

Phil Hontz (GPANM Member #72, Life Member) found the writeup below in his archives. Keep in mind as you read it, it only covers up to 1992.

A BRIEF (BUT HONEST) HISTORY OF THE CLUB

The club was initially started in 1979 by a small group of people who met at a Gold Prospectors Association of America (GPAA) meeting here in Albuquerque, and found they had a common interest in the possibilities of finding placer gold in and around New Mexico. At first, they met in the backyard of one of the members (Joe Highfill) girlfriend, when their attempts to use the basement of a bank didn't pan out. The actual first meeting only had about 7 or 8 people there, some of which are no longer with us. Those still with us are honored by being designated the "founders" of this club, and they are: Joe Highfill, who did all the original organizing, meetings, mandatory keg of beer, and probably can be called the true "founder" of the club; Mildred Benton; Bill Winterbottom; James Rogers, who was elected first president of the club; and Bill Bixby. These are the only surviving founders we have, and they were finally awarded lifetime founders certificates in 1991, entitling them to full membership rights and prospecting privileges free for as long as they live.

The original group spread the word, and the second meeting was held in the same backyard, but this time shared the yard with a rattlesnake in a glass box, right next to the beer. Must have been a fun meeting, because this is where the 20 or so people who attended decided to formalize what was started at the first meeting.

Moving swiftly through the history, this group of people founded the club based on the simple fact that they wanted to meet regularly, help each other and others learn about gold prospecting, and have a regular social event where they could meet, teach, and swap tall tales. A copy of the original set of by-laws (circa 1979) are in the club archives, and are available for anyone to view. In the beginning, the club existed solely as a social group, they owned no claims, nothing, and existed on \$5.00 fee per year per member just to pay for the meetings, which by now had progressed to meeting in the basement of that same bank who had forgotten them before. Presidents and their terms were:

James Rogers, till Sept., 1981 Edit (deceased)

Gene Garret, till Sept., 1982 Edit(deceased)

Tony Wolf, till May, 1983 Edit(deceased)

Ron Buzzard, till April, 1984

Jim Stone, till June, 1984

Phil Hontz, till Sept., 1986

John Paton, till Sept., 1987

Lorraine Wegryzn, till Sept., 1988

George Morris, till Sept., 1989

Kerry Hrcicsina, till Sept., 1990

The membership fluctuated yearly, as it does today, but everyone pitched in and took their turn at what ever needed doing. Even those that had no idea what they were doing. If you didn't know before, you had the grand opportunity to learn now !! Great philosophy!

There were lots of field trips, and everyone competed to find a better spot to take the others to (up till 1987). Yearly pot-lucks, outings, etc. were the norm (again up to 1987). Several members were fortunate enough to own mining claims where some gold could actually be found, and the club went to these as often as they were allowed. The club also went to other peoples mining claims, as they were invited, until several people were caught high-grading these pieces of private property, and the club was then no longer welcome on these and many other properties. (circa 1984)

The club went through good times and bad times, had it's treasury "misappropriated" (at least twice that we know of), couldn't get anyone to hold office, used strong-arm tactics to get officers, operated for months without officers, and also had times when things were easy. It even had to suffer through having one of its former presidents throw away all the club papers, keys, checkbook and stubs, etc., along with the secretary (his wife) throwing away all the papers she had too! (1984) Talk about a mess for the next president to straighten out! But, the coffee was always hot, cookies or donuts or something were always there, free for the taking, and camaraderie was always high. If one member had a problem, you could be sure that the rest of the members could be counted on for sympathy or help, depending on what was needed. Some of the officers during the lean times accomplished what today seems like three years work in that single term. The help and support of the GPAA in the beginning is also partly responsible for the club's existence today, for without them, the people who founded this club may never have met or had the idea to form a club.

Since all club records, prior to 1984 are gone, except for a few old newsletters owned by several members, there is not much specific information that can be told here, just some generalities. After this time though, the club still has all the newsletters and records, and these are open to all members to be able to view for a more specific view of the club's past.

In the 1982-1983 period, along with the GPAA and the spin-off club, and The El Dorado Recreational Miners Association, the club co-sponsored the only large gold show that has ever been held here in New Mexico. It was held at the State fairgrounds in Albuquerque, lasted two days, and was generally considered a success, even though there has never been another one since. A panning booth was set up by the GPAA, showing people how to pan, and prizes were awarded for the best times and recovery. Also there were various equipment dealers, lots of demonstrations, etc. A small show, but interesting.

Around 1983, Bob Ault, one of the club members, passed on to the goldfield in the sky, and his widow gave the club his mining claims, as she knew he would want. These were the first claims that the club ever owned. The club knew that this member had been finding gold somewhere, but for years couldn't find any gold on the acreage that they now owned. In 1984 the club decided to sell the claims, and most members stopped going to them.

