

## Conda Mine

In October, 1906, the Brown, Perkins Company located a group of 23 association placer claims for phosphate about six miles northeast and east of Soda Springs, Idaho (Figure 43, Table 5). The company consisted of eleven individuals, and was a mining claim location service that, at the time of location of these claims, was either an independent locator or was working for the Southern California Orange Grove Fertilizer Company. There is some indication that, although the mining claims were located as placer-type claims, there was some lode claims top-filed. Mansfield (1927, p. 234) reports that in 1912, his field crew found a claim corner in the SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of Section 35, T. 7 S., R. 42 E., in the name of Brown, Perkins and Berch (Birch?). This was on the Deer Placer claim but the corner was for a claim 1,500 feet long and 600 feet wide, the dimensions of a lode claim. The dual location as placer and as lode was not uncommon due to the uncertainties explained previously in this report. This group of placer claims was acquired by the Southern California Orange Grove Fertilizer Company from the original locators shortly after location, as that company filed proof of assessment for the claim group in 1907 (Hansen, 1964).

The Southern California Orange Grove Fertilizer Company was a growers' co-operative that was formed to explore for and develop fertilizer sources for the members of the co-operative. The company was drawn to this area of Idaho because of the reported finding of rich phosphate rock by C. C. Jones in his explorations of 1903-1904 (Jones, 1907, 1913).

The claim group was explored by a series of open cuts, pits, trenches, and approximately 22 short tunnels prior to patenting. The Brown, Perkins Company, acting as an agent for the Southern California Orange Grove Fertilizer Company, mined and shipped a 40-ton test load of ore to California in 1910 (unpublished BLM records). This ore came from a pit in the SE<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>SW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of Section 23, T. 8 S., R. 42 W., B.M., on the Agnes Placer mining claim (Figure 44).

The Southern California Orange Grove Fertilizer Company patented the 23 placer mining claims between October 3, 1916 and December 18, 1917. The co-operative apparently was not particularly interested in developing the deposit themselves and when the Anaconda Copper Mining Company expressed an interest in the properties in 1917, negotiations were started for purchasing the patented claims by the copper company. The Anaconda Copper Mining Company was, at that time, faced with a large excess of sulphuric acid derived from smelter fumes from their copper smelting operations in Montana. The production of fertilizer was a logical use of this excess acid and Anaconda started investigating phosphate deposits throughout the newly defined western phosphate field. The company constructed a fertilizer plant at Anaconda, Montana and started purchasing phosphate rock (principally from the Paris Canyon Mine, Idaho) while they investigated deposits of their own (Larison, 1934, Service, 1967). Local Montana phosphate deposits were quickly ruled out, due to lower overall grade. After a period of negotiation, the Anaconda Copper Mining Company bought all 23 patented placer mining claims from the Southern California Orange Grove Fertilizer Company. The first deed to

