

# A Permanent State of Decay: contrived dereliction at heritage mining sites

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## Introduction

The foundation for this chapter is a fieldwork experience that occurred in Alaska during 2009, during which time I was gathering information on the social and technological aspects of gold mining. During a visit to Goldstream Dredge No.8, one of the last remaining gold dredges in the Fairbanks's goldfields, I was able to wander round the site, exploring the collection of wooden buildings that had been salvaged from other local mining sites. One of these structures, the Bath House, was empty apart from its plumbing fittings and sinks, a motorized laundry tub, and a cast iron stove (fig.1) [Figure 1 near here]. Inside, the smell of dry pinewood combined with the muted colours of the bare rooms to give a seductive sense of age and gentle decay. But the experience took an unexpected turn when I encountered a small printed notice on a shelf which said:

### **The Bath House**

A variety of techniques have been used to interpret the unique heritage and cultural resources found at Goldstream Dredge No8, including film, still photography, personal communication, written materials, and the display of artifacts. Sometimes, an alternative approach to interpretation can be just as effective as the techniques listed above. In the case of the Bath House, that technique involves simply presenting the building in its "natural" state with no direct interpretation. The building alone tells the story. Can you hear it?

The implications of this text immediately undermined the serenity of the experience. What apparently consistent story was the empty Bath House supposed to be able to tell me? What exactly did

“natural” mean – especially as the quotation marks implied that this descriptive term was in some sense bogus? Subsequent research revealed that, contrary to the claim made by the little card sign, this type of presentation is anything but simple.

I found the Bath House intriguing in part due to its similarity to structures at other preserved mining sites I had previously visited. These included the mining town of Bodie in California (cf DeLyser 1999) and Geevor in Cornwall (cf Geevor 2009). At all these places visitors encounter a supposedly derelict environment which at some point has been artfully arranged and is being continually and carefully managed.

In order to analyse this phenomenon in depth, the following chapter presents two case studies where this mode of display is employed: the No8 Dredge complex described earlier and Kennecott, another Alaskan mining heritage site. The experience of visiting both these sites, their history and their current management will be described and considered in relation to academic research on similar heritage sites, in order to identify what this method of presentation emphasises, disguises and erases. The results support a proposal that in order to fully explain the presentations a new term – contrived dereliction – should be coined, in order to unpack how this method of display operates. The result is a rough guide to the nature, scope and implications of a very particular and peculiar form of site reanimation.

### **Mining Sites as Heritage**

The widespread acceptance that disused mining complexes could and should be considered heritage was part of the shift towards a more inclusive definition of the term that occurred during the second part of the twentieth century (Blockley 1999; Emerick 2001; Raistrick 1972). Throughout this period up to the present day, mining sites have typically been treated as a sub-section of industrial heritage (Conlin and Jolliffe 2011; Edwards and Llurdés I Coit 1996; Orange 2008). Less common interpretative frames have been ‘geotourism’ ( Dewar and Miller 2011; Timcak *et al* 2011) or, in specific circumstances, the memorialisation of culturally resonant individual events that occurred on or near the site (e.g. Evans 1991; Hollick 2011; White 2011). Categorisation as industrial heritage facilitates

interpretations that emphasise mining technologies and their development or diffusion, but is less conducive to the analysis and comparison of social organisation, including the distribution or concentration of power, resources and technical knowledge (Knapp 1999; Palmer and Neaverson 1998).

The UK was a pioneer in the preservation of industrial sites and artefacts, though the earliest interventions were undertaken by scattered groups of enthusiasts or individuals rather than within an institutionally funded programme. Consequently, material culture was valued according to individual preferences and the projects were undertaken with limited means, leading to some noticeable biases regarding what was considered desirable or possible to save. At this time the larger mining and ore processing complexes, due to their size, location and maintenance issues, fared less well than isolated smaller buildings, movable machinery or the vehicles from steam or canal transport systems (Blockley 1999; Stratton 1996).

