Rattlesnake Canyon Mine

On June 13, 1906, David Follick, E. V. Bridges, Sarah E. Follick, John Hancock, Marian Follick, John R. George, T. P. Bridges, and Ray George, all of Montpelier, Idaho, filed three association placer mining claims for phosphate with the county recorder of Bear Lake County. These three placer mining claims, Mud Spring, Lava, and Mountain View, were located in Sections 14 and 23, T. 10 S., R. 43 E., northeast of the Georgetown Summit (Figure 34).

Mansfield (1927) stated that two prospects were situated in the area embraced by the mining claims. J. H. Bridges (related to the claimants?) examined these prospects at the site of the claims in 1910. Mr. Bridges described the phosphate rock and measured a short section of phosphate ore in the NE¼SE¼ Section 23. When Mansfield visited the site in 1914, he reported no further development in phosphate exploration was in evidence.

The phosphate mining claims lay dormant, save for annual assessment work, until 1920. The mining claimants contracted with the Merriman Potash Products Company of Merriman, Nebraska, to open a mine on the claims and produce phosphate ore. Merriman Potash Products Company indeed opened a small mine in the SW¼SE¼ Section 14, T. 10 S., R. 43 E. (Mansfield, 1927; Service, 1966; Service, 1967). The company mined and shipped a small experimental tonnage of ore back to their fertilizer processing facility in Nebraska (Service, 1966). The tonnage was shipped from the Cavanaugh siding of the Oregon Short Line rail, just a few miles southwest of the mine site. The Paris Post (1920g) reported the Merriman phosphate operation as follows:

> *"A few miles northwest of Montpelier, near Georgetown Canyon, the Merriman Potash Products Company of Merriman, Nebraska, has purchased two phosphate deposits and has been rapidly pushing their development since last December. They are now making an output of nearly a carload a day from development work, an amount that they anticipate being able to increase very materially as their development work progresses."*

The report in the Paris Post did not prove to be very prophetic. Mining began early in 1920, and by the summer of that year, the company ceased operations; there is no further record of activity (Mansfield, 1927). That was the only phosphate mining performed on the three placer mining claims by the Merriman Company, which had never been licensed to do business in Idaho (records of the Secretary of State's office, 1996).

The last record of assessment filings on these three placer claims was in July 31, 1926. After that date, the mining claims were apparently abandoned by the claimants. There was no further phosphate activity in the area until November 30, 1954, when Grant J. Murdock of Montpelier, Idaho filed an application to lease phosphate non-competitively in sections 14, 23, and 24, T. 10 S., R. 43 E. The BLM/USGS determined that a competitive sale was necessary because phosphate was known to exist

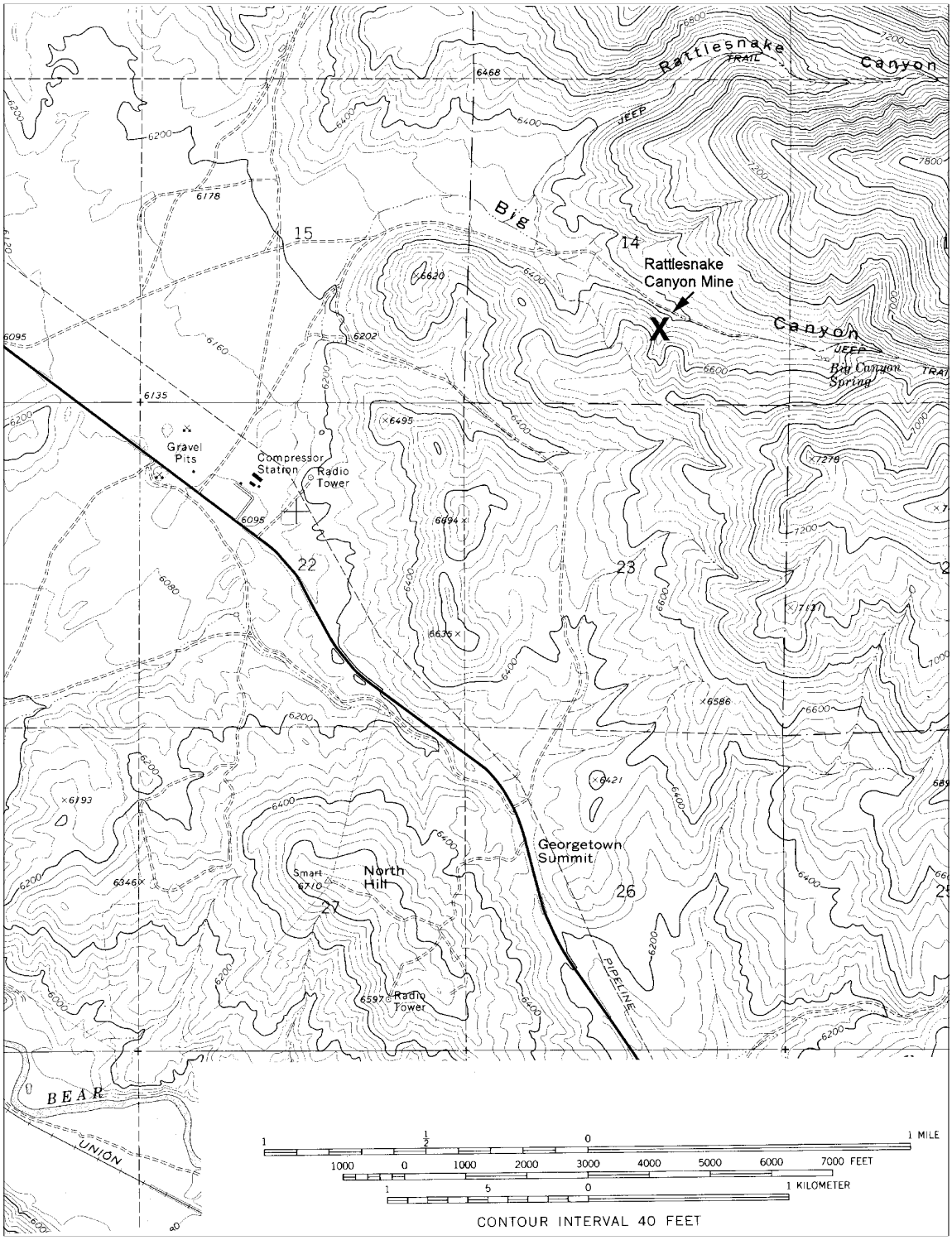

Figure 34. Map showing the location of the Rattlesnake Canyon Mine, Bear Lake County, Idaho.

Accordingly, Mr. Murdock's application was closed and a lease sale was scheduled for July 19, 1956. The sealed bid sale was held, and there were no bidders, therefore the entire case was closed on August 2, 1956.

Because of the lease application by Mr. Murdock, geologists of the USGS visited the site during May, 1955. In an report dated August 8, 1955 (unpublished BLM records), the geology of the area was discussed along with a mention of "an abandoned mine tunnel that was found in the SW¼SE¼ of Section 14. The tunnel was driven along the strike of beds in the upper middle part of the phosphatic shale member." This site visit along with the aborted leasing activity represent the last interest in the phosphate in this area.

Today, not very much remains of the early mining venture and the hillside occupied by the mine is overgrown with a dense cover of trees and brush (Figures 35, 36, and 37).

Figure 35. Remains of the trestle, Rattlesnake Canyon Mine, June 24, 1996. Photo by the author.

Figure 36. Remains of the trestle, Rattlesnake Canyon Mine, June 24, 1996. Photo by the author.

Figure 37. Caved portal, Rattlesnake Canyon Mine, June 24, 1996. Photo by the author.