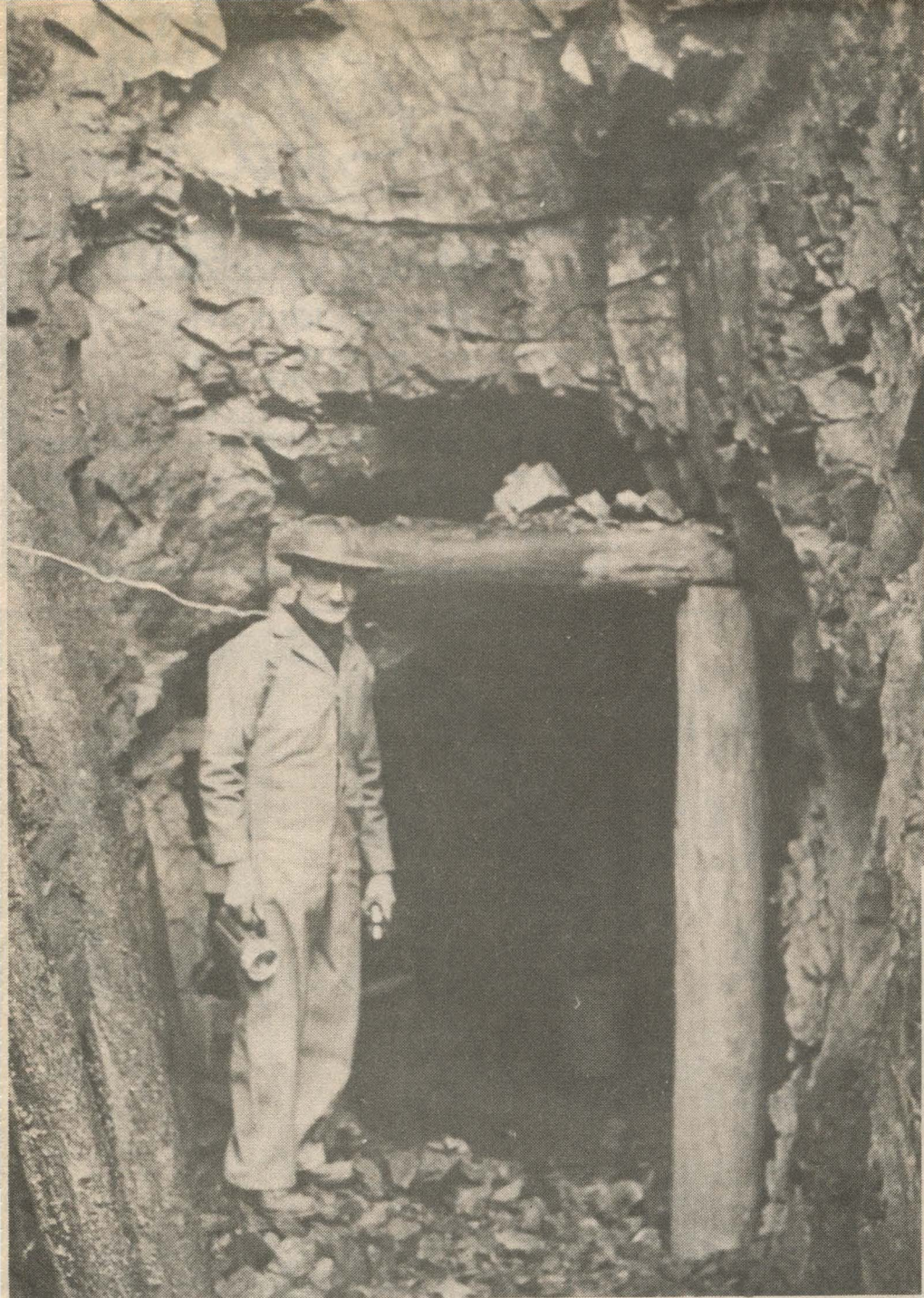




**A MAGNIFYING GLASS** is helpful in determining the amount of gold in a sample of ore. Here Tiaman Hatcher examines bits of the ore and gold

he extracts so laboriously from his 20-acre claim near Rogue River.





**A FLASHLIGHT** in one hand, Hatcher prepares to enter his mine shaft (above). The 82-year-old Rogue River miner and his helpers labor daily in the shaft. When they have a load of ore, they haul it to the rambl-

ing mill (right) which sits on Hatcher's property. When the load of ore gets big enough to make it worthwhile, the mill is fired up, separating the gold from the rocks and sand.

*Story and photos*

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**GOLDEN NUGGETS**, here displayed in the palm of Hatcher's hand, are what keep the old miner and his helpers working hard day after day.



