DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

# BULLETIN

OF THE

# UNITED STATES

# GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

## No. 178

WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
1901

UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CHARLES D. WALCOTT, DIRECTOR

---

THE

# EL PASO TIN DEPOSITS

BY

WALTER HARVEY WEED

WASHINGTON

GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

1901

# CONTENTS.

# ILLUSTRATIONS.

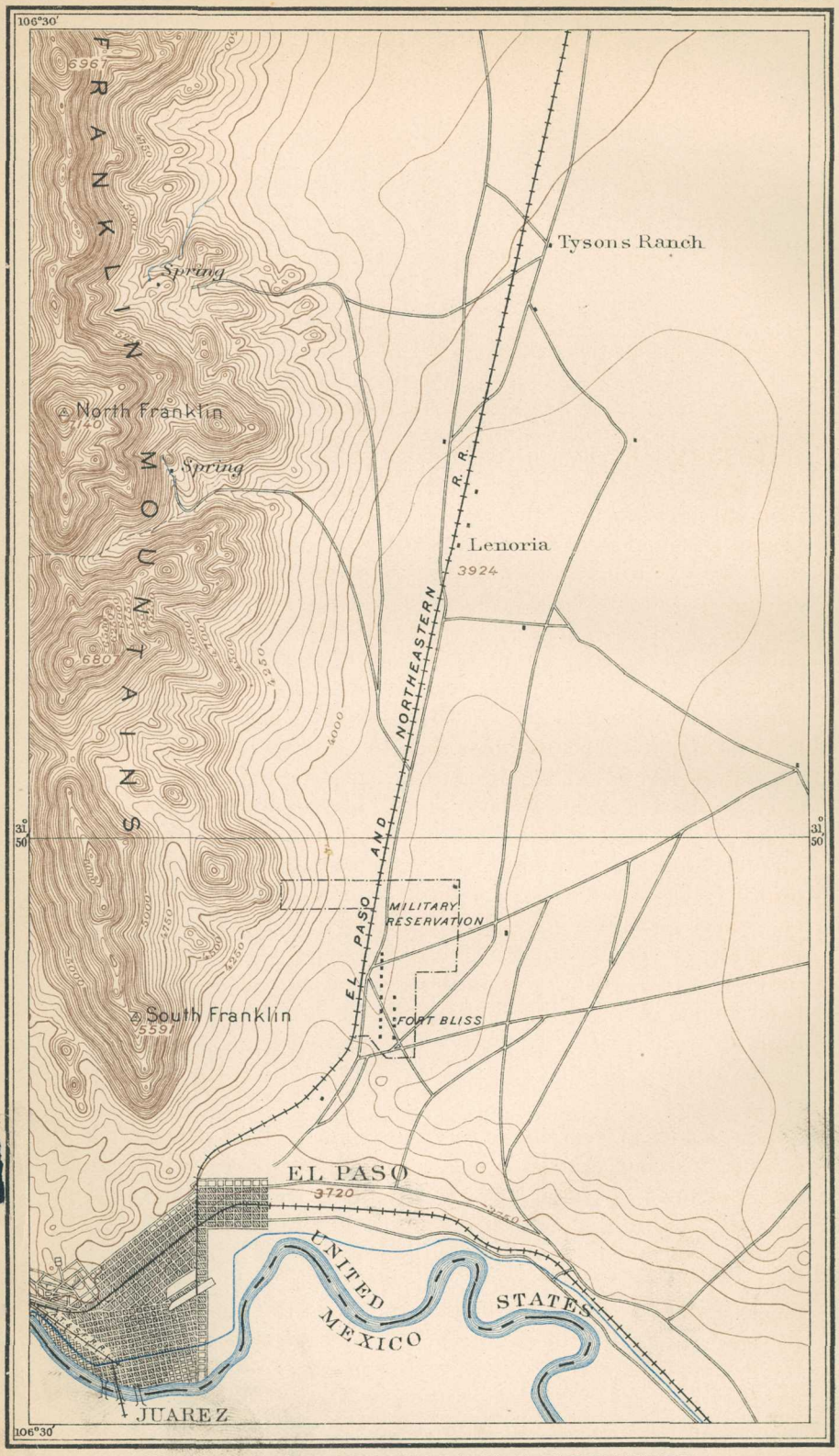
# LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY,
*Washington, D. C., March 19, 1901.*

SIR: In December, 1900, specimens of tin ore were submitted to the Survey for examination. They proved to contain abundant cassiterite and wolframite in a quartz gangue. They were said to come from the vicinity of El Paso, Texas, and in view of the infrequency of well-authenticated occurrences of tin ore in the United States it was judged wise to have their provenance and manner of occurrence verified at the earliest opportunity. This opportunity presented itself when, in January, 1901, Mr. W. H. Weed had occasion to pass through El Paso, and he was instructed to make a reconnaissance examination of the locality whence the specimens were said to come. The result of his examination is presented briefly in the following report, the immediate publication of which I recommend.