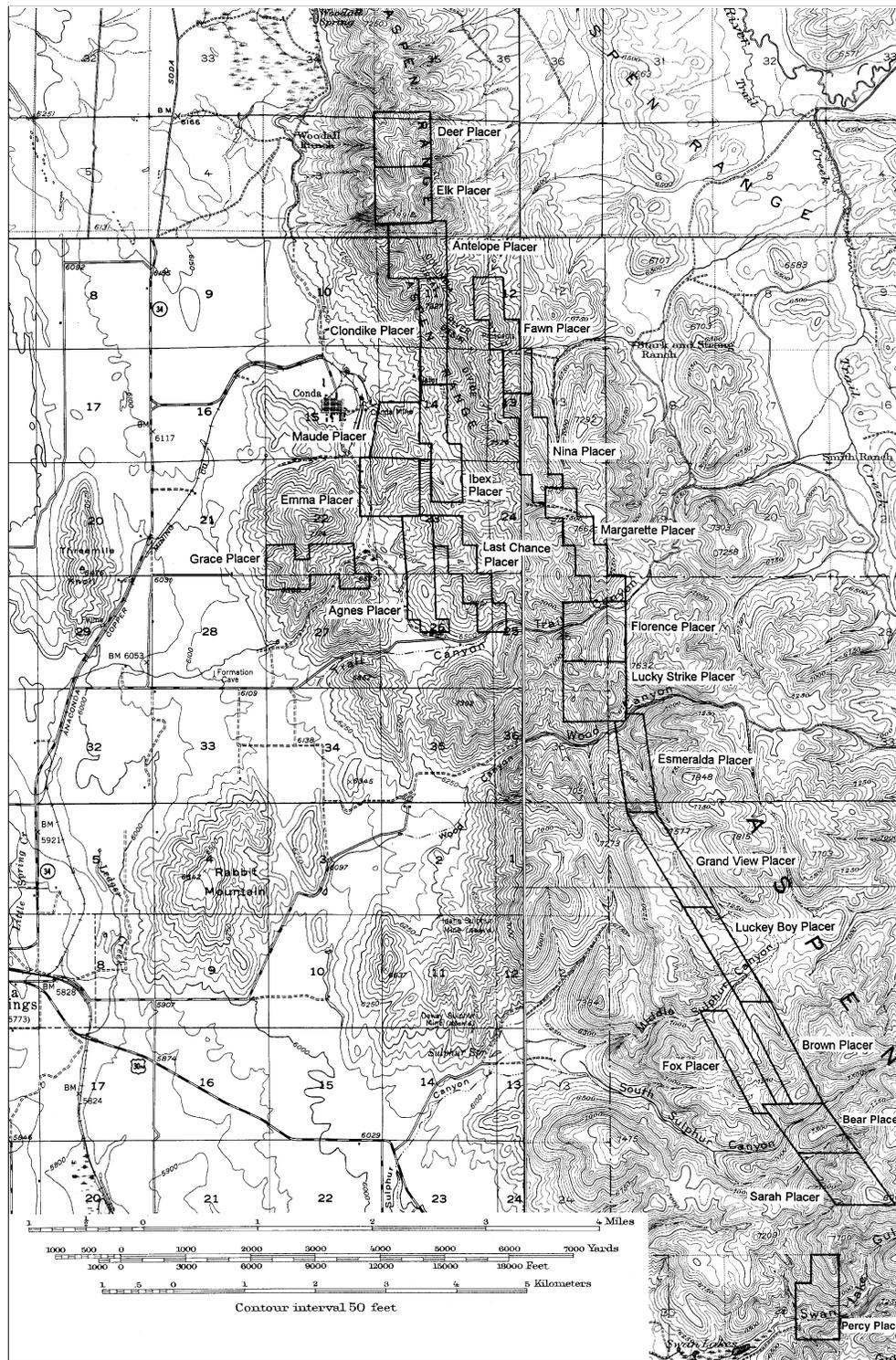


Figure 43. Map showing the location of the Conda townsite and the patented mining claims of the Conda Mine, Caribou County, Idaho.

Table 5. Patented mining claims of the Conda Mine

Claim Name	Date of Location	Mineral Survey Number	General Land Office Serial Number (Blackfoot)	Patent Number	Date of Patent
Ibex Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022673	548592	October 3, 1916
Agnes Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022673	548592	October 3, 1916
Deer Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022673	548592	October 3, 1916
Clondike Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022673	548592	October 3, 1916
Elk Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022673	548592	October 3, 1916
Antelope Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022673	548592	October 3, 1916
Maud Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022673	548592	October 3, 1916
Emma Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022673	548592	October 3, 1916
Last Chance Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022674	548593	October 3, 1916
Grace Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022675	548594	October 3, 1916
Nina Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022676	555876	November 24, 1916
Fawn Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 022676	555876	November 24, 1916
Sarah Placer	October 20, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Fox Placer	October 22, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Bear Placer	October 22, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Brown Placer	October 22, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Lucky Boy Placer	October 23, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Grand View Placer	October 23, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Esmeralda Placer	October 23, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Lucky Strike Placer	October 29, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Florence Placer	October 30, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Margarette Placer	October 31, 1906	2771	BL 023011	555877	November 24, 1916
Percy Placer	Unknown	N/A	BL 025601	611957	December 18, 1917

Note: All the above claims were located by the Brown, Perkins Company (S. M. Brown, G. C. Brown, S. P. Brown, Percy Brown, Lucius P. Brown, Robert A. Birch, Marion Perkins, Maggie Perkins, Joseph C. Rich, O. V. Birch, and D. H. Rowley) for the Southern California Orange Grove Fertilizer Company. The patentee for all claims was the Southern California Orange Grove Fertilizer Company.

