

---

## A Tour At the Climax Mine, Summer of 1953

---

By Hobart Bauhan

During the Winter of 1953, I was a junior in the College of Mines at the University of Arizona, studying mining engineering under the tutelage of Dean Thomas Chapman. One day, while sauntering by the administration office, I noticed a posted notice on the bulletin board telling of big money to be made at the Climax Molybdenum Company mine high in the Colorado Rockies. Mine students would be given summer jobs with the idea of returning later in management. Dean Chapman was enthusiastic, even though he preferred his graduates to join Phelps Dodge, a huge benefactor of our Mines College.

After school was out that spring, I jumped in my old Ford pickup and headed for the Climax Mine. The town of Climax then straddled Fremont Pass at about eleven thousand feet above sea level. At that time the mine gate was maned by U.S. Army security, as molybdenum was a strategic mineral.

After checking in, I was assigned a room in the "Climax Hilton," a company hotel for single men. There was a big dining hall on the first floor where we all took our meals. Most of the labor force came from the plains of Oklahoma and were lured up there for the \$1.75-an-hour money. A rough lot these guys; they would grab at the food like starving men.

The next day I reported to the dry, where the shift boss assigned me a locker. All new men went on the cleanup crew for a week, before being sent to a permanent crew. This was to get your body used to the rarefied air, to instruct you in safety, and to learn the mine. You got your brass at the beginning of each shift, which you turned in at the end of the day. This system ensured that no one went missing in the mine.

The Climax mine at that time had two working levels: the Philipson and the Stork. Both were adits going into a block caving system under a massive ore body. The granite phorphory consisted of less than 1 percent MoS<sub>2</sub>, and was well suited to caving.

At first, I was put on the correct crew, which was hard, sweaty work forming up slusher drifts with steal forms, pumping cement in behind them, and the really hot work of stripping off the forms. Then came the mine crew, which was the best. The shift boss put us in a slusher drift with jackleg drills (Clevelands) learning the art of the miner. What a fiasco! Guys were yelling, cursing, and just downright quitting and walking out. But after one mastered a jackleg, one really got a feeling of belonging to an elite group of miners! I spent the rest of the summer in the fingers and stopes on the mine crew, finishing out a great experience which I value to this day. A marine will always be a marine, so a miner will always be a miner!

After a stint in the army, and with a degree in mining engineering, I returned to Climax and stayed until the big strike shut down the mine. Dean Chapman finally got me, for I left and joined Phelps Dodge's mine at Ajo, Arizona. Thanks for the memories. ■

*Hobart Bauhan received his B.S. in mining engineering from the Arizona College of Mines, University of Arizona, in 1958. During his varied career he served as a shift boss on a repair crew at Climax, a petroleum engineer with the El Paso Natural Gas Company at Farmington, New Mexico, and a mining engineer at Phelps Dodge's New Cornelia Mine at Ajo, Arizona.*