Bennington Canyon Mine

The Bennington Canyon Mine is located in the SE¼NE¼ Section 14, T. 12 S., R. 44 E., BM (Figure 74). The first published report of the occurrence of phosphate at this location was made in 1907 when C. C. Jones (1907) reported:

> *At Bennington, Idaho, 3 miles north of Montpelier, a disconnected and faulted portion of the phosphate formation is shown. The material runs from 25 to 50 percent bone phosphate, and further work will be necessary to determine its position and relation to the other deposits.*

The San Francisco Chemical Company (SFCC), an operating division of the Mountain Copper Company, Ltd., a British company, apparently paid attention to the 1907 report. The company located mining claims between 1907 and 1912 on the deposit and opened prospects on the phosphate ore zone (BLM unpublished data). The mining claimant (J. J. Taylor, local superintendent of the SFCC) excavated three short adits, the two northernmost openings consisted of a tunnel about 75 feet long and a tunnel about 50 feet long. Little is known about the third opening which was situated somewhere in the Joes Gap drainage just south of the mine. Mansfield (1927) reported making measurements in the tunnel openings in 1909 but stated that no work had been conducted at the tunnel sites from 1909 to 1920, when the bed was opened again. In this same period of time, the mining claims were apparently relinquished as the land was offered for homesteading. The land on which the mine was to be later developed left Federal ownership December 15, 1914 under the Homestead Laws and was patented to John C. Nelson. Mr. Nelson is probably the one who reopened the deposit in 1920. Mansfield (1927) also reports that prospects were opened by F. R. Richards of Montpelier on the hillside south of Joes Gap in section 23.

None of this early activity resulted in economic development of this deposit. It wasn't until 1939 that there was serious interest in mining this deposit. On November 25, 1939, a new company was formed to mine the Bennington Canyon phosphate deposits, the Teton Phosphate Company of Boise, Idaho. On that date, the new company filed to do business in Idaho with the Secretary of State's office. The Paris Post (1939) reported that there were eight incorporators. They were: Houston T. Hitt, C. Van Clark, F. P. Van Horn, J. C. McKinley, Sr., Milton Robison, Conover Wright, Frank D. Maxwell, and Edward G. Rosenheim. The new company obtained mining rights on 160 acres (Service, 1966). Exploration was started in 1940 with the excavation of several shallow trenches, all of which are now caved and indistinguishable. In October, 1941, the Teton Phosphate Company started a small open pit operation. Overburden was stripped from about 1300 square yards of the flat-lying Phosphoria Formation. A prospect tunnel about 150 feet long was driven in the open pit. This tunnel was to explore the phosphate at depth. A 40-ton hammer mill with crusher, rotary barrel dryer, trommel screens, and storage bins were placed in the open below the stripped phosphate (Service, 1966; Anaconda Collection, 1942). The ore was crushed, dried, ground, sacked, and sold for direct application on farm lands throughout southern Idaho. One carload of 43 tons was mined and shipped

