

HISTORIC HAUNT

APACHE JUNCTION ATTRACTION IS A BIG DRAW FOR A FAMILY DAY TRIP BY TYSON HUGIE

Note to parents: Dress your 5-year-old in closed-toed shoes before taking the Mammoth Mine Tour at Goldfield Ghost Town. The last thing you want to hear when you're exiting the rickety wooden elevator and entering the mine shaft hundreds of feet underground is, "My flip-flop!"

There just so happens to be a four-inch-wide gap to step across, and, well, it tends to be a great place to lose footwear. That's what happened to my nephew Rex at the most inopportune time during our visit to the Apache Junction attraction.

Fortunately, my arm was just exactly long enough to reach into the opening and retrieve Rex's flip-flip from a ledge down below, with the assistance of a cell

phone's flashlight. Little Rex would have been waddling around half shoeless or needing to be toted around for the rest of the day, otherwise.

Like so many small Arizona mining towns, Goldfield peaked and then dried up based upon availability (or lack thereof) of its precious ores. At its high point, it was home to around 1,500 people, but that lasted only about six years between 1892 and 1898. In the decades that followed, prospectors again tried extracting more gold from the ground, but ultimately the efforts were abandoned.

Today, entrepreneurs are raking in the proceeds in Goldfield from a different type of revenue stream: tourists. Lots and lots of tourists. It took us about 45 minutes to

get to Goldfield from central Phoenix.

Even with a Thursday morning early arrival, not long after the 10:00 am start time, we still found ourselves herded around like cattle among the merchants, bakery and saloon, all set up along an 1800s-appearing "main street" of dirt, which was constructed in the 1980s to replicate what Goldfield might have looked like during its heyday about a century prior.

The 1.5-mile narrow gauge train ride around the property was our first of several attractions—packaged as part of a \$21 "combo" ticket that also includes a tour of the Mammoth Mine as well as admission to the Mystery Shack. We found the train ride to be a little slow-paced, but the con-

ductor's narration gave us some interesting education on the history of the region. The mine tour was engaging, and the kids loved it—especially the skeleton on display and the demonstration of what it must have been like to work in such a dark environment illuminated by only candlelight.

Perhaps our favorite attraction at Goldfield was the Mystery Shack, a crudely-constructed wooden home built on the hillside at a 45-degree angle. Designed to test your balance and play with your senses, it serves as a life-sized optical illusion. We enjoyed being able to watch water "run uphill" and a billiards ball roll uphill, too. It takes a few minutes to get over the vertigo after the tour but it was worth it.

The kids wanted some souvenirs, of course, so we paid a visit to one of the many gift shops along the main thoroughfare—partly to browse the wares, partly to

escape the heavy crowds congregating outside to watch a gunfight reenactment. We heard the gunshots from within the store, so we got our taste of Western movie action without having to be outside watching it and covering young ears.

We didn't venture to try the food at Goldfield, but rather drove another 13 miles up the road to Tortilla Flat Saloon—a fun scenic destination if it weren't for heavy construction traffic on Highway 88 when we went. An hour-long wait would be too much time for three hungry kids, so we opted to make our way back to Gilbert for some of the East Valley's best Mexican at Nando's Mexican Café on Baseline at Gilbert Road.

For our family outing, the trip to Goldfield was just what we needed to entertain my brother's three young kids for the day.

We'll just leave the flip-flops at home next time. ■

