



THE BIG MINE AT CRESTED BUTTE



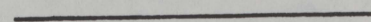
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INTRODUCTION

The town of Crested Butte began its early history as a supply town for the silver and gold camps of Irwin, Gothic, Ruby, Floresta, and other camps in the Elk Mountains, north and west of Crested Butte. Between 1879 and 1882 many prospectors came to the Elk Mountains. In 1879, alone, ten thousand prospectors swarmed into the Gunnison country.¹ This silver and gold mining population was an unstable and transient population. The great silver boom was short-lived, and in 1883 it collapsed leaving depressed towns, environmental scars, indebted miners, and bankrupt investors. The silver panic of 1893 caused more financial havoc in the silver camps; the price of silver plummeted to sixty-two cents an ounce.² Because the United States government would not take the necessary steps to support the metal, the fate of the silver mines was sealed.³ The mines were abandoned and the miners went away.

In the high and majestic Elk Mountains of Colorado, neither silver nor gold, but unglamorous and humble coal became the economic strength and wealth of Crested Butte after the gold and silver rush days. Coal deposits were first discovered in 1877 near the future site of Crested Butte by the Jennings brothers of Leadville, Colorado.⁴ The following year, Howard F.

¹Betty Wallace, Gunnison Country (Denver: Sage Books, 1960), p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Ibid.

⁴Duane Vandenbusche, "Crested Butte, a Town Named Desire," Colorado Country Life, April 1975, p. 6.

Smith, who brought in the first sawmill to Crested Butte, purchased some coal land and established the town site of Crested Butte. Howard F. Smith and his partners called the town site the Crested Butte Town Company. The town of Crested Butte was later incorporated in 1880.⁵ Two months later, Howard F. Smith sold much of his coal land to the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Company and the Colorado Coal & Iron Company, which later became the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company (CFI).⁶ In 1882, the Colorado Coal & Iron Company opened the Jokerville Mine above Crested Butte. After the "Disaster of 1884" the Jokerville Mine was closed, and CFI opened the Big Mine a decade later.

Coal mining was a stable, economic endeavour year around in Crested Butte; and except for a few strikes, coal mining lasted for nearly seventy years. The coal mining economy was very different from the ephemeral economy of gold and silver mining.

CFI owned most of the coal mines in and around Crested Butte. The Big Mine, being the largest and most productive mine in Crested Butte, employed 400 miners, or most of the coal miners in Crested Butte. In its heyday, it produced over 100,000 tons of coal per year.⁷

Crested Butte was renowned all over the country for its very high grade of bituminous coal, and Crested Butte anthracite was the only

⁵LeRoy R. Hafen, "Colorado Cities--Their Founding and Origin of Their Names," The Colorado Magazine, 9:173, September 1932.

⁶R. D. Aspinall, Early History of Crested Butte (unpublished master's thesis, Western State College, 1956), p. 6.

⁷"Coal Mines at Crested Butte in Full Swing," Gunnison News-Champion, August 5, 1937.

3

large source of anthracite west of the Pennsylvania coal fields.⁸ Nowhere else in the world was the discovery of coking coal and anthracite in such close proximity.⁹ Many of the newspapers in the region at the time celebrated Crested Butte's abundant and high grade coal. An article called "Coking at Crested Butte" in the Denver Tribune on June 10, 1882, stated that Crested Butte coking coal would be favorably competitive with English coke. Also in the Gunnison Daily Review of October 12, 1881, an article claimed that the coking coal and anthracite at Crested Butte could exceed the Pennsylvania coal fields.

From the information above, it may be concluded that there was an abundant and easily accessible supply of coal and coking coal at Crested Butte. Coking coal was in great demand for the reduction of iron ore, a process necessary for the production of steel. Coal was being used as a source of fuel by the CFI steel works at Pueblo, and coal was also sold by CFI to other industries.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the reasons why CFI closed the Big Mine in Crested Butte on May 29, 1952 after sixty-eight years of operation. The closing of the mine had a devastating effect on the town of Crested Butte as many families were compelled to move away to seek work elsewhere. Crested Butte very nearly became a ghost town. The secondary purpose of this paper will be a discussion of the consequences that occurred in Crested Butte as a result of the closing of the Big Mine in 1952.

