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Mining

By Ryan L. Dansak,
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For years scientists have produced study after study about the dangers of radiation exposure. Seldom are studies published that venerate the medicinal uses of radiation, other than in an imaging or radiation therapy setting. Many scientists and physicians believe that exposure to moderate levels of radiation may decrease the symptoms of arthritis, bursitis, gout, bronchial asthma and migraine headaches. Still, with all of the potential benefits of low-level radiation, you'll be hard pressed to find people vacationing at "radiation spas," right?

It's not such a far-fetched thought considering companies, like the Free Enterprise Health Mine in Boulder, Mont., that have therapy facilities located near or on top of radioactive mines.

Sound a little strange? While anyone can travel to the facilities and soak in the natural radiation, world-renowned scientists and physicians are going to the mines and singing their high praises. Suddenly, their joints don't feel so stiff, breathing has gotten a little easier and headaches seem to disappear.

for

Relief

In The Beginning

There are six radon health mines nestled in the mountains of Montana. The original mine, which is said to have medicinal effects from inhaling radon gas, is the Free Enterprise Radon Health Mine, located off of U.S. Interstate 15. The mine was originally dug around 1939 to excavate precious minerals like silver and lead. It produced small amounts of ore but was eventually abandoned.

Barbra Erickson, a doctoral candidate at the University of Nevada, Reno, researched the history of the mine for a recent essay. She writes, "... It was the 1949 discovery of uranium ore ... that began the chain of events that would result in today's 'radon for health' phenomenon." After the discovery of uranium in the mine, Wade Lewis bought the mine and began excavation and named it Free Enterprise.

Inexplicable Relief

The story goes that in the summer of 1951, a Los Angeles woman came to visit her husband who worked in the mine. She requested to see where her husband worked and was lowered into the mine.

According to the woman's husband, she had bursitis so severely in her right shoulder, she was unable to lift cooking utensils. After several visits to the mine, she claimed her shoulder was free of pain.

Word of the healing potential of the mine spread so rapidly, hundreds of pain sufferers flocked to Free Enterprise demanding access to the mine. Eventually, Lewis shut down the uranium mining operation and re-opened as Free Enterprise Radon Health Mine. Through the years, tens of thousands of cure seekers have traveled to the mine to breathe the air that has relatively heavy radon concentrations.

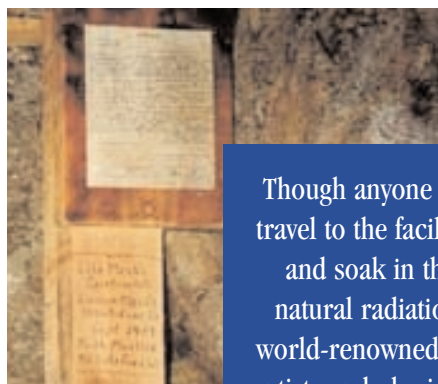
Wade Lewis died at the age of 81 and the mine has been in the family ever since. Today, the mine is owned and operated by Patricia "Pat" Lewis (Wade Lewis' granddaughter) and her husband, Burdette Anderson. The number of patrons to the mine have dwindled, but a significant number still visit, seeking relief from chronic illnesses. Some visit the mine once, are relieved of their pain and never return. Others go but are disappointed by the

results. Many people swear the radon health mine is responsible for their continued good health and return annually.

Anecdotal Evidence

One such person is Marie Klassen from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, who suffers from osteoarthritis. Prior to visiting Free Enterprise, she was under the care of a doctor for her illness.

The doctor prescribed Klassen medicine to alleviate the pain of her condition, but the



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pain persisted. "I got out of bed in the morning because I new if I stayed in bed it would just [get worse]," she says. Her medication dosage was so high, her doctor told her it might not be long before she needed a wheel chair.

"It was scary. I was in constant pain," she says.

Klassen heard of Free Enterprise from a friend, but she and her family were skeptical that radon therapy could ease her pain. "I have a son-in-law who's a nursing instructor and he didn't think it was a great idea, but then he did some research on it and said, 'Well mom, if it's not going to help you, at least it's not going to hurt you,'" Klassen recalls.

She decided to give the therapy a chance. On the way to California to visit their children, Klassen and her husband decided to stop in Montana to see if the radon therapy could accomplish what medication couldn't.

On the third day of treatment, Klassen says she became very ill. "I felt terrible,"

she says, "but that night I went to bed and had a strange tingling feeling in my body." The next morning Klassen woke early, showered and made breakfast. Her husband woke and was startled to see her moving around with so much vigor. "'How much medicine did you take last night?' he asked me. 'None,' I said. And from that point on it just got better and better," Klassen says.

She still has the osteoarthritis, but she's completely off medication. "It's changed not only my life, but the lives of everyone else around me, too," Klassen says. She still ventures to the mine once a year "just as a booster," she explains.

Klassen says she would recommend mine therapy to anyone experiencing a chronic illness. "The crippling will not go away," she says. "The pain will." How the radon gas she inhales frees her body from pain, she doesn't know. "It's a mystery to me. If you don't see it, it's absolutely unbelievable."

Science or Science Fiction

The actual science behind radiation hormesis, or radiation in small doses that has healing effects, is still a bit cloudy. The idea is that radiation stimulates the body to repair itself.