Anaconda was dated October 27, 1919, and was for the Maud and Emma patented claims in the amount of \$60,000. Robert J. Shields, acting as the head and part owner of the Southern California



Figure 44. Panorama of R. J. Shields phosphate pit in Formation Canyon in Section 23, T. 8 S., R. 42 E., September 12, 1920. Photo by G. R. Mansfield, #522, 523, USGS Photographic Library.

Orange Grove Fertilizer Company, offered Anaconda a proposition that if the Anaconda company would build a branch rail line from the main railroad to the mine, develop the property to a capacity of 500 tons per day and erect a mill of a daily capacity of 200 tons, then he would give the Anaconda company half interest in the remaining 21 patented claims. Shields also offered to sell the remaining 21 claims outright for \$540,000. Anaconda decided to purchase the patented claims and they were deeded to Anaconda on February 10, 1920 (Hansen, 1964).

On April 1, 1920, Anaconda started underground mining by developing a mine on the Emma and Maud patents. A tunnel in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 15, T. 8 S., R. 42 E., was started to develop the phosphate ore on the westernmost anticline, known as the Emma anticline (Mansfield, 1927) (Figure 45). Also in 1920, Anaconda started to construct a rail line north from Soda Springs, a distance of about eight miles. In late 1920 and on into 1921, Anaconda started construction of a townsite and adjacent crushing and screening plant to support the mine. The town was called Conda (Figures 46 and 47). The first shipment of Conda phosphate ore to the mill at Anaconda, Montana, was made in March, 1921 (Larison, 1934). It was found that due to a high organic content, the Conda ore had to be calcined before further processing could occur.

In 1921-22, the Anaconda company was exploring for markets for the fertilizer product. A descriptive book and photograph set was put together that described the mine, the town, the mill, and the geology of the Conda area (unpublished data, Anaconda Collection, 1922). The description of the mine and town in 1922 follows:

*“The present development and mining is being undertaken along the legs of an eroded anticline which lies immediately south of the plant. The main bed, along which the Company has a chain nearly ten miles long, lies about eight thousand feet to the east and will be opened through No. 1 Adit. The mine is opened up through two cross-cut adits a half-mile apart. These adits are 45 feet above the*



Figure 45. Panorama of portal of Anaconda Copper Mining Company’s phosphate mine in Section 15, T. 8 S., R. 42 E., September 12, 1920. Mr. C. E. Nighman of ACM Co. standing above portal. Photo by G. R. Mansfield, #520, 521, USGS Photographic Library.

