

When Santa Fe's surveyors initially assessed the Barco plateau, they faced a perplexing challenge: the plateau was too small to accommodate a train turnaround, and the nearby mountains were steep and unforgiving, making the creation of a second spur to rejoin the main line seem unfeasible. Undaunted by these obstacles, Santa Fe devised an audacious plan to carve a tunnel through the caverns, thus crafting a looping route around Oasis Palms. This astonishing feat of engineering would afford Santa Fe the necessary space to bring its trains into town, execute a graceful loop around its vicinity, and then seamlessly return to the main line. The ambitious endeavor to construct the Oasis Palms spur, tunnel, and loop commenced in the winter of 1896.

Emmet foresaw the advantages of the tunnel's trajectory, as it would pass the train right by the entrance of the Barco Gold Mining operation. This development promised a streamlined means of transporting larger quantities of ore, which had become essential to keep the Barco mining operation profitable. Additionally, it transformed the opening of the mine into something of a tourist attraction. Passengers aboard the trains could now gaze out their windows and witness "The world-famous Barco gold mine that helped win the war." Despite its numerous challenges, including geological complexities and logistical intricacies, the construction of the spur, tunnel, loop, and the

Oasis Palms railroad station was completed two years later in the autumn of 1898.



Regrettably, by the time the tunnel construction concluded, mirroring the fate of many other gold mines in California, the Barco gold mine was exhausting its riches. Recognizing the need to expand the mining operations in 1898, Emmet struck a deal with Walter L. Hastings owner of the Black Warrior, Copper Carbonate, Ventura, Little Ida, and Imperial mining claims. Hastings agreed to lease the lands and establish a working mining operation just below Oasis Palms. Lease and royalty payments were intended to replace the income loss from the Barco. The operation was dubbed the "Vulcania". Hastings was to mine the Ship Mountain deposits from below the Barco mine. Hastings would come in from the side of the mountain to access the vein below the plateau caverns. The [Vulcan Gold Mine](#) was established in 1898 and is a historically significant site in the

mining industry. Although during its active period, it was classified as a small-scale producer, the primary mineral extracted from the Vulcan was gold.

Due to increasing costs and the declining ore quality, in the winter of 1899, Emmett Smith was forced to shut down operations in the Barco. While the lease to the Vulcan mining operation provided some income to Smith, due to Hastings' slow development of the site it was nowhere near as profitable as Smith had hoped. Hastings purposely dragged his feet in developing the mine instead he persistently offered to purchase the land and mineral rights outright. Finally in 1901 to generate much-needed income, Smith was forced to sell the land to Hastings.

After the purchase, Hasting ramped up production and in September of 1901, the Los Angeles Mining Review noted that Walter L. Hastings had sunk a 40-foot shaft on the Vulcania which assayed up to 1.5 ounces of gold across a 16-inch pay streak. Shortly after the publication of the article, Hastings sold the claim to Delane & Co and then it was later sold to P. H. McDermott. While the Barco was busted in 1899 the Vulcan Gold Mine a mere mile away would be successfully mined until the mid-1940s.

After enjoying nearly six decades of prosperity, Oasis Palms and the Smith family now faced an existential dilemma: They possessed extensive infrastructure but lacked any viable industry to

sustain it. Like numerous other [mining boom towns in California](#), Oasis Palms stood at a crossroads, with limited economic activity following the mine's closure. To further complicate matters, Santa Fe threatened to discontinue the daily passenger train service, posing a threat to the town's survival. The Smiths recognized the urgent need for creative solutions to prevent Oasis Palms from fading into the annals of California's Gold-Rush ghost towns.