

CHUBBUCK LIMESTONE RAILROAD, SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Gregg Wilkerson and Larry Vredenburg
Feb. 7, 2024

INTRODUCTION

This report is part of a research project that describes the relationships between mines and railroads in the Mojave Desert and southwestern Great Basin of southeastern California and southwestern Nevada. t

The collection can be accessed at
<http://www.greggwilkerson.com/railroads.html>

Italics indicate quotations.

HISTORY

The Chubbuck railroad is a spur line that connected to the Arizona and California Railroad (A&C) at the north end of the Kilbeck Mountains and the western flank of Ward Valley between Cadiz Junction and Rice Junction. There are two mines, the Chubbuck Station Dolomite and the West of Chubbuck Limestone mine (Wright and others, 1953:174; Southern Pacific, 1964:174). The limestone mine is near the Desert Butte copper-lead-zinc Mine (Goodwin, 197:628; Wright and others, 1953:8).

The history of Chubbuck begins with the immigration of Charles Ingles Chubbuck from Ottawa, Canada to San Francisco in 1906. Chubbuck opened a building supply business here just prior to the great earthquake and fire and cashed in on the demand afterward. In the late teens, Chubbuck found a somewhat unusual source of lime for cement at his own back door. Union Carbide Company shipped calcium carbide from its plant at Niagara Falls to other plants in South San Francisco and Los Angeles where it was converted to acetylene gas. Lime was produced as a by-product. Lime is also the principal constituent of cement, so Chubbuck made an arrangement to removed the lime from the Union Carbide plant and he sold it as cement. However, the lime still had bluish flecks of carbide in it, a drawback that made it less desirable for marketing (Vredenburg and others, Desert Fever).

Thus, in 1921, Mr. Chubbuck purchased the claims to 1,600 acres of limestone along the Parker branch of the Santa Fe railroad to obtain a whitening agent for his cement. These claims were purchased from Marcus Pluth and Tom Scofield, two well-known prospectors. From 1922 to 1925 a town was built, and a narrow-gauge railroad 1 mile to the quarry was also constructed. Full-scale production began in 1925 with rock being shuttled from the crusher near the quarries to a kiln at the town of Chubbuck. Crushed limestone also was produced at the Chubbuck operations in a plant near the Santa Fe (Vredenburg and others, Desert Fever).

Chubbuck was truly a town. It had a company store, post office, and a school. There were perhaps as many as 40 buildings, including residences for the some 24 predominantly Mexican workers and their families. The school was opened by 1932, housing grades one through eight. The post office was established in May, 1938, and was housed in the company store (Vredenburg and others, Desert Fever)..

During the construction of the Colorado River Aqueduct in the late 1930s, Chubbuck supplied lime products. The open aqueduct was lined with a coating of highly reflectant "metropolitan white" that aided in the proper curing of the concrete. While for years Chubbuck had a stability rare among mining towns, by the late 1940s, it too belonged to the desert, as the processing of lime products from the Chubbuck mines had ceased. One of the reasons for the abandonment of operations included the fact that union Carbide stopped shipping calcium carbide to the West Coast. Also, a new process of producing plaster was developed, and the company did not receive patent rights for this process (Vredenburg and others, Desert Fever, 1981)..

