

Gilpin County News

BLACK HAWK, CO CENTRAL CITY • ROLLINSVILLE • NEDERLAND

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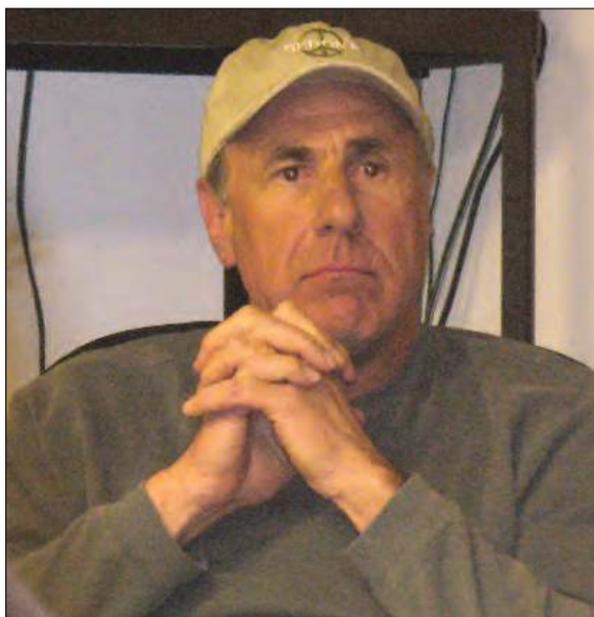
LYNN VOLKENS

“Shiver me timbers.” Pretty swashbucklers and buccaneers take over the Gilpin School stage. **p8**



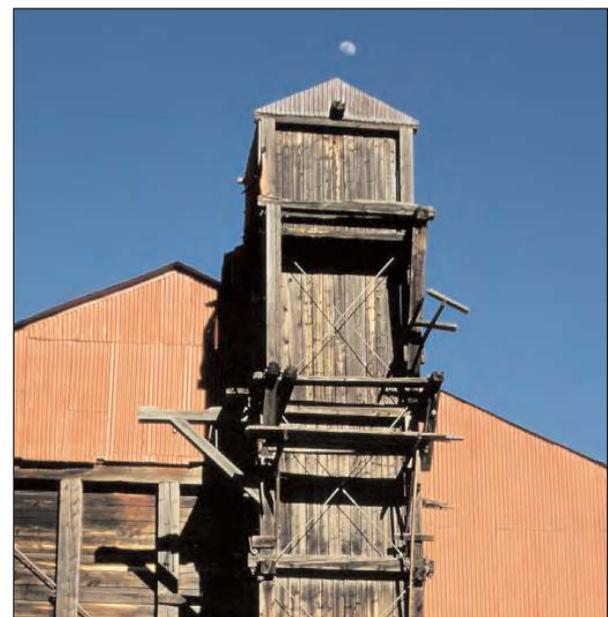
WES ISENHART

Just chillin’ - Sam’s not in any hurry for summer to arrive.



LYNN VOLKENS

New HCFPD Chief. Goals from Richard Bulich. **p7**



DAVE GIBSON

Argo Gold Mill. Tours are fun and educational. **p16**

COMMUNITY

Big brother. Surveillance coming to Justice Center. **p2**

HCFPD - A (fire) house divided. Here’s what’s hot. **p3**

Art Fest. In 2D and 3D. See what your kids are up to. **p9**

INVESTMENTS

Buy a street for a million dollars in Central City. **p6**

Stroehle House. Acquired by Historical Society. **p10**

\$8.628 million investment in Colorado State Parks. **p12**

RECREATION

Park closures. Pine Beetle attacks create unsafe areas. **p0**

Argo Gold Mill Fever

Try your panning luck in Idaho Springs

by Dave Gibson

After a ten minute orientation film, we head up the hill in a small school bus with benches on its sides and a dizzying open door view of Clear Creek below. We pass a two foot high white picket fence behind which is an old-fashioned mock graveyard with headstones of past tour guides. A short trail leads us to the Double Eagle Mine. Worked with hand steel, hammers, and blasting powder, it appears to have produced little gold since its opening in the early 1890's. Closed today except to tourists, we proceed inside the mine wearing our issued hardhats. Somewhat cramped, we must duck occasionally and can easily touch the mine's walls without reaching. Lights line the ceiling shooting 300 ft. straight back to the end of the mine where we see actual gold still held in the rock. Signs make the gold easy to spot and steel fencing keeps gold diggers at bay.

Below the Double Eagle Mine lies the Argo Gold Mill and, just beyond it, the Argo Tunnel. The 4.2 mile long Argo Tunnel, (originally called the Newhouse Tunnel) was created in 1898 to transport ore in the area and relieve the flooding problems of the 300 mines between Idaho Springs and Central City. In January 1943 the tunnel flooded killing four miners and has never been completely reopened. In 1983 it was listed as part of the Federal Government's Clear Creek/Central City Superfund Site. A water treatment facility now removes 1200 lbs. of heavy

metals such as zinc, copper, manganese, cadmium, lead, and arsenic from tunnel water each day before releasing it into Clear Creek. Once the largest source of heavy metal contaminants on the creek, the trout, aquatic insects, riparian vegetation, and quarter million people who use the water downstream now have some relief.

