

Grants Pass Courier  
Nov. 25 1939

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1939**

## **Greenback Mine Running Again After 3 Years**

PLACER—(JR)—The Greenback mine began running Tuesday for the first time in three years. Perry Wickham, the manager, has spent a year and three months rebuilding the mill and getting everything about the mine ready for operation.



March 21 - 1986



## Gold miner

Rushing water carries yards of earth through the sluice box, leaving gold nuggets behind for Wes "Mister Gold" Pieren, who counts the historic Greenback Mine in Sunny Valley among his

numerous mining ventures. For a profile on the veteran Josephine County miner, turn to Page 1B.

— Courier photo by Howard Huntington





“MISTER GOLD” and unofficial mayor of Galice, Wes Pieren is among Southern Oregon’s most celebrated miners. He owns the historic Greenback Mine in Sunny Valley and is a partner in other operations.

— Courier photo by Howard Huntington



# Mister Gold

## Dreamer likes rough-and-tumble of mining

By HOWARD HUNTINGTON  
Of the Courier Staff

**GALICE** — Shaking hands with a slot machine is easier, but the principle is the same: A little fortune feeds the fever.

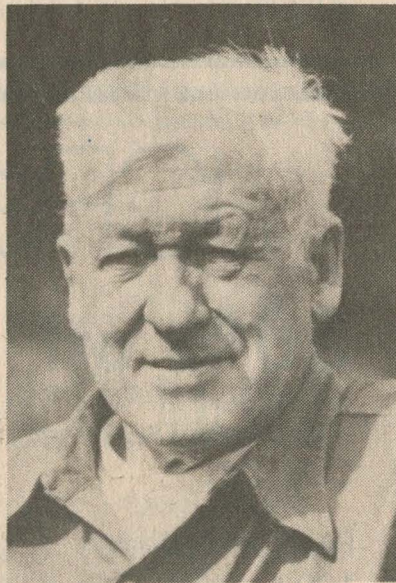
Thirty-seven years of mining, however, has taught Wes "Mister Gold" Pieren to enjoy the chase for its own sake. At 71, Pieren says he'd keep digging even if he made a big strike.

His many ventures include the historic Greenback Mine, on a tributary of Grave Creek in Sunny Valley. Pieren bought the mine in 1954 and has operated it at intervals ever since.

Greenback has been continuously active for the past two years, resulting in sales of more than \$70,000 in gold, he says. Pieren's luck was bound to exceed that of the Brown and Hannum families, who opened the mine in 1897 and sold it the next year for \$30,000.

One of the buyers is said to have made a million-dollar profit on Greenback, which became the second largest gold producer in Oregon.

Costs to operate "hard-rock" mines the size of Greenback typically run to several hundred dollars a



WES PIERIEN

day. The Sunny Valley operation reaches hundreds of feet into mountainsides, blasting away ore from which gold is extracted.

Conditions favor the easier "placer" method at Pieren's Leopold Mine in the Galice area. Loads of earth ride a stream of water through sluice boxes, leaving gold nuggets behind.

Placer mining usually produces at

least a small amount of gold daily, Pieren says. Hard-rock operations, by contrast, often require more patience and capital.

Pieren is accustomed to the ups and downs. Mining captured his interest when he was 12, and he helped his father Alfred work claims in the Cascade Mountains and along the John Day River.

"Anybody who has red blood is attracted by the sight of gold," Pieren says. "It's a fascinating thing. There's no mistaking it for anything else."

It wasn't a very prosperous start, but Pieren also worked as a logger during the summer. He bought the Leopold Mine, his first operation, in 1949, and now has partners in the operation.

"Mister Gold" in Southern Oregon, Pieren is known for his foresight in acquiring mining sites and his helpful nature, says friend and business associate Jim Dingman of Kerby. Pieren also is a partner in the Almeda and Sugar Pine mines.

And he's recognized as the unofficial mayor of Galice, Dingman said, because the veteran miner contributes to the community in many ways. He serves on mining advisory boards, including the Rogue River Coordination Board, and is a past

president of the Southern Oregon Timber Industries Association.

He also has made a local name for himself as a guitarist and fiddler, entertaining customers at the Galice Store during the summer.

Though he has uncovered impressive amounts of gold over the years — one mine produced 113 ounces in 20 days — Pieren says it doesn't add up to a fortune.