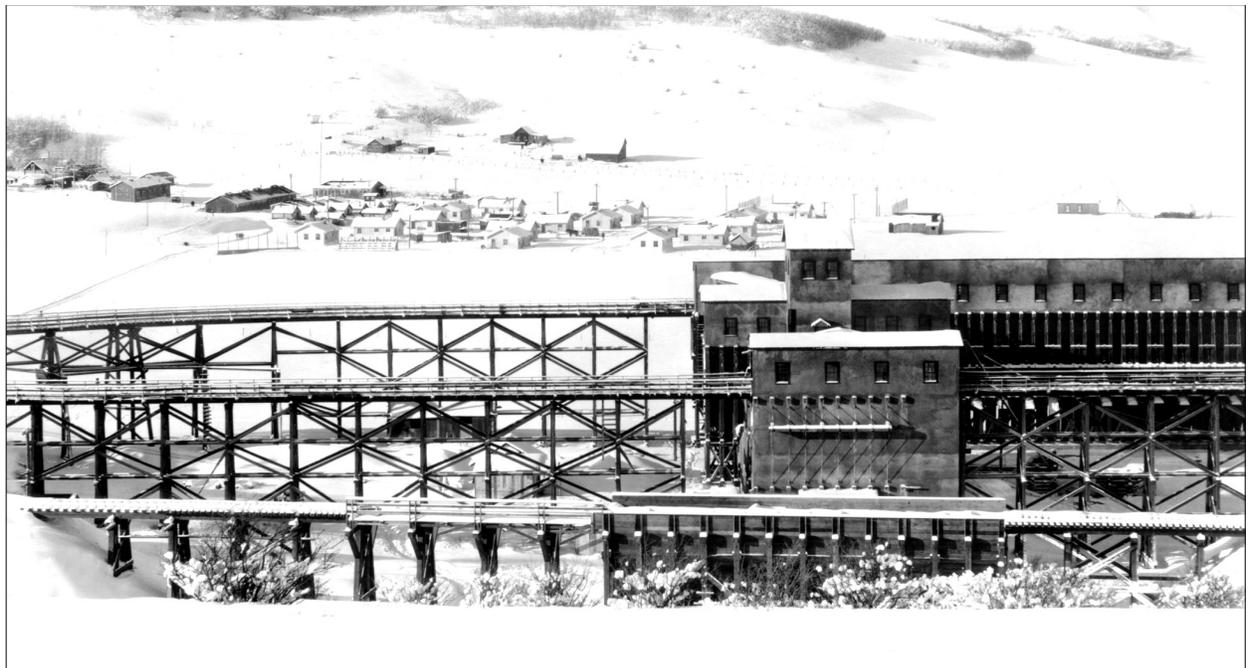


Figure 46. Conda town and phosphate mill, 1921. Photo courtesy of the Anaconda Collection, American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyoming.

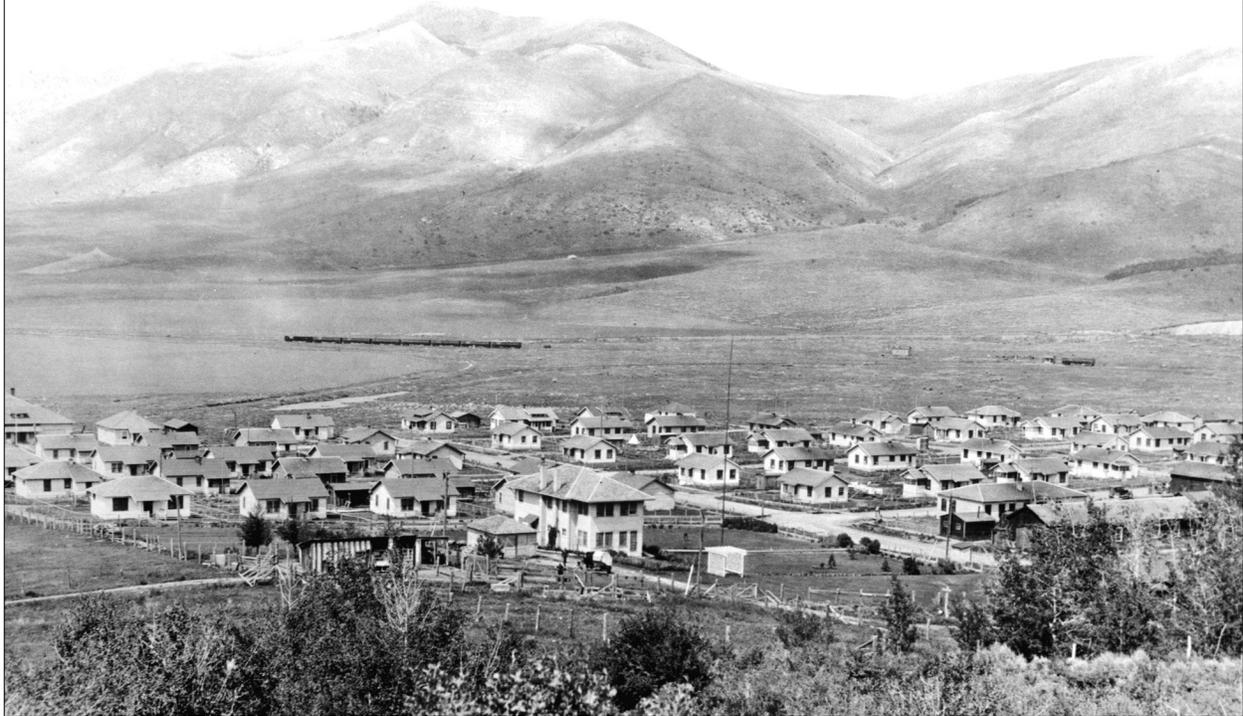


Figure 47. Conda, Idaho. Photo from the “Copper Commando”, Anaconda Copper Mining Company’s in-house newsletter, volume 3, number 12, February 2, 1945.

