employees discharged!... The bright prospects for a boom at Pitkin this year have faded away and, although no doubt remains of the existence of large bodies of silver ore in the park, its uncovered bonanzas will have to lay idle--the same as all the other silver mines in the state--until something is done to right the wrong of demonetization of silver... The crisis of silver is near at hand. Everything is closed down now...<sup>45</sup>

The Fairview managed to stay open for a short time after the Silver Panic of 1893. Combined with the Cleopatra, the Fairview shipped twenty-eight tons of ore per day which managed to keep the Quartz Creek mill in operation. The Fairview could not hold out, however, and was forced to close in August of 1893.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 7 April 1893, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Notes taken in "American Experience Since 1865" class at Western State College, 17 February 1983. Course taught by Professor Laura McCall.

<sup>45</sup>Pitkin Bulletin, 1 July 1893, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 29 July 1893, p. 5; 19 August 1893, p. 4.



The Silver Islet Mining and Milling Company dissolved and liquidated in 1897.<sup>47</sup> It was bought by the Fairview Mining and Milling Company for \$44,644.94.<sup>48</sup> It was sold again to the Colorado Smelting and Mining Company in 1903 for the sum of \$500,000.<sup>49</sup> Due to incomplete smelter receipts and insufficient records, it is virtually impossible to accurately estimate smelter returns. Estimates range from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000.<sup>50</sup> Production from the mines in October of 1906 was approximately 1.5 million tons.<sup>51</sup> By 1909 an anticipated revival had not materialized.<sup>52</sup> Ownership passed to Reynolds-Morse Corporation in order to pay back taxes for the years 1915-18, 1925, 1928, and 1933.<sup>53</sup> Exploratory and developmental work was done on the mine

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<sup>47</sup>Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstract, Book 112, p. 277.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.; Colorado State Mining Directory of 1898, p. 209.

<sup>49</sup>Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstract, Book 159, p. 333.

<sup>50</sup>Gerald J. Daub, Geologist, unpublished report for Miocene Resources, pp. 3 and 13. Information received from a personal interview with J. R. and Lorin Fullmer, 2 May 1983. Residents of Gunnison, Colorado.

<sup>51</sup>The mines referred to are the Fairview, Cleopatra, Mattie No. 1 and No. 2, Alabama, and George L. These mines are grouped together for two reasons: 1) they are all located very close to each other, and 2) they all deal with the same "ore body." Taken from personal interview with J.R. Fullmer and the Daub report.

<sup>52</sup>The Pitkin Miner, 7 May 1909, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup>Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstract, Book of Tax Sales 1915 (p. 20), 1927 (p. 42), 1929 (p. 72), 1934 (p. 8).



during the 1930s. Very little ore was ever removed.<sup>54</sup> A small amount of ore was extracted in 1934 and 1939 with 3.2 tons and 5 tons, respectively. The Fairview Limited gained control in 1964 only to lose the title to Ray Moretz in 1978, who is currently leasing out the mine.<sup>55</sup>

The Fairview mine has had a colorful, adventurous, and fascinating past. It was only one of the many mines that helped to establish the town of Pitkin, and indeed, typified many of the mines of the West. The Fairview definitely lived through numerous "boom and bust" cycles as was common in the mining industry and in mining towns. Its rich treasures had been sought, and only the passage of time will reveal what next will happen to the mine above timberline.

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<sup>54</sup>Personal interview with Mr. Dale Smith by telephone, 1 May 1983. Mr. Smith worked at the mine during the winter of 1936-37 or 1938-39.

<sup>55</sup>Colorado Geological Survey, and the Colorado Division of Mines. Information taken over the telephone in April 1983; Gunnison, Colorado, Mining Claims Abstract, Book 382, p. 322, Book 518, p. 33, Book 548, p. 884.



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Personal interview with J. R. and Lorin Fullmer, 2 May 1983. Residents of Gunnison, Colorado.

Personal interview with Mr. Dale Smith by telephone, 1 May 1983. Resident of Gunnison, Colorado.

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