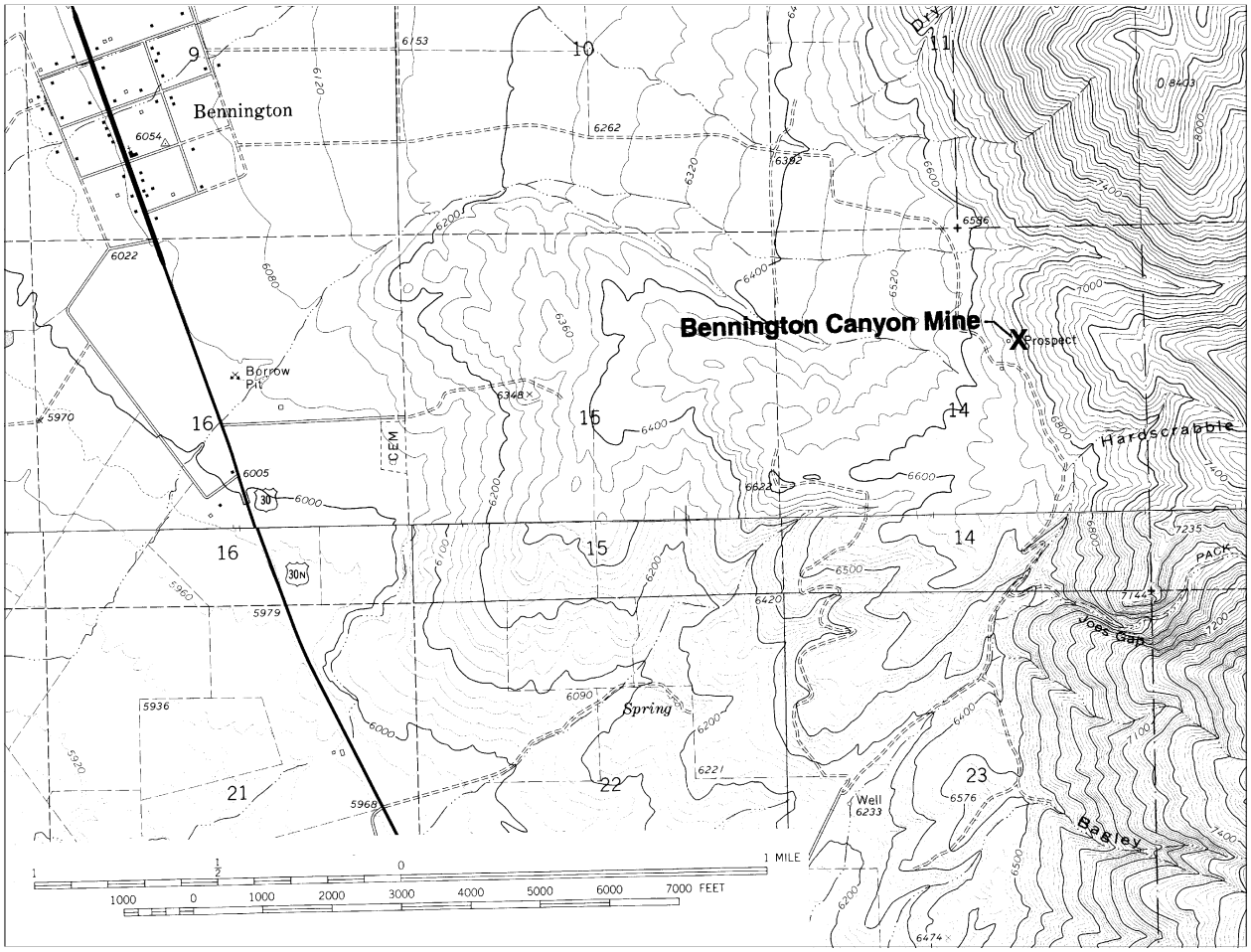

Figure 74. Map showing the location of the Bennington Canyon Mine, Bear Lake County, Idaho.

to the Vasser Produce Company in Caldwell, Idaho (Anaconda Collection, 1942). Campbell (1943, 1944) reported that production amounted to about 1000 cubic yards and that five men were employed. Many mines, including this one, have been opened in the phosphate field with the object to market the phosphate rock for direct application to the soil as fertilizer. Unfortunately, natural phosphate, even when finely ground, is not sufficiently soluble to benefit plant growth. The unanimous fate of small mines opened with soil amendments as a product was a short mine life (Butner, 1949).

Labor trouble and poor economic conditions closed the mine in 1942. Due to a demand from former users of the phosphate product, the mine reopened for a short period of time in 1943. Lack of volume capacity and stiff competition from larger phosphate mines in the area spelled doom for this mine and it closed again, never to reopen. The Teton Phosphate Company started to negotiate with several processors for a lease on parts of the property on a royalty basis. In 1946, the property was leased to J. L. Ogilvy of Spokane, Washington (Service, 1966) but there is no record that Mr. Ogilvy mined any ore.

McDowell (1951) reported that the property was being operated by Soilife, Inc. Officers of this new company included Houston T. Hitt, President, D. Charles Regan, Secretary, and J. P. Gilmore, Manager, all of Boise, Idaho. However, records of the Secretary of State's office do not show that Soilife, Inc. was licenced to do business in Idaho. This may have been a brief and unsuccessful name change by Teton Phosphate Company. Successive reports by the Idaho Inspector of Mines show the property as idle and in fact, the Teton Phosphate Company forfeited its right to do business in Idaho November 11, 1967. The mine only exists today as a scar on the hillside east of the small town of Bennington, Idaho (Figures 75, 76, and 77).

Figure 75. Bennington Canyon Mine, June 24, 1996. Photo by the author.

Figure 76. Open pit, Bennington Canyon Mine, June 24, 1996. Photo by the author.

Figure 77. Ruins of the processing facility, Bennington Canyon Mine, June 24, 1996. Photo by the author.