

Virginia City Territorial Enterprise
October, 1862

The Spanish Mine

This comprises one hundred feet of the great Comstock lead, and is situated in the midst of the Ophir claims. We visited it yesterday, in company with Mr. Kingman, Assistant Superintendent, and our impression is that stout-legged people with an affinity to darkness, may spend an hour or so there very comfortably.

A confused sense of being buried alive, and a vague consciousness of stony dampness, and huge timbers, and tortuous caverns, and bottomless holes with endless ropes hanging down into them, and narrow ladders climbing in a short twilight through the colossal lattice work and suddenly perishing in midnight, and workmen poking about in the gloom with twinkling candles—is all, or nearly all that remains to us of our experience in the Spanish mine.

The Comstock Mine

Yet, for the information of those who may wish to go down and see how things are conducted in the realms beyond the jurisdiction of daylight, we are willing to tell a portion of what we know about it. Entering the Spanish tunnel in A street, you grope along by candle light for two hundred and fifty feet—but you need not count your steps—keep on going until you come to a horse. This horse works a whim used for hoisting ore from the infernal regions below, and from long service in the dark, his coat has turned to a beautiful black color.

You are now upon the confines of the ledge, and from this point several drifts branch out to different portions of the mine. Without stopping to admire these gloomy grottoes you descend a ladder and halt upon a landing where you are fenced in with an open-work labyrinth of timbers some eighteen inches square, extending in front of you and behind you, and far away above you and below you, until they are lost in darkness.

These timbers are framed in squares or "stations," five feet each way, one above another, and so neatly put together that there is not room for the insertion of a knife-blade where they intersect. You are apt to wonder where the forest around you came from, and how they managed to get it into that hole, and what sums of money it must have cost, and so forth and so on, and you wind up with a confused notion that the man who designed it all had a shining talent for saw mills on a large scale. He could build the frame-work beautifully at any rate.

Whereupon, you desist from further speculation, and waltz down a very narrow winding staircase, and the further you squirm down it the dizzier you get and the more those open timber squares seem to whiz by you, until you feel as if you are falling through a well-ventilated shot-tower with the windows all open.

Finally, after you have gone down ninety-four feet, you touch bottom again and find yourself in the midst of the saw mill yet, with the regular accomplishments of workmen, and windlasses, and glimmering candles and cetera, as usual.

Now you can stoop and dodge about under the "stations," and get your clothes dirty, and drip hot candle grease all over your hands, and find out how they take those timbers and commence at the top of the mine, and build them together like mighty window sashes all the way down to the bottom of it; and if, after coming down that tipsy staircase, you can by any possibility make out to understand it, then you can render the information useful above ground by building the third story of your house to suit you first, and continuing its erection wrong end foremost until you wind up with the cellar.

You will also find out that at this depth the lead is forty-six feet wide, with its sides walled and weather boarded as compactly and substantially as those of a jail. And here and there in little recesses, the walls of the lead are laid bare, showing the blue silver lines traced upon the white quartz, after the fashion of variegated marble—this, in places, you know, while others, where the ore is richer, the blue predominates and the white is scarcely perceptible.

From these various recesses a swarm of workmen are constantly conveying wheel-barrow loads of quartz to the windlasses, of all shades of value, from that worth \$75 to that worth \$3,000 per ton—and if you should chance to be in better luck than we were, you may happen to stumble on a small specimen worth a dollar and a half a pound. Such things have occurred in the Spanish mine before now.

However, as we were saying, you are now one hundred and seventy feet under the ground, and you can move about and see how the ore is quarried and moved from one place to another, and how systematically the great mine is arranged and worked altogether, and how unsystematically the Mexicans used to carry on business down there—and you may get into a bucket, if you please, and extend your visit to the confines of purgatory—so to speak—if you feel anxious to do so; but as this would afford you nothing more than a glance at the bottom of a drain shaft, you could better employ your time and talents in climbing that cork screw and seeking daylight again.

And before leaving the mouth of the tunnel, you would do well to visit the office of Mr. Beckwith, the superintendent, where you can see a small cabinet of specimens from the mine which has been pronounced by scientific travelers to be one of the richest collections of the kind in the world. We shall have occasion to speak of the steam hoisting apparatus now in process of erection by the Spanish Company at an early day.