**HATCHER STEPS** carefully as he walks down the stairs of his ramshackle but functional mill.





# An Ounce of Gold For a Ton of Ore

## And Using His Ancient Mill, 82-year-old Miner Tiaman Hatcher is Determined to Get His Ounce

ROGUE RIVER — Tiaman Hatcher says he never takes a job unless he knows he is a big enough man to finish it.

The 135-pound man has never turned one down. He has, in fact, taken on a bigger job than most men would dare attempt.

Hatcher, 82, is a gold miner, but he is not panning creekside, using giant streams of water to wash away hillsides or dredging with a gasoline-powered motor. He and two workers are taking ore out of mine shafts with picks and shovels, hauling it on their backs over rugged hillsides, and milling it in Hatcher's 50-year-old mill.

They are sure that any day, they are going to strike it rich.

Maybe they already have. The old shaft they are working contains ore that puts a glint in a gold miner's eye.

"Should work out to around an ounce a ton," Hatcher said optimistically. That does not sound like much but to a hard rock miner, the ratio is not bad. The old mill can handle about three tons of ore a day, and three ounces of gold are worth over \$1,500. The rub is getting the ore from the mine to the mill.

**HATCHER HAS MINED** a 20-acre claim near Rogue River for 20 years. He is never really made much off of it. When he started gold was only bringing \$35 an ounce and the original shaft near his house was full of low grade ore. "Not worth grinding up," Hatcher says. Still, the tenacious 61-year-old man held on to his dream of striking a rich vein, and he picked, shoveled, hauled and milled tons of it.

Often he would trek off through the woods with his cast iron mortar and pestal in his backpack to test the rocks around his claim. Trekking on Hatcher's claim is no easy matter. It is heavily wooded and straight up and down. Hatcher's almost daily examination of it over the past 20 years may explain his vitality.

He walks up steep grades, leaving less stalwart reporters in his dust. On one of his hikes Hatcher discovered a shaft that an earlier miner had covered over with tons of debris. Less than a year ago he got around to uncovering it. "I'd have taken a lot of gold out of this claim if I could get some good help," Hatcher complained. "The men I get up here to help me usually go out in the woods and drink and don't do no good."

**HIS CURRENT HELPERS** are exceptions, he said. "They're good. They're working hard," he said. "Hard" is an understatement.

The two men and Hatcher removed the debris from in front of the abandoned mine. It took them 11 days. Then they cut 100 small trees to bolster the entrance to the mine. Now they chip ore from the back of the 250-foot shaft, cart it out in wheelbarrows, load it into five-gallon pails mounted on wooden backboards and pack it up and down over three-quarters of a mile of hills to the mill. It takes a while to pile up three tons.

Three tons is the amount Hatcher likes to have before the mill is fired up.

Recently the men cut a rough road so the ore can be hauled by tractor and trailer over half the way, but there is still a long haul uphill. The conviction that the ore is rich keeps them going, Hatcher said.

Hatcher himself needs a lot less to keep going. In his lifetime he has been a carpenter, a roadbuilder, a painter, an oxen driver, a farmer, a mechanic and a miner. "There ain't any dern thing I can't do," Hatcher proclaimed with a little slap on his leg.

**HATCHER DOES NOT** ask anyone for anything. He keeps healthy with home remedies and tends machinery, buildings and animals on his own.

"When my big diesel (the one that provides power to run the mill) broke down and the gears was stripped, I took the dern thing apart and put it back together and it hasn't needed a repair for 20 years," he said. Hatcher's disdain for mechanics other than himself is just about as rigorous as his distaste for doctors.

"I wouldn't take any of those medicines," he said. His back was broken in three places after a car fell on him in 1952.

"Those dern doctors said I'd never walk again, but I didn't believe nothin' they tried to tell me," Hatcher related.

In the early 1960s Hatcher heard that a mill he had set up near Rogue River was being sold for back taxes. He bought it for \$1,450. He had done some mining near Crescent City, Calif., and had worked a poor claim on the Umpqua River but had not gone all out on hard rock mining before.

**WHEN HE AND** his now-deceased wife moved onto the claim, the small cabin was occupied by goats and deer, and the mill had not been worked in some time.

The rickety but functional mill is built on a hillside and uses gravity to aid the mining process. Ore is fed into the top, ground fine by a ball grinder and dropped onto tables where the gold is shaken to the bottom and the lighter sand washed away.

Hatcher mined for more than 20 years, but when his wife died four years ago he only had \$1.35 after paying hospital bills. He gets \$180 a month in social security and together with his mining receipts it is enough to eat and keep his 1965 Chrysler running. It buys gas for his mining equipment and feeds his chickens and cat.

But in the best tradition of gold miners, Hatcher is sure that riches are just around the corner. One day a load of ore is going to come over the hill that is going to make his gold miner's heart palpitate. He is not slowing down until it happens.