

WAHMONIE MINING DISTRICT

The Wahmonie Mining district is east of Jackass Flats and north of Skull Mountain on the Nevada Test Site. The exact dimensions of the district are not clearly defined but earlier references describe possible limits as the north-side of Skull Mountain, four miles north of the Wingfield Shaft and Kane Springs which is four miles to the east of the main camp. The official record shows the district at its peak of activity had been staked for an area of six by seven miles (Tonopah Daily Times, February 22, 1928, p. 1).

Ball (1906) visited the Hornsilver Mine but did not elaborate on his findings. Kral (1951) reported that the district was rediscovered by McRea and Lefler in 1928 with a strike of high-grade gold silver ore, but with only minor shipments.

The published information on the district is very limited in scope. However, the Tonopah Daily Times (1928) fairly burst its seams with information on the camp. The 1928 newspaper accounts of the original discovery in 1847 (or 1853), include complete details on Lefler and McRea's discovery and activities, the people who had claims or owned interest in the camp (such as Governors James Scrugham and Joe Hutchison, Senators Key Pittman and George Wingfield), a detailed accounting during the sinking of the Wingfield shaft, a running account of activities on other properties, reports from most of the mining companies in Tonopah and their engineers, and elaborate geological and mineralogical descriptions as well as certified assays.

When Lefler and McRea rediscovered Wahmonie in 1928 they, along with others, were apparently aware that "The old Hornsilver Mine had been worked by Mormons in 1853". In fact, their initial 1928 discovery was described as being "very near several old holes dug by Mormons in 1853 from which very rich horn-silver was extracted" (Tonopah Daily Times, February 14, 1928, p.1). Wahmonie is on the old Mormon Trail from Salt Lake City to San Bernardino, California. Part of the route traveled included Groom, Oak Spring, Tippihah Spring, Kane (Cane) Springs and Wahmonie to the Amaragosa Desert, Death Valley and into San Bernardino.

Another account from the same paper, dated February 24, 1928, described a stone location monument found in a fireplace wall in a cabin above Kane Springs: "The stone bears the inscription F.O. Byers, 1847 and the lower left-hand corner has a clearly defined skull and cross bones chisled an inch deep". The newspaper had the stone on display and invited those skeptical about the primitive location notice, to drop by the office and examine the carving. This seems to confirm Wahmonie as a gold camp before gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in California. The inscription stone found its way north to Reno where it now can be seen displayed in the Mackay School of Mines museum on the UNR campus.

Rocks exposed within the district are mainly andesites, dacites, and latites along with intrusive granites, rhyolites, and breccia (Ekren and Sargent, 1965). The surface exposures of one of the intrusives is restricted to a zone of hydrothermal alteration

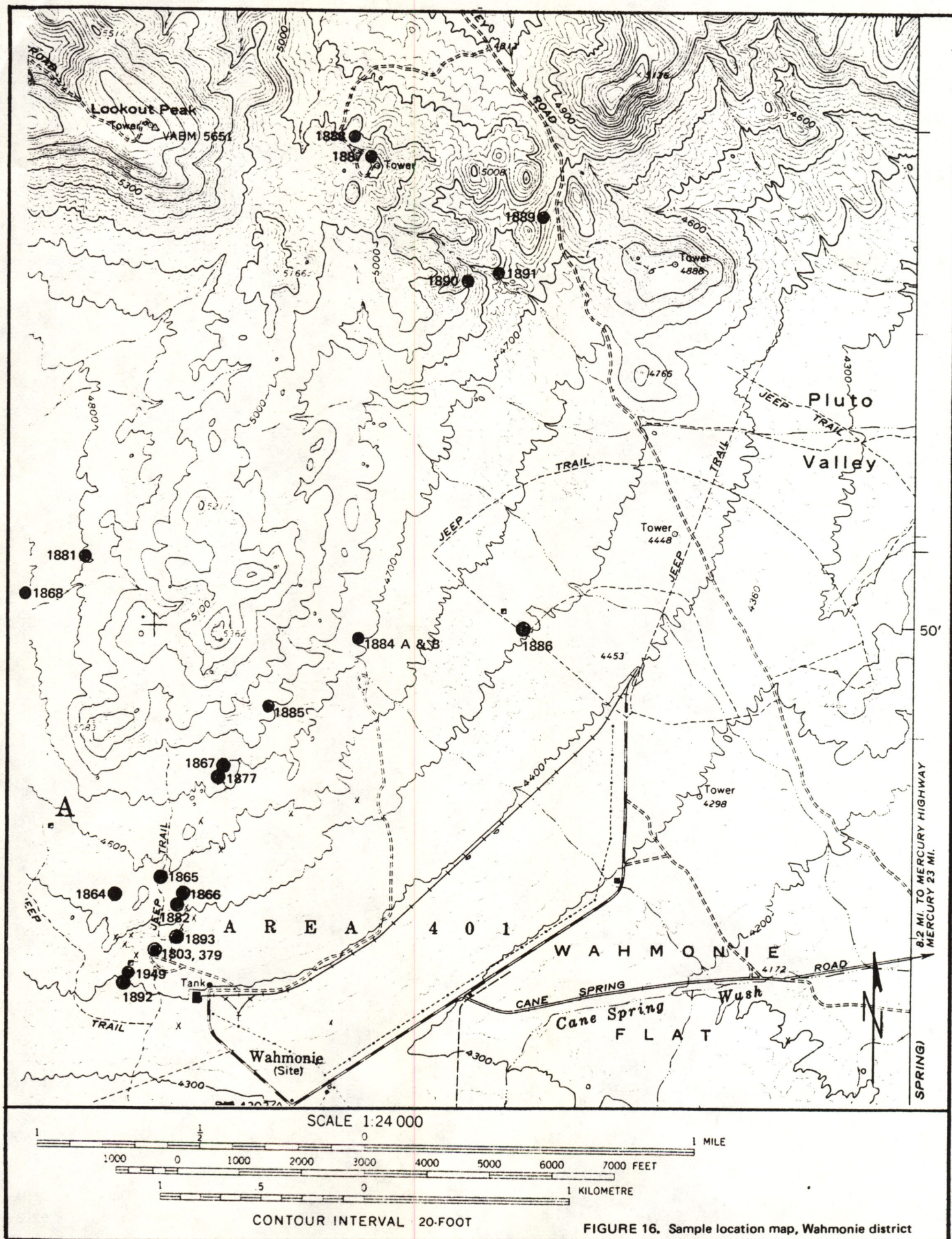
along a northeast trending fault that follows the eastern boundary of a horst. Based on geophysical data, the center of this intrusive is thought to be 300 meters below the area of the Wingfield shaft. The edge of the intrusive is said to be in good correspondence with the south and west side of the alteration halo, but due to a lack of data the remaining boundaries were not well defined. The halo is elliptically shaped and can be traced for over four miles to the southwest and several miles to the northeast of the Wingfield shaft. Another inference made by the geophysicist from the geophysical data is that disseminated sulfid mineralization is present in the intrusive. This conclusion is based on an IP survey that showed 2% or more sulfides may be present within the intrusive but below the water table (Hoover, D.B., et al., 1957).