"I wouldn't call myself one of the most successful miners," he says, "but I'm one of the most persistent."

Mindful of looting, miners typically are very secretive about their yields. In past times, says Pieren, there was a \$1 bounty for killing a thief. "It's just the same as breaking into your home," Pieren says, adding that miners once were equally murderous about water rights.

It's still a pretty rough-and-tumble business, according to Pieren, who warns that amateurs are in exceptional danger of blowing themselves up with dynamite or building tunnels that collapse.

"You've got to have a love for the unknown," he adds, "and you've got to be a dreamer, I suppose." He expects to keep mining in any event.

"Would you rather watch the boob box and just rot away?" Pieren asks. "I would rather wear out than rust out."



## Klepper Tells of Mining Options

Milton R. Klepper of Portland, candidate for Republican national committeeman from Oregon, was in Grants Pass Tuesday and, stating that he was associated with Greenback Consolidated mines on Grave creek, reported that the Placer Development company of San Francisco has leased and taken an option on 300 acres of Greenback's property for dredging purposes.

J. A. Ormandy, Southern Pacific official, and his associates, have also leased 20 acres, Mr. Klepper said. Greenback Consolidated is principally a quartz operation, but has some placer properties.

G. P. Courier, 4/3/41

"The Columbia mine buildings have been bought by Dr. Fred Gould and Art Johns of Grants Pass and Homer Inman of Placer".



WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 1937.

# OLD GREENBACK MINE PRODUCING MUCH ORE AGAIN

Prospecting and development work has been in progress for the past year on the old Greenback mining property located 23 miles north of Grants Pass on Tom East creek, a tributary of Grave creek. Approximately \$30,000 has been spent in improving the property and installing new equipment, according to Robert Finley, mining engineer of the San Francisco firm of Finley & McNeil, who acquired the mine a year ago from the Greenback Mining Co.

The new owners have installed much new milling and mining equipment. During the development work they have also taken out a considerable quantity of gold. The mine has produced approximately \$10,000 in the past three months, Mr. Finley stated, which has been shipped through local banks.

The present operation is the first large scale production that has been done since 1910. The new owners are increasing the milling capacity for handling double the amount of material during the coming season. During the past year ten stamp mills were operated by the company.

There are more than a mile of underground workings on the property, only 1500 feet of which are in use by the present operators, who are extending some of the tunnels, particularly those on the ninth level into new ground. Fifteen men have been employed regularly and more will be hired when the weather permits full operation.

The property was formerly owned by L. E. Klumpp of Grants Pass who operated the mine only in a small way.

Finley & McNeil have recently been retained by Greenback Consolidated owners of the old Lewis properties and operations, according to Mr. Finley, to look over placer and quartz claims and represent them in this field.

The Greenback Consolidated ceases to be a stock venture while Finley & McNeil represents the company. Mr. McNeil stated.

G. P. Courier, April 3, 1941.

"The Greenback mine has been leased to H. Anderson and Jeff Wimer, who are working it."

*Mining Jour. 3/15/41*

Work has been started on the Greenback mine 23 miles north of Grants Pass, Oregon, by H. Anderson and Jeff Wimer, who recently leased the ground from L. E. and Pearl E. Klumpp, both of Grants Pass. Values are in gold and silver. Until last fall the mine was operated by P. B. Wickham, who dismantled the mine and mill equipment which he had installed when he gave up the lease.



## Wesley J. Pieren

Wesley J. Pieren, 73, of Galice, died Saturday, July 30, 1988, at Highland House Health Care Center.

Services will be at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday at Lundberg's Funeral Home with Grants Pass Lodge No. 84, AF&AM, officiating. Jack Reinagel will preside, while Charles Jones will assist.

Graveside services will be at 1 p.m. Wednesday at Helvetia Cemetery near Hillsboro.

Friends may call today until 8 p.m. in Lundberg's chapel. Flowers are welcome, but donations may be made to the Lovejoy Hospice, Shriners Hospital or the American Cancer Society in care of Lundberg's.

He was born Dec. 16, 1914, in Helvetia, Ore., to Swiss and German immigrant parents. He started working at an early age with his father and brothers in orchards and the woods. He married the former Lucile Pedersen Nov. 18, 1944.