The situation began to change in the 1980s as more institutionally orientated and commercially managed mining museums were founded as part of the heritage boom, a development critically labelled “the heritage industry” (Hewison 1987). Preservation programmes, in terms of the type and size of site they targeted, became more ambitious, along with the expectations of what such sites could achieve when turned into visitor attractions (Wright 1985). Examples include Welsh coal mining museums such as the Bit Pit coal mining museum in Gwent and the Rhondda Heritage Park. Both were opened during the 1980s, with the expectation they would provide employment and stimulate the local economy (Cole 2004; Dicks 2000; Jones and Flynn 2011). When the last of the Cornish tin mines closed at the end of the twentieth century, a movement quickly developed to preserve key sites in order to reopen and maintain them as heritage destinations with an eye to the tourist market. In line with this aim, achieving WHS status to help promote mining sites became a key element of the regional development plan (Meethan 2002; Thorpe *et al* 2005; UNESCO 2012b). This general shift towards commercialism led to the rise of the professional heritage manager and the assumption that a site should and would eventually generate enough revenue to ‘pay its own way’ (Emerick 2001, 280).

A comparable timeline is evident in other Western countries. In the US the federally funded National Parks Service (NPS) took a leading role in the development of industrial heritage, establishing new urban parks and reappraising the cultural heritage within its wilderness acquisitions (Krumenaker 1998; Macintosh 1991, Norris 2005). As the NPS director is a direct political appointment, the scope and focus of the NPS's activities are subject to sudden revision in response to a change of federal government (Macintosh 1991; cf Watson 1989). Though in European countries the most influential heritage organisations are less overtly political, a consistently conservative and nationalistic political agenda can still be identified in overall strategies and most policy decisions and project objectives (Smith 2006).

In Germany the appreciation of mining sites as heritage has a longer history, stretching back to the 1930s. The Roter Bär iron ore mine in the Hartz mountains, which closed in 1910, was first opened for visitors in 1931 by the *Sankt Andreasberger Verein für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* (Sankt Andreasberg Society for History and Archaeology). The same society was also instrumental in developing the *Grube Samson* (Samson Pit) silver mine as a visitor attraction in the 1950s (Liessmann 2010). However, as in the UK, the largest and best known heritage sites were developed as a consequence of mine closures during the 1980s. These include the WHS listed Rammelsburg (also in the Hartz mountains) and the Zollern II-IV colliery complex in the Ruhr valley (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe (LWL) 2012; Palmer and Neaverson 1998 ; UNESCO 2012d). These preserved mining sites have since become anchor points in the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH), alongside many others from northwest Europe (ERIH 2012).

Across Scandinavia there were also significant efforts to protect mining heritage at major mining sites that closed around the same time. The mining town of Røros in Norway achieved WHS designation in 1980, shortly after the closure of its mines in 1977 (Palmer and Neaverson 1998; UNESCO 2012f). In Sweden the Stora Kopparberg mine at Falun was granted WHS status in 2001; unusually, its older buildings had been defined as heritage and actively protected by the mining company whilst the mine was still in operation. (UNESCO 2012e).

Over the past decade Sweden has witnessed more commercially orientated attempts to capitalise on extant mining heritage, including the branding of the east of Västerbotten County as the Guldriket (Gold Region). This project attempted to bundle a number of attractions relating to the region's gold mining past, including Bergrum Boliden (Boliden Mining Museum), the museum and archive at the still operating Ronnskär smelter, and the Norsjö arial tramway, into a coherent tourism offer (Gold of Lapland 2010). The notable absence in this offer is the still operating gold mines in the region.

Attempts to develop mines as heritage destinations in the south and east of Europe have been less successful. The lack of foreign visitors to mining heritage sites is often blamed on the lack of a cultural tourism promotion strategy and wider planning initiatives. (Perelli *et al* 2011; Timcak *et al* 2011; Vargas-Sánchez *et al* 2011). Even major sites, such as the giant Rio Tinto mine near the coast in southern Spain, find that the majority of their visitors are local residents on day trips (Vargas-Sánchez *et al* 2011). Such sites face the additional problem that whilst they are dependent on the local population, the percentage of this potential audience likely to take an interest in the site is far lower than in northern Europe, due to the conservative Spanish attitude towards what constitutes heritage (Edwards and Llurdés I Coit 1996).

In contrast, in the US and Australia, there is a strong cultural identification with mining which leads to the perception that mining sites are heritage. In both cases nineteenth century gold rushes play a key role in the mythology of the nation. Whilst this leads to high visitor numbers, it poses problems for site interpretation. Managers of heritage gold mining districts have to negotiate a position between the historic record and catering to entrenched but often romantic and simplistic audience expectations. Attempting to fully acknowledge the multicultural nature of most gold rushes and boom towns (Chan 2000; DeLyser 1999; Reeves *et al* 2011), the complexities of colonial power and local resistance (Evans 1991; Hollick 2011) or the sexual mores of frontier towns (Goldman 1981; Simmons 1998) without offending an audience of overwhelmingly middle-class, conservative visitors is an issue faced by heritage managers in both countries.