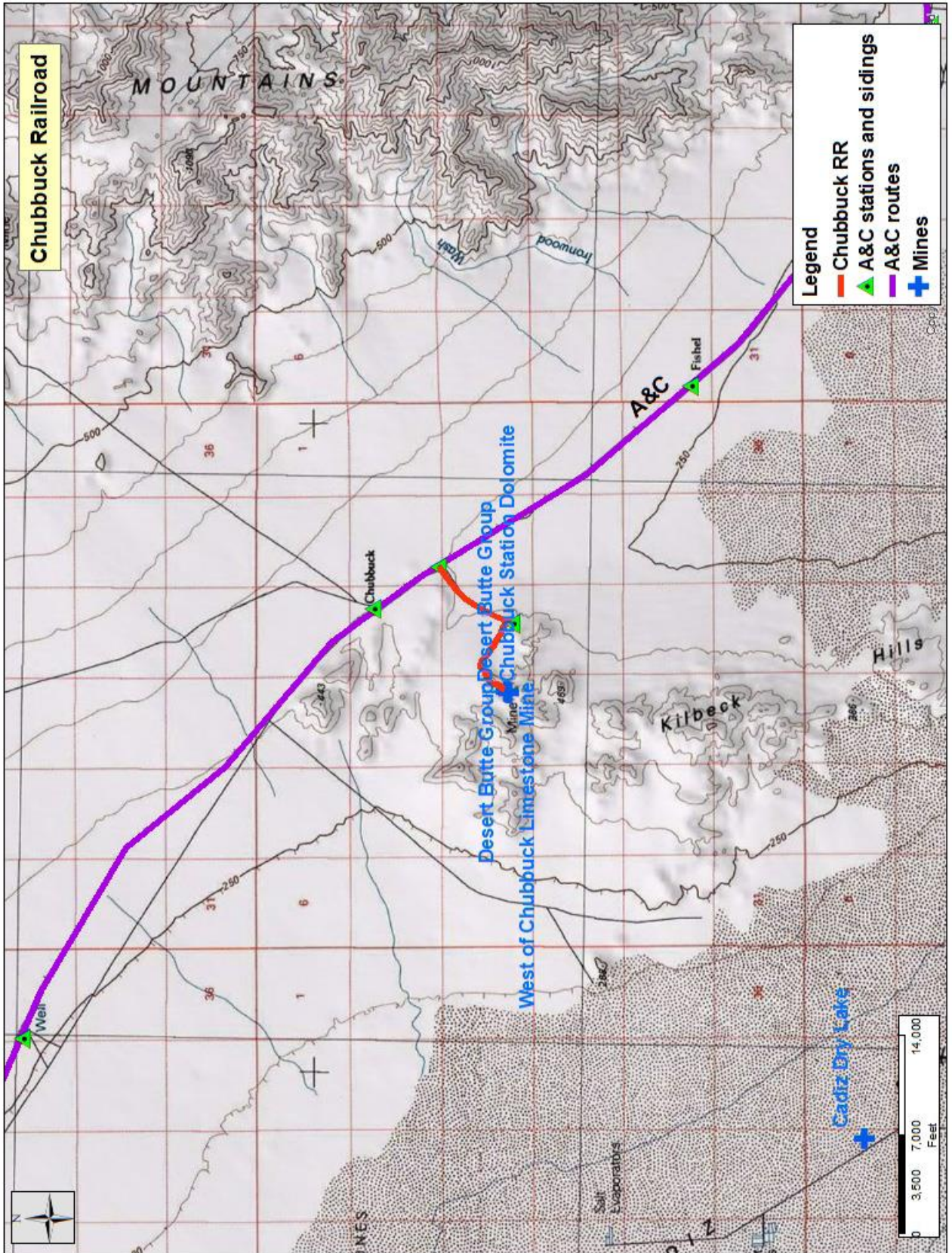
In 1950 the school and post office were closed. In 1951 the Harms Brothers Construction Company of Sacramento acquired the property with the equipment intact. The Harms brothers probably intended to make concrete for roadways, but there was simply too much silica in the limestone. The Harms brothers trucked the rock to the crusher near the quarries instead of using the narrow gauge that had been constructed for that purpose. However, another narrow gauge running from the crushed to Chubbuck was utilized. For a short time, a few workers employed by the Harms brothers lived at Chubbuck, but operations ceased and the equipment was auctioned off about 1954 (Vredenburg and others, Desert Fever)..

