

# MINING WITH DON CAMERON

A former Oregon State Senator from Josephine County, and former Head Engineer for the Siskiyou National Forest, Don Cameron tells of the early days of mining in southern Oregon.

Mining in Don Cameron's family started with his father. Just after the Gold Rush started, Don Cameron's father headed across the plains in 1852 to the mining town of Jacksonville, Oregon. Jacksonville had a western look but smacked of importance.

Todd Cameron started out with a small mine in Jacksonville. This mine payed off well and enabled Cameron to become partners with his brother. Together they bought the rich and famous Sterling Mine in Ruch, Oregon.

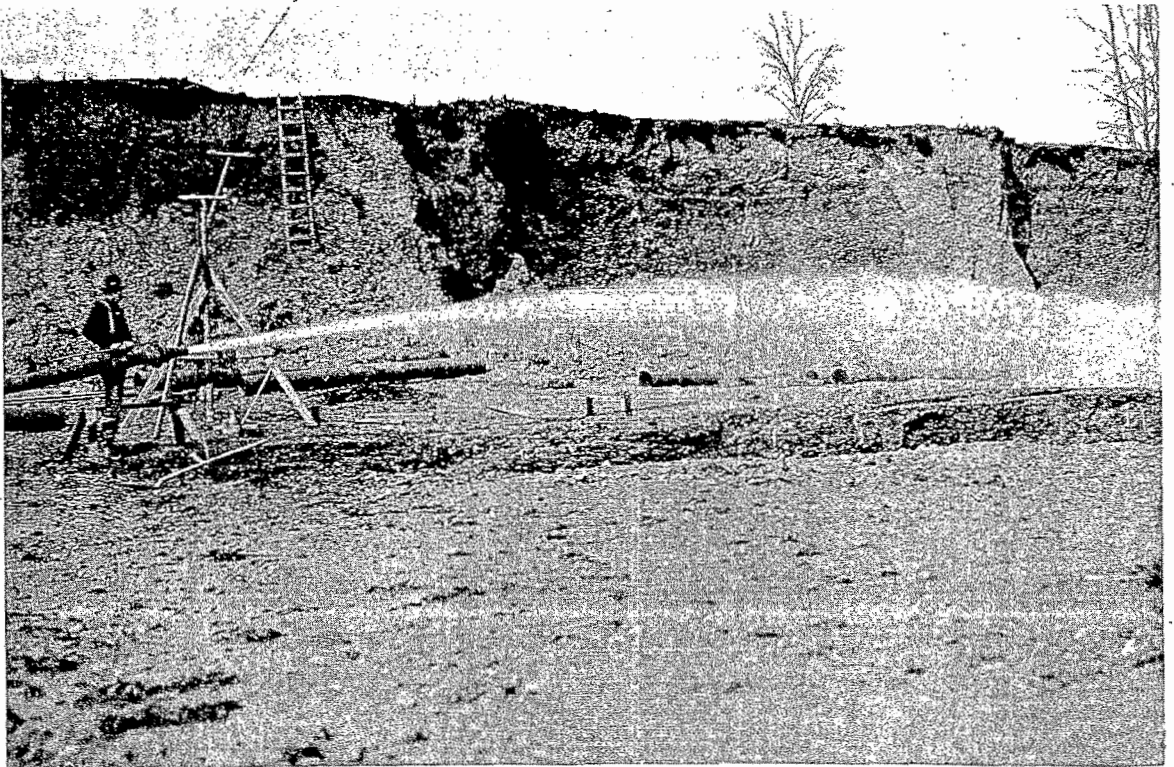
The Sterling Mine was one of the best gold producing mines in Southern Oregon. Soon after the Camerons bought it, major construction was needed to keep the mine running. Long canals and flumes were needed and the Camerons couldn't finance the construction, so they sold the mine for \$25,000.00, a fortune in the 1850's.

"There was a lot of gold mined out of the Sterling Mine. Millions came out of the Ruch area."

"Another big mine in Jacksonville was the Opp Mine. The Opp Mine was originally owned by Beekman and Huffer and was located on Jackson Creek, two miles from Jacksonville's city center."

The Opp Mine was a quartz mine and had a 20 stamp mill. A quartz mine is different than a placer mine. A quartz mine follows a vein of gold with a shaft rather than breaking a bank of earth down with water pressure. The Opp Mine was rich but the vein ran out, so they finally tore the old mill down.

