

THE MINNIETTA MINE

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This presentation will cover four topics: A short history of the Minnietta Mine, Adopt-A-Cabin program at the Minnietta, our view of the effects of the natural and human environment on the site, and our role as site stewards at Minnietta Mine

SHORT HISTORY OF THE MINNIETTA

In 1875, Senator George Hurst, a director of Modock Consolidated Mining Company of San Francisco, acquired the Modoc Mine, located northeast of the Minnietta site. The company town of Lookout, located on top of Lookout Mountain above the Minnietta, sprang up to support the Modoc Mine. The mines and the town of Lookout are located in the Argus Range west of Death Valley, on the west side of the Panamint Valley.

In 1876, the Minnietta Belle Mine and the Minnietta Silver Mining Company were formed. The Minnietta, with the shaft down 100 feet, was estimated to contain 3,000 tons of ore worth \$100 per ton. The mine produced silver, gold, and lead. The ore was crushed and treated at Panamint's 20-stamp mill, located across the Panamint Valley, until October 1876, when a 30-ton furnace began operation at nearby Lookout.

In 1877, Lookout hits its peak until the Fall, when the furnaces broke down. In 1878, the furnaces were back in operation. In 1888, a man named Jack Gunn bought the Minnietta.

During the 1890s, the Minnietta produced over \$350,000 in silver and \$25,000 in gold. The Minnietta stopped production from 1920 to 1944. Total estimated production for the Minnietta between 1895 and 1955 is \$600,000.

According to California Journal of Mines and Geology Oct. 1938, Jack Gunn leased the mine to Ralph Merritt of Los Angeles. Helen Gunn, daughter of Jack Gunn, later leased the claims to a Mr. King of Midway City, CA.

ADOPT-A-CABIN PROGRAM AT THE MINNIETTA

There is a cabin located at the Minnietta Mine that is improved and maintained by the Adopt-A-Cabin folks. They've done a wonderful job making improvements to the cabin and keeping the surrounding area clean. They even put in an outhouse with toilet paper, reading material, and a view.

Many people come and stay at the Minnietta Cabin because of the breathtaking view of the Panamint Valley and the comfy accommodations provided by the Cabin. Figure 1 shows the view up the mountain near the adits (Figure 1). The ruins are located spread across the valley, indicated by the arrow.

THE MINE

The mines of the Minnietta provide plenty of tunnels, adits, and down shafts that tempt visitors to explore. In spite of notices posted in the cabin telling people to stay away from adits and down shafts, we saw a whole family with flashlights going into an adit and walking across a down shaft on a wooden board.

THE RUINS

The non-mortar walls of the ruins are located just south of the mine, below and across the dirt road from the mine. I think people are more interested in exploring the mines and don't notice the historic naturally camouflaged walls of the ruins located below and across the road from the mine.



Figure 1: View of Panamint Valley from the area of mining adits. The arrow points to the remains of the Minnietta Mine structures.

There are several stone wall features at the site; all configured differently, all different sizes. One has a narrow room attached to a large room. All of them have walls about four feet in height, some taller, some less than four feet. One wall uses a huge boulder as the cornerstone (Figures 2 and 3). Figure 3 shows us measuring and drawing the ruins, this particular day being our first trip out without Judyth but accompanied by another Site Steward who is now monitoring a large petroglyph site nearby. The Minnietta site is pretty big too; so when we tackle a big task like measuring and drawing, it's easier to do with another person along. We have been to his petroglyph site, too.

EFFECTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT ON THE SITE

On one site monitoring trip we encountered a burlap mail bag laying outside one of the adits (Figure 4). The burlap bag is whip-stitched to a metal ring at the top. When researching this site, I read there was actually a post office there for a short time in the 1870s. There is a dump at the site with old cans and square nails, a 1930s compressor, an old wooden cart. All that is at the mine on the side of the mountain. Below at the ruins, we see window glass, some nails, some cans, and old broken pieces of white dinnerware, like the dishes found at the boarding house at Reilly.

The Adopt-A-Cabin cabin definitely attracts visitors to this site...more than if there were no cabin. However, visitors either don't know about the ruins south of the cabin, or are not interested in them. Like

I mentioned before, most of the site disturbance is evident around the cabin and the actual mines.

The weather can change the terrain in that area from "you can get through with a station wagon full of kids" to "you need a 4-wheel drive to get up there." We always take our 4WD just to be safe. The ruins are located right by a wash, and I imagine during a good flash of rain artifacts get moved around or swept away. We need to remeasure the ruins to see how much the weather has affected them.

OUR ROLE AS SITE STEWARDS AT THE MINNIETTA

My husband, David, and I became Site Stewards in 1999. We have made many visits to the Minnietta over the last 4 years. The site is about an hour from our home, so we usually pack a picnic lunch and leave for the mine in the morning.

When we encounter visitors, they are always pleasant and usually interested in the history of the Mine. Visitors come mostly in the Spring and Fall seasons; visitor traffic tapers off during the months of severe summer heat and winter cold and wind. We know we are not there to "police" the visitors' activities at the site; we are there to monitor and document the site.

I know how important Site Steward reports are to the CASSP program. When we notice changes to the site, we do turn in a report and pictures. We usually

Figure 2: At the Minnietta Mine remains, this wall uses a huge boulder as the cornerstone for a structure.



Figure 3: Same structure as Figure 2; the arrow points to the large boulder. We are taking measurements of these ruins.



Figure 4. A burlap mail bag found outside one of the adits at Minnietta Mines. It is whip-stitched to a metal ring at the top. For a short time in the 1870s, there was a post office in this area.



take pictures of the site and compare them to previous pictures and note changes.

As Site Stewards, we benefit from attending as many of the workshops offered to us as possible. One summer we were able to attend a mapping workshop in Bishop, and attended a workshop in San Francisco at the Presidio's Archaeology Lab on analyzing and identifying artifacts. We've volunteered our labor on digs and surveys. Every time we attend a workshop or volunteer to work a project, we become more valuable as site stewards and as volunteers in general.

We love being site stewards...it is truly a rewarding hobby. We meet cool people, make new friends, learn new stuff, and get lots of exercise hiking around. And, as we encounter visitors, I hope we are educating them about the site and the importance of preservation.

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