

Hanging Valley (Milovich) Mine

Mijo "Mike" Milovich, a native of the mountains of Yugoslavia, arrived in the Nevada mining town of Goldfield in 1906. It was there that he learned the hand-steel mining technique before moving on to drilling and construction work in California. Health problems brought him to Bishop in 1912. He worked construction for the Southern Sierras Power Company and was a building contractor until 1932 when he inherited a gas station in lieu of a job payment.

When not managing the station, Milovich explored the mountains that reminded him of his rugged homeland. There he indulged in two of his favorite pastimes, deer hunting and prospecting. On returning from his many trips, if not in possession of a deer, he would have pockets full of rocks. In 1939, while on a deer-hunting trip in the high country above Horton Lakes, Milovich picked up some garnet-rich float in a broad, plateau-like valley on the western shoulder of Mt. Tom. The year before Bill Wasso, a fellow Yugoslav, had discovered nearby the scheelite-bearing rocks that would be the basis for the Tungstar Mine. Milovich had signed the "certificate of responsibility" for Wasso, who was not a citizen at the time. Upon finding that his rocks also contained scheelite, Milovich was soon back to the remote spot later named Hanging Valley. In partnership with another Yugoslav immigrant, Pete Jono, he located 10 lode claims on the west side of the valley and five millsite claims near Horton Lakes in the valley below.

In 1940, Milovich improved a crude trail up Horton Creek and packed out a 50-ton sample of the rock for a mill test. The results were encouraging which prompted Milovich to spend the next five years constructing a five mile road from Upper Wells Meadow to the 11,700 foot site. The biggest challenge was completing the last 14 switchbacks up the steep 2,000 foot-high escarpment between Horton Lakes and Hanging Valley. It was slow going as most of the work was done by hand with the aid of a small dozer. Ring bolts were placed in the bedrock and the dozer attached by cable for safety should it come too close to the road edge. Once completed, some of the switchbacks were so tight that vehicles had to back up between them on the climb up to Hanging Valley.

Jono sold out his interest after completion of the road, but Milovich hung on and developed the property further with various partners. This was done during the early 1950s when high tungsten prices made the operation economic. An adit driven into the talus slope on which the original discovery of tascite had been made, intersected ore which was subsequently mined. Milovich's original plan was to build a tramway from the mine down to a proposed mill site at Horton Lakes. When money to finance such a venture never materialized the ore was hauled out over the road and delivered to several mills in the Bishop area including U.S.V's operation at Pine Creek. Milovich's two sons Ray and Bob did most of the ore hauling. The ore was brought down the switchback road from Hanging Valley to Horton Lakes, using a dozer and a specially designed trailer that could negotiate the tight switchbacks. It was then transferred to dump trucks for the haul to town. The brothers hauled ore, at the rate of 20 to 30 tons per day, down the narrow

winding road for five summers, not losing any equipment in the process. A dozer was later lost off the hazardous road, but the operator was not injured. After the accident he was observed walking down the mountain past the Horton Lakes camp muttering, "I've done it now."

A camp to house workers was constructed at the mine and two log cabins were built near Horton Lakes in the valley below. Milovich hired an interesting assortment of miners to work at the remote high-altitude site. When some got a few days off, they would head into Bishop for a spree. Upon returning, the long rough drive back up the hill cleared up any drunkenness or hangovers that the miners might have.

The operation was usually worked in the summer months, but one year Floyd "Boots" Heedick and Jim "the Moose" Piana elected to stay and work the mine over the winter. They figured that living so far from town would keep them out of the Bishop bars. After several snowfalls piled up drifts around the mine, they decided that they had had enough and opted to come down the mountain. The snow was too deep for walking so Milovich hired pioneering Bishop pilot Bob Symons to air drop snowshoes and warm clothing to them for the long trip out.

In 1950, operators leased Hanging Valley to form the combined Tungstar-Hanging Valley Mining Company managed by Clarence Hall, who years earlier had been general manager at the Pine Creek Mine for U.S.V. This gave the Tungstar miners access to Milovich's road as the Tungstar tram was by now inoperable. Hall deaned up some ore left underground at both properties, shipping it to the U.S.V. mill. At the Hanging Valley Mine an adit driven downslope from the original adit intersected no ore, convincing the operators there was little hope for the future of the mine. When the government stockpile program ended in 1957, mining ceased at both properties. Milovich later sold the claims to movie actor Slim Pickins.

During its operating life the Hanging Valley Mine produced 15,000 tons of ore averaging 1.0% WO_3 . The log cabins built by Milovich still stand in a dramatic mountain setting adjacent to Horton Lakes – a reminder of the man and the mountains he so loved.