A short time later, the elder Mr. Cameron came to Josephine County. After settling his family, Todd Cameron got acquainted with Frank Ennis. Ennis was a miner himself, so they became partners. They got together and bought the "Old Channel Mine" on the Rogue River. The old Channel Mine is probably the most famous mine in Josephine County. It is located just up the hill from Galice. Frank Ennis and Todd Cameron placer mined there for quite a few years but finally sold the old Channel Mine to a large company for thirty thousand dollars in 1886.



Running the Placer "Giant" in the early 1900's at the old Logan Mine near present day Waldo, Oregon

Don Cameron, who was born in Jacksonville, Oregon, in 1893 continues,

"Getting to Galice before the turn of the century was quite a trip from Grants Pass. First you went by stage coach or hack to what is now called Indian Mary Park. A small ferry was located there and enabled the crossing of the river. From Indian Mary Park to Galice you had to go by burro and horseback because there was no road. Galice was the headquarters for all mining in the area.

"I can remember my mother holding me next to her on horseback as we rode down the Rogue River to Galice."

"After selling the old Channel Mine my dad and Frank Ennis bought part interest in the Simmons Ranch and mine near Waldo, Oregon. The mine was then known as the Simmons, Cameron, and Ennis mine. The mine is right on the road just this side of Waldo.

"As kids we had fun mining here and there. I went to the University of California at Berkeley. I studied engineering, and graduated in 1912. After graduation, at the age of 19, I moved back to Medford, Ore., and worked as a surveyor for the City of Medford.

"In 1912 we surveyed a 'right of way' for a railroad to run from Medford to Crescent

City. This was a 4 to 5 month job and required a crew of 22 men. There were cooks, map men, brush cutters, and surveyors.

"We went down the Medford railroad to the Applegate River and then followed the Applegate to Wilderville. From Wilderville we ran the road straight through the little valley and up over Hayes Hill. The right-of-way descended into the Illinois Valley, through it, and into Elk Valley. We came out of Elk Valley and over to the Chetco River. We then followed the Chetco River to the coast. Our railroad right-of-way tied into the "Hobbs-Wall" railroad at Crescent City. Hobbs-Wall had big mills in the Crescent City area.

"On our way to the Coast I went through the mining settlement of Waldo for my first time. At that time, Waldo was a busy little town of three or four hundred people. George Elder had the General Store, and Charlie Record owned the Blacksmith Shop.

"Just a few years before, Waldo had been a boom-town with over 2,500 population. Waldo was named after Judge Waldo and was the county seat of Josephine County. Waldo was a prosperous little town before Grants Pass came into existence."

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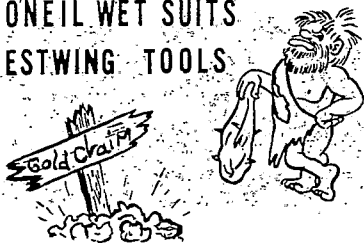
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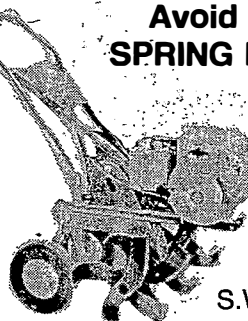
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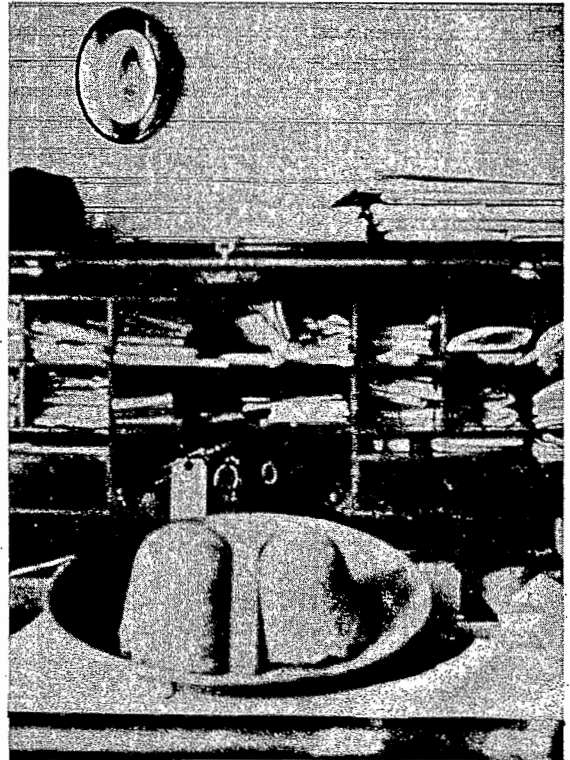
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## MINING WITH DON CAMERON

"When I first saw the town of Kerby, it had three or four motels and some fine livery stables. The county seat went from Waldo to the more centrally located Kerby. When Grants Pass got many times bigger than the other towns the county seat was moved there.