*railroad track level and are connected with the mill feed bins and the storage bins by large trestles (Figure 48). The adits are nine feet by nine in the clear, inside the timbers. They are heavily timbered, and are electrically lighted and ventilated by fans. From the adits, advance or development headings about six feet by eight feet (largely untimbered) are driven long the bed; these heading are subsequently enlarged, and are timbered the same as the adits. Raises for ventilation are put up about one thousand feet apart. All mining is done above the level of the adits. Compressed-air-operated mucking machines are used in the headings (Figure 49). Twenty-five ton rails and two ton roller-bearing side-dump cars are used in the advance or development headings. Rock from mining operations is hauled to the mill in heavy steel side-dump cars of ten tons capacity (Figures 50 and 51). These cars are equipped with standard railroad wheels and journals, couplers and hand brakes. Haulage is done with two very large storage battery locomotives each of which is capable of hauling a hundred ton net load at a speed of four to seven miles per hour, depending on the grade (Figure 52).*

*“A small town has been built about a half-mile from the mine (Figure 53). The Company has constructed a number of modern homes which are rented to the employees at nominal figures; additional houses are now being constructed.*



Figure 48. Conda Mine, mill, and bins. Photo from the “Copper Commando”, Anaconda Copper Mining Company’s in-house newsletter, volume 3, number 12, February 2, 1945.

*A well equipped store, and a recreation hall in which moving pictures are shown and dances and various community meetings are held, are all maintained by the Company. A United States Post Office has also been established in the settlement.”*

Conda was sited on property that was originally homesteaded by Charles Stiles and used by Mr. Stiles as a sheep ranch (Norris, 1944). The planned community consisted of lots that were 60 by 80 feet, eight houses per block, and with central alleys for deliveries and waste removal (Nighman, 1923). The houses were equipped with electric lights, running water, and sewer connections. They were rented to the mine and mill employees at a nominal rent (\$12 a month) that just covered upkeep expenses. This monthly rent included water for domestic use and gardens. Electric light, power, and fuel were supplied at company cost (Norris, 1944). All told, 82 houses were built for the employees.

In addition to the homes, there was the mine superintendent’s residence (Figure 54), bunkhouses, offices, a boarding house, a community store, a post office, and a recreation hall. The community store profits were paid back to employees semi-annually as rebates based on percentages of dollar amounts of purchases (Norris, 1944). The recreation hall also doubled as a center for religious services, dances, community parties, and motion pictures. In 1923, a two room grade school was constructed,



Figure 49. Armstrong Shovel loader, Conda Mine, circa 1922. Photo from the Idaho State Historical Archives, #62-181.23.

high school students were taken to Soda Springs daily by school bus. A rail tram, called the Galloping Goose, operated on the rail lines to Soda Springs between 1922 and 1936 (Figure 55). Outdoor recreation facilities such as tennis courts and a baseball diamond were also constructed for the use of the employees. Figure 56 is an aerial view of the townsite and shows the relationship to the mine.

The phosphate mill at Conda was for screening, crushing, washing, and drying the phosphate rock (Figures 57 and 58) in preparation for rail shipment to the Anaconda Company's processing plant at Anaconda, Montana. There, the phosphate was processed and sold as a concentrate of triple super-phosphate fertilizer. As time went on, the plant at Conda was enlarged to keep pace with the advances in the mine and the increasing volume of phosphate ore being removed.

In 1924, after only being in operation for about three years, the underground workings consisted of 1,335 feet of drifts, 3,050 feet of crosscuts and tunnels, and more than 500 feet of raises (Kirkham,



Figure 50. Series of 10-ton ore cars, Conda Mine, 1925. Unknown individuals. Photo by V. R. D. Kirkham, courtesy of the Idaho Geological Survey.



Figure 51. Adit Number One, Conda Mine, circa 1922. Photo courtesy of the Anaconda Collection, American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyoming.



Figure 52. Adit Number Two, Conda Mine. Photo courtesy of the Anaconda Collection, American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyoming.

1925). The underground mine would eventually be developed and enlarged until 1952 when the underground operation started being phased out. It consisted of three main adits and crosscuts, drifts, tunnels, raises, and shafts totaling about 150,000 feet (Service, 1966, 1967). In 1941, it was reported (Campbell, 1941) that the Anaconda Copper Mining Company was leasing phosphate land from the estate of Charles J. Kelly. Charles Kelly held Federal lease BL-039942 and had the distinction of being the first to produce phosphate on a Federal lease in Idaho. The Kelly lease was initially developed by two tunnels called the North and South Development D Tunnels. A cross-cut was developed between the two tunnels.

