

Champ Mine Champ Mine Extension

The Champ Mine and its extension are located in Section 35, T. 8 S., R. 44 E., and Section 2, T. 9 S., R. 44 E., in the upper Dry Valley, Caribou County, Idaho (Figure 182). The mine was an open-pit operation located on two low hills on the valley floor.

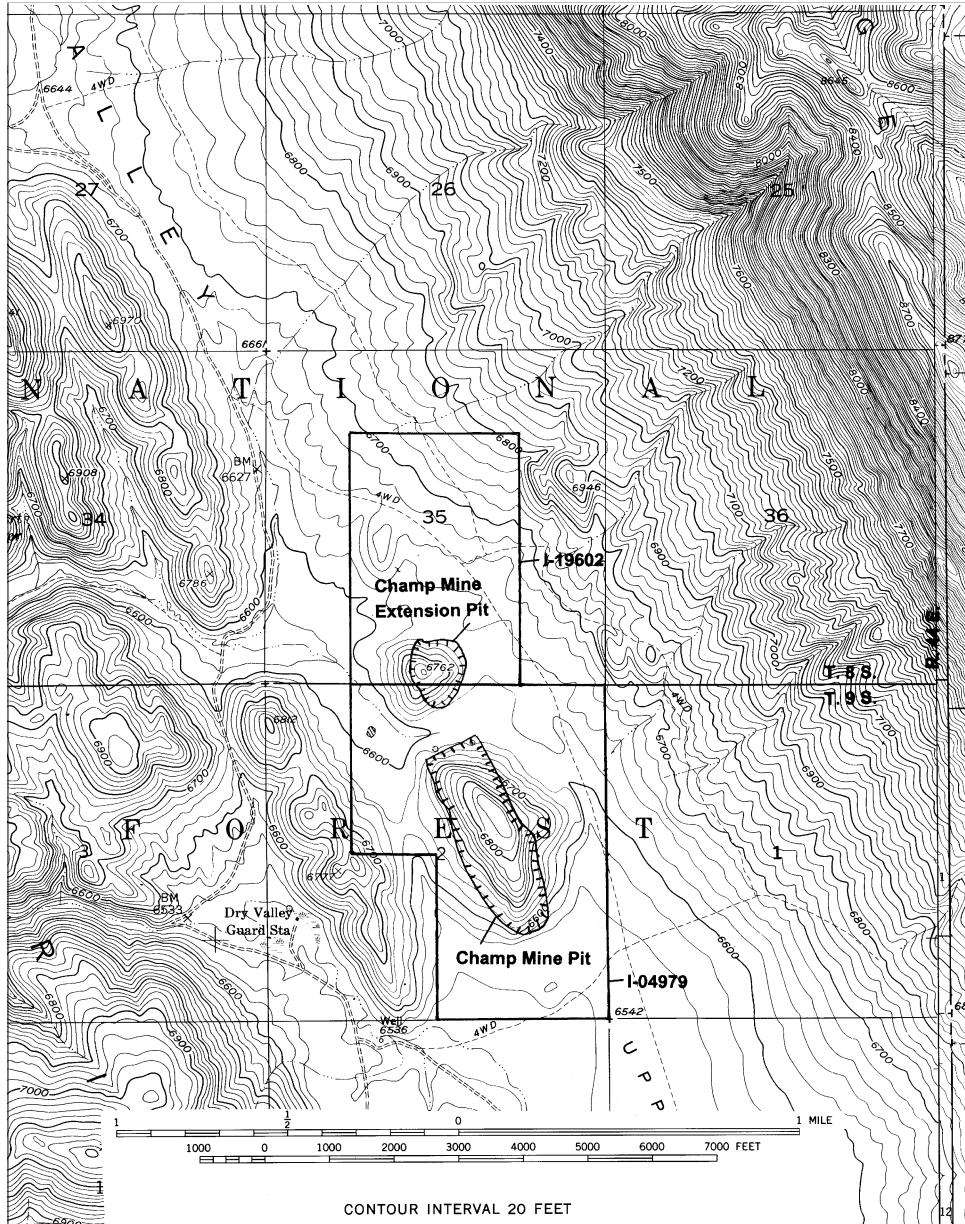


Figure 182. Map showing the location of the Champ Mine and the Champ Mine Extension, Caribou County, Idaho.

Phosphate ore was known to exist in the area of the Champ Mine as early as 1911 (Mansfield, 1927, p. 260). The nearest early exploration was conducted by members of the USGS in July of that year, and consisted of a hand-dug trench 450 feet long and averaging 10 feet deep. This trench was located about 2½ miles southeast of the future site of the Champ Mine. Another early exploration in the area was conducted by the USGS later in 1911 with the excavation of three pits about 3½ miles north of the Champ Mine site in Section 7, T. 8 S., R. 44 E., very near the future site of the Maybe Canyon Mine.

A second round of phosphate exploration was conducted by the USGS in 1947. In September and October of that year, the USGS excavated two bulldozer trenches in the NW¼SE¼ Section 14, T. 9 S., R. 44 E., about two miles south of the Champ Mine site. This trenching site (Lot 1211) was extensively sampled (McKelvey, Armstrong, Gulbrandsen, and Campbell, 1953, p. 38).