"In 1914 I inherited my Dad's interest in the Simmons, Cameron & Logan Mine. (Ennis had sold his interest of the mine to Logan.) At this time I moved to the Waldo mine.

"In order to mine on the Simmons property in Waldo, three canals were dug to the Illinois River. In places these large ditches were over 100 feet deep. The longest of these canals was 5 or 6 miles long. Another canal had to be tunneled through a ridge in order to reach the Simmons Mine. This particular canal cost \$100,000 to build and was simply a ditch to wash unwanted gravel or 'tailings' through. The other two ditches on the Simmons mine were built for water pressure. These ditches wound around up to the top of a hill and then the water was piped into a nozzle, or 'Giant', under tremendous pressure. The highline ditch had a 365 foot



PURE GOLD from the Logan Mine of Waldo, OR.



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'head' and the middle ditch has a 160 foot 'head'. These 'Giants' are used in placer mines to break down the earth and move it through a flume. The gold is trapped in the flume.

"During the same time I was mining on the Simmons, Cameron & Logan mine, Logan and I leased the Osgood Mine in Waldo. The Osgood Mine was in extremely hard ground, so we ran tunnels into the bank and blew up tons of powder. This loosened the ground so we could work it with our placer giants. We sold the Osgood mine in 1916.

"While I was mining in Waldo, I got married to Olga. We were married in 1916, and then in 1917 we sold the 'Simmons, Cameron and Logan Mine' to George Esterly for \$150,000.

"The Esterly Mine ran until 1925, when he died. The Esterly Mine was then sold to an English company. This company was a dredge company, and they wanted to dredge out the Esterly property but found that it wasn't suitable for mining.

"After selling both the Simmons mine and the Osgood mine, my brother-in-law and I leased the Queen of Browns Mine. The Queen of Browns Mine was a copper mine near Takilma.

"We sent our copper ore to the Tacoma smelter by rail. First we blasted the vein and sorted out the good ore. Then, the ore went by little ore cars to a bin where it was picked up by horse-drawn wagons and taken to the Waters Creek Railroad.

"In the early days the miners had a smelter there and made squares of gold and copper mixed and shipped them to the refinery.

"Mining is not all velvet though, because we got up one morning in 1919 and read in the Oregonian that copper prices had dropped from 19¢ a pound to 7¢ a pound overnight. We were in a fix. There were two car-loads of ore at the Waters Creek Railroad dock and it wouldn't pay to

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ship them, so we just left them there. Soon the timbers rotted through and all the ore fell down beside the tracks. In 1929 the copper prices went back up to 19¢ so we sent the ore out.

"Because of the drop in copper prices, three good copper mines shut down, never to be worked again. They were our Queen of Browns mine, the Cowboy Mine, and the Waldo Mine. There is still a lot of copper in these mines. The fact is, there are millions of dollars worth of copper in the Waldo area.

"My last real mining was done at the  
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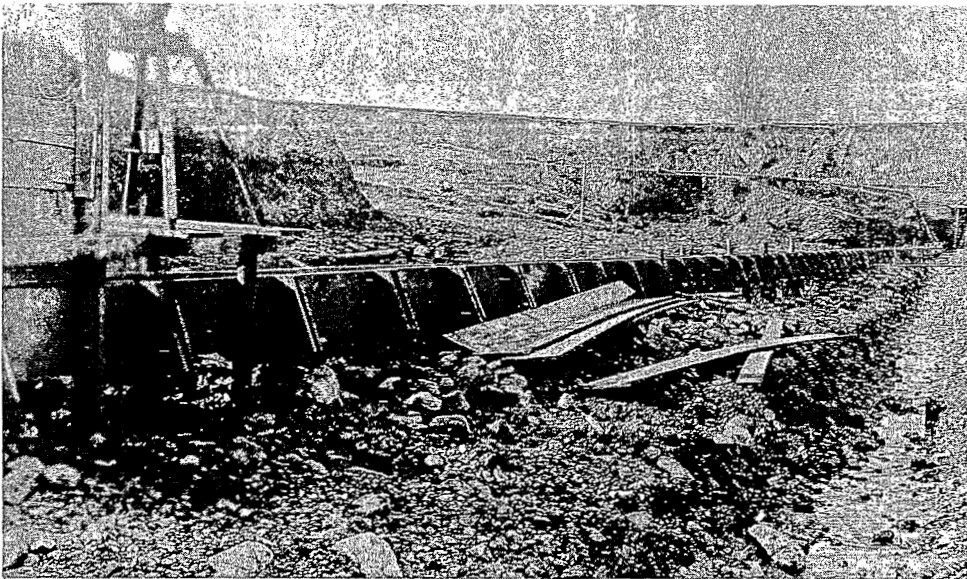
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The flume "that catches the gold" in the lower pit of the Logan Mine near Waldo, OR.

