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U.S. Department of the Interior

Death Valley National
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Death Valley News Release

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Historic Keane Wonder Mine Area Closed Death Valley National Park

The Keane Wonder Mine area is closed to all foot and vehicular access. "Public safety is the primary reason for the closure of the historic Keane Wonder Mine area," explains Superintendent JT Reynolds. The abandoned mines and ruins are over 100 years old and now pose a serious safety risk to visitors due to the potential for rock collapse and slides and the unstable condition of the historic tramway and other wooden features. The closure is now in effect and the area will remain closed until the site can be made safer while preserving its historic features. The closed area is from the junction of the Beatty Cut-off Road and Keane Wonder Road east to Chloride Cliff. This includes the Keane Wonder Mine, Mill and spring, Cyt's Mill, and the Big Bell and King Midas mines.



Over the past 100 years scavengers and the natural elements of the desert have taken their toll on the features of the Keane Wonder Mine which was one of the most successful gold mines in Death Valley. Miners were following a rich vein of ore that was deposited in fractures in the metamorphic rock. Tunnels were dug and side tunnels were added, always removing as much ore as possible. Eventually the mine became a series of chambers supported by pillars. So much material was removed that the entire mountain slope above became unstable and started to collapse. Besides the obvious danger of entering a crumbling mine, just being on the surface above or near the mine has become a safety hazard. Like the crumbling mines the historic structures of the Keane Wonder Mill and tramway are suffering from rot, rust, and decay. These structures are in danger of collapse and need to be stabilized. Additionally preliminary testing of soils near the mill site has shown elevated levels of lead and

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mercury. To extract the gold from the ore, cyanide and other toxic chemicals were used at the Keane Wonder Mill site. Not far from the parking area are the remains of the tanks used in the cyanide process and fine tailings that remained after processing. Erosion is constantly exposing this material and the windblown dust can be a hazard.

The ruins of the site have attracted visitors curious about Death Valley's mining legacy since before it became a national park. So why close the mine now when these conditions have existed for years? In light of the recent interest in mitigating safety hazards at abandoned mines on public lands throughout the West a more thorough inspection of the Keane Wonder site revealed that the remains are in an advanced state of collapse and that the erosion of surface features near the mill site has exposed other hazards associated with the cyanide processing.

It is not so much a question of whether or not someone might get hurt at the site, but due to the level of decay in the mines and in the ruins it has become more of a question of **when** will someone get hurt. This has prompted the park to close the site until funds and staffing are available to correct the safety concerns. Because of the increased national awareness among federal agencies of the dangers of abandoned mines, and as a result of their stated commitment to address the problem, it is hoped that funding will become available within the next few years.

For more information about the Keane Wonder Mine and other historic mining sites within the park, visit the park's web site at www.nps.gov/deva.

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