Beyond Europe and North America, there has been little enthusiasm for considering mines worthy of preservation and presentation, though isolated exceptions exist, such as Potosí silver mine in Bolivia (Pretes 2002). Potosí is now WHS listed and promoted locally as a tourist destination. The WHS listing encompasses the colonial town with its patrician and workers dwellings and the industrial monuments of the Cerro Rico (UNESCO 2012a).

This short review shows that three characteristics recur across national boundaries. Firstly, during the last half century there has been a clear growth and maturation of the notion of mining sites as heritage across Northern Europe and America. Whilst this initially only involved sporadic and uncoordinated actions which had limited impact, since the 1980s many large mining sites have typically been reclassified and preserved, often shortly following closure. These reclassifications have been consistently supported by local and national governments. Apart from a few notable exceptions, mining sites elsewhere have not been seen as worthy of preservation and promotion as heritage.

Secondly, mining heritage has taken an increasingly commercial turn. There is now an entrenched expectation amongst policy makers that heritage mining sites should ultimately be self-sustaining and are able to drive economic regeneration through tourism. These attitudes persist despite the uneven track record of many projects over the past two decades (cf Cole 2004; Edwards and Llurdés I Coit 1996; Jones and Flynn 2011; Vargas-Sánchez *et al* 2011). Whether these expectations are realistic outside of Northern Europe and America, or even applicable within these regions in the longer term, remains an open question. Even when a site is considered to be financially successful, its managers usually face unrelenting pressure to further exploit the material resources at hand to enhance the visitor experience and increase visitor numbers.

Thirdly, since its inception in 1972 WHS listing has come to play an increasingly influential role in determining perceptions of a mining site's cultural value, both nationally and internationally. The growing tendency to seek WHS listing for economic gain rather than just cultural recognition (Rodwell 2012) has also been of key importance. In addition, UNESCO's procedural requirements for WHS submissions have a further impact as they demand influential actors and hegemonic groups actively support the claims

being made about a site's cultural relevance (Shackley 1998a; Williams 2005). Though the discourse around WHS listing treats the process as recognition of a site's existing value, in many cases listing is instrumental in constructing that value.

### **Case Study Methodology**

The two case studies were chosen in part to illustrate how these three characteristics play out at specific locations. The sites chosen display a number of historical similarities: both mines operated during the first half of the twentieth century and were located in the US territory of Alaska, being subject to an identical legal jurisdiction. Both mines extracted and processed non-ferrous metal ore onsite and were owned by large capitalised corporations who employed a migrant 'settler' labour force. These similarities make the differences in the ways the sites are managed and interpreted more attributable to contemporary social factors.

Data collection relied on a combination of qualitative social science methods. The participant-observer activity of taking part in formal visitor tours provided a wealth of data regarding site management, interpretation strategies and visitors' responses. This material was augmented by informal discussions with staff on site about their roles and the longer-term operation and management of each site. This body of data was compared with material on the sites gathered through digital and library research. The overall results were then compared with academic research on comparable sites, with key concurrences and discrepancies identified and considered.

### **Kennecott, Alaska**

Kennecott is an enclave of industrial heritage in a natural heritage setting (Norris 2005). The mining town is located in the heart of the Wrangell-St.Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST), run by the US National Park Service (NPS). WRST forms part of the Kluane / Wrangell-St Elias / Glacier Bay / Tatshenshini-Atsek World Heritage Site, which stretches across Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory (UNESCO 2012c). Kennecott is remote even by Alaskan standards; visitors have to drive at least 60 miles on rough track after leaving the nearest tarmac road, or fly in by light aircraft.

Kennecott is 'considered the best remaining example of early 20th Century copper mining' in the US (NPS 2007). The town was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1986. In 1998 the NPS purchased the lands and mineral claims originally owned by the Kennecott Copper Corporation, as part of its strategy of consolidating ownership of the WHS territory. This placed most of the extensive remains – the ore processing mill, support buildings and employee dwellings - directly under the care of the NPS system and its institutional apparatus (Gilbert *et al.* 2001).

