

BAKER AREA

(Pocahontas, Auburn, Minersville, and Baker Districts)

The Baker area, as the term is now used, includes the several areas formerly referred to as the Auburn, Pocahontas, and Minersville Districts. Its boundaries are extended south to the crest of the divide, taking in the drainage of Sutton Creek and other tributaries of Burnt River as far west as Hershals. It extends west to the crest of the Elkhorn range, except for the Rock Creek District, whose eastern boundary is the 118 degree meridian. The northern boundary is the county line. The Baker area is located upon the southern end of the Elkhorn range. The flanks of this range here are four to five miles wide and present narrow sloping ridges separated by deeply incised gulches. On the east is Baker Valley, which is 3,500 feet above sea level, while along its southwestern base are the gravels of Sumpter Valley, at an elevation of 4,000 feet. The foot of the south end of the range is flooded by basaltic lavas up to 4,700 feet and Powder river flows around the district in a semicircle.

The streams which drain this district are the several branches of Salmon Creek, extending up into Hibbard, Rouen, Dutch and Washington gulches, and flowing northeasterly into Powder River; Griffin and Elk Creeks, flowing eastward; Poker Creek and California gulch flowing south into Powder River, and draining French and Blue Canyon gulches in the old Auburn diggings.

Heavy timber covers the middle slopes of the range, while the upper ridges and peaks are often bare and rocky. South and east of Auburn the rolling foothills are composed of lava and gravel covered by sagebrush.

Geology:

The rocks are Carboniferous and Jurassic slate, argillite and some limestone, together with interbedded schists and greenstone, some of which are old lava flows. That the main granodiorite intrusion outcropping over wide areas farther north extends underneath this district is made evident by numerous dikes of porphyry.

There are numerous other old intrusives consisting of gabbro, diorite and albite granite. Some of these were intruded in post-Carboniferous times while the main granodiorites came in during late or post-Jurassic time.

Tertiary rocks cover a considerable part of the area and consist of andesite breccias and phylolite of Dooley Mountain; the basalt which laps around the south end of the Elkhorn range and covers the hills north and east of Baker, and the very extensive lake and river deposits interbedded with and overlying the basalts.

The veins range from stringers to wide massive quartz veins. In Auburn the veins although small have occasionally produced rich pockets, while most of the larger veins in other parts of the district have been too low grade to work. At the present time both placer and quartz production is not large. There is some placer work on Elk Creek south of Bald Mountain.

The first gold discovery in eastern Oregon was made at Griffin gulch in the fall of 1861. In 1862 the large placer mines of Auburn were discovered and the following year Auburn camp had a population of 5,000.