

Future | Preservation Efforts

“Flume Fever”

Western Colorado Interpretive Association received funding from the J.M. Kaplan Fund and the John Hendricks Family Foundation to reconstruct a portion of the Hanging Flume. It will allow visitors to interpret and study the intricate construction and craftsmanship used to build the Flume. Reconstruction of the Historic Hanging Flume on the San Miguel River began the week of April 9, 2012 with the support of the BLM Uncompaghre Field Office. A film crew was on site to document the entire process. When the final project was constructed, a 48-foot section of the Flume stood completed along the side of the wall just as it had back in the 1890s.

Driving along the San Miguel River near the historic town site of Uravan in western Colorado, one has to study the cliffs to find remnants of a 10 mile long structure built 120 years ago. Constructed by the Montrose Placer Mining Company between 1889 and 1891, the Hanging Flume ended its service life in 1903 and has since succumbed to weathering, rock fall and plundering by locals in need of timber.

With much of the structure long gone and few existing original documents and photographs, myriad mysteries surround the construction process. Did the workers use a steam engine powered drill, or were the thousands of anchor holes in the sandstone drilled with only a hammer and chisel? How were the frames weighing more than 300 pounds moved into place? These and other questions have stirred up “**flume fever**” in residents of neighboring communities as well as those who keep returning to measure, survey, photograph and examine the mysterious structure known as the Hanging Flume.

It *is* known that at its completion, the Flume was a 10-mile long series of wooden and earthen troughs carrying 80 million gallons of water per day to gold mines.

In 2004, Vertical Access teamed with Robert Silman Associates, Anthony & Associates and Western Colorado Interpretive Association (et al.) to document representative sections of the Flume. Eight years later, VA technicians returned to the Flume to begin a new phase of work.



A 1/8 scale model of the Hanging Flume, built by Vertical Access.

Keith Luscinski and Donn Hewes were on site February 10-12, 2012 to gather more information on one particular “hanging” section, that is, a section that was built on the side of the cliff. Taking dimensions and recording deterioration, the two technicians gathered information to prepare for reconstruction of the 48-foot long section. The building process

will not only help answer questions about the original construction techniques, but also provide residents and visitors of the area with a representation of the original structure.

Ron Anthony, of Anthony & Associates, Project Manager for the reconstruction portion of the flume worked over the next several months to acquire the necessary timbers and arrange construction logistics. As part of the preparation process, VA constructed a 1/8-scale model of two sections of the Hanging Flume.

“The original flume was built with about 1.8 million board feet of timber and people would walk through the flume box and dismantle the side boards and the floor boards and that ended up in some of the communities around this area,” said project manager Ron Anthony.

For years afterward, the flume sat untouched, slowly being weathered by the environment until people realized that it should be preserved. Since then, groups have come together to discover the history of the flume and protect it. Thanks to private donations by the JM Kaplan Fund, the Hendricks Family Foundation and more along with the support of the BLM Uncompaghre Field office and Western Colorado Interpretive Association, a 48 feet of the original flume has been reconstructed for future interpretation. The revised construction documents will be made available on this site...stay tuned.