

The Gold Mine Museum

The exciting history of gold mining in South Africa has been told in many different ways — in books, plays, and films, and on radio. But now, there's a new and far more lively way to find out about it — and that is by actually participating in living history.

Your invitation to go back in time will not take you much further from the centre of Johannesburg than the late-afternoon stretch of the shadows of the skyscrapers. The Gold Mine Museum — a new venture by the Chamber of Mines — brings back all the colour and romance of mining a century ago, and reminders of some of the hardships too. This is not an ordinary museum, but one of the most modern attempts in the world to make the past come to life.

Visitors will be taken several hundred metres underground, in the 'cage' that once took thousands of miners to work every day, to an authentic working face. They will ride around the carefully restored site in a vintage train behind an equally elderly locomotive that once pulled thousands of tons of gold ore. They will be able to wander through a recreated mine village, where rooms in the cottages have been furnished down to the last detail with period pieces grandma will remember. To bring visitors up to date, there will be regular live demonstrations of how gold is smelted and poured into bars.

The museum, just south of Johannesburg near Booysens, was officially opened by the State President on the 5th of June this year.

The Gold Mine Museum has been created round 14 Shaft of the old Crown Mines. The project has taken years to plan, and more than a year to complete. It is destined to become a major tourist attraction very

quickly, because it tells the story of how Johannesburg was born.

In January 1979, after the land had been donated by Rand Mines, work began on turning the abandoned shaft, disused buildings, and overgrown site into a living reminder of gold mining as it was, and a tribute to the pioneers and mining men whose endeavours created it. Many sorts of specialized talents and knowledge, and a great deal of research, have gone into creating the museum. Exhibits cover the period 1886 to 1920, with a few straying into more modern forms of technology.

Extensive research was done into how mining villages were constituted and constructed, and what sort of furniture and appliances one would expect to find in the homes. Special investigation was conducted into what the well-dressed miner might have worn to work in the early 1900s. Many of the museum workers will wear turn-of-the-century period costumes to increase the realism of the exhibits.

The site of the museum — Crown Mines — is a particularly appropriate choice. The Witwatersrand's gold was first discovered nearby, on the widow Oosthuizen's farm, Langlaagte, in 1886. Backdrop to the museum's site is the impressive skyline of Johannesburg — the city that was built on gold.

Crown Mines 14 Shaft was sunk in 1916, when quite a few regular shaft sinkers were off fighting the First World War. But the stay-at-home crew still managed to set a world record for shaft sinking.

One of the first of the Museum's projects — still in its first phase of development — is to assemble a collection of gold-mining Africana. The museum is looking for old



Many of the beautiful antiques that adorn the houses in the old mining village have been tracked down by Mrs Rose Christie—items like the old Victorian brass lamp she is polishing

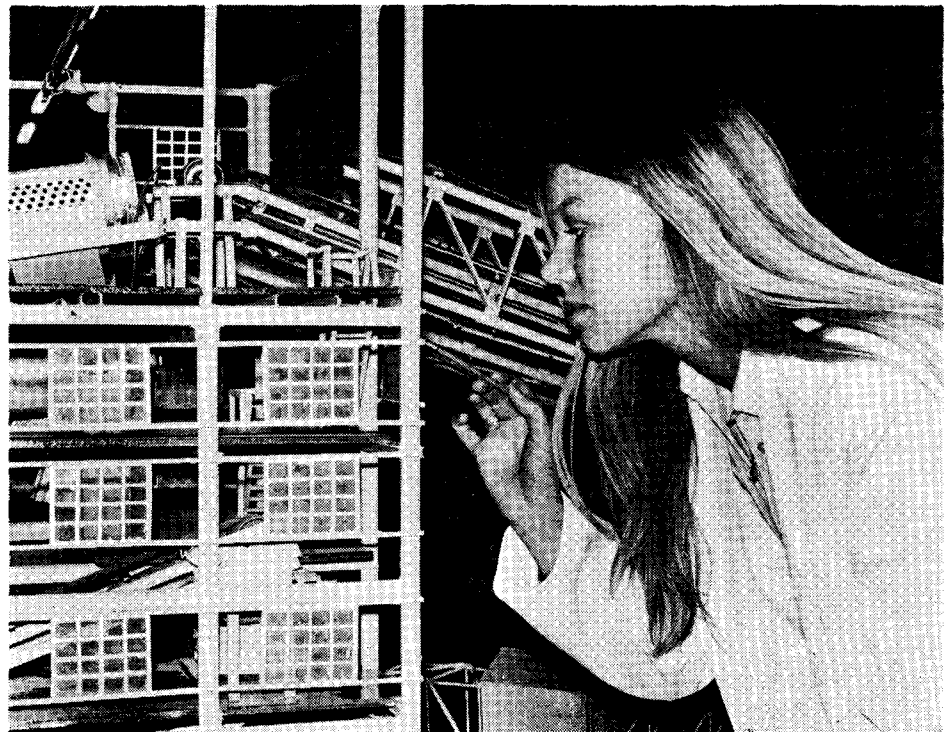
papers, letters, work or household objects, and pictures or prints. In addition, a business village, a mine magnate's mansion, and a mill and reduction works are planned.

Mining today is vastly different from what it was seventy years ago. The old familiar reminders — like the latticework of headgear silhouetted against the sky,

the old-fashioned mining villages, and the hiss of steam power — are gone. Modern gold-mining methods are very different. Already about 66 mines that once flourished on the Reef have closed. The Gold Mine Museum is a major and positive step to retain some of the Witwatersrand's rich heritage.



Mr Sydney Henderson will drive the winding gear that operates the cage in which visitors will travel down number 14 shaft. Mr Henderson has worked at Crown Mines since 1936



Finishing touches to the model of the crushing plant are applied by museum worker Beatrix Slabber