While visiting Southern Oregon, he found a gold nugget that changed his life to a career of mining and logging. He owned the Leopold Claims on Galice Creek, Golden Wedge, the Almeda and other small claims, plus the famous Greenback Mine in Sunny Valley.

In 1962, he was appointed to the Rogue Coordination Board. He also served on the advisory boards of the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service. In 1967, he served as president of the Southern Oregon Timber Industries Association.

He was organizer and first president of the Josephine County Sour-doughs, past president of Pythian Lodge and a member of the Grants Pass Elks Lodge, the Masonic Lodge and Hillah Shrine Temple. He also was a member of the Southern Oregon Resources Alliance and the Retired Loggers Association.

He moved to Galice in 1970 and was well known for his music at the Galice Resort. He received the title of honorary mayor of Galice.

He is survived by his wife, Lucile of Galice; three daughters, Nancy Tunberg of Galice, Dixie Pieren of Grants Pass and Wendy Duden of Merlin; two brothers, Ralph Pieren of Beaver, Ore., and Harold Pieren of Timber, Ore.; two sisters, Helen Cook of Helvetia and Fern Congdon of Vernonia, Ore.; and four grandchildren.





TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Beamsnyder checks values from broth flow in the mill.



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Da

The Greenback Mine is getting a new lease on life as Dave Arnold, left, takes over operations from owner Wes Pierer

# Digging up the past for a profit

Greenback  
old mine  
s to life

Dillon  
y Courier



"We're subsidizing them."

The United States produces only 5 percent of the world's gold. South Africa produces 54 percent.

Gold miners boarded over the portals to their mines at the start of World War II because gold wasn't a strategic metal. When the war ended, few bothered to reopen their claims.

Arnold reminisced as he took a guest through the mill and 1,700 feet into the black chill of the mine. But he has his eyes on the





feet below Greenback Mountain. Josephine County miners rejuvenating the most successful gold mining operation in county's history.

the process, new investors operators say they are offering an opportunity to other South-Oregon hard-rock miners.

es Pieren, who has owned the historic mine since 1954, has led the mine, mill and surrounding 400 acres to Geo Gold Silver Corp., headed by Dave Gold. Josephine County Partners, a Denver-based investment firm, put up the financing and realize 50 percent of the profits.

The Greenback vein is the second-largest gold producer in Oregon after the Cornucopia Mine. Baker. More than 175,000 ounces of gold have been mined from the greenstone and quartz veins above East Tom Creek. "This is richer in proportion," Pieren said. "Cornucopia has 28 miles of underground workings we have only two."

ough Geo Gold also leases the Gold Bug and Pyx mines in the western Josephine County, its operation is centered at Greenback.

his had a bigger reserve,"

## Gold clings to its host rock until removed during milling.

Arnold explained, "and the mill was right here.

"There haven't been any mills that can produce the tonnage of this mill in Josephine County."

Since his crew moved in in January, it has cleaned the mine shaft and pumped out the water. And it refurbished the mill, installing a flotation plant.

The flotation process allows the mill to recover more metal than the gravity flow system that Pieren operated. It recovers three to four ounces of gold from 35 tons of ore.

The secret is in grinding the ore pepper-fine.

"We have to reduce it in size to recover the value," Arnold said.

The Southern Oregon mining industry also has been reduced in size, said Steve Roberts, one of the Denver investors and Arnold's nephew. "In terms of an industry, it's real cottage."

But his uncle, who spent 17 years with Phillips Petroleum managing a uranium mine in New Mexico and exploring mineral sites throughout the Americas, sees a cottage industry with the potential to turn a tidy profit.

"In this area, there are quite a few small mines, good mines," he said. "The fellows could make some good money if they could get it processed."

Pieren knows there are customers dotting the hills of Josephine County and Southern Oregon.

"There's a lot more mines around here than people know about," he said. "People keep their mouths shut when they're working in the mines."

But operators who will mill ore from small mines are vanishing from the landscape like the mining industry.

"The only mining that's really going on in the United States is the gold mining in Nevada," Arnold said. "All of our production is foreign."

"You look around for a smelter now, there aren't any," he said, listing the names of mining boom towns gone bust.

"It sounds like a sad story, but it's true," Arnold said.