S. F. EMMONS,
*Geologist in Charge of Section of Metalliferous Ores.*

Hon. CHARLES D. WALCOTT,
*Director of United States Geological Survey.*




PORTION OF THE EL PASO QUADRANGLE

1 ½ 0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

Contour Interval 50 feet

# THE EL PASO TIN DEPOSITS.

By W. H. WEED.

## LOCATION OF DEPOSITS.

The El Paso tin deposits lie on the east flank of the Franklin Mountains, the southern extension of the Organ or San Andreas Range, about 10 miles north of the city of El Paso. The ores were discovered in 1899 and have been prospected by several open cuts and pits, the deepest of which is about 50 feet below the surface. The property belongs to Judge C. R. Moorhead, of El Paso, to whom I am indebted for many courtesies during my visit to the deposits. The place is distant about 14 miles by wagon road from El Paso, 12 miles of excellent road across the flat mesa being succeeded by 2 miles across the foothills. The White Oaks Railroad crosses the flat 3 or 4 miles east of the property, and the main line of the Southern Pacific lies 10 miles to the south. There is a good spring one-fourth of a mile from the ledges, but there is no large supply of water nearer than the Rio Grande. The mesa is underlain by water, the city of El Paso being supplied from driven wells sunk in the mesa gravels. The mesa is scantily grassed and covered with the usual desert vegetation of small yucca and cactus, while the mountain slopes show cedar bushes, with mesquite, yucca, sotol, and other arid-land plants. The mountains show a very regular crest of bedded rocks surmounting smoother basal slopes of a prevailing red-brown color dotted by green sotol bushes.

## GEOLOGICAL STRUCTURE AND FORMATIONS.

The geological structure is very simple and is easily made out, as the mountains are not wooded, but show outcropping edges of the upturned limestones and bare slopes of red granite. The mountain range consists of Cambrian and other Paleozoic limestones, upturned by and resting upon an intrusive mass of coarse-grained granite that forms the central core of the range. This granite is well exposed for a distance of 4 or 5 miles along the eastern side of the mountains, forming the lower half of the mountains proper, and in places extending out to the foothills. The crest of the range consists of steeply tilted, heavily bedded, dark-gray limestones dipping westward. The basal quartzites

were observed in the drift seen in arroyos, so that the granite is probably intruded between the base of the Cambrian rocks and the underlying Archean complex.

The eastern foothills consist mainly of limestones, but near the tin deposits these bedded rocks have been cut through and granite now forms the surface, remnants of the limestone cover showing as isolated masses capping the hillocks. These relations are shown in the diagram, fig. 1, which is a rough sketch of the range, representing a cross section at the tin mines. North of the place where this section was made a transverse ridge of the range shows the granite to be sheeted by well-marked planes, dipping eastward at an angle of about 45° to 50°. The granite is very much altered by surface decomposition, and crumbles readily to a coarse sand. No fresh material was observed anywhere on the surface, but fairly good material was obtained from the dump heap of the shaft on the north vein. The granite is sheeted near the veins, the planes of sheeting being parallel to the veins themselves. The general sheeting, however, is in a different direction, the average strike

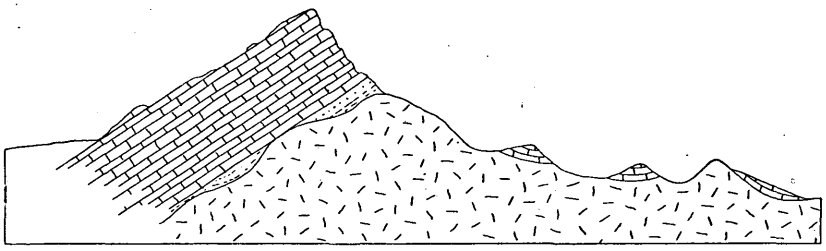


FIG. 1.—Cross section of Franklin Mountains 10 miles north of El Paso, Texas.

being N. 20° E, and the dip 70° SE. A thin section of this granite has been examined under the microscope by Mr. Lindgren, who furnishes the following notes:

The rock is a coarse-grained normal granite. It shows much anhedral quartz with anhedral feldspar, largely microperthite, with some few grains of microcline. A few small flakes of brownish-green hornblende and some small grains of magnetite were also seen. The rock is a soda granite.