⁸Robert L. Brown, Ghost Towns of the Colorado Rockies (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1968), p. 95.

⁹Gunnison Daily Review, November 8, 1881.

There are multifarious reasons for the closing of the Big Mine in Crested Butte. Some of the reasons which have been attributed, by the author, to the closing of the mine include the following: the demise of the railroads, the economic value of coal versus new fuels, the rise of the labor unions and subsequent strikes, the inaccessibility of Crested Butte, changing CFI policies, and other factors. Most businesses close down an operation for economic reasons. The question is, what causes a business operation to become uneconomical? The thesis of this paper is that the combined detrimental economic effect of the factors mentioned above made coal mining at the Big Mine in Crested Butte economically prohibitive.

Before discussing the factors that led to the closing of the Big Mine, the author will describe the establishment of CFI in Crested Butte, and some pertinent history of the company and will conclude with a description of Crested Butte after the evacuation of the Big Mine in 1952.

COLORADO FUEL & IRON COMPANY IN CRESTED BUTTE

Howard F. Smith and his business partners, Colonel W. H. Holt and Mr. George H. Holt sold one-half interest in the town site of Crested Butte to the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Company and the Colorado Coal & Iron Company for economic reasons, only two months after the town of Crested Butte was incorporated in 1880.¹⁰ At that early date, the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Company, and the Colorado Coal & Iron Company were really one and the same company; the president of both companies was

¹⁰Aspinall, op. cit., p. 6.

5

General William Jackson Palmer. General Palmer first organized Colorado Coal & Iron Company in 1880,¹¹ and it became a subsidiary of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Company. Later the company combined with other companies to become the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company.¹²

General Palmer of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Company was interested in developing the bituminous and anthracite coal deposits at Crested Butte for the use in the Colorado Coal & Iron Company steel works at Pueblo. In 1881, the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Company laid down a narrow gauge railway from Gunnison to Crested Butte.¹³ The extraction of gold and silver decreased considerably in Crested Butte after 1883; coal became the dominant extractive industry.

Colorado Coal & Iron Company purchased coal land, one mile west of Crested Butte, and opened the Jokerville Mine in 1882. It was a very productive mine as it produced twenty-two cars of coal and four cars of coke daily;¹⁴ but it had a gas problem which resulted in the "Disaster of 1884." After the mine explosion, the Jokerville was closed. The Big Mine, that opened a decade later in 1894, was a reopening of the old Jokerville vein at a point sixty feet above the old workings.¹⁵ Colorado Coal & Iron Company also built 150 coke ovens south of town, to make coke

¹¹Lee H. Scamehorn, Pioneer Steelmaker in the West: The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, 1872-1903 (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Co.), p. 4.

¹²Ibid., p. 5.

¹³Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴Vandenbusche, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁵Aspinall, op. cit., p. 29.

from coal for the reduction of iron ore.

6

Crested Butte became a prosperous town with the stable economy of coal. A city hall, churches, school, and business buildings were built. In 1883, the town's gaslights and a community water system was installed.¹⁶ The coal industry in Crested Butte was a year around economy, compared to the gold and silver mining economy that was seasonable in most camps. When Crested Butte was a supply town for the gold and silver camps, there was such a decline in the population during the winter months that many merchants left for warmer climates. The sparse winter population in the Elk Mountains is characterized by Betty Wallace in Gunnison County:

W. A. Gillaspay kept the store in Irwin for L. L. Harding the winter of 1881-1882. That is he kept the key, and whenever anyone wanted anything, he hunted up Gillaspay to go to the store to wait on him.¹⁷

Colorado Fuel & Iron Company was making quite a profit from the Big Mine in Crested Butte. The Pueblo Company and the Bulkley Company each had a mine in Crested Butte, but the Big Mine was producing, by far, the most bituminous coal. In 1900, it was producing thirty-five to forty cars of bituminous coal daily, whereas the Bulkley and the Pueblo mines were only producing four cars a day, individually.¹⁸

That coal was in demand is not to be disputed; but also from 1879 to 1920, there was an extraordinary development of coal mining in

¹⁶Brown, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁷Wallace, op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁸George Sibley, A Crested Butte Primer (Crested Butte Society, 1972), p. 7.

