

Summary of Field Trip to Dixie Mine December 19, 2020 **In Maricopa County McDowell Mountain Regional Park**

Text below is based on observations by Dennis DuBose who participated on the Field Trip, with some additional research. It was written by Dennis DuBose who is responsible for all inaccuracies and photos (unless otherwise credited).

Dixie Mine is a popular hike destination from adjacent Fountain Hills, Arizona. It is in Maricopa County McDowell Mountain Regional Park. Besides the historic mine, there are nearby some prehistoric petroglyphs and some apparent remains of former ranching operations.

The round trip loop for this Field Trip hike was about 6 miles over an unimproved trail taking about four hours. Mostly the route was reasonably level or gently sloping, but there were parts of up-and-down crossing ravines and some limited but not easy scrambling up some rock slopes.



On the Trail in McDowell Mountain Regional Park

The following is not in the order of the hike but in order of most interesting first: Petroglyphs, Dixie Mine, and finally, Ranching Remains.

The first “Rock Art” encountered was a boulder bearing cupules.



Cupule Boulder Close Up (Photo by Marie Britton)

Cupules are small round ground-in “cups” in a rock face, bedrock, or boulder. They can occur on vertical, horizontal, or sloping surfaces. All three arrangements occur in the Gila-Maricopa County area. They are usually in arrays of cupules. They appear all over the world. Their purpose or significance is uncertain.

In this case the cupule array occurs on a sloping surface. The boulder could have moved since the cupules were made. On the back face are some petroglyphs, but they are indistinct and do not photograph well.

Elsewhere along the trail were a number of petroglyphs.



Climbing up to the Main Petroglyph Panel was Not Easy

The main petroglyph panel includes archaic and Hohokam petroglyphs and some historic ranching era additions.



Main Panel of Petroglyphs

For example, the interlocking “U” glyph in the upper left quadrant is believed to be an Archaic glyph. On the other hand, the P-Bar glyph “P –” in the upper right quadrant is the brand of the Pemberton Ranch, which formerly owned the site.



Believed to be an Archaic Glyph



P-Bar Brand of the Pemberton Ranch



Climbing Up Past the Main Panel was Not Easy Either

There were more Petroglyphs ...



The Column of Dots in this Petroglyph may Represent Someone Counting, Keeping a Tally



This Petroglyph may be a Horned Toad



Field Trippers Photographed Petroglyphs



Photo by Marie Britton



Boulder with Several Sets of Concentric Circles

There were more of these concentric circles on this boulder than are clearly visible. At least four show up here. The boulder did not have “varnish” on it to make these petroglyphs distinct. Also, they are deeply grooved, and the “lines” are wide. Some say this is characteristic of very old petroglyphs.

There were more scattered petroglyphs.



A Small Petroglyph Panel



Petroglyph Possibly Representing Rain



A Rainwater Pool Nearby, Weeks After Rain

Some petroglyphs were indistinct or “faded.”



