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# A HISTORY OF THE



*Mule trains carried the copper south along the Copper Trail.  
Photo credit: US Forest Service*

**G**rant County's igneous volcanic geology has fostered a rich mining heritage and economy for the area since pre-historic times. Mineral resources have ranged from placer gold in the streams near Pinos Altos (1860) to silver outcroppings in Silver City (1870).

The east-to-west conquest of the country, California Gold Rush of 1849, and Civil War superseded the documentation of the Santa Rita Mine as a treasure of American history. But the Santa Rita Mine has a colorful story...and is the longest continuous mining claim in the western United States.

The Mimbreno Indians (1100–1300) collected low-grade turquoise and chrysocolla. The Apaches, who migrated into the area later, collected the copper from the surface for ceremonial and trade purposes. The area was also a seasonal camp in the homeland of the

Warm Springs Apache, whose leaders included Mangas Coloradas and Victorio.

Mining of the copper veins began shortly after 1799 when Lieutenant Colonel Jose Manuel Carrasco, a Spanish soldier stationed in Janos, Chihuahua, Mexico, was shown a copper deposit by a friendly Apache Indian. This was the beginning of Santa Rita del Cobre (Santa Rita), and it has been mined almost continuously since.

In 1804 the first land-title transfer occurred, when Carrasco sold a portion of the property to Don Francisco Manuel Elguea, a merchant who directed mule trains loaded with the copper south to Mexico. The Spanish soon established a military presidio and used convict labor in the underground mines.

Santa Rita was under Mexican rule for twenty-five years following the War of Independence from Spain in 1821. Mule trains carried the copper

## SANTA RITA MINE

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GRANT COUNTY  
NEW MEXICO

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Silver City – Grant County  
Chamber of Commerce  
201 North Hudson Street  
Silver City, NM 88061





*The head frame was used in shaft or underground mining.*

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*Currently the tailing piles are under extensive reclamation.*



*The community of Santa Rita grew from a frontier settlement into a self-contained company town. Photo credit: New Mexico State University Archives*

established a military presidio and used convict labor in the underground mines. Rita was under Mexican rule for twenty-five years following the War of Independence from Spain in 1821. Mule trains carried the copper south along the “Copper Trail” through Janos and Chihuahua to Mexico City. It is said that, because of the clean quality and malleability of the Santa Rita ore, the metal in most all Mexican copper coins minted between 1800 to 1840 originated here.

Misunderstandings between Mexicans and the Apaches eventually led to violence on both sides, and providing security for the miners and mule trains became increasingly difficult. By the 1850's the political and financial instability of the Mexican government, and the Apache threat, forced the abandonment of the mines. In 1850 the mines were reopened; however, the citizens of Santa Rita faced constant danger from Apache raids until the 1880's.



In 1873 the mine was purchased from the original Spanish owners by a Colorado silver miner, who eventually sold it to a Bostonian banker, who built a railroad spur up from Deming in 1883 to provide a transportation connection with the intercontinental railroad. Underground

## FACTS:

- The Santa Rita Observation Point is located on the east side of NM Highway 152 just south of milepost 6.
- The Phelps Dodge Santa Rita Chino Mine pit is almost 1,500 feet deep and 1-1/2 miles across.
- The 360-ton haul trucks are approximately 3 stories tall.
- The ore is crushed and concentrated before being transported for smelting through the solvent extraction, electro-winning (SXEW) technology, utilizing chemical reactions and electric current to capture copper from low-grade ore to form into plates of 99.9% copper.
- Phelps Dodge Mining Company is the second-largest producer of copper in the world. The Company produces about 8% of the copper, 20% of the molybdenum and 13% of the carbon black used globally each year.
- Phelps Dodge is the largest employer and supporter of the tax base in Grant County. A valuable community partner, the Company provides in-kind donations and financial contributions throughout the County.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:  
1-800-548-9378  
WWW.SILVERCITY.ORG