

Local Mining

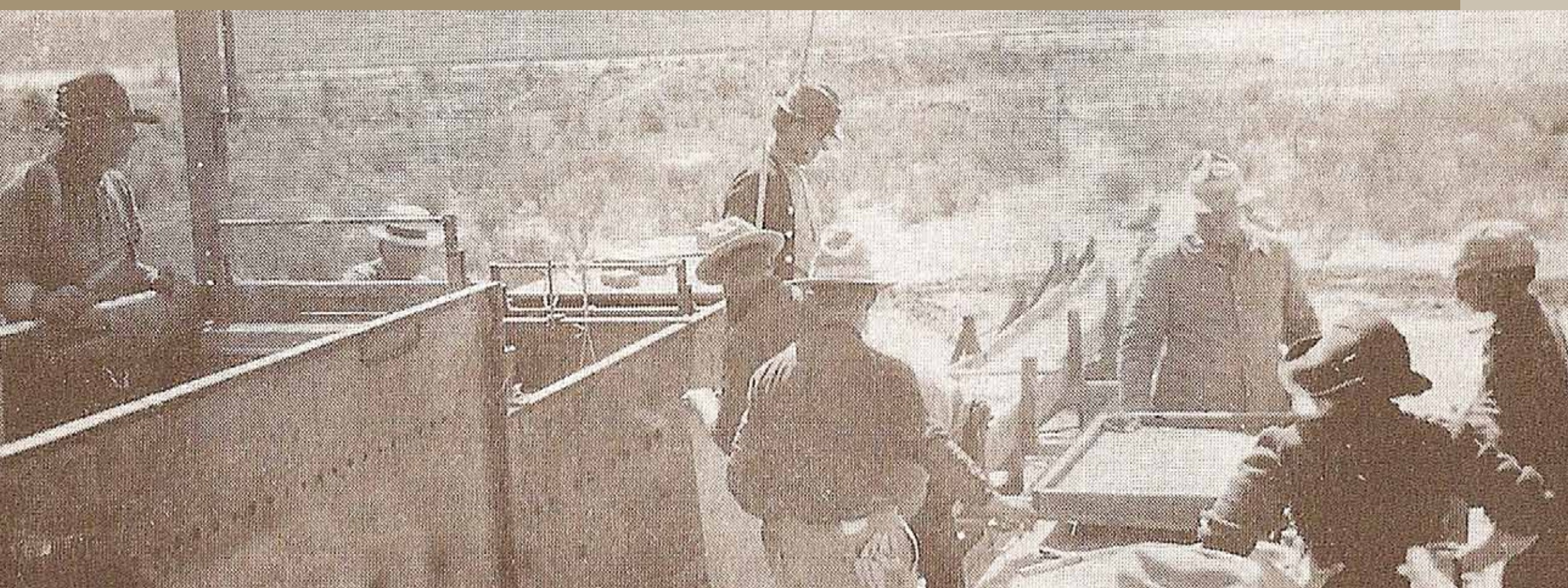
Ever since pioneers came to this area in the late 1800s, people have searched for minerals in the Paria River drainage. Though none of the mines yielded big returns, prospectors have dug for coal and bentonite clay in Bryce Valley, and lead, copper, manganese, uranium, and gold further downstream.

Coal

Here in Bryce Valley, you'll find coal seams in both the Dakota and Straight Cliffs formations. While some of Tropic's earliest residents used coal for blacksmithing, it wasn't until the late 1930s that any significant coal mining took place here. Eleven miles northeast of Tropic, in Emma Canyon, Lewis and Vern Ray began to mine coal from the base of the Straight Cliffs Formation. In the mid-1940s, they sold the mine to Alton and Vernal Shakespear, who operated the mine until the late 1950s. Alton Shakespear sold the mine in the mid-1960s, but it hasn't produced coal since that time.

Gold

If you follow the Paria River about 30 miles downstream, you'll come to the ghost town of Pahreah, where you can still see the remains of the stone cabin built by Charles H. Spencer in 1912. After unsuccessful attempts to mine gold from the Chinle Formation at confluence of the Paria and Colorado rivers, Spencer moved his operations upstream to Pahreah. Spencer tried to extract gold from the clay rock by steeping it in vats of mercury, but once again was unsuccessful.



Charles H Spencer (right, facing camera) stands beside his gold-extraction mercury vats. Pahreah, 1912.



Louie and Alton Shakespear, outside the Shakespear coal mine, one of several small coal mines in the Paria River drainage.

Bentonite

In the late 1950s, a Henrieville mine drew thousands of tons of bentonite clay from the Dakota Formation. Bentonite can absorb many times its volume in water, a quality that has led to its use in well drilling, water storage, medicines, cat litter, and more. Much of the Henrieville bentonite was trucked to the Glen Canyon Dam site, where it was used to build a coffer dam that diverted the river while the main dam was built. To facilitate transport, local men donated time and machinery to complete the Cottonwood Road from Cannonville to Route 89.