Faded Stripes Petroglyph



Petroglyph Perhaps of a Snake

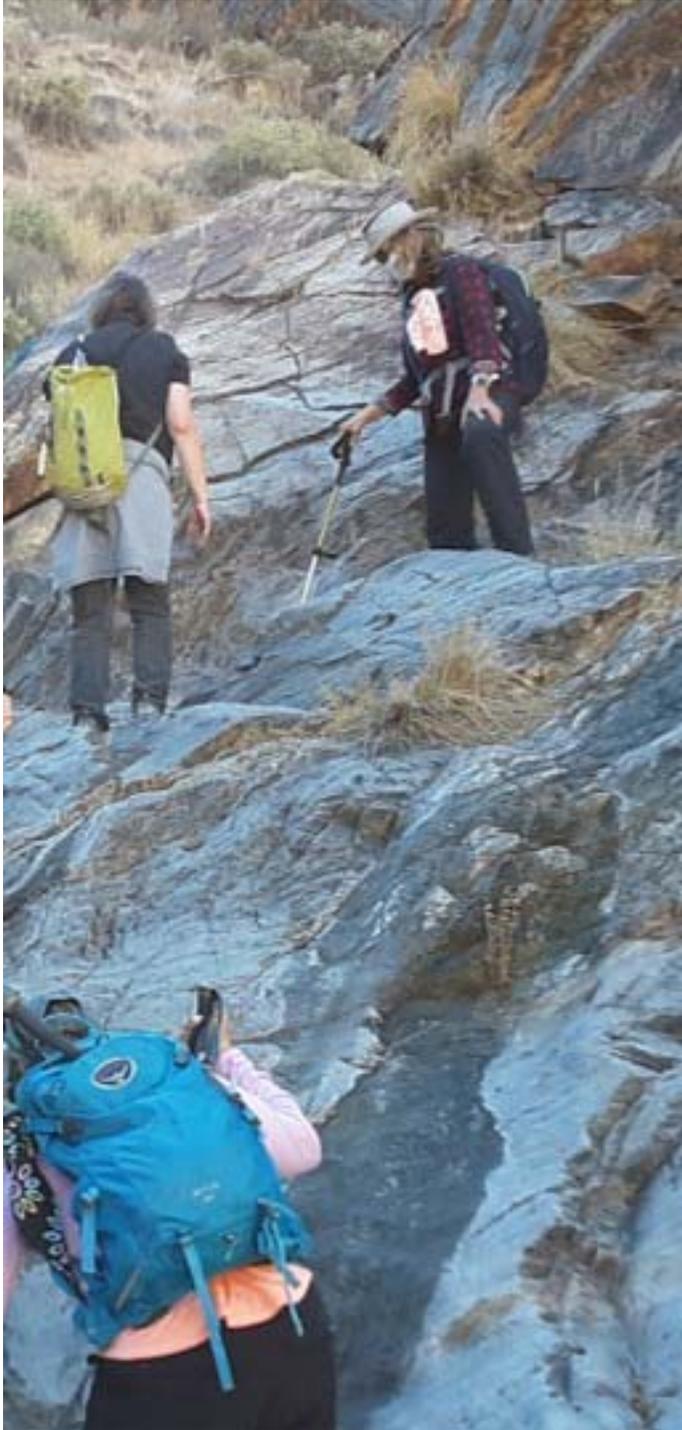


On the Trail ... Four Peaks Mountain is on the Horizon at the Upper Right



Lunch Break ... And then Back on the Trail





Clambering up Some Rock Slopes



Approaching the Dixie Mine Tailings

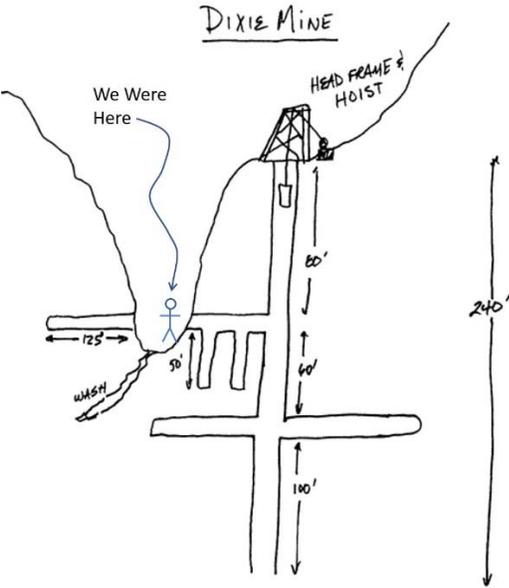


There is an intermittent spring near the lower entrance to Dixie Mine. It supports a small oasis of lush plant growth.



Barred Lower Entrance to Dixie Mine

It is home to bats and other animals. There are unexpected vertical shafts inside, making it dangerous to explore.



The early part of the hike led past several ruined structures that were presumably part of historic ranching operations in the area. The first several of these appeared to be involved in providing water for livestock. Two of these were near each other in a ravine through which the trail followed for a while. The third was just outside the ravine.

The first one encountered was a stone and cement “box” in the ravine. It was broken apart on one side. Speculation is that it was intended to capture and hold some rain water overflow in the ravine for livestock.



Presumed Stone and Cement Water Overflow Catchment Structure

The second such structure was not much further down the ravine. This one was better built of concrete and was in better condition, perhaps still capable of holding water.



Presumed Stone and Cement Water Overflow Catchment Structure

Perhaps someone with actual knowledge of historic ranching operations in the area can give a more accurate description of the purpose of these two structures.



Rusted Rectangular Steel Tank and Concrete Slab

The third item was a rusted rectangular steel tank just above the ravine bank. It was barely clinging to the edge of a concrete slab. Apparently, it formerly sat squarely on this support slab. Presumably, it once held water for storage, as the sides were too high for livestock to drink from. Perhaps water stored in it was drained down to fill the two lower structures in the ravine.

Some familiar local landmarks were visible in the distance along the hike.



Weaver's Needle



Field Trippers Pose with Four Peaks in the Background