7

Colorado due to the truly liberal political and economic climate for industry in the West. There was the freedom to own, invest, and politically control freely, without heavy taxes and regulations. There was also a cheap immigrant labor force. Within this economic environment, CFI became prosperous in an era of great railroad construction. CFI supplied the West with steel rails and coal.

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF COAL VERSUS NEW FUELS.

From 1850 to World War I, coal was the only fossil fuel in use. The United States coal industry enjoyed a steady growth period until 1918.¹⁹ After 1910, the share of coal in the total energy consumption of the United States began to decline.²⁰ During the Depression of 1931 to 1940, coal showed a decline or remained static, following the trends of other national mining patterns.²¹ During World War II, there was an increase in the demand for coal, from 1940 to 1945.²² After 1947, coal had a permanent downward trend.²³ It can be concluded that the demand for coal was decreasing in an absolute sense, only to be in demand in a relative sense, during war times.

¹⁹Richard L. Gordon, Coal in the U. S. Energy Market: History and Prospects (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath & Co., 1978) p. 21.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Glen O. Saxon, A Summary of Colorado and Its Mining Industry, 1859-1959 (Denver: Mining and Petroleum Committee, Colorado State Chamber of Commerce, 1959), p. 9.

²²Ibid.

²³Gordon, op. cit., p. 21.

The most obvious and direct cause in the decline of ocal production, and the subsequent closing of the Big Mine at Crested Butte, was the increasing use of alternate fuels. Petroleum and natural gas were being discovered and replacing coal at a much more economical price, both as industrial and domestic fuels. Coal had been used as a fuel for railroads; but since the 1930's the railroads had converted to the use of diesel fuel or electric power.²⁴ By 1945, petroleum was the fourth largest producer of mineral wealth in Colorado.²⁵ The coal market had also been undermined by the decline of the precious-metal mining industry which used both coal and coke.²⁶ In 1910, the decline of the smelting industry had a dramatic impact on CFI, the region's largest manufacturer and distributor of coke.²⁷

DEMISE OF THE RAILROADS

Not only was coal in competition with petroleum and natural gas for all uses, but coal and coke's exclusive customer, the railroad, was also on the decline and after 1935 there was no longer a demand for steel rails for railroads, hence there was reduced need for coke in the production of steel for rails.²⁸

²⁴Encyclopedia Americana, 1979 ed., s.v. "Coal," by C. L. Christenson.

²⁵Saxon, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁶Scamehorn, op. cit., p. 169.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸George S. McGover and Leonard F. Guttridge, The Great Coalfield War (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972), p. 342.

It might be easy to explain that CFI closed the Big Mine in Crested Butte for the simple, straightforward economic reason of the decline in the demand for coal; however, that would not explain the whole picture. There were more subtle economic reasons which caused the eventual closing of the mine. Why did coal mining become economically prohibitive in Crested Butte? One reason was the changing relationship between the coal miner and the coal operator. There was a national labor movement, and miners were demanding higher wages, more benefits, and safer working conditions. These demands, when satisfied, were going to cost CFI, and the other coal companies more money, consequently raising the costs of coal production.

One of the factors that kept coal economically feasible to mine during the industrial expansion of the early twentieth century was cheap immigrant labor. Most of the mining laborers were immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe.²⁹

During the first quarter of the century, Crested Butte's population was mainly a large, unskilled immigrant labor force of Italians, Germans, but mainly of Croats and Slovenians from Yugoslavia.³⁰

CFI often did not pay these workers in money wages; the workers were paid in "script" which could only be cashed at the Company Store.³¹ With this system of payment, the company did not lose any profit through wages as the script was organized and owned by CFI.

²⁹Sibley, op. cit., p. 9.

³⁰Ibid., p. 10.

³¹Ibid., p. 39.

16

The coal digger's wages were determined by the amount of commercially marketable coal that the miner brought out of the mine. The coal digger was obligated to wash the coal of its impurities before it could be weighed. This labor work was called "dead work" because the miners were not paid for this labor; they were paid only for the clean coal.³² This "dead work" also included such jobs as the following: displacement of rock layers, timbering when the roof was in need of repair, and clearing fallen debris.³³ This "dead work" was a source of deep frustration for the miners; later, the miners demanded compensation pay for "dead work".

