Rocky Mountain Guides Association

Idaho Springs & Argo Gold Mill FAM

May 25, 2022

**IDAHO SPRINGS / ARGO GOLD MINE & MILL FAM**

Nine members and a guest of RMGA participated in a familiarization tour (FAM) to Idaho Springs on May 25. Like the millions of others who swiftly pass or make stops in this historic community while traveling on Interstate 70, you have surely noticed the imposing [ARGO GOLD MINE & MILL](https://argomilltour.com/argo-tunnel/history/) structures along the mountainside. Speaking for myself, and perhaps other members on the FAM, there was much to learn about this place’s history, and future.

**THE HISTORY**

The ARGO dates to 1893. The name is drawn from Jason and the Argonauts of Greek mythology and their quest for the legendary golden fleece. The mill’s function was to crush and process gold-bearing ore that was collected from several mines serviced by the 4.2-mile-long Argo Tunnel, which began operating in 1913 following 17 years of construction. The tunnel was conceived by Samuel Newhouse as a way of collecting or consolidating mine diggings from multiple mines, and for continuously draining water from the mines. Draining the mines continues to this day.

The mill’s highest producing years were 1913 to 1917, a period during which $3 trillion dollars (today’s valuation) of gold and other minerals were processed. In addition to gold, the mining process also yielded copper, lead, zinc, and silver. A giant hammer mill literally pounded tons and tons of gold-bearing ore into smaller pieces from which gold could be leached from; a process similar in some respects to what is still used today by the Cripple Creek & Victor mine operated by Newmont Mining. The hammer mill was so loud it was known as Thunder in the Valley and could be heard 20 to 30 miles (sic) away! In fact, the 120 decibels emanating from the mill 24/7 was comparable to thunderclap, albeit a continuous one.

Production at the Argo Mill was slowed by World War II when machinery was confiscated by the U.S. government and scrapped to support the war effort, and ended forever on January 18, 1943, when a catastrophic flood surged through the tunnel. Toxic effluent laden with dissolved heavy metals and other contaminates continues to run from the tunnel, but drainage is now treated by an elaborate system required by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) that went online is 1995.

**THE FUTURE**

In the months and years ahead the Argo site will undergo a huge transformation, a convergence between history and outdoor recreation. Mine owners, in partnership with the City of Idaho Springs and other agencies are redeveloping the surrounding area with trails, a gondola that will transport riders on a 1.2-mile-long line to the mountain 1,300 feet above the mill, and outdoor entertainment mall of sorts, and eventually a deluxe, boutique hotel. The trail will be the first to open in June 2022. The gondola, featuring 27, 8-passenger cabins is expected to be complete by May 2023, and projects ridership of between 500 – 700 thousand per year. The Greenway bicycle & recreation trail which parallels I-70 and U.S. 6 through Clear Creek Canyon will connect to and complement outdoor-centric experiences. Mine tours will continue.

Exciting times are ahead for the iconic Argo, and for one of Colorado’s most historic mining communities.

by Steve Kaverman

[Tourismchampion.com](http://www.tourismchampion.com)