White aplite-granite occurs in veinlets and irregular masses intrusive in the granite, but none was observed close to the veins. The mesa is underlain by cemented gravels, which form also the lower slopes of the foothills.

## ORES AND VEINS.

The ores consist of cassiterite, or oxide of tin, with wolframite (tungstate of iron and manganese) in a gangue of quartz. Specimens of nearly pure cassiterite weighing several pounds have been found on the surface, and this mineral occurs in the quartz, either alone or associated with wolframite. The most abundant ore is a granular mixture

of tin ore and quartz which resembles a coarse granite and corresponds to the greisen ore of European tin deposits. Pyrite occurs rarely in the eastern exposures of the vein, but appears to constitute the bulk of the metallic contents in exposures seen in the westernmost openings. These ores occur in well-defined veins, which run up the slopes nearly at right angles to the direction of the range, the strike being approximately east-west and the veins dipping steeply to the north. Three veins have been discovered, all of which have been exposed by open-cut work and by pits for several hundred feet in length. The most northerly vein is traceable along the surface for a distance of about 1,200 feet. The middle vein lies about 300 feet south of the east end of the northern one, but apparently converges westward toward the northern vein. The southern vein, which is the smallest of the three, lies about 600 feet farther south.

The veins exhibit the usual characters of the European tin veins, notably those of Cornwall, England, their clearly defined fissures showing a central core or lead of coarse quartz, sometimes containing tin ore, and flanked on either side by altered rock in which the tin ore replaces the feldspar of the granite. Where this metasomatic replacement is complete the ore shows a mixture of cassiterite, with or without wolframite and quartz. Where the replacement is only partial the greisen ore fades off into the unaltered granite. A cross section of the veins shows, therefore, the same phenomena seen at Cornwall. The diagram, fig. 2, shows an ideal representation of the conditions existing in the veins, and has been drawn from sketches made in the field. The central mass of quartz corresponds to the "leader" of the Cornish veins. It is composed of massive, coarsely crystalline quartz, sometimes showing comb structure, and it is clearly the result of the filling of the open fissure by quartz. The adjacent ore-bearing material is a replacement deposit in which the mineral solutions have substituted ore for the feldspar of the granite by metasomatic action; in other words, the main mass of the ore occurs alongside of a quartz vein, and is due to the alteration of the granite forming the walls of the fissure. In general, the ore passes into the granite by insensible transition and there are no distinct walls.

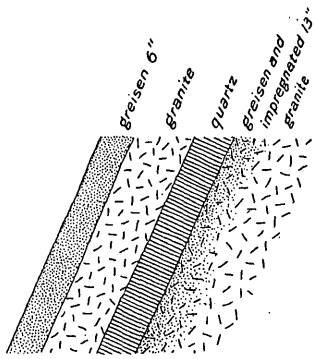



FIG. 2.—Section of tin vein exposed in open cut (north vein).

A thin section of the greisen ore has been examined by Mr. Lindgren, who furnishes the following notes:

The thin section of the tin ore shows it to be a quartz-cassiterite rock. It is a coarsely granular rock consisting of anhedral quartz, with which is intergrown grains of slightly brownish cassiterite. The quartz is full of fluid inclusions and makes

up about 75 per cent of the mass. The cassiterite grains are, along the edges, intimately intergrown with quartz. If this is a metasomatic form of the granite a silicification has taken place. The microscope affords no direct evidence, however, that this ore is metasomatic. One small grain of tourmaline and a few flakes of sericite were seen. Neither topaz nor mica occurs in the section, and no remains of feldspar were observed.

The north vein has a course of N. 85½° W. magnetic, as determined from the openings at the east end. At the west end of the workings the course observed, looking back along the outcrop, appears to be N. 80° E. for the northern vein and N. 80° W. for the middle vein; so that if these observations are correct the veins must intersect toward the west. The surveys by the owners of the property show a course N. 85½° W. for the middle and 65° W. for the south vein.

