

Family revives old Ajax Mine

Ajax Mine
Beaverhead County

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Standard Staff Writer
WISDOM — The historic Ajax Mine that rests close to the Continental Divide southwest of Wisdom near Swamp Creek may begin producing gold and silver by next year, according to manager and vice president Don Jenkins.

"We haven't started any mining this year. We're still working under the Forest Service's special-use permit to complete renovation of the road to the site," he said.

"We took a small amount of ore out last year. All of it was done by hand, and the ore was taken out by backpacks. We hope to take out 50 tons of ore on pack mule this year if we complete our road on schedule," he said.

The family operation, headed by Clayton Jenkins, is called Ajax Gold Inc. It is being financed by Elkhorn Resources of Bryan, Texas. The corporation has an option to buy the property from the Howard Morse family of California, said Jenkins, and may do so this year.

"MY FATHER Clayton has had the mine under lease about 25 years, and I've been managing it the past 10 years," said Jenkins, 34, a consulting geologist.

Investment into the mine is about \$100,000 so far, but he said a total of \$750,000 will be invested before the mine goes into full production.

The mine employs just

four family members. When full-scale production begins, they may hire up to 10 people.

There are four adits, or tunnels, into the side of the mountain at Ajax. Two have caved in, but will be reopened. They run from 180 to 430 feet into the mountain.

A small mill is to be built adjacent to the current abandoned mill site, about a mile from the mine. Jenkins said the mill will process 15 to 20 tons of ore a day.

The mine in within the proposed Big Hole wilderness area, but Jenkins said if the wilderness bill is passed, it should not prohibit the mine's operation.

"The Forest Service is mandated to provide reasonable access. We do have an environmentally sensitive area and we are taking steps to minimize the impacts of the mine," Jenkins said.

THE TAILINGS will be left on the patented ground, but there will be "little tailings to speak of" from the operation.

Most tailings will be generated from the mill, he said. Those will be spread out along the existing road to improve the base and remove any tailings piles.

And environmental impact statement has not been done on the mine, but the Forest Service has written an environmental assessment.

The ore body hasn't been

proven, but Jenkins said that out of about 10,000 to 11,000 tons of ore, there is about one to two ounces of gold per ton and considerable silver, lead and copper.

The work at the mine will be seasonal, with good reason. The mine is at 9,750 feet and, according to Al J. Noyes, author of "The Story of Ajax," snow drifts pile up to 40 feet in the winter.

One winter was so fierce that it drove a crew from the high mountains.

ACCORDING TO Noyes' story, the mine was called the Carrie Leonard before being renamed Ajax.

"Tom Buggy of Butte, one of the best assayers in Montana, had been there, from the Idaho side of the range, had taken samples and was satisfied with the lead and ore, but said a fellow would need a flying machine or something not at the time invented, to get to the place and the Lord alone could tell how one was to get the ore out," Noyes wrote of his first experience with the mine in 1893.

"The boys took a sample of the dump (because the mine was covered with snow) and also got some specimens that showed free gold. The sample showed something over \$14 per ton in gold, besides silver and lead.

"To say that we were pleased would be drawing it mild ... We made up our minds that the world was ours ...," Noyes wrote.

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