"Foreign countries don't have the tax structure, so they have the advantage there," he said. "Plus we loan them the money."

ple the mill's operation by late fall.

"The ore is here," he said. "It's a matter of getting the thing started and getting our cash flow started."

"We've got a good reserve at the Greenback Mine, which is a stable feed."

When it is up to speed, the mill can handle 150 tons of ore daily.

"The bottleneck will not be the mining," Arnold said. "The bottleneck will be the milling."

Pieren looks at the changes and thinks about what might have been.

"Well I'd like to do it myself, but I didn't have the capital to get it done," he said. "If I had a million, I'd spend about half of it developing that mine because I'm sure it would be successful."

"I haven't been too successful, but I didn't go bankrupt," Pieren said. "I love mining."

That rubs off on the people he's met and talked mining with.

"He knows mining, he knows gold," Arnold said. "He's one of the best I've ever seen."

Both men see a bright future for gold mining.

"I think mining's going to be a very viable operation," Pieren



TIMOTHY BULLARD

## Arnold inspects ore 1,700 feet inside the mine.

said. "The world's currency isn't worth the paper it's written on, to be blunt, if it isn't backed by gold or silver. Whenever the dollar drops, gold immediately raises."

Arnold agrees. "People are spooky about gold," he said. "If there's a recession, they buy gold. If there's a recession, they buy gold."



# GOLD RUSH ON AGAIN IN OREGON



Werner Bittner

By Jinx Quinlan

**G**OLD! GOLD! Gold! Gold! Eureka! The goldrush is on. The '79ers are hammering, panning and sluicing their separate ways up and down Oregon's creek-beds and hills.

Seven Cities of Cibola. There's a new breed afoot.

The '79ers come in all shapes, sizes, sexes and ages. They're chiefly amateurs equipped with a \$15 rock hammer, a \$5 plastic gold pan

Texas firm bought and reopened the Iron Dye mine in Hell's Canyon and has located a large concentration of gold, silver and copper. Moreover a Colorado mining company has been working the Cougar Gold Mine near

costly machinery capable of processing huge tonnages of low grade ore. Individuals have a far greater chance of finding gold at garage sales where fine old watches and jewelry are unwittingly sold for



Prospecting is no long given over completely to wheezing and grizzled solitary old-timers and their heavily laden burros eternally searching for El Dorado and the

*JINX QUINLAN is a Portland writer.*

and a free leaflet from the U.S. Geological Survey on prospecting as a hobby. They can be seen roaring over once inaccessible terrain in 4-wheelers or working on a quiet stream not far from their picnic baskets and parked cars. They may be weekend gold seekers, but their dreams are just as fanciful as those whose lifeblood has been infected with gold fever.

The gold market is out of control. The value of gold has risen \$200 an ounce since the beginning of the year. Fast-buck speculators and anxious investors are buying the precious metal as a safeguard against accelerating inflation. In an effort to strike it rich, the '79ers have taken to the hills to rework old mines and explore new areas.

Well over half the gold extracted from Oregon came out of the Wallowa and Blue mountains in the northeast section of the state. Gold was discovered there in 1861 in the John Day and Powder rivers. The once roaring mining settlements of Sumpter, Granite, Canyon City and Baker are showing signs of renewed mining activity.

The Blue Mountain goldfield extends 100 miles from Canyon City east to the Snake River. Not only individuals but large companies are staking claims in Eastern Oregon. A

Sumpter for the past two years.

Oregon's other major gold district is located in the southwestern

### *Successful miners rely on machinery to make the grade*

part of the state, stretching from Medford to Gold Beach, through the Rogue River Valley and the Siskiyou Mountains. The Applegate district in Jackson County and the Greenback district in Josephine County have been the main gold producing areas in this region. Soon after gold was found there in 1850, the Jacksonville area became the most populous part of the Oregon Territory.

Novice prospectors should keep in mind that few areas in Oregon with metal bearing deposits have been ignored by expert mineralogists. Novices should also be aware of the fact that after the initial boom periods, placer deposits have been reworked twice: first by the Chinese who gleaned the lower grade ore and tailings and again by itinerant miners and unemployed people caught in the Depression of the 1930s.

The successful gold miner today is the large-scale operator with

pennies. Because the watch does not work, it is considered of little value. That a timepiece might be gold seems not to enter the seller's mind. Not infrequently precious stones, gold and silver pieces have been found mixed with paste jewelry selling for 50 cents apiece.