The company also saved money in wages by deliberately underweighing a miner's load of coal.³⁴ Wages in the Crested Butte coal fields were often at starvation levels.³⁵ George McGovern in his book The Great Coalfield War, describes the reaction of the coal miner:

As much a part of him as the pick he wielded was the tormenting conviction that he could never be sure of being fully paid for what he had sweated and produced. There was no way of knowing. He had no trustworthy check-weighman. Daily he felt cheated.³⁶

There was a coal miners' law of 1905, limiting the hours of toil for underground workers, but the law was weak and was not enforced.³⁷ In

³²McGovern and Guttridge, op. cit., p. 20.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 21.

³⁵Aspinall, op. cit., p. 10.

³⁶McGovern and Guttridge, op. cit., p. 21.

³⁷Ibid., p. 22.

Colorado, there was no workman's compensation law for the disabled miner or compensation for a deceased miner's family. In the southern coal fields of Colorado, most of the public officials were put in office by CFI, or they were CFI employees. As a result of this political control, the usual practice of the coroner's office was to record a miner's death in the mine as the fault of the victim. Thus CFI officials could escape the company policy of providing for the surviving family, had the death been ruled the fault of the company.³⁸

The coal industry was the least regulated of the mining industries. As soon as the workers started demanding higher wages, mine regulations and safety standards, the price of extracting coal from the coal mines increased considerably. It became increasingly less economical for CFI to mine coal in remote places such as Crested Butte.

COLORADO COAL STRIKE OF 1913-1914

These contributions led to a formal request by the miners in the southern coal districts, that certain provisions of the state--that they, "the miners, be allowed to select the men who weigh their loads of coal"--be enforced.³⁹ John D. Rockefeller, Jr. who owned the controlling stock in CFI, would not negotiate with the miners, so the miners went on strike September 23, 1913.⁴⁰

³⁸Ibid., p. 33.

³⁹Leon Stein and Philip Taft, eds., Massacre at Ludlow: Four Reports (New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1971), intro.

⁴⁰Ibid.

12

This strike also involved the miners in Crested Butte and disrupted CFI operations at the Big Mine in 1913 and 1914. The miners had also gone on strike in an attempt to win recognition of the United Mine Workers of America as their bargaining agent to negotiate the demands for them.⁴¹ Acting in the name of Colorado coal miners, the union delegates met at Trinidad on September 15, 1913 to issue the following demands:

(1) recognizing the United Mine Workers of America as bargaining agent for the employees, (2) operators were to increase wages 10 per cent for miners on tonnage, (3) give an equal increase to coke-oven men, (4) eight-hour work day in all mines and ovens, (5) coal diggers were to be given compensation for narrow and dead work, (6) check-weighmen elected by miners were to be hired at all mines, (7) workers were to be granted the right to trade at any store, choose their own boarding houses and physicians, (8) mining laws were to be enforced, and (9) the mine guard system was to be abolished.⁴²

CFI officials rejected the union's demands. Shocked by the strike and the Ludlow Massacre of April 20, 1914, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. asked the Rockefeller Foundation to investigate ways of restoring peace and harmony to the Colorado coal fields. The investigation produced the "Rockefeller Plan" or the "Industrial Representation Plan." This program was supposed to guarantee to all mine workers, through a system of representation, the right to bargain collectively, have annual confer-

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Scamehorn, op. cit., p. 171.

ences with management, and provide miners with welfare benefits.⁴³ This program of welfare capitalism lessened antagonism for a time, but did not eliminate the miner's periodic strikes. For the next seven years, there were seven coal miners' strikes, four involving the CFI miners.⁴⁴ Written in the "Rockefeller Plan" was the company's decision to do the following: to do away with the script system, increase wages, increase welfare, improve medical care and provide better housing. These changes were made in the old company paternalistic way, and the employees' representatives had no power.⁴⁵

The miners became dissatisfied with the company union, and in 1933, the majority of the miners declared by ballot that they favored an independent union.⁴⁶ The CFI miners joined the United Mine Workers, In 1935, the Wagner Act outlawed the practice of company unions.⁴⁷

Due to the demands of the United Mine Workers, also the new state and federal regulations, labor problems were costing CFI more money as it had to do the following: pay their miners higher wages, adhere to safety standards, and pay workmen's compensation. The days of cheap labor and unregulated coal mining were coming to an end.