A paper published in 1999, co-authored by Ludwig E. Feinendegen, MD, FESC, states that "low doses of ionizing radiation have been observed to initiate a slowly appearing temporary protection against causation and accumulation of DNA lesions, involving the radical detoxification system, DNA repair and removal of DNA damage. This protection apparently does not operate at high doses."

Furthermore, Mortazavi, Ikushima and Mozdarani wrote in "An Introduction to Radiation Hormesis," that radiation may repair DNA and stimulate the immune system. They cite a 1909 study by V. K. Russ that showed that mice treated with radiation were more resistant against bacterial disease. The authors write, "... Many epidemiological studies have indicated that low-level dose irradiation may lead to beneficial effects such as increase in growth and development rates, increase in mean life span, stimulation of immune reactions

and even decrease in cancer mortality.”³

Increasing Evidence

Pat Lewis’ theory on how the therapy benefits the chronically ill is now being supported by research in Japan, where scientists are finding hormonal improvements in animal subjects treated with radiation.

“I believe that radon stimulates the hormone producing glands of the body. Hormones control everything — pain circulation, allergic reaction and inflammation. But remember, we know this doesn’t work for everyone and we don’t know the exact mechanisms at work. But that is the case with many medical applications,” she says.

Lewis explains she avoids the use of words like “treatment” and “cure.” “We have a uranium mine, open to the public. People visit the mine for a suggested duration. If they benefit from their time at the mine, we can only hope they will tell their friends and family,” she says. “We want people to understand that we are not playing ‘God’ or ‘doctor’ and that we do not hold ourselves so highly that we think we are ‘treating’ or ‘curing’ people in a technical sense of the word.” According to the brochure, the mine facility is available for people seeking an alternative or complement to present treatments for pain relief and disease symptom management.

“Yes, we have guests who profess ‘cure,’ however, most come to relieve their symptoms of pain [or] immobility,” Lewis says.

While she may not profess mine visits as a cure-all, she does believe it helps some people. She does not believe that after visiting the mine people feel better because of “a vacation in Montana,” “being in the company of friends” or the “clean mountain air.”

Lewis insists that Boulder is not a vacation destination. “The motels are old, the food in the restaurants leaves something to be desired. The cost of getting to this area is excessive by air; [it takes] two to three days to drive by car. The pain brings them here — not a good time.”

Setting Free Enterprise Apart

Each mine in Montana has a different draw, whether it be certain amenities or simply the price. Lewis claims that Free Enterprise is the most knowledgeable and

has set the model for other mines to follow. “We do the homework; we research the science,” she says. “Our mine is also the most developed and probably the best kept.”

She says that Free Enterprise may not be the right mine for everyone. “We encourage a new visitor to tour all the mines and choose the one that fits them best — whether the fit is in the pocketbook, location of housing or comfort of mine.”

In 2000, Free Enterprise had 400 visitors sign up for radon therapy. With the 1978 radon scare in America, Lewis has seen her business shrink significantly. “Pre-radon scare days, our summer saw about 3,000 to 5,000 people. ... That hey-day is gone.” Most clients who come to the mine seeking relief seem to like what they find. Depending on the year, Lewis says anywhere between 50 percent to 75 percent of the visitors return.

A Certain Je Ne Sais Quoi

If it doesn’t sound like your typical getaway — it isn’t.

As part of Erickson’s research, she visited Free Enterprise Mine. She described the mine, writing: “The walls of the tunnel are the native rock with huge wooden support beams spaced throughout the length of it. The tunnel is approximately 100 yards long all together, and along the walls are old bus benches and padded seats of assorted shapes and colors. Card tables and chairs are placed at each end in widened-out areas. It feels cool, but not uncomfortable, and the air smells fresh. The tunnel is well lit, and people read, play cards, chat or doze in their chairs all along the length of the corridors.

“On every wooden beam dozens of names and dates are inscribed, some with cryptic messages about their healing experiences, and hundreds of business cards have been tacked or stapled onto the wood.”¹

At an elevation of 5,400 feet, the average radon concentration at the resort is 1,700 pCi/l of air. For those still concerned that radon levels present at the mine are dangerous, there are state regulations in place to assure no one is overexposed. Clients at the mine must schedule treatments in increments and are encouraged to rest frequently between sessions.

Recommended Therapies

First-time visitors are encouraged to commit to a 10-day stay for 32 total hours of treatment. Best results, according to the brochure, are gained by two to three one-hour visits per day, spaced two to four hours apart. Clients are recommended to rest an hour after each session to reap the full benefits of the treatment.

According to Free Enterprise literature, “The exposure to radon is set under guidelines from the State of Montana recognized as ‘perfectly safe’ and based on one-tenth of an occupational dose for an underground miner at these levels.”

“The therapy,” Lewis says, “is a simple one that only requires some patience and time. No side effects, no babysitting. The price is right.”

The price of the treatment is \$150 for 32 one-hour mine sessions or \$5 for each one-hour session. The underground mine is closed for the winter, but Free Enterprise has an above ground “radon room” available for clients during the winter or those who want the benefits of radon gas but don’t like the enclosed feeling of being underground.

Results of the therapy vary and depend on factors such as severity of disease, degree of affliction and general health. Reported results vary from immediate to several months later.

— *For more information on Free Enterprise Radon Health Mine, call 406-225-3383, or visit their Web site at www.radonmine.com.*

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