How profitable is prospecting today in Oregon's goldfields? Well, the great majority of the '79ers are striking out altogether, although some have found a little "color." A few have managed a day's wages. Occasionally someone unearths a fine nugget.

The chances of hitting "paydirt" are infinitesimal. However, prospecting does offer an enriching family camping vacation which can be exciting, diverting and educational.

Potential prospectors are advised to do a little research and reading before running willy-nilly into the great outdoors with a gold pan and box lunch. Check with federal and state geology and mining bureaus for locations of promising areas, and ask for available maps and handbooks.

Libraries should also be consulted. Multnomah County Library has a fine map room equipped with treasure maps and more than one atlas. ■

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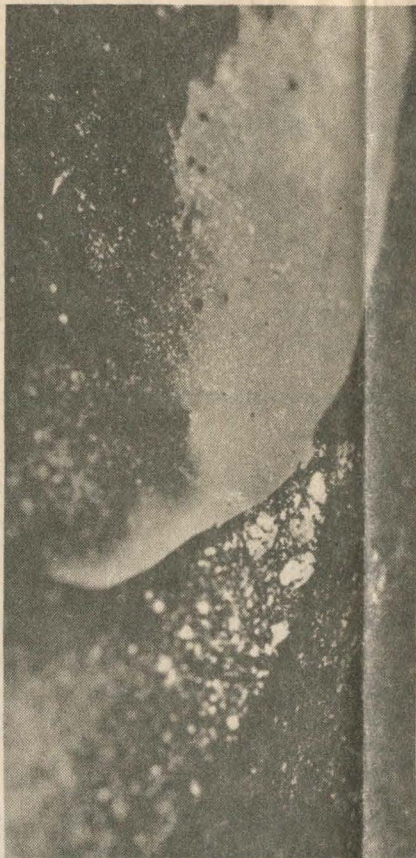
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The streets are not paved with gold, but Wes Pieren knows gold is nearby, and his pan glitters . . .

# Miner separates gold from tons of earth



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**AFTER GOLD** — Wes Pieren, above left, knows when he finds it. At his Greenback Mine near Grants Pass, Pieren oversees 120-foot stream of water he uses

to wash gold into sluice box. High price of gold has brought renewed interest in mining Oregon gold fields.

to wash gold into sluice box. High price of gold has brought renewed interest in mining Oregon gold fields.



**THE TECHNIQUE** — Water and grit are sloshed around pan in attempt by Pieren to retain and reveal gold.

was 14, and he had been mining for (the past) 30 years. "I haven't mined gold steady, but I'm not wrong. I have to make a living as a logger."

Since 1954 Pieren has been the owner and chief prospector of the Greenback Mine, 20 miles north of Grants Pass, historically one of the state's best gold producers.

"When I came down to Helvetia (near Hillsboro) I thought I'd be a full-time miner," he says. "I loved to do it all my life. But the economics weren't right (in 1970) — one ounce."

For years Pieren has shared his knowledge about the natural distribution of gold.

"I once asked an old miner where he bought from him, 'Where is the gold is?' " Pieren said.

"He said, 'Nobody knows where it is and he doesn't tell. But when I was filling his salt shaker to send it over the earth, he spilled a little bit.'

"That's true, that's the way it is when you mine it," Pieren says. In Southern Oregon there are many streams that don't have a lot of gold. The gold will be in enrichment areas.

He aimed a towering stream of water pumped from a pond on the hillside, blasting alluvial soil. He watched the dirt break down into a red-colored mud and tumble into a 40-foot sluice box. The gold caught in steel riffles as it settled.

The sluice box handles about a ton of "at least 100 pans of material," Pieren said.

After this hillside placement is completed, Pieren will be able to see over the bald spot he has cleared.

"If I didn't, nature would just take its course. There'll be trees growing in two years."

Has the veteran prospector ended up with fool's gold? Pieren says the sulfide that resembles the real thing is soft.

"Sometimes I get fooled. But you can't scratch it with a knife and you can with gold. It's soft."

"I'd say there's more gold around here, but it's harder to find," Pieren said. "There are more fools than either on either side."



