

# Mining the Grand Canyon

## History

The 1870s and 1880s yielded the discovery of lead, zinc, asbestos, and copper, which prompted many to stake mining claims. However, actually mining the canyon proved difficult and treacherous. Instead of getting dollars through mining, many miners turned to a more profitable venture: tourism. Buildings, railroads, lodging, and new trails along with fabulous photos and paintings depicting the canyon and eventual National Park status in 1919, beckoned tourists from all over the world with promises of a sight unlike any other in the world. They were right.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the Grandview Trail, in an area where the [Hopi](#) once gathered blue copper ores that they used for paint, Euro-American entrepreneurs would establish one of the few successful mining operations at the Grand Canyon. Here, on Horseshoe Mesa, Pete Berry and his partners including Niles and Ralph Cameron and Ed Gale, established Last Chance Mine to more fully exploit these productive copper veins.<sup>2</sup>

## Present Day

Conservationists contend mining leaves the Grand Canyon vulnerable to environmental damage and that no new operations should be proposed when the old mining sites haven't been cleaned up.

The [Interior Department](#) announced Monday July 20, 2009 that it is temporarily barring the filing of new mining claims, including for uranium, on nearly 1 million acres near the Grand Canyon.

The land is being set aside for two years so the department can study whether it should be permanently withdrawn from mining activity, according to a notice published in the Federal Register online. The notice covers 633,547 acres under the control of the Bureau of Land Management and 360,002 acres in [Kaibab National Forest](#).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Arizona Leisure, "The History of the Grand Canyon," <http://www.arizona-leisure.com/grand-canyon-history.html>, accessed 16 November 2009.

<sup>2</sup> NCHGC: History: Logging, Mining, and Ranching, "Last Chance Mine," Arizona State University, [http://www.asu.edu/clas/grandcanyonhistory/history\\_loggingminingranching\\_lastchancemine.html](http://www.asu.edu/clas/grandcanyonhistory/history_loggingminingranching_lastchancemine.html), accessed 16 November 2009.

<sup>3</sup> MSNBC, "Interior halts uranium mining near Grand Canyon," <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/32004574/>, accessed 16 November 2009.

# Mining Mount Taylor

## History

Located in the southwestern corner of New Mexico's San Mateo Mountains, midway between Albuquerque and Gallup, Mount Taylor, with an elevation of nearly 12,000 feet, is a startlingly beautiful, sacred place. Visible from up to 100 miles away, the mountain has been a pilgrimage site for as many as 30 Native American tribes, with special significance for the Acoma people. Centuries before the mountain was named for President Zachary Taylor, it was known to the Acoma as Kaweshtima, or "place of snow." Mount Taylor is rooted in Acoma's history and traditions and is closely aligned with the tribe's cultural identity.

Mount Taylor is approximately 50 miles from Acoma Sky City, a 367-foot tall mesa that has been the home of the Acoma people for nearly 1,000 years, and is today a National Trust Historic Site. The mountain sits atop one of the richest known reserves of uranium ore in the country: the Grants Uranium Belt. This reserve has already spawned two uranium-mining booms in the area, one in the 1950s and another in the 1970s. Current high demand for the ore has resulted in a renewed interest in mining the uranium deposits beneath Mount Taylor on federal, state and private lands, as well as on other public and private lands in the area. The New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division continues to receive proposals for exploration, mining and milling operations for Mount Taylor.<sup>4</sup>

## Present Day

One month after being placed on the [National Trust for Historic Preservation's](#) most endangered historic places list, New Mexico's majestic Mt. Taylor looks to have a new lease on life.

This past Friday June 9, 2009, the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs Cultural Properties Review Committee (CPRC) voted unanimously to give Mt. Taylor temporary Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) status. Once designated a TCP, a site is protected from new development.