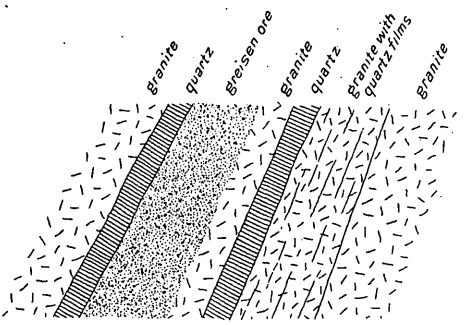



FIG. 3.—Section of north vein (6 feet across).

## DEVELOPMENT.

A shaft 35 feet deep has been sunk on the north vein at the eastern end of the vein outcrop. This shaft is about 5 by 10 feet across and shows a very well-defined vein about 5 feet wide, having a dip of about 70° to the north. The sides of the shaft show excellent ore, mostly of the greisen variety, extending down for 8 to 15 feet below the top. At this point a slip crosses the shaft and cuts out the ore. This slip, or fault, is a clay seam but one-fourth to one-half inch in thickness, and seems to have thrown the upper part of the vein to the north. The lower half of the shaft reveals only rusty granite, shattered and showing films of quartz, but without recognizable ore. A crosscut south from the bottom of the shaft should reach the vein if the fault is a normal one. In the exposure seen in the upper part of the shaft the ore occurs in bunches in altered granite and lies on the north side of a 15-inch streak of sheeted and rusty quartz. A second shaft on the north vein has been sunk at a point about 300 feet west of the one just noted. This shaft is about 25 feet deep. The vein is well exposed at the top, and shows a dip northward, but the shaft passes out of the vein into the sheeted granite, forming the foot wall. A crosscut about 8 feet in length, driven from the bottom of the shaft, cuts the vein, but does not pass through it. The sheeting of the granite seen in this shaft is very pronounced, the rock being divided into plates from one-fourth inch to 12 inches in thickness

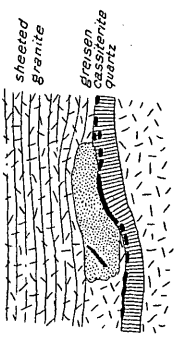



FIG. 4.—Greisen bowlder in tin vein (shaft on middle vein).

by planes dipping 61° E. and crossing the vein at 90°. The outcrop of the vein is traceable westward up the slopes by its rusty quartz, and a nearly continuous ledge can be followed. This outcrop has been opened at intervals of a few yards by trenches, which expose the vein and show it to have a thickness of from 2 to 6 feet, with about half this thickness of ore. No samples were, however, taken, and it is uncertain whether the altered granite does not contain a percentage of tin oxide. The most westerly working that could be surely identified as being upon the north vein is a pit 6 feet deep, which shows a 6-foot vein in which the quartz is bluish in color and the tin ore is associated with much pyrite. This point is about 600 or more feet west of the first shaft. West of this point the ledge can not be traced across the slopes, but an opening north a hundred feet higher and a few hundred feet farther west shows a good vein, carrying much pyrite, but devoid of any recognizable tin ore.

The middle vein is developed by a shaft 50 feet deep, which shows a vein having a central leader of quartz 2 feet wide at the top and tapering to 1 foot 4 inches wide at the bottom of the shaft. The dip, as shown by the walls of the shaft, is 70° N. The central quartz mass is spotted with cassiterite, and the altered granite on either side contains recognizable grains of tin oxide.

The south vein lies 500 to 600 feet south of the middle vein. This vein is much narrower than the veins on the north, having an average width of about 1 foot. The strike, as shown near the shaft, is N. 50° W. and the dip 50° N. The vein walls are sometimes defined by a clay selvage one-sixteenth inch wide, but more often show a gradual fading off into the granite.

## CONTINUANCE OF VEINS IN DEPTH.

It will be noticed from what has been said that the veins are all well defined at the surface and carry good values in tin ore, but that the ore apparently dies out in depth. Further development is needed to establish the existence of the ore at a greater depth than 50 feet, but it is believed that the veins have been thrown by local slips or faults and will be found by crosscutting from the bottom of the present workings. The character of the fissures and the nature of the ore both indicate that the veins are the result of deep-seated agencies, and are not merely segregations due to descending surface waters. For this reason it is believed that further exploration will develop well-defined tin veins. The absence of topaz in the deposit is noteworthy, for this mineral is commonly associated with cassiterite veins the world over. In other respects the deposits closely resemble the tin veins of Europe, and are clearly due to metasomatic processes. The evidence of a pneumatolitic origin is, however, not conclusive.