The streets are not paved with gold, but Wes Pieren knows gold is nearby, and his pan glitters . . .

# Miner separates gold from tons of earth

By **STEVE ERICKSON**  
of *The Oregonian* staff

GRANTS PASS — Wes Pieren has been panning gold for so long that he can tell at a glance how many dollars or cents a fleck of gold is worth in today's inflated market. If that fails, his ears provide the price.

A "nugget" as big as a parsley flake, for example, "would cost 10 cents" or bring it, said Pieren, who in 30 years of mining has scratched out a few ingots worth of color.

"If you can hear them drop in the pan, they're at least a quarter," he said, adding that he once "found a seven-grain piece of pure gold that broke out of a quartz host rock. It weighed six dollars.

"Economics are conducive to gold mining right now," he said. "You couldn't find a mine around here with any history to it that isn't being actively explored, or about to be."

Pieren began young. "I first went out prospecting with my father when I was 12, and now I'm 64," he said. "I've mined for (the past) 30 years, but I haven't mined gold steady, don't get me wrong. I have to make a living. I'm a logger."

Since 1954 Pieren has also been owner and chief prospector at Greenback Mine, 20 miles north of Grants Pass, historically one of the state's biggest gold producers.

"When I came down here from Helvetia (near Hillsboro) I expected to be a full-time miner," he said. "I've loved to do it all my life. But the economics weren't right (in 1949) at \$35 an ounce."

For years Pieren has shared a theory





near Grants  
water he uses

to wash gold into sluice box. High price of gold has brought renewed interest in mining Oregon gold fields.



**THE TECHNIQUE** — Water and grit are sloshed around pan in attempt by Pieren to retain and reveal gold.



**DOUBLE DUTY** — Pieren washes gold dust down with sip of mountain water from gold pan.

about the natural distribution of gold.  
"I once asked an old miner at a mine I bought from him, 'Where do you think the gold is?'" Pieren said.

"He said, 'Nobody knows but God and he doesn't tell. But when he was filling his salt shaker to sprinkle gold over the earth, he spilled a little.'

"That's true, that's the way you find it when you mine it," Pieren said. "In Southern Oregon there's hardly a stream that doesn't have a little gold in it. The gold will be in enriched areas."

He aimed a towering torrent of water pumped from a pond at a nearby hillside, blasting alluvial soil loose, and watched the dirt break down to caramel-colored mud and tumble like a candy river into a 40-foot sluice box that caught the gold in steel riffles (grates) as it settled.

The sluice box handles the equivalent of "at least 100 pans a minute," Pieren said.

After this hillside placer operation is completed, Pieren will bulldoze earth over the bald spot he has created.

"If I didn't, nature would do it anyway, it would just take longer," he said. "There'll be trees growing here inside of two years."

Has the veteran prospector ever ended up with fool's gold, native iron sulfide that resembles the real thing?

"Sometimes I get fooled," he said. "But you can't scratch it with a pocket-knife and you can with gold because it's soft.

"I'd say there's more fool's gold than gold around here, because it's easier to find," Pieren said. "But there's more fools than either one of them."



# Obstacles cool fervor of Oregon gold rush

11/11/79  
11/11/79

By STEVE ERICKSON  
of The Oregonian staff

GRANTS PASS — There is no "new Oregon gold rush," although the gold is out there in the wild and its price reached \$444 an ounce at the end of September. One reason is inflation. Another is hard work.

"It takes a tremendous effort — man labor, real labor — to produce an ounce of gold," said Wes Pieren, a miner for 30 years.

And, he added, "Despite the price of gold, it's not more than equal to inflation because of the cost of supplies."

Nevertheless, gold lies alluringly in Southwestern Oregon hills and stream beds, and it is not being ignored.

"All major streams and tributaries in this part of the state carry gold," said Len Ramp, resident geologist in the Grants Pass field office of the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries. However, he says:

"The average person doesn't realize that it is hard work (getting it out) so about 90 percent of those who start to try to prospect and mine for gold don't stay with it very long.

"The returns are generally quite discouraging, especially for a person who has high expectations of getting rich quick."

Ramp said, "It seems there was more of a rush a few years ago when the price was climbing. A lot of (novice miners) found out how difficult it was. A lot of people bought little dredges then tried to sell them. The people who made money were dealers and manufacturers of dredges."

