

A Real Production at the Spokane Bar Sapphire Mine
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by Deb Thompson

The customer that bought this mine-run of sapphire gravel never heard about any of the background activity. I explained some of the complications we were dealing with at the mine office. It was okay with him, okay with how the day turned out. The mine run was a success! He was elated with the 12.65 carat big sapphire as well as the 80 or so carats of facet grade sapphires in the first six hand screens!

The big fuel truck arrived the day before when the customer was here waiting for the mine run day. We paid \$1500 for fuel, truck did not show up until four pm, (he'll see stuff behind the scenes, with all the production that went on for the mine run.)

The day of the run, the 955 front-end loader batteries went dead. The loader was stuck in front of the trommel and couldn't be moved.

We called for batteries, finally went to 3 stores, Cumley's nutcase girlfriend Dawn does the run to town. Cass calls, his truck was stranded (still) he's out of commission for two hours with no assistance in front of South Market.

We decided to get the big loader, drag the little loader away from the trommel. We loaded the trommel with the big loader, but the bucket was too big – so it spilled over the sides.

Meanwhile, Russ calls from El Dorado. A big boulder had gotten stuck in the shaker plant. The rock was huge, 2-3 feet in diameter and the material would not move. Dan, the shaker plant operator, had to use a crow bar and sledge hammer to pry and pound his way past the obstacle.

The big belly dump truck drove over the treacherous road and arrived at the office and the belly dump would not dump. Here's the truck and crew stranded at the mine office for hours. Help finally arrived from town with duct tape to fix the belly dump wires, but it didn't work. Hours pass. Finally, the driver asked permission to drive the truck to town. So now there's a belly dump load of El Dorado sapphire material sitting in town.

We ended up washing more material from Cactus Hill to complete the run for a combination of Cactus Hill and El Dorado.

The day was a total meltdown. The haul crew didn't call when they should have to meet at El Dorado. They didn't have directions, didn't know where to go, then sat idle for two hours. They had been told to put grizzly (grate) on the machine. When they neglected the grate, rocks the size of a refrigerator were pulled out of the machine.

Dump trucks weren't comin' up. The only belly dump in use broke down. Still not back.

Doug finally got up to clean out the machine (jig) for the customer. He said “it’s hot in here.” Doug’s not super expressive, I asked him what the gravel looked like? “It’s really good. Really big ones went in there.” So he finally got it cleaned out and delivered to the guy. He found some beautiful stuff, 12 carat, some really pretty ones.

Wow! It was worth more than the \$5,000 he paid!!

I hope it turned out all right. “Just in the first couple scoops we’ve got about 80 carat’s of facet-grade sapphires. It’s really good. How many can you do during a year?”, he asked.

“One a month,” I replied.

“I’ll be ordering one a month.,” he said.

The customer said he would be ordering for his jewelers for a promotional thing for his business as a jewelry manufacturer. His clients are high-end jewelers. Stones would end up in high-class mountings, providing each jeweler with a sapphire suite.

Nothing ever came of his idea.