

Claim Markers: An Accidental Collection

by Barbara "Blue" Boelter

Since moving to Jerome Arizona in 1984, I've learned that any hike can become a collecting experience here. I have old bottles on all my windowsills, a crowd of rusty tricycles in the yard, and some strange copper plaques on some of my doors. What are those you may wonder. I did too, but this is how it came about.



These copper plaques decorate the the antique doors in the author's home. One day while walking in open country that surrounds Jerome, near an old mine shaft and foundations of long-gone headframes, I took a little shortcut back to the main trail. It was the first time I'd gone down this little dry wash. Pushing through some brush, I ran into a steel pipe about 3' high. It didn't move, so I had to stop a moment. It was a 3" diameter pipe, filled with concrete and set in concrete. It was rusted and pitted with age, but as I grasped the top to go by, I felt something different on the back side. It was a smoother rectangle, rivetted to the pipe at top and bottom, invisible in its darkened color-match with the pipe. It was barely hanging on, the iron-based rivets being rusted through. With a slight tug, it came off in my hand. A touch of green on the back hinted at a composition of copper. It went in my pocket and back home with me.



As time goes on more of the copper tags are found in the hills around Jerome, Arizona. When I flattened out the pipe-curve and cleaned it up, hand-stamped letters and numbers showed up. I couldn't make any sense of it, but knew it must be mining-related. It was definitely pure copper, about 4 ounces of it, roughly 2" by 4". I had that thought: Hmm, I wonder if there are more of these out there?

Sure enough, next time I was out there, I spotted a similar pipe from a distance and made my way over to it. It bore the same type of plaque, so I pried on it with a pocket knife till it came free. I had begun a collection. I started carrying a multi-tool with me. Wondering if there was an alignment factor, I walked straight forward in a line set by the first two pipes. There, an equal distance away, in the middle of thick bushes, I found my third copper plaque.

