



THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN FILM HISTORY

Arrastra



The word arrastra comes up in Lone Pine frequently as many movie fans know of the scene in ***Yellow Sky*** (1948). It was believed for many years that the Arrastra in the Alabama Hills was built for the movie as it is located fairly close to the “mine” in ***Yellow Sky***.



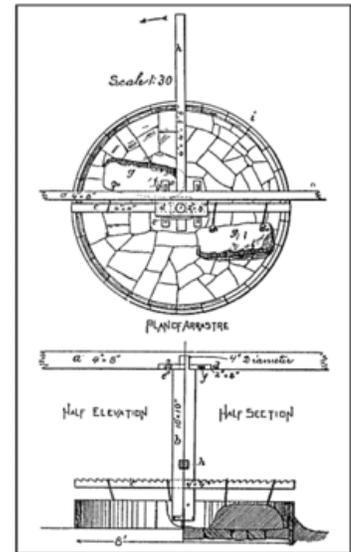
In actuality, the Arrastra is visible in an earlier movie, ***West of Nevada*** (1935) and later seen in ***Kim*** (1950).



For your next Jeopardy quiz here is a description of What an *Arrastra* is.

An Arrastra (or Arastra) is a primitive mill for grinding and pulverizing (typically) gold or silver ore. The simplest form of the arrastra is two or more flat-bottomed drag stones placed in a circular pit paved with flat stones, and connected to a center post by a long arm. With a horse, mule or human providing power at the other end of the arm, the stones were dragged slowly around in a circle, crushing the ore. Some arrastras were powered by a water wheel; a few were powered by steam or gasoline engines, and even electricity.

Arrastras were widely used throughout the Mediterranean region since Phoenician times. The Spanish introduced the arrastra to the New World in the 16th century. The word "arrastra" comes from the Spanish language arrastre, meaning to drag along the ground. Arrastras were suitable for use in small or remote mines, since they could be built from local materials and required little investment capital.



Typical Arrastra construction:
Mining & Scientific Press



For gold ore, the gold was typically recovered by amalgamation with quicksilver. The miner would add clean mercury to the ground ore, continue grinding, rinse out the fines, then add more ore and repeat the process. At cleanup, the gold amalgam was carefully recovered from the low places and crevices in the arrastra floor. The

amalgam was then heated in a distillation retort to recover the gold, and the mercury was saved for reuse.

Turn over...

For silver ore, the patio process, invented in Mexico in 1554, was generally used to recover the silver from ore ground in the arrastra. The process was invented by Bartolomé de Medina in Pachuca, Mexico, in 1554. The patio process was the first process to use mercury amalgamation to recover silver from ore. It replaced smelting as the primary method of extracting silver from ore at Spanish colonies in the Americas. Other amalgamation processes were later developed, importantly the pan amalgamation process, and its variant, the Washoe process. The silver separation process generally differed from gold parting and gold extraction, although amalgamation with mercury was also sometimes used to extract gold.

Museum of Western Film History
PO Box 111 Lone Pine, California 93545
760-876-9909

Website: www.museumofwesternfilmhistory.org