Commercial interests in the phosphate resources in this area developed and the BLM was requested to hold a competitive lease sale. The BLM held the lease sale on September 26, 1951. There were three bidders for the property with Frederick P. Champ, of Logan, Utah, being the successful high bidder. The Federal phosphate lease (I-04979) was issued to Mr. Champ on April 1, 1954.

Some exploratory trenching by bulldozer was undertaken in 1952 but the work did little more than expose the main high grade phosphate bed next to the outcrop of the Wells Limestone. In 1954, the Boyles Brothers Drilling Company of Salt Lake City was contracted by the lessee, Mr. Champ, to drill on the lease. At first, a wagon drill was used, which proved to be unsuccessful, and later a rotary rig was used which proved highly successful. A total of 17 holes were drilled that year for a total of 597 feet. In 1955, lease exploration consisted of ten bulldozer trenches (Figure 183) and stripping operations. In 1956, exploration was conducted by drilling 17 more holes totaling 874 feet.

All of this early exploration led to a modification of the lease to add additional acreage on August 14, 1957. Additional exploration was conducted on the lease by Mr. Champ in July 1962, and this led to another modification to the lease to add more acreage on February 13, 1963. There was still no mine development or production on this enlarged lease.

On November 1, 1973, Frederick Champ assigned the lease to the Williams Family Partnership (50%) and the Champ Family Partnership (50%). One month later, December 1, 1973, the lease was further assigned to the Agricultural Products Corporation of Greenwich, Connecticut and Conda, Idaho, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Beker Industries.

Tangled legal maneuvering concerning the Federal lease continued when Agricultural Products Corporation was absorbed into the parent company, Beker Industries, Inc., in 1975. Beker Industries, Inc and the Western Cooperative Fertilizers (US), Inc, joined together by mutual agreement on December 20, 1978, to form the Conda Partnership. On January 1, 1979, Beker Industries, Inc. partially assigned (50%) the lease to the Western Cooperative Fertilizer (US), Inc., and, on the same day, Western Cooperative Fertilizer (US), Inc reassigned the lease to the Conda Partnership.



Figure 183. Exploration Trench “E”, Champ Mine, date unknown. BLM file photo.

The Conda Partnership initiated mining operations on Federal lease I-04979 in late September, 1982, with a small, limited production through the remainder of that year and into 1983. The initial mine plan called for two open pits on the lease. Equipment used in the opening of the mine were diesel-powered scrapers to remove the overburden and front end loaders to remove the ore. Ore was loaded onto trucks and transported six miles via a private haul road to the rail head loading tippie at the Maybe Canyon Mine where the ore was loaded into rail cars and shipped to the Conda Partnership plant at Conda, Idaho.

As mining continued through 1983, two things became apparent. First, all of the available ore on Federal lease I-04979 would be mined out by 1984, and secondly, there were additional reserves of phosphate ore located just off-lease to the north on land leased by the FMC Corporation. The character of this additional ore was such that it was logical to mine it with the current operations of the Champ Mine and not as a separate mining operation. Negotiations were entered into between the Conda Partnership and the FMC Corporation for this adjacent ore deposit.

On June 1, 1983, the FMC Corporation assigned part of their adjacent Federal phosphate lease to the Conda Partnership. FMC Corporation retained a 1% override on the gross value of output from this land. This additional land was given a new lease number, I-19602. Mining on this new acquisition, the Champ Mine Extension, commenced later in 1983.

In 1984, mining operations were escalated. Railroad service was extended to the Champ mine and an onsite loading tipple was completed for use in 1984. Overburden was blasted and loaded into 100-ton trucks by 14-yard shovels. Ore was moved from the mine to either ore stockpiles or the tipple by 120-ton unit rig trucks. All economically recoverable phosphate ore reserves on the original lease, I-04979, were mined during 1984 with mining operations moving onto the Federal lease I-19602. There was a lease modification to add more acreage on January 1, 1985.

By later in 1985, all recoverable phosphate reserves on the Champ Mine Extension, I-19602, had been mined. Backfilling of the pits with overburden and waste had been taking place continuously during the mining phase, and with the completion of mining operations, final reclamation was initiated. The final reclamation consisted of completion of pit back filling, overburden replacement, contouring and reseeded, and was completed in 1986 (Figure 184).



Figure 184. Champ Mine, view north, June 11, 1986. Photo by Peter Oberlindacher, BLM.

The completion of mining and reclamation did not see the end of all of the business maneuvering that was associated with these Federal leases. Beker Industries, Inc., one of the Conda Partnership, declared bankruptcy on December 10, 1986, and sold their interests in the Conda Partnership to Nu-West Industries, Inc. on July 24, 1987. The other Conda Partner, Western Cooperative Fertilizers (US) Inc., became Nu-West Mining Inc. on July 14, 1992. Nu-West Mining Inc. is wholly owned by

Nu-West Industries Inc., so in essence, the old Conda Partnership was consolidated and ceased to exist. On August 10, 1995, Nu-West Industries was acquired by Agrium, Inc., a Calgary, Alberta, Canada agriculture and chemical company. All through these various business dealings, the Federal leases, I-04979 and I-19602 continue in effect, albeit worked out.