At Erickson's Mining in Grants Pass, where would-be sourdoughs and 49ers outfit themselves for prospecting, Elaine Behrendt said, "In the last year, sales of gold-mining equipment has boomed. To me a gold rush is when people stampede to creeks and rivers, and I don't think they're doing that.

"But there's still a lot of gold left in the creeks," Mrs. Behrendt said. "I can see where they could get a little gold fever."

She said gold dredges cost \$370 or more, sluice boxes \$19 and more, and that gold pans start at \$2.

"They're working on almost every creek," she added, "but whether they're taking anything out, I don't know. Most people are pretty quiet about what they have."

At Erickson's, where books such as "Gold in a Campground" and "Gold Panning with Prospector John" entice initiates, Mrs. Behrendt said, "It takes an awfully lot of money to make it profitable. I've never heard anyone say, 'I'm gonna get rich.'"

"We've had guys buy \$400 to \$500 dredges and come in and say, 'We've paid for our equipment in a couple days,' But very few.

"A lot of them (new miners) are weekenders," Mrs. Behrendt said. "They think it's fun. They're mostly serious hobbyists."

The first rich deposits of Oregon gold were found in the Southwestern

shortly after the discovery of gold in California in 1848.

The Ore Bin, a state geological publication, reported in 1973, "The gold 'rush' in Oregon never reached the great intensity of that in California (but) Oregon's gold rush quickly became a way of life for many Oregonians in the Southwestern counties of Jackson, Josephine, Coos, Curry and Douglas, and the Northeastern counties of Baker, Grant, Malheur, Union and Wallowa."

In April 1973, however, The Ore Bin said, "Today the gold camps have all but disappeared and the mines are idle."

All the mines aren't idle any more. In 1954, Pieren bought the Greenback Mine ("and it's paid for, too") 20 miles north of Grants Pass and worked it periodically. He resumed mining five years ago during a surge in the price of gold.

"There's 245 acres of deeded ground and 76 acres of mining claims," he said.

Pieren, 64, said that, historically, the Greenback is the second-biggest gold producer in Oregon. The biggest, he said, is the Cornucopia Mine near Baker, "which is being operated right now."

The Greenback, sparkling at the feet of St. Paul Mountain and St. Peter Mountain, has operated intermittently since it was opened in 1897.

"At today's prices, at least \$50 million has been taken out of this mine," Pieren said. How much is left? "I think possibly twice that much."

Ore from the Greenback Mine, Pieren said, "contains 2½ ounces-plus of gold per ton. That's considered a high yield," although it can go much higher.

"You would have to reclaim \$40 (1/9-ounce) a ton to make it worthwhile opening a mine," he said. "Every hour I run this operation I'll get at least \$40 in gold, and it could go as high as a hundred."

Today's hard-rock mining method is "similar to what was used in the old days," Pieren said. "Drilling and blasting, crushing, then milling and extracting the values (gold and silver)."

In placer (hydraulic) mining, silt and rock are washed away and the gold is caught in a sluice box. Panning uses the same principle.

"Gold handling hasn't changed much," Pieren said.

Nor have the motives of people who seek gold, it seems.

"Finding it is the big thing," Pieren said. "After I find it, it don't really mean a hell of a lot. To me, it's the challenge.

"No other human ever had his hands on it until you touched it," he said. "It gives you some elation, you might call it."

But although wealth is a secondary consideration to Pieren, he said, "I expect to be a millionaire from gold if I don't die. Everybody does, don't they?"

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# Price Spurs Mining; Success Not Easy

Since the price of gold was lifted, the market has experts are an ounce

price has recreational miners and in January, were filed. If ore would- ably head g the next

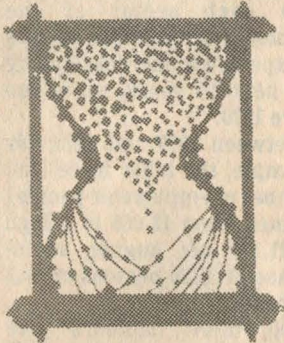
een pretty Many are mining gold, cumulated rush," Len arment of

Geology and Mineral Industries geologist, said.

"There is some gold out there. They (early miners) didn't get it all," he added.

Ramp said the price of gold is not all that much higher in relative terms than before the price ceiling was lifted.

