

**ANIMALS AND OUR MINING HISTORY**

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Animals have had a major influence on the development of the civilized world. Beasts of burden were used to move or carry what man could not. The use of animals in the development of underground mining in Butte is no exemption. Animals were used for various jobs and earned the love and devotion of the miners whose lives they saved and helped make a little easier by getting the ore to the surface.

Butte miners loved the animals and knew that without them the hard work would not have gotten done as quickly as it did. The miners were not only devoted to the familiar dogs of the town but were very fond of the mules that worked along side the men in the mine. Mules would help the miners by pulling the ore cars from deep within the mine to the shaft where the ore would be brought out of the mine. If there were no mules to do the job, the miners had to push the heavy ore cars.

Getting the mules into the mine was a very difficult task. The cages taking the men down into the mine were very small. It was difficult to cram six men into one cage for the journey to the bottom of the shaft, let alone get a mule underground.

For three days before making its journey to the bottom of the mine, the mule would get no food or water. "If this was not done, there was danger of a ruptured bladder or suffocation" while the mule was being lowered to the bottom of the mine." (Brothers page 7) In order to get the mule into the cage it had to first be blindfolded so it would not get spooked and also its legs

history. Without the animals the work would have been much harder on the miners who just by the nature of their work died at a very young age. Without the help from the animals, many of these men would have died even younger. The animals made life just a little bit easier for the brave young men who tried to make a living by working in the mines of Butte. I found out just how important the mules and other animals have been in the development of every one who has lives or does live in Butte and other towns where mines have played a vital role in its history and future. I also learned how much people loves the animals of the mines and they also appreciated the mules being such hard workers.

were bound in a leather truss so that the animal could not move at all. The mule would then be set on its rear and stuffed into the cage so it could be lowered to its destination safely. It took a cage and a few heavy cables to get the mule down into the bottom of the mine. The mule would give a few wild kicks and then settle down to the quiet and safety of the mine. Once the mule was inside the mine it would stay there pulling the ore cars and helping out until the day it died. The mules were only taken out of the mine if they were sick, injured, or if there was a strike. ("Struggling Mules...")

The mules that worked in the mines were very strong. The ore cars that they pulled were very heavy. The mules worked all day and did not get many breaks. Some might say the animals worked harder than the men who worked in the mines.

The mule skinner was the man who cared for the animals by feeding them and making sure they had a tub of ice water to drink each night. " Every night the skinner would treat his mules just like his children and scrubbed the hoofs with soap and water to keep the deadly copper water from ruining the animals feet." ("Struggling Mules...") The copper water would eat away at the hoof of the animal. The animal would then be useless. This also calmed the mules down from the hectic day of work. The mules didn't seem to mind the cool climate of the underground and they became adjusted very quickly. ("Struggling Mules...")

Mules were used in the mines until about 1920 when electricity was introduced to the mines and provided for moving the ore cars by rail. These cars were small. They could not use

large cars because it was very difficult to get the cars in and out of the mine. The mule skinner was replaced by the conductor of the ore cars. ("Struggling Mules...")

One of our feathered friends made mining a little less worrisome for the lone prospector by singing a pretty canary song while the miner worked alone. The canary went to the mine each day in his little cage and kept the miner company while he worked looking for precious metals.

If the miner did not hear the canary's song, he knew it was time to get out of the mine because the precious oxygen was gone. If the canary died it indicated there was dangerous gases in the tunnel. The tiny canary having tiny lungs died when there was no more oxygen and the miner knew he only had a short time to get to safety. The tiny little bird would give its life to keep the miner safe.

Stories about the cats who lived in the mines eating the rats abound, as do stories about incredibly smart dogs and horses who saved many a life by alerting men to the dangers of fires. The miners adoration for the beasts who made their lives a little easier in a time when life itself was not easy can be summed up by the following poem: (Malone page 73)

My sweetheart's a mule in the mine.  
I drive her with only one line.  
On the dashboard I sit  
And tobacco I spit,  
All over my sweetheart's behind.

(Greever page 251)

This poem is about a miner who is working with a mule at the deep bottom of the mines.

By doing this report I have found that animals played an important part in Butte's mining

## Bibliography

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Malone, Michael P. "Boom town" Pages 57-80 The Battle for Butte, Mining and Politics on the Northern Frontier 1864-1906, Montana Historical Society: poem is quoted from William S. Greever, *The Bonanza West: The Story of the Mining Rushes*, p. 251.

"Struggling Mules in Straight Jackets Sent to Depths of Butte Mines"  
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