

[Mining]



Drive. M2, headgear at Village Main (City and Suburban), Top Star Drive-in (Selby). 2010.

> Deep-level. Route. Stranger.

◇ **Village Main⁽¹⁾**

- Notices the mining headgear next to Heidelberg Street onramp has disappeared.
- Visits the site. Walks up the dirt road to a cement slab with free-standing wall structures. Several men appear from behind the wall. Decides to leave.
- Notices a group of men digging with pick-axes and shovels on the slopes of the site. Bags with soil are arranged in lines.
- Notices a month later that the site has been enclosed with barbed wire. One security guard stands next to a tree.
- Sees a group of Shembe praying on a weekend, opposite the site, on the side of Heidelberg Street.
- Returns to the site. A smaller group of men sit close to the fenced-off area. Cannot see where exactly the entrance to the mine shaft is. Two security guards, Bishop and Emmanuel, patrol the site. Both friendly. They say that the men extract gold from the soil with blow torches, mercury and towels, amounting to roughly R1 000 a day. They, mainly diggers from Zimbabwe, sell the gold at the Carlton Centre (at about R350 per gram). The gold is considered less valuable than 'white' gold found in Zimbabwe. Now that the shop has closed, they sell to 'the Nigerians', at less. They can make up to three grams a day. One of the trees on the site marks the most extensive findings (about R80 000). Emmanuel points to the top of the neighbouring mine dump, says 'see the men by the tree, they are watching us'. Says 'digging is hard work'. Points to where a tunnel runs below the ground. A week before, one of the men crawled into the old mine entrance and fell into the shaft proper, which is said to be 1 km deep. Says, 'they called a rescue team; they couldn't enter since the ground is too unstable. His body was not recovered'.
- The entrance to the shaft looks like a trough. Because of the rains, the soil is not dusty.
- Uncertain how long the mine has been defunct.
- Eight months later, one small wooden and two corrugated iron structures are erected on site. Security personnel and vans can be seen from the highway.

(1) Village Main Reef Gold Mining Company was formed in 1888 and originally situated on the farm Turffontein to the south of the city, 'on the dip of the Jubilee and City and Suburban companies' property'. The site contains two mineshafts. William Powell. 1985. 'Part IV. Excerpts from the Memoirs of William T Powell', 231.