In Crested Butte, the 1913-1914 strike lasted eighteen months.

⁴³Ibid., p. 173.

⁴⁴McGovern and Guttridge, op. cit., p. 341.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 342.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

The strike in Crested Butte and the southern Colorado coal camps almost 14
paralyzed the CFI coal industry, and the railroads that were dependent on
coal for fuel.⁴⁸ By 1930, the CFI workers in Crested Butte had achieved
complete unionization.⁴⁹

The interesting fact is that the decade between 1930 and 1940 also
marked the beginning of the end of Crested Butte as a coal-producing
community. As soon as wages began the approach to a reasonable level
in Crested Butte, the price of coal began to creep upward; and the CFI
Pueblo steel mills began looking for cheaper fuel, closer to home.⁵⁰

By 1940, CFI started to cut back production at the Big Mine. With
cheap labor a thing of the past, the demand for coal decreasing, and
transportation becoming more expensive, CFI closed the Big Mine at
Crested Butte in 1952.

CRESTED BUTTE'S INACCESSIBILITY

The factors that made Crested Butte coal economically feasible,
was the great demand for high quality coal, and the low costs of coal
mining in the early part of the twentieth century. In an absolute sense,
Crested Butte was too remote and inaccessible from Pueblo, to make coal
mining economically practicable. Coal mining became financially prohibitive
in Crested Butte due to the shrinking market, the increase in the cost of

⁴⁸Aspinall, op. cit., p. 30.

⁴⁹Sibley, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 41.

CHANGING COLORADO FUEL & IRON COMPANY POLICIES

In response to the rising costs of coal mining, CFI changed its ownership and company policies over the years. One of these policy changes eventually resulted in the decision to close the Big Mine at Crested Butte on May 29, 1952.

In 1902, CFI ran into financial difficulties. The steel plant at Pueblo was modernized at a cost far exceeding the company's resources. The Denver banks would make no more loans and CFI was going bankrupt. Later in 1902, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. invested six million dollars in CFI stock, and bailed the company out of its financial insolvency.⁵⁴ CFI was no longer an independently owned regional business, but one of many national industries with a national outlook. The decisions of the company were made in New York, not Pueblo; Rockefeller became a sort of "absentee landlord." The company was privately controlled by Rockefeller - to the angry dismay of the countless citizens of Colorado, who said that Colorado had been secretly "sold out" to Wall Street.⁵⁵

In the early part of the twentieth century, CFI derived its profits mainly from the sale of coal and coke; the metallurgical departments, when in operation, usually incurred losses.⁵⁶ After the demand for coal declined,

⁵³McGovern and Guttridge, op. cit., p. 6.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁶Scamehorn, op. cit., p. 5.

and the temporary increased demand for coal during World War II subsided, CFI had to change its company emphasis from coal and coke production, to the manufacturing of light steel products.

The Big Mine had enjoyed prosperity when mobilization for World War II required maximum production of all fuel resources. After World War II, many mines had surplus coal, but no demand for it; CFI closed many of its mines. The Big Mine was eventually closed in 1952.

The Rockefeller stock still controlled CFI until the eve of Christmas 1944, when Charles Allen, senior partner in the New York investment firm of Allen & Company, bought all of Rockefeller's CFI stock. Charles Allen was also president of Wickwire Spencer Steel Company, an east coast firm.⁵⁷

This merger of the two companies made it possible for CFI to expand its operation of the manufacturing of light metal products. CFI also acquired industrial property in the East in which to expand its operations.

After World War II, American manufacturing companies became very vulnerable to competition from foreign manufacturers. The lower priced imports of wire products undermined the domestic light metal market. CFI was once again experiencing financial difficulties. CFI had to sell many of its eastern properties and permanently close some coal mines in Colorado; one of those mines was the Big Mine at Crested Butte.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 174.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 175.

CONCLUSION

The author has discussed individually, for the sake of analysis, the economic factors that led to the decision, by CFI to close the Big Mine; but in reality, all these factors were occurring simultaneously. The additional burden of their combination increased the economic infeasibility of coal mining at Crested Butte. The thesis of this paper is that the economic reasons discussed above had an influence in the decision of CFI to close the Big Mine in Crested Butte. The decline in the use of coal, the demise of the railroad, the rise of the labor unions, Crested Butte's remoteness, new federal and state coal regulations, changing economic times, and international and national economic and political events were all factors which created distinct economic consequences that influenced the CFI decision to close the Big Mine in Crested Butte on May 29, 1952.