As early as November, 1947, there were discussions within Anaconda about beginning strip mine operations at the Conda Mine. The actual transition from being an underground mine to that of surface operations started in 1952 (Aro, 1960). In that year, Anaconda began an exploratory strip mining operation near the center of Section 14, T. 8 S., R. 43 E. (Gidel, 1947). Also in 1952, the Anaconda



Figure 53. Conda Mine and townsite, view north, 1975. BLM file photo.



Figure 54. Conda Mine superintendent's house, formerly located at Conda, Idaho, now near Bancroft, Idaho, June 8, 1998. Photo by the author.



Figure 55. The “Galloping Goose”. Photo by Tony Varilone, U. S. Forest Service.



Figure 56. Conda townsite and mine, view east, 1975. BLM file photo.

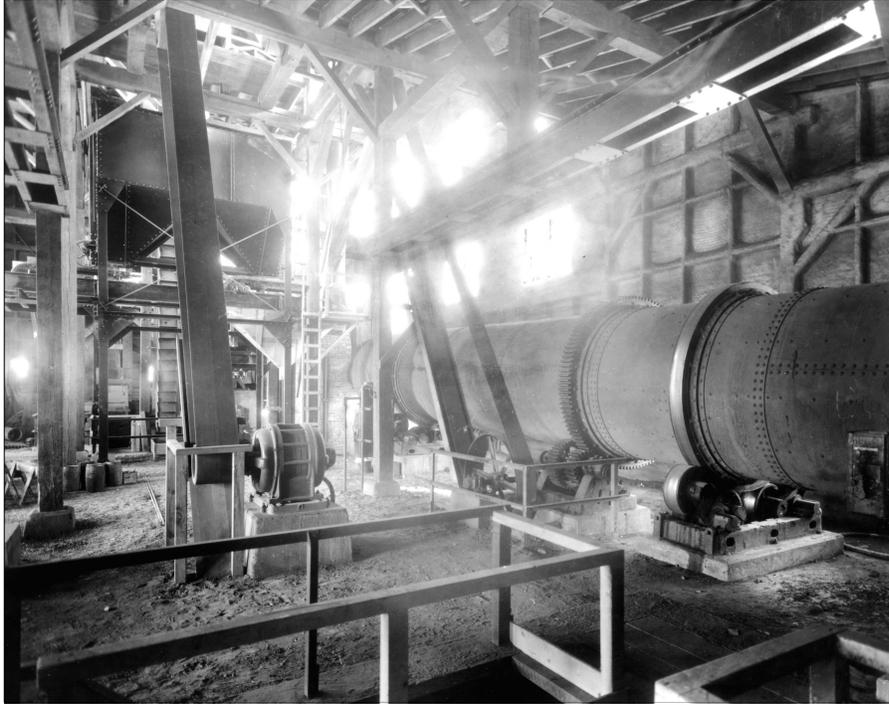


Figure 57. Crushing and drying plant, Conda Mine, circa 1922. Photo courtesy of the Anaconda Collection, American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyoming.