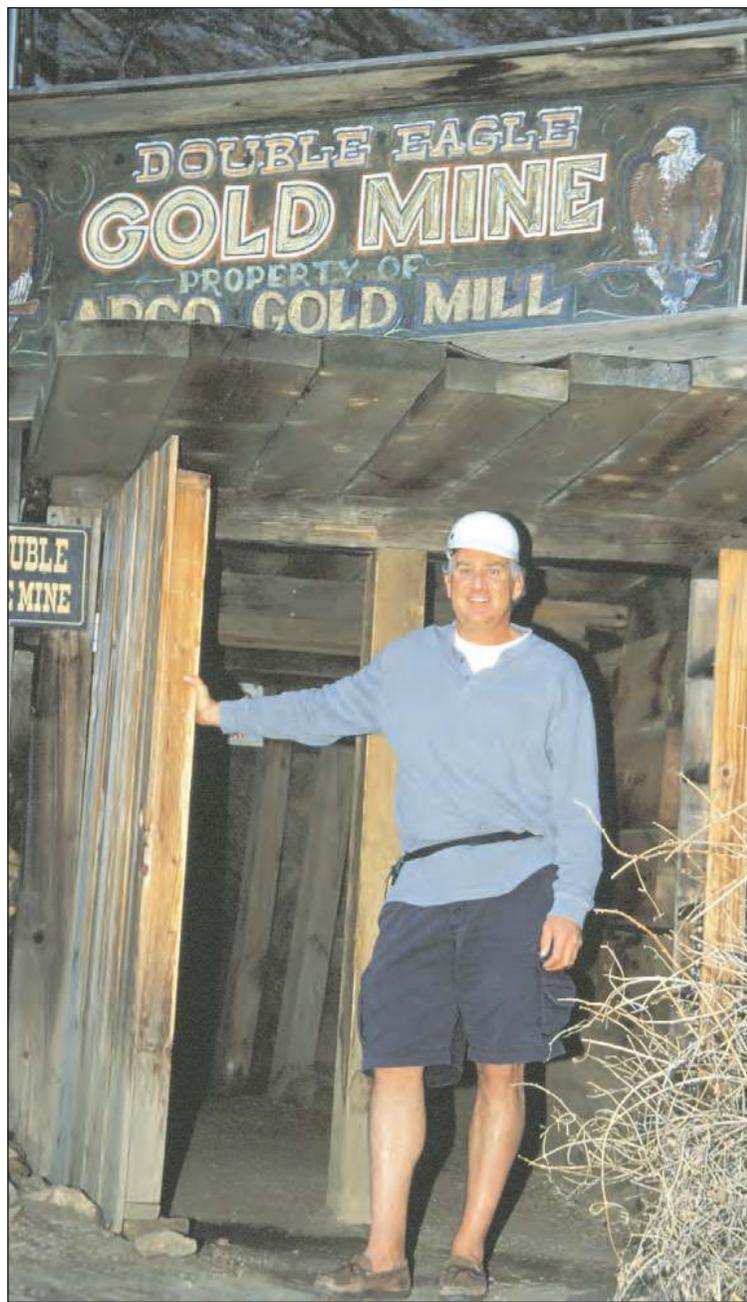
The Argo Gold Mill opened in 1913 and was the largest of its type in the world. During its lifetime it processed 100 million dollars worth of gold ore when the price of gold averaged 26 dollars per ounce. Inside its door we walk along a labyrinth of time-hardened dusty planks to the "stamp room." The noise here was at one time deafening as rock was dumped from ore carts into bins and pulverized by the mill's twenty stamps. The constant crushing and clanging of earth against machine filled the particulate choked air. Sweat and liquidized chemicals flowed freely. Working its way down, the ore was fed through a series of grinders, mixers, conveyors, classifiers, amalgamation tables, flotation cells, liquid distribution systems, and concentrators. In the final step of the processing, flotation tanks were used to capture any fine gold particles that were left. This recovery process was invented by a Leadville Colorado housewife whose mine mechanic husband's greasy overalls would collect gold in the grime that floated to the top of the laundry water. I admit that following the path of the gold is a bit confusing especially since some of the original chutes, belts, and hardware is missing but considering all of the broken down mills that I've seen, this one is in remarkable condition. Down creaky stairs and through the dif-

ferent levels now, all one can really do is stare up at the immense dimly lit space of beams, pulleys and archaic machinery and try to put yourself back in time when the mill was operational.

The ground floor of the Argo Gold Mill is now a museum. Ore and mineral samples can be seen with examples of antique mine lighting lamps, hand mining tools, and updated progressions thereof. Faded pictures of miners decorate the rustic walls. Colorful bottles and finer period pieces fill the display cases. On a track sits a row of ore carts leading us towards the gold panning area.

The Argo Mill was built solely for one purpose - to extract gold, which is exactly what we plan to do next. Panning troughs have been set up by the gift shop and with our plastic bags of what looks to be sand (but I'm told contains guaranteed placer gold) and pans in hand, we step to the edge of one of them. General Manager Bob Maxwell demonstrates the proper technique swirling the water back and forth and discarding the lighter materials into the trough. In a short time his pan is almost empty of foreign debris except for a half dozen shiny specks. GOLD! Having already caught the fever, I eagerly try my luck but fall far short of Bob's efforts and come up with four minute flakes about half the size of a flattened pinhead. I consider it a success and ponder how much gold has settled into the crevices of the trough.

Argo Gold Mill is located at 2250 Riverside Dr. in Idaho Springs, Colorado. Tours are conducted daily mid-April through mid-October from 9 am until 4:30 pm. The mill closes at 6 pm. Winter tours are available by appointment. For further information go to: www.HistoricArgoTours.com or call (303) 567-2421.



TINA MANNING

ABOVE: Hardhats are standard issue at the Double Eagle Mine. Author Dave Gibson holds up a support wall to prevent a collapse...

BELOW LEFT: Argo Gold Mill General Manager Bob Maxwell demonstrates gold panning.



DAVE GIBSON

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