

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

HISTORIC SITE FILE: CABIN BRANCH PYRITE MINE SITE
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Potomac News
Friday, March 20, 1992



THE STROLLER

The Stroller received an interesting piece of mail from George Mason University this week.

At first, the envelope looked like it contained one of the hundreds of GMU press releases the Stroller receives each year from the state university in Fairfax.

When the Stroller picked up the envelope and prepared to rip it open with his usual finesse, he realized the envelope was empty.

OK, so some poor soul in the public relations department flubbed up. No big deal.

It was one less press release the Stroller had to read — or type.

If the Stroller were a math whiz, he would be able to tell those environmentally conscious readers out there, just how much time and energy — not to mention 29 cents for the stamp — was wasted on the letterless letter.

But the Stroller is not a math whiz, or even mathematically literate, so he'll save the calculations for the experts.

Speaking of which, be sure to check out the Regional Science Fair Saturday at Hynton High, 14051 Springs Road.

The community can view from 2 to 2:45 p.m. projects by seventh through twelfth graders, who are in fact math wizards.

See you there.

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The Stroller thinks this area is too quiet.

On a very uneventful Friday the 13th, the Stroller was asked to drum up some interesting police stories. No such luck. Not even an escaped pet rabbit or stolen pork chops.

No joke. A few nights ago, the Stroller heard of a man who walked into a local grocery store in Thiangle and stole exactly 12 pork chops.

The Stroller wonders why Stafford, Prince William County and the Manassas area are so quiet. Keep up the good work, folks.

The Stroller's plant loves to drink coffee. When the Stroller has drunk

There's 'fool's gold' along Quantico Creek

By GREGORY TRIPLETT
for the Potomac News

Mining fool's gold, or pyrite, was once a profitable business in the Dumfries-Triangle area. The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine, now included within the boundaries of Prince William Forest Park, was a thriving "company town" and a major source of income for area residents from 1889 to 1920.

Park visitors interested in a short hike can visit the site of the mine alongside Quantico Creek by hiking the park's fire road and trails leading there. Prince William Forest Park also schedules ranger-guided hikes to the mine site about once each month. Dates on Saturdays or Sundays are printed in the Turkey Caller, the park's monthly guide of activities.

Places

"Ranger-guided hikes take about one-and-one-half to two hours," Park Ranger Guy Tippet, one of the rangers who leads hikes to mine site.

Prince William Forest Park's main entrance is on Joplin Road in Triangle. There are two routes inside the park for hiking to the former mine.

Park maps are available at the ranger's booth near the park entrance or at the Pine Grove Visitor Center, as well as a Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine brochure.

One route may be reached by parking in the Pine Grove picnic area lot, then walking a trail identified with red markers, to a trail marked by light blue. This path is the longer of the two routes. Its distance is approximately 2 miles from the trail's origin at the picnic area to the Cabin Branch Mine site.

The origin of the other route to the Cabin Branch pyrite site can be reached by driving a bit farther into the park. After entering, take the first left turn onto the park drive, which loops through the heart of the forest. Approximately 3 miles along this hilly, winding road, watch for Parking Lot D on the left just after crossing a bridge over a stream.

A large white sign posted in the parking lot displays an enlarged black and white photograph of the pyrite mine in full operation before 1920, according to its caption. Numerous buildings, structures and equipment were built into a steep hillside above the creek.

CABIN BRANCH MINE

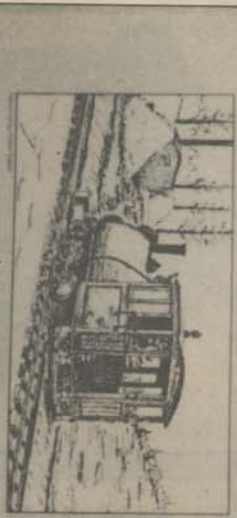
"Before I will give you another penny, I will let the mine fill up with water and let the steam jump out," Cabin Branch Mine Superintendent's response to workers' demand for a 90 cent per day pay raise in 1920.

So ended the days of one of Virginia's largest pyrite mines, the Cabin Branch Mine.

During its heyday, the mine employed up to 300 men, included over 70 buildings and produced over 1.5 million dollars' worth of pyrite ore used in the manufacture of soaps, gunpowder, and other products.

A visit to the mine site today will reveal remnants of its former activity. Though the shafts are filled in and the miners' buildings gone, an observant hiker can pick out the old railroad ties, foundations and roadbeds that were once part of a thriving company town.

The Cabin Branch Mine site can be reached by a 1-mile walk. Follow the Pyrite Mine Fire Road to the Cabin Branch Mine Trail which leads directly into the old mining area.



This display at the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine explains how pyrite was mined at the turn of the century.



By Robert Stewart-Potomac News

"There was nothing growing here up until a few years ago."

Marcia Keener
Prince William Forest Park

names, directions and distances. Cabin Branch Mine Trail is identified with orange marks on tree trunks. The mine site is four-tenths of a mile away, according to the marker.

Cabin Branch Mine Trail is narrower than the fire road, intended as a hiking path. This trail is also more hilly and winding. Hillsides, draws, and gullies slant off from both sides of the path. Hikers should be watchful of roots, rocks, and fallen branches in the path.

Nearing Quantico Creek, the trail courses downhill more steeply from this point. Many fragments of concrete, as well as more complete foundations of former mine buildings are visible on the leaf-covered ground.

At the bottom of the hillside, Cabin Branch Mine Trail ends near Quantico Creek. Here, the light blue marked trail runs east alongside the stream, and a concrete post marker at the junction indicates that the pyrite mine site is three-tenths of a mile downstream.

Rocky hillsides rise on the right all along the path. The trail ends at a broad, open area beside the creek. Remnants of foundations are partially buried on the slopes. According to Prince William Forest Park Management Assistant Marcia Keener, mining operations poisoned and destroyed plant life along the stream.

"There was nothing growing here up until a few years ago," Keener said. "The Park Service has put in some experimental vegetative plots along Quantico Creek which are progressing. We want to show the human impact on natural areas."

Many young pine trees have grown up in the flat area and on the hillside also.

Chunks of pyrite ore are scattered over the hillside and mine site. On many pieces, yellow specks glint. Although this shiny "fool's gold" resembles the actual element, genuine gold has a paler yellow hue, park officials said.