Alteration at Wahmonie includes argillization, silicification and strong oxidation. Much of the quartz vein material present contains brecciated volcanic fragments cemented with opaline quartz which fills vugs and forms cockade structures. Sulfides occur as wispy gray streaks within the quartz. Visible mineralization from samples collected in dumps and prospect pits consists of cerargyrite, free gold, sulfides, alunite, iron and manganese oxides and gypsum. On the surface, the vein system follows a N30°E structure that can be traced for nearly three miles under the alluvium and is thought to follow the zone of alteration for another four miles.

The Wahmonie mine workings consist of the Wingfield shaft, is now radioactively contaminated (unknown amounts and types of debris were dumped there) and is therefore inaccessible. The other six shallow shafts are accessible but are without timbers. There are no buildings and the road access is poor.

Sample 1949 from the Wingfield dump fire assayed at 29.68 oz/ton silver and 0.67 oz/ton gold. This sample was examined on a microprobe and found to contain cerargyrite, argentite and hessite with anomalous amounts of mercury, bromine, bismuth, and tellurium. Sample 1867 was quartz vein material collected from a dump near a shallow shaft about 3/4 of a mile north of the main camp. Fire assay results from this sample showed 49.89 oz/ton silver and 0.65 oz/ton gold.

Another six Wahmonie samples, historic relics of the 1928 era mining boom, were located in the Mackay School of Mines Museum. Museum sample 1708 was a gift of A.H. Lawry who was George Wingfield's engineer, and I assume (though there is no record) that the sample came from the Wingfield shaft. This specimen contained visible gold and cerargyrite in a matrix of highly oxidized quartz breccia along with minor sulfides. No values were reported, but it was said to be rich ore. Museum sample 1902 from the Wingfield shaft, looked like sample 1702 and was reported to be a "gold-silver telluride ore worth \$3400/ton". The sample was highly oxidized and brecciated quartz vein material with visible gold and cerargyrite. Another similar sample, 1185, was donated by Governor Joe Hutchison. The sample was reported to be gold-silver ore worth \$800/ton. Sample 1951 was a highly oxidized quartz vein material reported worth \$1500/ton from the New Strike claims. An arrangement was made with the Museum whereby a 15 gram chip sample



was removed from the least conspicuous place on samples 1902 and 1185. Both samples were examined on a microprobe before fire-assaying the remainder of the sample.

The microprobe examination of sample 1902 revealed the presence of cerargyrite, some argentite, hessite and free gold with lesser amounts of mercury. A probe examination of chip sample 1185 showed cerargyrite to be the dominate mineral with lesser amounts of argentite, minor hessite and free gold also present.

Fire assay results showed the following: Sample 1185 had 35.08 oz/ton gold and 1271.72 oz/ton silver, while sample 1902 had 42.08 oz/ton gold and 1129.49 oz/ton silver.

Summary

High-grade gold silver mineralization associated with a zone of alteration can be traced on the surface for three miles to the northeast and five miles to the southwest of the Wingfield shaft. Geophysical, geological, and geochemical data, as well as historical background, make Wahmonie a prime exploration target for precious metals. Drilling is the next logical step necessary to determine the true potential of this highly mineralized area.

Selected References

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- Tonopah Daily Times (1928) February 14, p. 1; February 23, p. 1.