

Bear Lake Mine (Keystone Mine, Sleight Canyon Mine)

On December 17, 1914, Walter H. Lewis of Paris, Idaho applied to the U. S. General Land Office for an enlarged homestead entry under the Act of June 17, 1910 (36 Stat. 531) for the NE¹/₄SE¹/₄ and S¹/₂SE¹/₄ of Section 5 and the N¹/₂NE¹/₄ and SE¹/₄NE¹/₄ of Section 8, T. 14 S., R. 43 E., B.M. (240 acres). Mr. Lewis gained a patent to the property on September 2, 1919. He apparently had more in mind for the land in this tract than simple homesteading because on December 26, 1919, just under four months after patenting, the first work to open a phosphate mine started (Figure 38) (Paris Post, 1920n). Unfortunately for Mr. Lewis, this tract of land had been classified by the USGS as containing phosphate and the phosphate had been reserved to the United States. This meant that the newly started mining venture for the phosphate ore was not legal. Legal or not, work continued until in March, 1920, ore was encountered in the tunnel. During this early mining operation, all work was done by hand from the drilling of shot holes to hauling the muck out of the mine by wheelbarrow (Paris Post, 1920o). It wasn't until track was laid that ore could be removed from the mine with any degree of efficiency. During this period of development, Walter Lewis contracted to sell his homesteaded lands to a new phosphate mining company called the Bear Lake Phosphate Company. The Bear Lake Phosphate Company, an Idaho corporation, was organized in January, 1920 (Paris Post, 1920a) and filed to do business in Idaho on December 24, 1920.

On February 25, 1920, Congress passed and the President signed the Mineral Leasing Act (41 Stat. 437) thereby creating a means to issue leases for the development and mining of Federal phosphate and other minerals. In March, the phosphate company made the final payment to Walter Lewis for his homesteaded lands (Paris Post, 1920e). Recognizing that the reserved Federal phosphate on this particular tract of land was now available by leasing, J. Russell Shephard and Leo W. Bach, agents for the Bear Lake Phosphate Company, attempted to legitimize the mining operation by applying for a Federal lease on March 13, 1920 (lease application BL-034591). Because there were no implementing regulations in place at that time, the lease application was withdrawn on June 21, 1920 and replaced with another application, this time with the Bear Lake Phosphate Company as the applicant (lease application BL-034988).

Mining continued during 1920 and by the end of the year, underground development totaled about 1,000 feet of double tracked tunnel, several ventilation raises, and trestling (Mansfield, 1927) (Figure 39). The produced phosphate ore was hauled in horse-drawn wagons in summer and sleighs in winter (Paris Post, 1921a) down the Sleight Canyon road to the rail siding at Paris, a distance of about 2½ miles (Service, 1966). As an aside, on October 31, 1920, Leo Bach, mine superintendent, was accidentally shot by a stray bullet on his way home from the mine. He did not suffer any serious injury because the bullet was stopped by two time-keeping books in his pocket (Paris Post, 1920k).