Mining of the exceptionally high quality ore deposits at Kennecott began in 1911. The pithead buildings, processing mill, company town and 200 miles of railroad needed for access were all constructed and owned by a business syndicate of powerful US industrialists. At its peak, about 600 people lived and worked in Kennecott. All were employed and housed by the Company and were required to behave according to the Company's expectations (Kluh 1996; NPS 2007). The nearby settlement of McCarthy, beyond the mine owners' control, was the home of Kennecott's 'irregular marketplace' (cf Goldman 1981, 30). McCarthy specialised in providing the goods and services formally prohibited by the Company's regulations: heavy drinking, gambling and prostitution. It was also the local source of luxury items such as fashionable clothes and children's toys (Kain 1991; Kluh 1996). This symbiotic twinning was not unique to Kennecott and McCarthy; other company towns in the American West had similar unconventional neighbouring settlements (Hardesty 1998). In less regulated frontier mining towns, 'deviant' activities were located in specific districts within the town's own limits. Most had a street with a high concentration of drinking establishments or brothels (Goldman 1981; Simmons 1998).

Senior managers dictated who could live in Kennecott. Accommodation was allocated on the basis of seniority in the Company's hierarchy. The only single women in the town were the hospital nurses. Only managers and specialist technical and support staff were permitted to bring their wives and children to live with them. Due to their novelty (and parents' status), the few children were indulged by many employees (Kain 1991; Kluh 1996). At a 1990 reunion the NPS started collecting oral histories from people who grew up in Kennecott, an activity that became known as 'The Kennecott Kids Oral History Project'. The avowed aim was to create a social record: "The mining and industrial history of Kennecott is



well-known, but through the interviews we were able to know Kennecott as a living community rather than a mining ghost town' (Kain 1991, 1). These oral history transcripts and Sissy Klüh's (1996) published memoir of her childhood form the largest body of first-hand accounts of living in Kennecott during its heyday.

Kennecott was abandoned in 1938 due to the exhaustion of the high grade ore seams and competition from new copper mines in less remote and unforgiving locations. When the last train left, the rails were pulled up behind it, leaving the town isolated in order to protect the Company's property (NPS 2007). It became known as a ghost town, with the majority of the buildings surviving largely unmolested up to the end of the century; it was the preservation of many of the interiors that impressed its few visitors (e.g. Herben 1997).

Once the NPS had taken possession of Kennecott, a Cultural Landscape Report was drawn up, which included a strategy for preserving the site. Some buildings were slated to be stabilised, others restored and converted to new uses, while the remainder were to be demolished or left to collapse (Gilbert *et al.* 2001). A need to direct resources towards selective interventions was reinforced in 2006 when the mine's reservoir dam broke and a cascade swept through the town, ripping several well-preserved buildings from their foundations. By 2009, construction crews were busy implementing a revised management plan.

Access to most of the buildings in Kennecott is currently restricted. Visitors can only see inside the processing facilities on tours offered by a private guide company approved by the NPS. Guides start the tour with a brief description of the town's history and social structure, referencing contemporary photographs and Kennecott Kids reminiscences. This description includes potentially discomforting facts about institutional and pervasive ethnic discrimination: the Company's practice of selectively employing North European *émigrés* (ostensibly as they were believed to be more suited to sub-arctic conditions); the *de facto* exclusion of Afro-Americans from the Alaska territory and the holding of a Klu Klux Klan meeting in Kennecott. This material was similar in content and depth to that found in NPS handouts and on their website (NPS 2007).

The tour included a walk through the processing mill (fig.2), with the guide explaining what the equipment was used for, the tasks workers had to carry out and general working conditions. The mill, the largest of the stabilised buildings, consists of 14 stories of dust filled rooms, full of rusting machinery and pipework. The glass in almost every window was missing, salvaged by the inhabitants of McCarthy during the decades before the NPS took charge. Due to continual exposure to the cold wet winters and hot dry summers, the wooden interiors had turned a uniform silvery yellow and all the ironwork was covered with a purple-brown patina (fig.3). This colour palate, together with the shafts of sunlight streaming in and picking out motes of dust, gave the rooms an overwhelming feel of dereliction. During the summer, tours passed through daily, but it was easy to believe that nobody has been in the building for decades. The mill was operational for nearly twenty years, during which time machinery was decommissioned and replaced, and structural alterations undertaken. But the unifying power of the harsh climate made pinpointing any such changes, or even any recent NPS stabilisation work, extremely difficult. [figures 2 and 3 near here]

McCarthy's current relationship to the NPS dominated Kennecott ironically mirrors the one it had with the Company controlled town during the early twentieth century: McCarthy's residents have responded to the constant trickle of summer tourists by offering souvenirs, food and rooms, and some of the NPS and guide company employees lodge in McCarthy whilst working at Kennecott. As it was peripheral to the mining operation and the Company, McCarthy only appears as a footnote in Kennecott's formal history. Details of its social role are sparse in the oral histories. The Kennecott Kids' memories of McCarthy are dominated by their parents' relationship with the town: it was a place of obvious and subtle dangers (both physical and moral) and a treasure trove of luxury goods and experiences, but it remained incidental to the life of higher ranking company employees and their families (Kain 1991; Klueh 1996).