CRESTED BUTTE AFTER MAY 29, 1952

On May 29, 1952, the Big Mine closed in Crested Butte after sixty-eight years of operation, and ended the town's main source of income. Also with the closing of the mine, was the closing of 150 coke ovens that had operated twenty-four hours a day for several years. With the closing of the mine, the town's working population of more than a hundred men became unemployed overnight. Many young families had to move away and find new work. Many miners and their families lived in company houses. When CFI closed the mine, these families had to vacate their homes. The twenty-two company houses were hauled away to Gunnison for use in a

18
motel.⁵⁹ Many of the desperate miners had to sell their homes for just a few hundred dollars, to well-off midwesterners who bought them for vacation homes.⁶⁰ The old timers stayed in Crested Butte and lived on their savings, pensions, and welfare. Many merchants carried the town's people on credit through the winter. For the first time since the town's incorporation, seventy-two years ago, the community was without a payroll.⁶¹ Myrtle Veltri, author of The Crested Butte Melting Pot, was growing up in Crested Butte, when CFI closed the Big Mine. She describes the despair of those days:

The years after 1952 were lean. With helpless dismay we watched as the railroad tracks were pulled up and the younger families moved away. People out walking on summer evenings commented sadly about the many unlit houses.⁶²

After the mine closed in 1952, the Salida-Gunnison line of the Denver & Rio Grande was also abandoned; 1955 saw the complete end of the railroad in the Gunnison country.⁶³

Crested Butte had a magical hold on many of its residents; some people just did not want to move away, no matter how hard the times might become. The people of Crested Butte did not want to see it become a ghost town. To many, especially the immigrant coal miners, the town was their

⁵⁹Wallace, op. cit., p. 148

⁶⁰Sibley, op. cit., p. 9.

⁶¹Myrtle M. Veltri and Michele Veltri, The Crested Butte Melting Pot (Crested Butte, Colorado: Myrtle M. and Michele Veltri, 1973), p. 4.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Aspinall, op. cit., p. 34.

only home. Few of the older residents had ever left Crested Butte, and those who had usually came back to their old jobs at the Big Mine.⁶⁴

19

Later in 1952, a committee of local citizens headed by the Mayor Frank Starika looked around for other mining businesses.⁶⁵ The American Smelting and Refining Company (A. S. & R.) in Utah was interested in reopening the Keystone Mine up on Kebler Pass road west of town.⁶⁶ As stated in "New Life and Hope Pours Into Crested Butte," an article in The Rocky Mountain News on May 13, 1953:

A. S. & R. at Kebler Pass will employ seventy men to refine lead, zinc, and copper. This news came after the bleakest weekend in the Crested Butte history. Not one man, save schoolteachers and the county highway employees, received a paycheck the day before.

In 1953, A. S. & R. was mining at the Keystone Mine on Kebler Pass. A. S. & R. built a \$800,000 mill that processed precious metals, lead, zinc, and copper. The Keystone Mine and Mill were the mainstay of the Crested Butte economy through the 1950's. The mine had its problems; the mineral veins were difficult to reach, so the mine closed in 1969.⁶⁷

In the meantime, Crested Butte survived because it had become a popular vacation spot for hunting, fishing, tourism, and winter skiing. By January of 1965, all ideas of Crested Butte becoming a ghost town were forgotten when the winter population more than doubled because of

⁶⁴Veltri, op. cit., p. 63.

⁶⁵Sibley, op. cit., p. 9.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

the ski resort.⁶⁸

20

It is interesting to examine the effect that the closing of one coal mine can have on a community. It is also interesting to speculate, as petroleum and natural gas become more scarce and expensive that perhaps Crested Butte will once again become a coal town. In the Denver Post on September 3, 1952, an article stated that there was still a reserve of six million tons of the finest coal in Colorado in the Big Mine when it closed.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Brown, op. cit., p. 101.

⁶⁹Denver Post, September 3, 1952, p. 52.

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