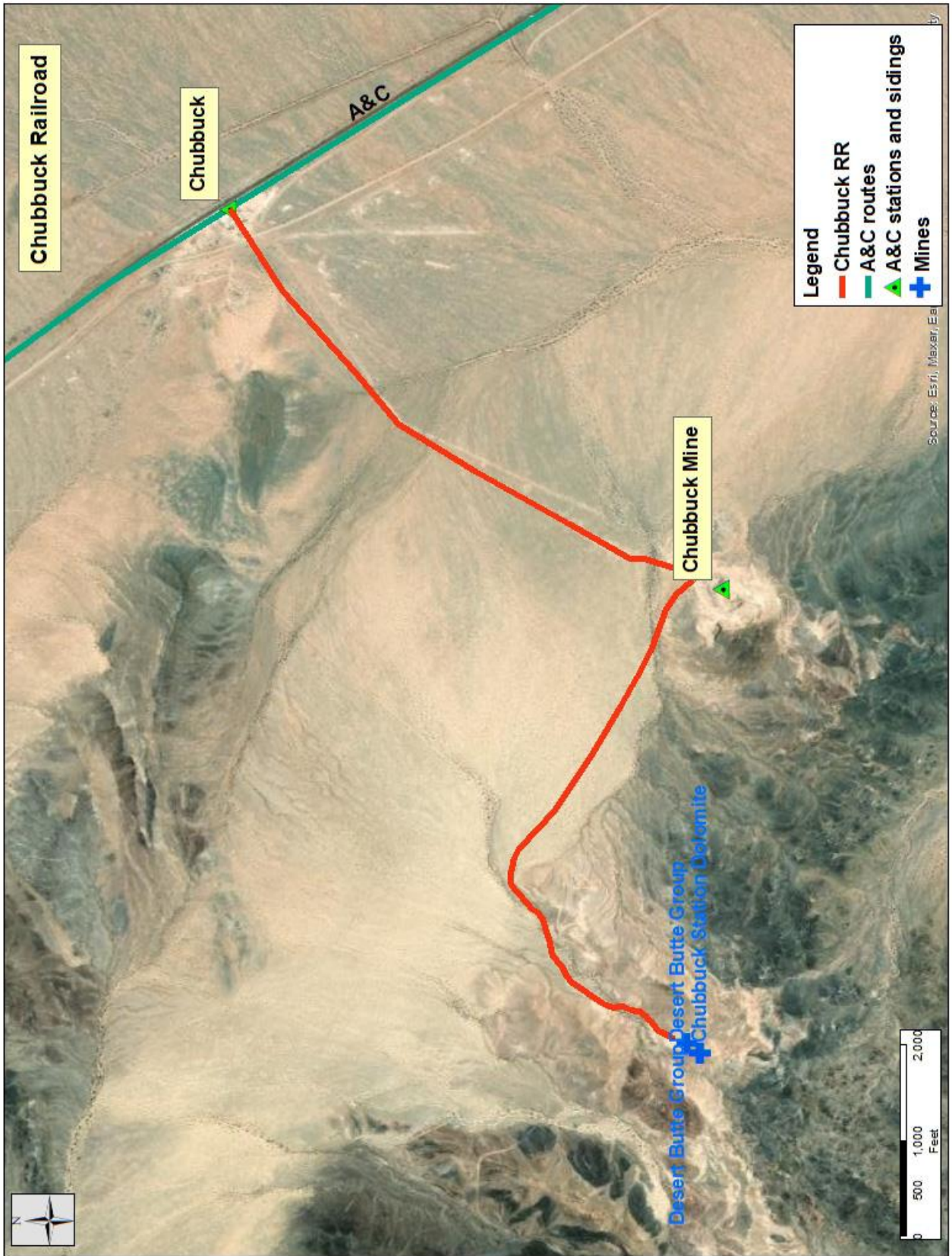
In the winter of 1975-76, the Santa Fe relaid the entire track of the Parker Branch in California and removed the siding at Chubbuck. At that time, someone had built a house and garage on one of the mammoth foundations. A small ore crusher operated by an automobile engine, probably used to sample gold ore, sat in front of the house (Vredenburg and others, Desert Fever)..

In the summer of 1977, the house was gone, except for a heap of trash and the automobile engine. The only structure that remains in its entirety is the explosives building, a concrete hexagon about 6 feet in diameter. The last 8 years have taken a heavy toll on the buildings that once stood there, and shortly, only the massive foundations will remain. 220 (Vredenburg and others, Desert Fever).



Caption: Black Butte Lead-Zinc-Copper Mine, Chubbuck, California; From https://dzrtgrls.com/black_metal_mine_chubbuck/TheBlackMetalMineandChubby/006.html accessed Nov. 11, 2023.





REFERENCES

All references in this report are available at
<http://www.greggwilkerson.com/iv-references.html>