The NPS's stewardship has meant the exclusion of permanent residents from most of the buildings in Kennecott. The majority of town's architecture is now maintained as empty structures whose only declared role is to represent the region's history. In comparison, McCarthy remains a living, evolving settlement, where the early twentieth century past has been sedimented under multiple subsequent presents. The giant, red processing mill that visually dominates the valley has been sanctified through a

combination of NPS stewardship and WHS status. It is covertly held in limbo between full restoration and terminal decline, in contrast with the profanity of overt everyday repair practiced on the buildings of McCarthy.

McCarthy's identity as a settlement raises uncomfortable questions about institutional power, social exclusion, and the construction of deviance in early twentieth century Alaska. Its continuing subaltern position raises further awkward questions about the priorities and values of heritage in early twenty-first century America. Whilst highlighting historic examples of racism is now an expected aspect of NPS heritage interpretation, there is little enthusiasm for acknowledging the existence, extent and social structure of prostitution and other behaviour still considered socially undesirable or unacceptable.

### **Gold Dredge No. 8, Fairbanks, Alaska**

From the beginning of the twentieth century prospectors worked the extensive Fairbanks Goldfields using basic extraction techniques such as panning and sluicing. By the 1920s the most accessible gold had been collected and hand techniques were no longer a financially viable way to mine the alluvial gravel. The Fairbanks Exploration Company bought up blocks of local mining claims and installed five industrial gold dredges to rework the deposits (Gold Dredge No.8, 2002; Reeves 2009). [Figure 4 near here]

The Alaskan dredges were three or four storey structures, which floated on a pond that they had excavated (fig.4). A dredge operation also needed a complex of support buildings: bunk houses, a bath house, store rooms, a repair shop and canteen. There were also other major pieces of equipment: a churn drill and mobile steam boiler. The drill sampled the gravels in order to determine their gold content. The boiler was connected to a series of pipes driven into the ground ahead of the dredge to melt the permafrost (Gould 2008). Installing dredges required massive capital investment, but despite this the Fairbanks dredges proved to be highly profitable. It has been estimated that No.8 alone extracted 7.5 million ounces of gold over the 30 years it was running (American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) 2012; Gold Dredge No.8, 2002).

In the 1920s Alaska was a US Territory, with less rigorous legislation than the US States. One of the consequences of statehood in 1959 was tighter controls over the use of mercury. The dredges used huge quantities of mercury to extract the gold from the gravels and environmental pollution was an unfortunate consequence of the industrial process. In response to the new restrictions the Fairbanks Exploration Company shut down the dredges.

In 1982 the dredge was bought by John Reeves, a local entrepreneur, who opened the site as a tourist attraction a year later, after building amenities for visitors (Reeves 2009). In 1984 the social significance of the dredge was acknowledged through a listing on the National Register for Historic Places; in 1986 its technological importance was highlighted when it was made a National historical Mechanical engineering Landmark. In 1996 Reeves sold the dredge as a commercial tourist attraction to Grey Line of Alaska, a division of the Holland America Line (which operates cruise liners on the North-West Coast). Grey Line spent \$700,000 renovating the dredge, building further tourist facilities and erecting more support buildings salvaged from other dredge sites (Gold Dredge No.8, 2002; Reeves 2009).

Though the site had previously been open to all paying visitors, in 2009 entrance was restricted to tourists on package tours booked through Grey Line or Holland America. Visits followed a predetermined schedule: a 'backwoods' meal in the on-site restaurant, a tour of the dredge and, time permitting, an opportunity to look round the salvaged buildings. The visitors were then bussed to El Dorado, a nearby mining-themed tourist attraction. At El Dorado they could take a ride on a mock steam train round a series of mining dioramas, watch demonstrations of sluicing and panning, and pan for gold using pay dirt provided by the staff.

