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Dawson, New Mexico



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Inside [Dawson](#) Coal Mine, 1920's, Carol and Dwight Myers Collection, [New Mexico](#) State University


In 1913, Stag Canyon No 2 Mine at Dawson, New Mexico was the 2nd worst coal mining disaster in U.S. History, claiming 263 lives.

[Dawson](#) became a mecca for miners from all over the world with immigrants arriving from Italy, China, Poland, Germany, Greece, Britain, Finland, Sweden, and Mexico. The miners worked together to dig the coal that fueled an area equal to 1/6 of the United States and [Dawson](#) grew into a company town of about 9,000.

Phelps Dodge strove to make the mines as safe as possible. They did such a good job with Stag

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Canyon Mine No. 2 that it attracted the eyes of coal-mining experts who, in 1913, described it as "the highest achievement in modern equipment and safety appliances that exists in the world." The [New Mexico](#) Inspector of Mines completed two days of inspection of the [Dawson](#) pits on October 20, 1913 and reported that Stag Canyon Mine No. 2 was totally "free from traces of gas, and in splendid general condition."

Yet, [Dawson](#) was doomed to suffer a series of tragedies that shadowed its history to the end. During this period of abundance and prosperity [Dawson](#) suffered its worst catastrophe on Wednesday, October 22, 1913, only two days after the mine's inspection. The morning dawned bright and clear and 284 miners reported to work at Stag Canyon Mine No. 2. Work went on as usual until a little after three p.m. when the mine was rocked by a huge explosion that sent a tongue of fire 100 feet out of the tunnel mouth shaking the homes in [Dawson](#) two miles away.

Relief and disaster crews were rushed from neighboring towns. Phelps Dodge sent a trainload of doctors, nurses and medical supplies up from El Paso, [Texas](#) and striking miners in [Colorado](#) ceased picketing and offered to form rescue teams.

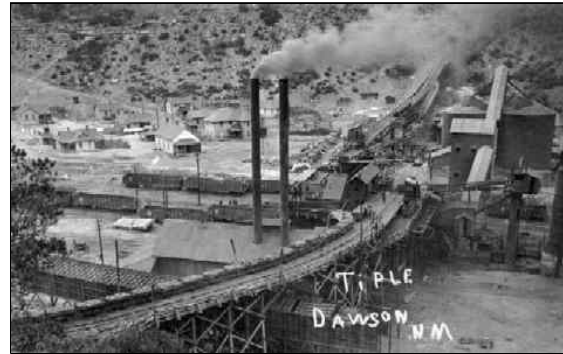
Relief and disaster crews were rushed from neighboring towns. Phelps Dodge sent a trainload of doctors, nurses and medical supplies up from El Paso and striking miners in [Colorado](#) ceased picketing and offered to form rescue teams. Working around the clock, rows of bodies were brought to the surface. The distraught wives and family members clogged and impeded the operations around the mouth of the mine.

Only 23 of the 286 men working in the mine were found alive. Two of the rescuers were themselves killed by falling boulders in the shaft. Mass funerals were conducted for the victims and row upon row of graves dug, making it necessary to extend the cemetery far up the hill. The cemetery was marked by white iron crosses and the burials continued for weeks. It was the second worst mine disaster of the century.



Explosion View on February 21, 1923, less than two weeks after 121 men lost their lives after a train jumped it's track, igniting coals dust in the mine on February 8, 1923. Dwight and Carol Myers Collection, NMSU.

Investigators determined that the explosion had



Tipple, 1900, Denver Public Library

been caused by an overcharged blast in a dusty pillar section of the mine. Dynamite, not a permitted explosive, was being used. The Bureau of Mines allowed certain types of explosives, but blasting was to be conducted only when all miners were evacuated and water sprays were to be used to settle the coal dust. These rules had obviously been ignored.

Safety measures were heavily increased after the disastrous explosion and subsequent accidents were comparatively minor with few fatalities. The mining continued and in 1918, the [Dawson](#) mines reached their peak production of over four million tons of coal.

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