

## THARS SILVER IN THEM THAR HILLS!

Text & Photos by Virginia Keeley



First and foremost, we want to say a huge THANK YOU to **Sam Macaluso**, **Drew McGregor** and **Joe Riney** at the Nevada Mining Association and **Robbie Anderson** and the entire Coeur Rochester Mine operation for an informative and comprehensive look at the workings of a silver mine in the twenty-first century. Also, to our driver, **Dave** who gave us a safe, comfortable ride deserves a special thanks .

We were very fortunate on Saturday to have a beautiful day for the hour and a half drive from the Nevada Mining Association offices in Reno to our destination at the Coeur Rochester Silver Mine east of Lovelock, NV.

After leaving I-80, we followed the winding road through the hills for 13 miles into the canyons leading to the open-pit mining operation. It was a scenic drive with wonderful rock formations and, as if on cue, a herd of pronghorn headed to their drinking hole. The question by one of our members was, "How did people ever discover silver way out here?" **Joe Riney** explained that they just followed the old prospector's diggings. As we rockhounds know, there is not a lot of land in Nevada that hasn't been explored.

Upon arrival, we were escorted into the Security office where we were issued our hard hats, safety glasses and safety vests to be worn for the duration of our visit.

**Robbie Anderson**, geologist for Coeur Rochester, took us through a safety training followed by a slide show describing the history and operation of the mine and the geology of the area.

In the 1860s, a group of miners from Rochester, New York came to the area in search of gold. The silver vein that started the Rochester boom was discovered in

1912 by **Joseph Nenzel**. Some 2,000-3,000 people settled in small towns around the area. The first shipments of silver ore from Nenzel Hill (now Rochester pit) occurred in 1912. Coeur acquired the site in 1983 and began open-pit mining in 1986. From 1912 to 1924, this operation yielded approximately 8.7 million ounces of silver and 81,343 ounces of gold. Since 1986, Coeur Rochester has produced more than 155 million silver ounces and 1.6 million gold ounces. Robbie explained that the site yields less than 0.55 ounces per ton of silver and 0.0047 ounces per ton of gold.

The Coeur Rochester mine covers approximately 16,354 acres in Nevada and employs about 280 men and women.

After Robbie's presentation, we all loaded into the mine's vehicles to get a first-hand look at the pit, the equipment that is needed to run the operation and the surrounding area. The mine's profitability is based entirely on efficiency and volume. Therefore, digging and extraction is a 24 x 7 process. We visited an area that had been recently blasted to break up the surrounding dirt. The dirt is then loaded into huge dump trucks that hold about 165 tons. The trucks carry this dirt to the crusher where it is broken up into smaller pieces and fed into a conveyor leading to the leach fields. There the dirt is spread onto a thick layer of PVC and then sprayed with a mixture of water and cyanide to remove the silver and gold from the dirt and rocks. From there the solution goes to the processing plant.

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More Rochester Mine photos by Tom Nichols



Chuck Jackson (a big guy) and a mine shovel



Digger digging



And, of course, here's what happens when you tell Rockhounds that they can have samples!



Weird beauty

Before mining operations can even begin, a plan must be submitted and approved for the reclamation of the land once the mine is no longer operating. This plan includes removing all the equipment, regrading the land and replanting vegetation. The mine is monitored constantly for safety and compliance by both Coeur Rochester and the State Mining regulators.

The reclamation process brings to mind an [old saying](#) I once heard: "We do not inherit the earth from our parents; We borrow it from our children."



Take a bite of dirt & chew it up