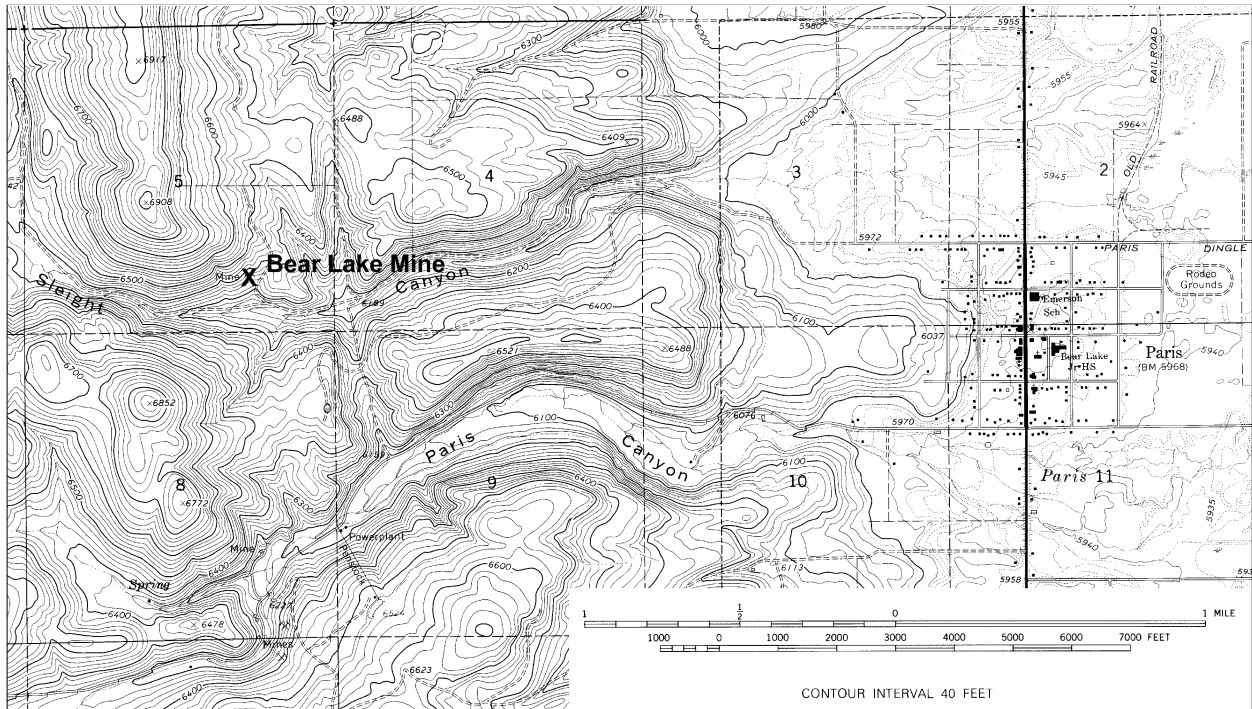


Figure 38. Map showing the location of the Bear Lake Mine, Bear Lake County, Idaho.



Figure 39. Bear Lake Mine, August 30, 1920. Photo by G. R. Mansfield, #476, 477, USGS Photographic Library.

In January and February, 1921, small shipments of phosphate ore were made to a fertilizer plant near San Francisco (Mansfield, 1927, p. 295). The mine closed in March, 1921 because of apparent poor business conditions. Campbell (1921) reported that the underground workings consisted of 900 feet of 7 x 7-foot double tracked tunnel and approximately 1,200 feet of other workings and that the mine was awaiting conditions to warrant production. In fact, the mine was waiting the issuance of the Federal phosphate lease before proceeding. On February 21, 1921, Federal phosphate lease BL-034988 was

finally issued for 360 acres of reserved phosphate to the Bear Lake Phosphate Company. This was the first Federal phosphate lease issued in Idaho and finally legitimized the mining operation in Sleight Canyon. Ironically, the lease was issued during a period when the mine was being shut down for a lack of a market for phosphate.

The mine remained closed during the rest of 1921 and most of 1922 and 1923 with only short events of maintenance and repair. At this time, the underground workings consisted of 1,200 feet of double track tunnel, and raises, crosscuts and drifts totaling approximately 1,500 feet (Kirkham, 1925). Service (1967) stated that there was no reported production after 1922, however, there was a small stockpile of ore outside the mine that provided material for sporadic shipments (Figure 40). In November, 1923, there was a report in the Paris Post that an offer to purchase the mine was made by a Pacific Coast fertilizer company but apparently nothing came of it. On November 30, 1925, the Bear Lake Phosphate Company forfeited their right to do business in Idaho.



Figure 40. Bear Lake Mine, Western Phosphate Company, 1925. Photo by V. R. D. Kirkham, courtesy of the Idaho Geological Survey.

The Bear Lake Mine was sold to the Keystone Phosphate Company in September, 1926 (Paris Post, 1926a). The Keystone Phosphate Company, an Idaho corporation, was organized in April of 1926 and filed to do business in Idaho on May 4, 1926. F. S. Irwin and C. A. Serrot of Nampa, Idaho were the principal officers of Keystone. After the purchase, the renamed Keystone Mine opened in October, 1926 and started rehabilitation work and ore shipments to the west coast (Paris Post, 1926b, c). Litigation resulting from the transfer of ownership and lack of payroll closed the mine in November,

1926. Campbell (1928) reported that the property was idle and that there was an active attempt to refinance the operation.

