

SUMPTER AREA

Geography:

The Sumpter Area includes the drainage of upper Powder river above Hershah (near Union and Dean creeks), with the exception of the Cracker creek area, whose southern east-west boundary lies three miles north of Sumpter. It thus takes in practically all of Sumpter valley. A short distance below the mouth of Deer creek the Powder river enters a narrow canyon in which it flows for about 12 miles. The Sumpter valley, which is above the canyon, is at an elevation of from 4,000 to 4,500 feet and is an alluvial bottom flanked by broad gently sloping forested benches. Beyond these the snowy summits of the Elkhorn range rise abruptly eastward, while to the west a well-timbered ridge of moderate elevation separates the valley from Burnt river drainage. A little above Sumpter the Powder river branches into Cracker creek, McCully fork and several other smaller creeks, all heading among the high ridges leading to Elkhorn range or Mt. Baldy.

Geology:

Argillites in great variety outcrop over most of this area. Although the main branches of the streams rise in granodiorite areas, the only outcrops of granodiorite within the district are of small extent; one on the divide between Sumpter and Granite, about half of which is in Baker county, a very small outcrop at the head of Lake creek, a branch of Deer creek, and several small irregular outcrops on the divide between Powder river and Burnt river on the south side of Sumpter valley. Some small outcrops of limestone as well as occasional bodies of greenstone are found within the argillite areas, and granodiorite porphyry and aplite dikes occur in the vicinity of the granodiorite, since the latter is an intrusive into the argillite.

The general course of Powder river was evidently laid out before the outpouring of the basalt which covers much of the territory to the south of the district. It is evident that these basaltic flows dammed the river to a height of 4,600 to 4,700 feet and that this barrier created Sumpter valley. Coarse gravels at once began accumulating and filled the valley to an elevation of 4,600 feet and these ancient gravels can now be seen on the older rocks for a maximum width of nearly 6 miles and a length of about 15 miles. As the lava barrier was gradually cut through, the gravels were left in terraces in the valley. At the present time the stream has cut down 700 feet below the top of the lava flows.

There is a small area of lava still remaining upon the divide between Buck gulch and Burnt river valley. Underneath this lava flow is a buried stream channel. This buried 3-mile remnant of a former drainage system apparently forked a short distance above Sumpter. The destruction of most of this stream probably contributed more gold to the placer mines than the erosion of veins by the present drainage system.

Workable placer grounds do not extend very far up Cracker creek from Sumpter since most of the area north was formerly occupied by glaciers. To the west there was much placer mining in former days, particularly at the Weaver mine and on benches above and below the town of Sumpter. The greatest area is below the town where on the valley floor the dredges are working a wide field. Several of the smaller creeks which empty into Deer creek contain placer gold.

History:

The placer deposits were discovered in 1862 and have been worked more or less actively since that time. The first dredge (9 cubic foot buckets) was constructed during 1912 and began operating January 7, 1913, and a second dredge (7½ cubic foot) was constructed in 1914. With some interruptions, dredging has continued up to the present time (1939). There is now operating a 9 cubic foot dredge which washed 3⅓ million cubic yards of gravel in 1938, with a probable life of eight additional years. Dragline dredges are also operating in the area. Pg 94-14 A