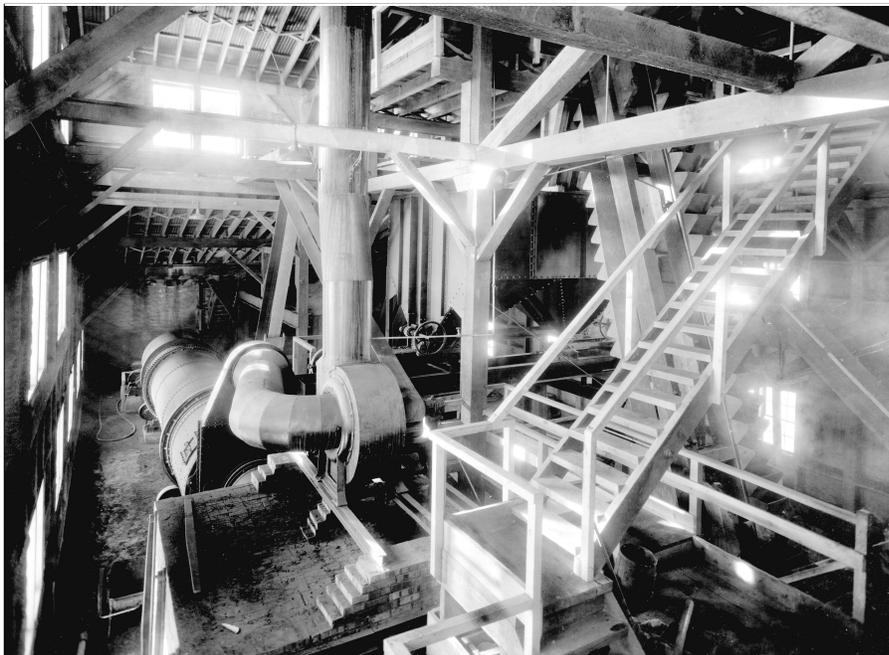


Figure 58. Crushing and drying plant, Conda Mine, circa 1922. Photo courtesy of the Anaconda Collection, American Heritage Center, Laramie, Wyoming.

Company acquired a Federal phosphate lease (I-01603) on property in Middle Sulphur Canyon, and in 1954, the company acquired Federal phosphate lease I-04494. These two leases were adjacent to the patented mining claims of Anaconda and increased their reserve base for future mining.

On April 1, 1956, underground operations ceased permanently. From that point, all production came from surface open-pit mining. Also in 1956, the plant at Conda went through an upgrading with the addition of a new washing plant. From 1952 to 1958, the Anaconda Company subcontracted the surface mining operations to the Morrison Knudsen Company (Schwarze, 1967).

In April, 1959, the Minerals and Chemical Division of the J. R. Simplot Company and the Anaconda Copper Mining Company entered into negotiations to create a joint venture. The joint venture agreement between the Simplot company and the Anaconda company was created under which Simplot took over management and operation of the mine and supplied both partners to the agreement with their rock requirements (Aro, 1960). In 1960, the Anaconda company made the decision to get out of the fertilizer business altogether, at least for the immediate future. An arrangement was worked out whereby the joint venture with Simplot and the ancillary agreements which accomplished it were terminated, all of Anaconda's fertilizer production facilities were sold outright to Simplot, and the mines in Idaho were leased to Simplot on a long-term royalty basis. After the conclusion of these agreements, the fertilizer plant at Anaconda, Montana, was dismantled and shipped to Idaho, where it was reassembled and put into operation by Simplot. On April 1, 1961, the Simplot Company acquired 80% of the two Federal leases that were held by the Anaconda Company. In 1965, after long use, the old mill at Conda was no longer adequate and a new mill was constructed by the Simplot Company. On August 1, 1965, two additional Federal phosphate leases (I-015523 and I-015820) were issued in the area of the Conda Mine. They were issued to the Ruby Company, a subsidiary of the J. R. Simplot Company.

In the case of lease I-015523, the Ruby Company assigned the lease to the Anaconda Company on May 1, 1967, and 80% of the lease was quickly reassigned to the J. R. Simplot Company on July 1, 1967. It wasn't until July 1, 1984, that the Simplot Company gained the remaining 20% of the lease as well as the remaining 20% of the two earlier leases, I-01603 and I-04494.

In addition to the surface mining on the patented mining claims at Conda, surface mining was conducted on two of the four Federal leases (Figures 59, 60, and 61). Mining started on lease I-04494 in 1955 and the last minable ore was removed in April of 1984. Mining started on lease I-015523 in 1970 and the ore was depleted in 1972. Overall mining at the Conda Mine ceased in January of 1984, however, much of the reserves on the patented mining claims and on two of the adjacent Federal leases remain untouched, available for future mining. Over the period from 1984, when the mine closed, to 1987 when operations at Conda were shut down, the town was vacated and eventually was torn down or moved out, leaving only a memory (Figure 62).



Figure 59. Conda Mine, date unknown. Photo courtesy of the FMC Corporation.



Figure 60. Conda Mine, showing highwall, date unknown. Photo courtesy of the FMC Corporation.



Figure 61. Conda Mine, footwall and ore bed at right, benched waste area to left, date unknown. Photo courtesy of the FMC Corporation.



Figure 62. Conda townsite and main street, June 24, 1996. Photo by the author.