The tour of the No.8 dredge focussed almost exclusively on its construction and operation. After an introductory talk, groups of a dozen visitors followed a set route through the dredge, stopping at designated points where further members of staff gave further short explanatory talks. As the route was self-guided, the dredge had been fitted with direction signs, safety fences, and safety warning signs. In contrast, visitors could wander round the support buildings unaccompanied. One bunk house contained

display boards giving facts about the dredge operation and a selection of labelled artefacts relating to small-scale and dredge mining. The Store Room held a collection of fossils found in the gravel during dredging. The Bath House was empty, except for the plumbing fixtures, a large cast-iron stove and the occasional bar of soap and enamelled metal jug.

Most visitors displayed a marked lack of interest towards most of the site. Their priorities were eating and getting a cursory view of the dredge. Many appeared to find the 30 minute tour demanding and the attention they paid the staff was often negligible. Very few of the group visited any of the salvaged buildings, and those that did only took a quick look round (except one couple who became absorbed in viewing the fossil display). This disinterest contrasted with the engagement shown during the later demonstrations of panning and sluicing at El Dorado, their own attempts at panning and the consumption opportunities offered by the extensive gift shop.

In 2009 the site was in the process of being sold to the owners of El Dorado, who planned to relocate most of the activities currently being offered at the El Dorado site to the dredge compound (the sale and relocation went through with the 'new' attraction opening for summer 2012). The dredge complex was considered key to the plans due to the dredge's landmark status, but also because of the extensive catering facilities that were onsite. Whilst accepting this would make the dredge site more commercially viable, the site manager was concerned the changes would compromise the site's 'serious' heritage status.

Through this and other discussions, the extent to which expenditure on any aspect of the site was closely linked to its role as a revenue generator became apparent. All research, restoration or interpretation had to be justified in terms of direct visitor appeal. There was an obvious mismatch between the expectations of the visitors, who had little interest in acquiring any knowledge about the dredge operations and those of the site manager, who valued the industrial heritage contained on the site. This disjunction is a consequence of the context of dredge operations: dredges are material culture intimately connected to the industrialisation and capitalisation of gold mining in Alaska. Rather than part of the well-known and romanticised gold rushes of the Klondike period (Emanuel 1997; Spude 2011), the dredges

were associated with the end of this era and the arrival of the big corporations. As a representation of the hardships and constraints the dredge operators endured to earn their wages the Bath House was never likely to appeal to the pleasure-seeking cruise visitor. The ambiguity of the Bath House's presentation, which effectively disguised the less appealing realities of working on the dredge to anyone unused to communal manual labour in freezing conditions, resulted in a much more palatable experience for tourists.

**From “arrested decay” and “stabilization” to *contrived dereliction*.**

[figure 5 near here] When the State of California Division of Parks began to acquire the remnants of the town of Bodie, their policy for managing the site formulated a set of principles that later became known as “arrested decay” (DeLyser 1999). It was maintaining the appearance of the town as it was at the point of acquisition, with its “curved walls, sagging roofs, broken windows etc.” (Superintendent Clyde Newlyn to Chief Newton B. Drury Sept 9, 1955, quoted in DeLyser 1999) to create an emotive place that became the goal (fig.5), rather than restoring the town's surviving structures to their original state. The aesthetic of decay has continued to be an important touchstone for Bodie's stewards:

...when Bodie's Lester Bell house was reroofed, workers carefully removed and saved as much of the old rusted tin as possible to reuse on the new roof. When there was not enough, and new tin had to be added, we were distressed at the shiny appearance of the roof and so oxidised the tin with Coca-Cola to make it look more authentic, even though this was not part of our instructions for completing the job”

DeLyser 1999 614

From this and similar descriptions of Bodie's physical management, it is clear that authenticity at Bodie is considered to be the result of its appearance (DeLyser 1999), rather than being dependent on the existence of extant physical material - the usual criteria for authenticity at heritage sites (cf DeLong 2008; Shackley 1998a; Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996).

This raises the question of how anomalous the approach taken at Bodie really is. The Kennecott Cultural Landscape Report (Gilbert *et al* 2001) makes no reference to “arrested decay” as a guiding principal. It follows the guidelines set out by the US Federal government (Weeks 2001), describing proposed interventions as “stabilizations” or “restorations”. But onsite the private tour guide used the term “arrested decay” to describe the ongoing NPS conservation strategy for the mill building. This conflation by an informed observer exposed the extent to which the two approaches overlap in practice. Whilst the Federal government guidelines require new interventions to be identifiable on close inspection, restorers are also expected to use similar, or if possible identical, materials to those originally employed for exposed parts of the structure. As these newer elements become weathered, the results of “stabilization” following NPS guidelines become indistinguishable from “arrested decay”. The ubiquitous matte red paint that coats every building in Kennecott could have been applied at any time. Even close onsite observation cannot distinguish recent from historic interventions.

