

DETROIT CITY PORTAL OF SWEET HOME MINE IN COLORADO CLOSES PERMANENTLY

Brecken Branstrator, GIA GG

After eight years of mining operations at the site, Collector's Edge Minerals has permanently closed the Detroit City Portal of the Sweet Home Mine.

While the original Sweet Home Mine on Mount Bross in Colorado—known for its exceptional rhodochrosite specimens, including the Alma Queen and Alma King—has been closed for two decades, Collector's Edge continued its prospecting and planning, opening a new tunnel called the Detroit City Portal, 200 feet above the original, in 2016.

Two years and a lot of prep work later, the team started recovering specimens in the 2018 season. The portal yielded quality rhodochrosite specimens through the 2024 season but is now officially closed, Collector's Edge announced.

The issue, according to Bryan Lees, is that they didn't hit enough good crystal pockets at the new site to keep the mining funded.

"It turns out that at literally 200 feet higher, the chemistry had changed a little bit. And more importantly, the quality of the rock that hosted the veins changed, and those two changes from the vein geochemistry to the rock mechanics, it starved out the fluid," he told GemGuide. "There was rhodochrosite everywhere, but there were no nice pockets, and that's because the rock was a little bit softer up there."

For crystals to form, hard rock needs to stand open and allow for the fluids to come through and deposit crystals. In this case, there wasn't a lot of open standing structure like there was down in the lower Sweet Home Mine, Lees explained, so not only were the



The Detroit City Portal is 200 feet above the original portal at the Sweet Home Mine on Mount Bross in Colorado. (Image courtesy of Collector's Edge Minerals)

hydrothermal solutions starved but also the softer rock meant it didn't stand open to create a pocket.

When asked about production and quality at the Detroit City Portal, Lees said they found probably at least a couple million dollars' worth of rocks, but said that "paled in comparison" to the cost of running the mine, especially as costs went up at least 50% across the board after the pandemic—fuel, electricity, drill steel, equipment, parts, and labor.

"We hit dozens of pockets between 1991 and 2004 when we ran the Sweet Home property. Comparably here, we only found maybe two pockets that were that were pretty decent, but nothing that rivaled what we found down below. We never found an Alma



A rhodochrosite specimen from the Detroit City Portal at the Sweet Home Mine in Alma, Colorado. (Image courtesy of Collector's Edge Minerals; Photo credit: Dustin and Will Suitts)

King-size crystal, not even close to anything that big.”

He said when they were operating the original Sweet Home site, they found some specimens worth seven figures. At Detroit City, the best pieces they found were worth in the \$200,000-\$400,000 range, and only a couple at that.

So, will they explore more in the area or, given the geochemistry of the Detroit City Portal, will they call it quits on the Sweet Home property?

“With the chemistry changes, we’ve got to go back to our drawing board, scratch our head, and think about that question. It’s a very big property, and I’m sure there’s more, because we see strong evidence of rhodochrosite, even 1,000 feet above us, up on the mountain. But the big question would be, what’s the quality of that rhodochrosite? We thought we had a pretty good handle on that until we put this tunnel in.

I’d be a little more skeptical that we would find anything great up above us.”

He said future exploration efforts would need to not only be targeted higher up on the mountain but also a little bit deeper in. Additionally, they would do more than just put in tunnels—they would set up drilling rigs and analyze the veins to see if they would be a good “habitat” for rhodochrosite crystals.

“We have a geochemical model that we use, and used at Detroit city, to help factor into areas that might give us higher probability of good rhodochrosite crystals. We did a lot of applied science from all the things we’ve learned. We were up there for 33 years, and we were able to learn a lot about rock chemistry, the hydrothermal makeup of these veins, the makeup and structure of the rock. We know a lot, and even applying all that, we couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel on the Detroit City level.”

But Lees said it’s not likely to be reopened in his lifetime as he estimated it would take a minimum investment of \$10 million to do so, if not double that.

At the very least, though, Collector’s Edge will preserve the property for posterity.

“It was quite an adventurous project. It was really a large-scale treasure hunt. And you go into that with your eyes wide open, and you enjoy the excitement of the hunt every day. There are a lot of bad days, but there’s a lot of fun days when you’re finding things. So, I encourage everybody to explore and keep looking and keep trying, because that’s the only way great things come out of the ground.”

Lees said they still have some specimens from the Detroit City Portal available and expect to sell the rest of it during the Tucson gem and mineral shows. ♦

Gemworld International, Inc., 2640 Patriot Blvd, Suite 240, Glenview, IL 60026-8075, www.gemguide.com
© 2024 Gemworld International, Inc. All rights reserved.

All articles and photographs that appear are copyrighted by the author, the contributing person or company, or Gemworld International, Inc. and may not be reproduced in any printed or electronic format, posted on the internet, or distributed in any way without written permission. Address requests to the editor-in-chief.

The opinions expressed in this publication are the opinions of the individual authors only and should not necessarily be considered to be the opinions of the staff of Gemworld International, Inc. as a whole. Any website listings that appear in articles are for informational purposes only and should not be considered an endorsement of that company.