The decision pitted uranium-mining interests against local tribal nations that have considered the mountain a sacred site for millennia, and supporters saw the new designation as a confirmation of Mt. Taylor's endangerment.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> National Trust for Historic Preservation, "11 Most Endangered: Mount Taylor," <http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/southwest-region/mount-taylor.html>, accessed 16 November 2009.

<sup>5</sup> The New Mexico Independent, "Kaweshtima (a.k.a. Mount Taylor) gains temporary protection," <http://newmexicoindependent.com/28964/kaweshtima-aka-mt-taylor-gains-temporary-protection>, accessed 16 November 2009.

# The Snowbowl Controversy

## History of Land Use Controversies

A [timeline](#) of commercial use of the Peaks reveals uses from logging and cattle grazing began on the peaks during the late 1800s, through mining, to today, when the commercial uses of the peaks have expanded to include skiing, mountain biking, frisbee golf and hiking. The San Francisco Peaks have been found to be rich in [pumice](#) – the mineral used to create the “stone-washed” look for jeans. Mining for pumice is extremely destructive. In order to extract the mineral from the ground all vegetation and topsoil must be removed from the site. The Tufflite Mining Corporation built a pumice mine on the Peaks in the early 1980s despite strong opposition from Natives and conservation groups. The company was able to build a mine on the site because of the [1872 Mining Law](#), which allows mineral deposits found on federal land to be mined by mining corporations. The Natives received sympathy from the Forest Service regarding the mine’s destructive effects on sacred land and in August of 2000 a suit was filed by the Forest Service against the Tufflite Corporation. The suit was settled out of court when Tufflite agreed to close down the mine, and restore the land affected by the mine over the course of five years in exchange for a 1 million dollar payment from the government. Since the settlement, the Peaks have been protected from further mining for 20 years. In efforts to permanently protect the peaks from mining after the 20 years expire, the Forest Service is currently seeking to have the Peaks designated as [Traditional Cultural Property](#) under the [National Historic Preservation Act](#).<sup>6</sup>

## Present Day Snowbowl Controversy

The controversy surrounding the Snowbowl expansion on the San Francisco Peaks is not likely to disappear anytime soon, with environmentalists and Native tribes fully entrenched in opposition to the expansion and use of wastewater for snowmaking. The conflict between the Forest Service and Native tribes hinges on the difficulty that Native Americans often have in explaining their religious traditions to the courts and government agencies like the Forest Service. The outcomes of such conflicts often rest solely on how receptive the courts and agencies are to the explanations offered by tribes and how egregious courts and agencies perceive the intrusion. In the case of the San Francisco Peaks, the pumice mines, which left an obvious physical scar, were seen by the courts and the Forest Service as intrusive on the religious practices of Native tribes. However, the courts and the Forest Service are not as quick to respond when the physical scar is less obvious, even if tribe members maintain that both activities desecrate their sacred place. (Pluralism 2009:1)

In July 2008, a panel of the [9th Circuit Court of Appeals](#) ruled in favor of the tribes, but the full court reversed this decision. The court granted the Snowbowl the go-ahead to

---

<sup>6</sup> The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, “Research Report: San Francisco Peaks, AZ (Navajo, Hopi, White Mtn. Apache),” Harvard University, <http://pluralism.org/reports/view/56>, accessed 16 November 2009.

start using reclaimed water to make artificial snow, and to add upgrades of 2 new lifts, 10 more trails, a half pipe, and lodge expansions. The case was appealed to the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) on [January 5](#), 2009. The Supreme Court Justices officially rejected the tribes' appeal on June 8, 2009, and by default left the second ruling of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals intact, allowing the Snowbowl to go ahead with their proposed updates to the resort. Some are concerned about hormones and pharmaceuticals in the man made snow, but they are largely few in number.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Fox11AZ, "Tribes appeal decision in Arizona Snowbowl case," <http://www.fox11az.com/news/topstories/stories/kmsb20090106jc-tribes-appeal-snowbowl-case.441b56fc.html>, accessed 16 November 2009.