Though “arrested decay” and “stabilization” both imply a simple functional response to physical necessity, in practice they inherently involve direct pursuit of a particular type of visual aesthetic; an aesthetic Bodie, Kennecott and the No.8 Dredge Bath House all share. This underlying intention, and the extent to which it is downplayed by stewards, can be foregrounded by coining a new, more fully descriptive phrase: *contrived dereliction*.

### **The effort involved in contrived dereliction**

Despite superficial appearances, maintaining any structure or environment in a state of contrived dereliction requires an immense and ongoing effort. This includes marshalling the extensive resources (in terms of manpower and materials) that are needed to keep the fabric sound, and mustering the authority and practical means to effectively police the level and type of access to the site. The undertaking is made more challenging by an essential element of contrived dereliction: the structure or environment cannot be used for any functional purpose.

In the case of the Kennecott mill building, it required the intervention of the NPS, an organisation with enormous financial resources, to even attempt to impose contrived dereliction. Prior to that point, the

structure was suffering an ongoing gradual loss of physical integrity due to environmental factors and selective disassembly by the local population. The Bath House required an even more extreme intervention; it had to be physically relocated to a secure compound.

The maintenance of an aura of dereliction requires that though maintained, the structure is not put to any practical use. Everybody has to be considered a temporary visitor rather than belonging to and fully using the site. Though the realities of maintenance and interpretation means some individuals have ongoing interactions that may extend to decades (cf DeLyser 1999), the conceptualisation of the site prohibits living individuals from laying a claim to fully belonging there. As Kennecott and the No8 Dredge site are owned by abstract organisations, maintenance and interpretative staff are identified as representatives of the organisation, stewarding rather than belonging to the location.

The Kennecott Kids are accorded a unique status with regard to Kennecott, as their personal histories give them a moral claim to close identification due to their prior residency as children. This status results in the privileging of their memories, even at the risk of skewing the site's interpretation. But the temporal and social distance between the life stages of childhood and old age erects a barrier that effectively distances them as living individuals, a situation that repeatedly resurfaces in their statements (Kain 1991; Kluh 1996).

This denial of appropriation of the site by the living is necessary in order that departed past residents can be allowed to retain ownership. It is these imaginary tenants that give the sites their impact; sites in a state of contrived dereliction are in effect a type of temple to valorised ancestors, kept free from prosaic functional uses in order that they may house the ghosts of the past.

### **It's about time**

The overwhelming experience of observing contrived dereliction is of viewing the passing of time, materialised in the dust and apparent decay. However, the moments of time that anchor this passage are difficult to determine. Immersion in the site requires the viewer to momentarily step out of the present, but the point of origin remains obscure. At Kennecott and the No8 Dredge the period being evoked is the



early twentieth century, yet this is not connected to wider historical events that would situate it more concretely. The most explicit date audiences are made aware of is the point of termination of use.

In contrast, the management of such sites reference another point in time: the moment at which a stewardship plan is confirmed in principle or implemented. At Kennecott the key point is 2001, when the Cultural Landscape Report was published. At No.8 Gold Dredge it was 1996, when the salvaged buildings were re-erected onsite. The other sites previously mentioned have comparable moments (DeLyser 1999; Geevor 2009). Whilst these anchor points have become the definitional moments for managers as they provide the benchmark for future physical interventions, they sit outside the site's overt message, only being mentioned in passing in histories offered to the intended audience.

### **The Limits of Contrived Dereliction**

Considering the appeal of contrived dereliction it may seem surprising that it is not more widely used as a presentation strategy. In practice, its adoption is subject to two unyielding restrictions: the local climate and visitor numbers.