Also, the club was seriously discussing folding up and disbanding during this time period. The membership was down to around 12 members, there was no gold out there, it was too hard to find, and interest just wasn't there. Fortunately, there were a few that continued to go look on the club owned claims. Either they were real dedicated, had nothing else to do, or knew something that the rest of us didn't. Or, maybe, they just had the time and were willing to try when the rest of the club has given up. (We now know that they were stubborn, bored, and newcomers who didn't know that there wasn't any gold on that property !)

Of, course, at this time (1984-1985) is when gold was found on one of the claims given to us, and everyone scrambled to be the first to find a nugget. Regardless, this "discovery" started the infamous gold rush in the club. Some say this was a good thing, in that it increased membership, gave us a large treasury, and helped the club grow. Others say this was the beginning of the troubled times for the club. The claims were withdrawn from sale (1985), and everyone found gold easily in the beginning. The well that hadn't overflowed since before the club inherited it started to flow, and this made it a lot easier. The next two or three years were really a once in a life time experience as far as finding clean, crystalline gold, but all good things eventually come to an end, and most of the club members as of the time of this writing are finally coming to realize this truth. If only we had taken more pictures, kept better records, you know....

After several years, the well returned to it's normal status of not flowing, and the now claims were again dry. It was during this time in the clubs history that the character of the club definitely changed. The days of social events were on the decline. Most members now were there specifically for the gold they could get, and that was all that mattered. Gold Fever in it's worst had finally arrived, just like all the new members. The social meetings became a once per month 4 hour argument. Who had the rights to do this, who was allowed to do that. Who could and couldn't go here or there. At one point, the club considered limiting the amount of dirt a member was allowed to take off the claims, and that guests weren't allowed any dirt at all!

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed, and rules that supported the greedy gold fever ridden members did not become dominant. Yes, some people still managed to come out ahead, mainly because they had the means and time to utilize the claims more than others. Members who did not have 4 wheel drive vehicles were at a great disadvantage, and those who did have them got the majority of the gold on the claims. Sad times indeed for the club. Members who had been in the club since the beginning decided they wanted nothing to do with this type of prospector, and to this day, have not rejoined the club. Today, of course, the gold is still there, but it is a lot harder to find, and not near as plentiful. Some even think it is about played out, and that may be close to the truth, but the club needs to remember that looking and finding new areas is what the club is all about. There may be more on that group of claims, then again, there may nothing. We are supposed to be trying to teach how to find new deposits, or at least the principles, and not just grabbing all we can find.

There is a lot of acreage there to check out, plus the club owns more claims in other areas of the state which all have potential for gold. Flour gold can be found on virtually every one. Oh, yes, just in case you're interested, the gold that the club found was NOT the same deposit of gold that the former member had been finding. It turns out that he was getting that gold from another area completely, trying to keep it a secret, and while we know where that exact spot is today, it is not property that the club has any prospecting rights to, so to "spill the beans" wouldn't be fair to the legal property owner.

In 1986, the club decided to incorporate as a non-profit organization, and to register with the state, etc. For the next several years (1987 thru 1991), the club floated along in an uneventful state, until some irregularities in the officers duties, responsibilities, and actions brought to light some problems. It turns out that in 1991, when the club hired a lawyer to check out the status of the club's operating principles (by way of a single members investigations), the club found it needed to correct 6 years of illegal by-laws (because the club filed their old constitution as their by-laws, which hadn't been written for that purpose, and which were illegal as to content and format for state laws).

A new set of by-laws was proposed and passed (1991), and all new operating rules, etc., were ratified, discussed and passed by the membership. Also, in 1991, the club found out that when they had incorporated, they were supposed to start filing state and federal income tax forms, and had not done so for the last 6 years. This matter was straightened out, and of course, the club had to pay for their mistakes for both matters, literally and figuratively.

By now, when you have joined, everything should be running fine and smooth, (We hope !) and you now know a little of the club history from 1979 to early 1992. In view of the past, we urge you to find out just what you are entitled to, and don't let anyone take your fights away! Be active in the affairs of the club, participate if you can, and know what the various duties of the officers, etc are. This is the only way you can help make sure the club remains on bedrock for the future! (Like the way we snuck in a mining word?)

If you want to know more detail, check out the club library to see if there are any old records there to search thru, or talk to one of the founders, or even someone who has been in the club a long time. Most members are more than happy to tell you the history as they remember it! Remember though, to take everything you hear or read with a grain of salt! Not all of the notes or other information are complete, or tell the full story.

Have fun, find Gold, and Welcome to the wonderful world of Recreational Gold Prospecting !