## MINING WITH DON CAMERON

Osgood placer mine, a mine that I once owned. An English mining company had bought the mine and hired me to help run it. I worked the Osgood Mine from 1919 to 1924 and we took out an enormous amount of gold. Today a miner named Jack Finney

is prospecting in this area trying to find main pockets of gold.

"Mining built up big along the Rogue river and was responsible for the railroad coming into the Grants Pass area.

"Some of the famous mines in the area were the old Channel Mine near Galice, the Alameda Mine, the Granite Hill Mine, the Blue Channel Mine, and the Greenback

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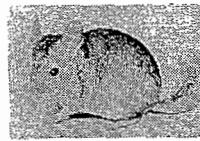
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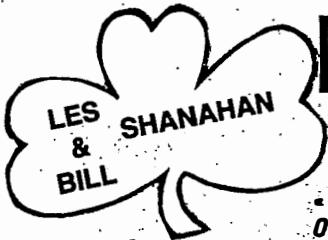
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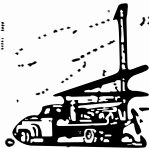
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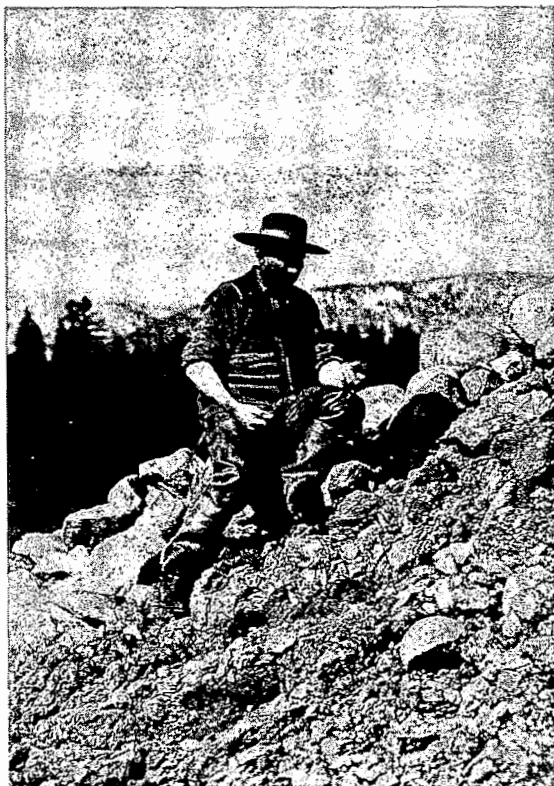


Mine. The Greenback Mine is being re-worked today.

"By 1924, I had a family of four to take care of and wanted something that was less hectic than mining. I went to work for the Siskiyou National Forest Service as an Engineer. I worked in the forest service for thirty years. In 1955, I quit and formed a little engineering company.

"In 1957 some of the townspeople wanted me to run for State Representative. Well, I told them I wouldn't run for State Representative, but that I would run for Senator. I wanted to follow in my father's footsteps. You see, he had been a State Representative four terms and a State Senator two terms. I got both the Democratic and Republican nominations for State Senator. I served as a Senator for one term, or four years.

"In 1901, when I was eight years old, I was a page boy in the Oregon Senate. So when I made Senator in 1957 the paper had a big write-up saying, 'From Page to Senator in Fifty-five Years'."

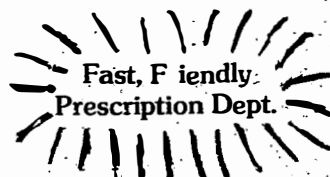


The man who gets ahead is the one who does more than is necessary—and keeps on doing it.

Looking for signs of gold, early 1900, Waldo

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