The litigation, Frank Athay, et al vs. Keystone Phosphate Company, et al, was over 24 liens to recover wages by the plaintiff, Mr. Athay. The decision in this case found for the plaintiff and rendered judgement against all of the defendants except Mary Stucki, a shareholder of the Federal phosphate lease. The litigation was settled in May, 1929. During the period of litigation, there was no mining activity conducted, and in fact, Campbell (1927, 1928) reported the mine idle in 1927 and 1928. Also during this time period, the Keystone Phosphate Company reorganized (Paris Post, 1926d) and the company formulated plans for a grinding mill and a mixing and powder plant to be located in Paris. This mill was never constructed. Campbell (1929) reported that the property was idle and that there was an active attempt to sell stock.

In September, 1930, the Federal phosphate lease was assigned from the Bear Lake Phosphate Company (lessee of record) to Mary Stucki and others. In June, 1930, Leo W. Bach and Lewis A. Jeffs, acting as agents for the Keystone Phosphate Company, quit claimed deeded the lands in Section 8 that contained the mine to Agricultural Potassium Phosphate Company of California (APPC) (BLM, unpublished information). This company, a Delaware corporation, filed to do business in Idaho on December 18, 1930. Mary Stucki and her partners subleased the Federal phosphate lease to APPC during this same time period. With the transfer of ownership of both the land and the Federal phosphate lease, Keystone went out of business, forfeiting the right to do business in Idaho on November 30, 1931.

In November, 1930, the mine was reopened and rehabilitation started (Paris Post, 1930c). In December of 1930, APPC released plans to open a mill in Paris that would use a proprietary process for the phosphate called the Kreiss process (Paris Post, 1930d; 1931). Active mining operations started and a small amount of ore was produced during 1931. This ore was shipped to the company's plant facility in San Pedro, California (Campbell, 1930). Due to a poor financial picture for the phosphate industry, the mine closed during the latter part of 1931 and remained idle during 1932 (Campbell, 1932). In fact, the mine was to never operate and produce again, with the surface structures largely removed and the mine property allowed to become overgrown (Figures 41 and 42).

The end of active mining and phosphate production did not signal the end of the interest in the Federal phosphate in and around the Bear Lake/Keystone Mine. Table 4 presents a summary of phosphate permitting and leasing for the Federal phosphate in and around and including the mine.



Figure 41. Bear Lake Mine, July, 1966. BLM file photo.



Figure 42. Site of Bear Lake Mine, September 9, 1996. Photo by the author.

Table 4. Permit/lease summary for Federally-owned phosphate in and around Bear Lake Mine.

GLO/BLM Serial No.	Lease or Permit	Applicant or Lessee	Date of Appln.	Remarks
BL-034591	Lease Appln.	J.R. Shephard & Leo W. Bach	3/13/20	Application withdrawn on 6/21/20 because of lack of implementing regulations
BL-034988	Lease Appln.	Bear Lake Phosphate Co.	6/21/20	Lease issued for 360 acres on 2/21/21; lease assigned to Mary Stucki et al Sept. 1930; terminated 2/26/38
BL-052909	Lease Appln.	R.S. Hartnell	5/2/38	Protest filed 6/13/38; sale held 9/24/53, no bids
BL-054694	Lease Appln.	Walter Heyde	2/7/44	Sale held 5/16/46, Idaho Organic Fertilizer Co. high bidder (\$201); lease issued 4/1/47; relinquished 11/20/50
I-06065	Lease Appln.	Potash Co. of America	5/16/55	Sale held 9/14/55, voided; sale re-held 11/2/55, Potash Co. of America high bidder (\$1,906.80); lease issued 5/1/56; relinquished 12/30/60
I-017198	Prospecting Permit Appln.	K. Davis & E. Young	3/11/66	Permit never issued, case closed 2/17/67
I-017277	Prospecting Permit Appln.	K. Davis & E. Young	4/7/66	Permit never issued, case closed 2/17/67
I-3557	Prospecting Permit Appln.	Eldon Young	5/15/70	Permit issued 9/27/71; permit assigned to Earth Science Inc., 12/1/72; Pref. Right Lease applied for 9/26/75, rejected 3/21/95; appealed to IBLA
I-9066	Prospecting Permit Appln.	G.E. Fowler & C.F. Murer	11/29/74	Application withdrawn and case closed 3/24/75
I-9357	Prospecting Permit Appln.	C.F. Murer	3/24/75	Permit never issued, case closed 10/13/81