"The price of gold is higher, but so is everything else. I've heard it said you can buy the



same amount of oil for the same amount of gold you could 10 years ago. Gold may be a little ahead of its market value now, but not by much," he said.

Ramp said the price of gold is not actually going up, but the value of the dollar is falling. Many are finding gold a hedge against inflation.

Wes Pieren, an area sour-

dough, said serious mining takes a commitment, both in terms of time and money.

"I would almost starve to death panning," he commented.

While a gold pan costs only \$2 to \$4, a sluice box will cost a minimum of \$30, according to Janet Erickson of the Redwood Rock Museum and Gift Shop, 1493 Rogue River Highway.

An "economy" 2½-inch dredge sells for \$400. The prices go up into the thousands. In addition, the price of a compressor is usually added to the price of the dredge.

Diving equipment can also cost thousands of dollars. A mask, regulator and harness cost over \$100. Wet suits are also priced over \$100. A diver also needs air hose, and many purchase boots and a hood.

A fairly typical example of a commercial operation, Pieren was able to buy his mining equipment, including two bulldozers and a sluice, with money he earned from his logging operation.

The sourdough admitted the escalating price of gold makes mining more attractive to novices. But he says that the cost of recovery is probably

just as high as ever in proportion.

Pieren figures wages at \$60 per man per day. When gold was \$35, wages were \$4 a day.

The cost of a bulldozer for mining can run as high as \$328,800. In 1934, a particular bulldozer cost \$40,000. A similar model now costs \$234,730.

Pieren uses two bulldozers in his operation, and estimates the cost of running the machinery at \$450 an hour.

The cost of fuel is up, too. Diesel is required to run the equipment.

"You can't just go out there with a pick and shovel and make it," Pieren said.

A serious miner usually has a claim. Claims can still be staked, but the price of buying one where there is known pay dirt is getting very expensive — if the prospective miner can find a seller.

Having a claim is not the only thing a miner must obtain. Various permits, water rights and dumping rights are needed. Because there are different kinds of claims, would-be miners should be wary.

A good place to start is the Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, 912 SE H

St. The department has copies of state laws concerning mining and mining claims and general information on mining. Geologic and mineral locality maps of the area are sold at the local office.

Another source of information is the Josephine County Sourdoughs. The organization meets at 8 p.m. the first Wednesday of every month in the Women's Club Auditorium in Grants Pass. New members are welcome. The group, made up of some area miners, sponsors Greenhorn Days to teach panning to novices, and puts out an annual newsletter.

Booklets on mining are sold at the Redwood Rock Museum and Gift Shop.

Many area miners are willing to teach their skills to greenhorns. Pieren said he is still learning about mining (he has worked his Leipold claims 31 years), but "I'll always let people come if they are interested in mining."

Pieren said any miner should be notified in advance of visitors. Unannounced strangers are not welcome on most claims. In some areas, the miners have been known to shoot first and ask questions later.



**WES PIEREN** stayed a miner through gold's \$35-an-ounce doldrums, working claims on Galice Creek. He says it takes a real commitment to make a living — even at \$600-plus an ounce.

—Courier photo by Becky Nelson



# Gold Price

By **BECKY NELSON**  
Of the Courier Staff

"Thar's gold in them thar hills," the rallying cry of earlier gold rushes, is being heard once again in Southwestern Oregon.

A gold rush, the likes of which have not been seen since the frenzied activity of the 1940s, is under way.

Although an exact number of miners is impossible to determine, a local supplier has been having difficulty keeping mining equipment in stock. Activity has been brisk in the mining claims division of the Josephine County clerk's office.

As the price of gold goes up, more and more cases of gold fever are reported.

At the start of the 1970s, gold

sold for \$35 an ounce. Since the price ceiling was lifted, the price jumped and kept going. A frenzy of gold buying at the end of 1979 and the first part of this year pushed the price even higher. The market has calmed, but some experts are forecasting \$1,000 an ounce before July.

The increase in price has meant both more recreational and commercial miners and more claims filed. In January, 46 mining claims were filed. If the pattern holds, more would-be miners will probably head for the hills during the next decade.

"This area has been pretty well worked over. Many are gleaning the remaining gold, or what has accumulated since the first gold rush," Len Ramp, Oregon Department of