Madonna Mine Is Kept 'Alive'

By BERT HANNA
Denver Post Staff Writer

Koster, a well-to-do Salida insurance and real estate man, who has been interested in mining all his life, owns Silver Creek Lakes in a beautiful little mountain valley a few miles southwest of Salida.

There, besides establishing an exceptional habitat for fish and wildlife and a secluded retreat for his many friends, Koster has spent much of his spare time creating a replica of the famous old Madonna Mine which he is interested in the mine. Ores were transported from several miles away.

Silver Creek Lakes is a series of reservoirs which Koster built himself, each not more than 10 feet deep and surrounded in the summer by lush grass, transplanted lilies and mountain flowers.

The area is a feeding ground for deer and elk which come down from the surrounding hills late in the day. Ducks and other waterfowl rendezvous there. The ponds are well-stocked with trout for Koster's guests. There's a caretaker's house and near Koster's cabin is a large, enclosed patio.

Fascinating Feature

But the most fascinating feature is the replica of the old Madonna Mine which Koster has spent so much time restoring.

The authenticity of minute details within the mine entrance is accentuated by lengths of rail extending from the mine entrance and supporting an ore car and timber car which date back to the turn of the century.

Timbers atop the entrance have been dated to 1884, while some of the ore buckets on display, filled with ore, can be traced back more than 80 years.

Tools of the mining industry of the 19th century, when the Madonna Mine was one of the outstanding producers of metals in the area, are displayed at the mine. Some are unlike anything found today.

All the mining apparatus has come from the original mine.

Koster was interested financially with the Utze Lode Co. which purchased half an interest in the Madonna Mine workings in 1942. The mine was shut down for good in 1953.

The history of the Madonna goes back to 1878 when two prospectors found what looked to be a good gold prospect. The next year, they sold their interests in two claims. Development began.

The mine location is at the foot of Monarch Pass on the Eastern Slope at the old and long-abandoned mining camp of Monarch. The mine in its heyday employed more than 300 men and Koster says the town once had a population of 2,000.

When a shaft was sunk in 1890, ore ran very high in silver and lead. A group of New York people purchased a two-thirds interest in the mine. Ore was transported more than 100 miles to the nearest smelter at Pueblo. Gradually, more claims were acquired and developed in the area.

$10 Million in Ore

The records show that more than $10 million in rich ore was taken from the Madonna. There was never a mill at the mine because the ores were of such high quality that they could be shipped to the Pueblo smelter in raw form.

At one point, an ore called sulphuretts was found which ran 57 ounces in gold per ton, 6,331 ounces in silver and 28 per cent lead. The value of this ore on the present market would be about $8,000 per ton. Some sacks of the ore were "highgraded" — stolen en route from mine to smelter.

Old pictures of the Madonna Mine show the well-designed town of Monarch. Housing was wooden and seemingly permanent. The winters were harsh and the only method of communication was a snowshoe trip of several miles to the nearest town, Maysville.

Then came a terrible snowslide on Madonna Hill. The snow came down Eclipse Gulch and virtually wiped out the entire town, causing considerable loss of life.

An interesting recorded sidelight of the snowslide shows that a little baby was lost for a day or two afterward. The baby had been sleeping on a mattress and, when found, the mattress was rolled up around the baby. The infant was reported to be in good physical condition.

The ores there have now gone to zinc-carbonates. There is no way to upgrade zinc or the mine would be in production today.
CROSS-SECTION
THROUGH
PARK UTAH MINE
LOOKING NORTH 60 WEST
STRATIGRAPHIC DIAGRAM ACROSS THE PARK CITY ANTICLINE LOOKING NORTH 15° WEST