Alaska is a state known for its harsh climate; extremely cold winters which contrast with dry, warm summers. At Kennecott and Fairbanks unpainted ironwork quickly acquires a purplish-brown patina, whilst timber shivers and bleaches. In the dry summer the wind blows fine-ground glacial dust into every corner and onto every exposed surface. Current conditions are the same as prevailed during the past hundred years. In a matter of months, any new additions or repairs to structures left untreated become indistinguishable from the older architectural fabric. In contrast, at most other industrial sites surface qualities are mostly the result of exposure to atmospheric contaminants produced by onsite coal or oil fired furnaces and boilers: soot, sulphurous smoke and acidic water droplets. At decommissioned sites these are no longer being produced, so new metallic surfaces develop a different patina, and new brickwork never gets ingrained with soot. Though everything weathers, these additions and repairs do so

in a way that means they remain visually distinct rather than visually converging to provide a unifying aesthetic (cf Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow 1993; Prudon 2010).

The second factor is related to the location and management rather than immediate maintenance of such sites. Visitors need to be able to immerse themselves to be fully affected by the site; the presence of too many other visitors compromises the experience. As contrived dereliction gains its power from the audience acting as explorer the site has to be exclusive. This may be an incidental result of location;. Both Kennecott and Fairbanks are seen as difficult to access, though this is now due to the funds and time needed for the journey rather than the physical and environmental barriers, as was the case in the early twentieth century.

Mass-tourism is inimical to contrived dereliction. The sense of discovery the experience requires is undermined by the presence of large numbers of co-visitors. The compromises necessary to accommodate coach loads of tourists is evident at the Fairbanks dredge site. The Bath House can only offer a contrived dereliction experience as a subsidiary, little-visited attraction. The dredge itself has suffered an intrusive concretion of modern alterations and additions. Once site managers aim to maximise footfall, contrived dereliction becomes an unviable presentation strategy.

Some long-term trends in the management of disused mining sites can be seen as supportive of contrived dereliction as a presentation strategy. The growing acceptance of mining sites as heritage has led to national heritage organisations and commercial organisations taking ownership of such sites, providing the funding, motivation and legislative framework to keep disused mining structures secure from contemporary interference. Though most established conventions for maintenance do not explicitly condone contrived dereliction, interventions can incidentally lead to its emergence. As WHS listing tends to valorise the historic mining community associated with the site, it helps turn them into the mythologised imaginary tenants needed to complete the contrived dereliction experience.

In contrast, the growing tendency for increased commercialisation at sites poses threats. If exploitation is interpreted as a need to repeatedly increase visitor numbers, eventually the delicate balance needed for contrived dereliction is disrupted. If visitor numbers are kept restricted, in order to

increase revenue entry fees have to increase. As a consequence managers may find that their sites become the exclusive preserve of a narrow section of society, defined by their ability to pay for the privilege of access.

## **Conclusion**

The use of contrived dereliction is found at a selection of mining heritage sites, though its applicability is restricted to those sites whose remote location and harsh climate assist in the minimising of visitor numbers and the unassisted creation of a unifying visual aesthetic. If contrived dereliction is successfully deployed it leads to a peculiar type of reanimation: the viewer perceives the immanence of the site's past through a process of distancing. The material indicators that construct this distancing mechanism - weathering, patination and rotting - are all fundamental to its impact. Whilst ostensibly appearing as a veil, they actually construct the frame that animates the environment for the audience.

There is a central paradox to this type of site: in order to appear abandoned they need to be heavily managed. Contrived dereliction can be considered fragile, easily disrupted by the intrusion of a number of different realities: of the awareness of material maintenance; of overt contemporary interventions; of the overall presentation as a response to the visitors' wishes; or even the success of the site in attracting too large an audience.

Contrived dereliction holds the potential for a unique immersive experience for the visitor, allowing them to take on a temporary (though equally contrived) role as explorer, providing they ignore the contradiction of overt dereliction and covert management. A crucial aspect of the successful overall presentation of contrived dereliction (and often its stated underlying rationale) is the evocation of imaginary past inhabitants which provides such a powerful if intangible powerful element to the experience. However, facilitating this apparent presence comes at a cost, as it requires the absence of any contemporary claim over the site. When contrived dereliction is embarked upon, new uses and claims for association have to be prohibited and the site left physically empty.

Though specific mining heritage sites provide outstanding exemplars of contrived dereliction, similar practices are evident at other types of heritage site e.g. the Haida village of Ninstints (Shackley 1998b). How far the concept of contrived dereliction is directly translatable to other types of tourist destination and what specific nuances other types of site throw up would be interesting avenues for future study. Equally informative would be further work on stewards' and audiences' perceptions of contrived dereliction as a practice. The preference amongst heritage professionals for alternative functionalist terms that do not fully encapsulate their actual practice raises interesting questions about the ways they conceptualise their professional identities and social roles.

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