

## Artist Statement



*On-line definition*

**tail·ing**

*/ˈtāliŋ/*

plural noun: *tailings*

1. the residue of something, especially ore.
2. the part of a beam or projecting brick or stone embedded in a wall.

*Additional interpretation by Les Allert*

***3. the stuff discarded or left behind, i.e. buildings, structures, foundations, equipment, and vehicles associated with mineral extraction and exploration operations.***

Our history of westward expansion was often driven by those seeking riches from the ground. Much of the evidence of their activities was discarded when they left for the next big strike. The landscapes are littered with their remains. Left exposed to the elements, items rust, dry out and crack or simply fade out of existence.

From Arizona to Alaska, I have been drawn to photographing these scenes, from the grand scale to the abstract details. The weathered features add interest and display age. Photographing these subjects with the large format camera is a slow, deliberate process. Mostly it allows me to look closer at the features that make up the composition and to make lens and exposure adjustments that accent interest.

The printing process used here is called Platinum Printing. It was first patented in 1873, but with the rise in the cost of platinum and palladium, the process was abandoned after the turn of the twentieth century. Fine art photographers began working with the process again beginning in the 1970's. This is a contact printing process which means the print is the same size as the negative. Today, the paper is hand coated with a solution that is only sensitive to ultra violet light.

So why use such an old, complicated and expensive process? Two reasons: 1) the tonal range of a platinum print is greater than that of today's silver prints, yielding more detail in the shadows and highlights, 2) the platinum and palladium metals bonded to the paper are inert to change, making this process one of the most archival of all photographic processes. Platinum prints are projected to have a lifespan of perhaps a thousand years. Both the sensitizing solution and the developing chemistry used here produce brown tones rather than grey, adding to the antique feel of the images.

In my photography, I connect to the people, the past, and the risks taken in the search for riches from the earth. Their stories speak through these leavings... these tailings.

Les Allert