

Plataurica and Easterly Mines

Grants Pass Courier, January 27, 1937

MANY MINES IN TAKILMA REGION

The Plataurica and Esterly mines are two of the largest operations in the district around Takilma, where E. H. Messenger has been postmaster and merchant for a number of years. A third hydraulic operation in the vicinity, somewhat smaller, is the W. M. Dillenbeck placer mine, employing a crew of three or four men who hydraulic the material to a quartz mill and run it through.

Some of the giants are working in the Waldo district, about two miles from the Takilma store, but water is still insufficient in most places.

There are about 35 independent miners working in the neighborhood with hand tools. The dry spell and freezing weather kept the miners from doing any real work so far this season, Mr. Messenger re-

ports. Last year was one of the best on record, there being plenty of rainfall and mild weather.

Gold was first discovered in the district at Waldo in 1851. It was then known as Sailor Diggings, so called because sailors first found gold there, leaving their ship to follow the streams inland from the coast.

Josephine county's earliest recorded history starts with this section, the first settlements springing up in this little hollow between low hills and spreading to Browntown and Althouse creek.

The mines in this district are still good producers and the two large operations above mentioned are equipped with the most modern placer mining devices.

Mr. Messenger estimates that the independent miners working in the neighborhood take out from \$2 to \$5 a day. Even these have not worked much this season because of the cold weather and lack of water.

Shown in the picture are Mr. Messenger and C. L. Owen, a miner of the district who is demonstrating a portable placer rocker, designed for the use of small miners and compact enough when dismantled to be packed on a man's back.

It was invented by Carl Oding of Redding, a friend of Mr. Messenger's, who sent him one of the first models to be tried out in the mines of this section. It was patented under the name "Grubstaker" and manufactured recently in Oakland.

Mr. Owen was the first to try it out and reports that it is very useful either in "sniping" or in prospecting new ground. It may be used with very little water in dry sections or places where water must be carried a long distance. The same water may be used over and over and much more gravel may be worked than by the panning method or with ordinary rockers. It uses mercury to separate the gold particles from the other minerals, much in the same manner as does an amalgamator.

Owen says he also has used the device in tracing pockets with good results. It saves small gold that would ordinarily escape. Three or four yards a day may be run through it in ordinary ground, he declares. It weighs just 18 pounds.

Inside

Classified Pages 7-11
 David James Page 5
 Mary Korbolic Page 2
 Carol Wiseman..... Page 4



ce man
 ieren
 y-time miner
 4



Birder
 Volunteer
 helps with tagging
 Page 5



Country Weekly

25 Cents Per Copy

Serving Southwestern Oregon
 VOL. V, No. 1, ISSUE 210

THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 1986 Phone 474-3700



of historic placer mine

By BARBARA HAHN
Of the Weekly Staff

CAVE JUNCTION — Once, it was considered one of the most productive placer mine in Oregon.

Today wood ducks glide on lakes formed when the deep mine basins gradually filled with water. Locals know the privately owned area as the Esterly Lakes.

Yet in its heyday — from the late 1800s through about 1945 — hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of gold and platinum was laboriously washed from what was once just a cow pasture on a typical Southern Oregon farm.

Pioneer Illinois Valley families owned and worked the mines, and left their names to local landmarks.

Olga Valen Cameron was a member of one such family, moving to the Illinois Valley in 1904 at the age of 10. In 1916, she married the son of another long-time Southern Oregon family, the Cameron's. Her new husband, Charles Donald Cameron, was a partner in the then-robust Simmons Cameron mine near the present intersection of Waldo and Rockydale roads.

But her memories of the area begin as a child in Takilma.

"All the copper mines were going then," she says. "The place was swarming with people."

It was a time when O'Brien was just another big farm, and cattle roamed the Simmon's farm, which would eventually become the pit mine. She recalls walking past the farm, at the edge of the pasture, on her way to school in Waldo.

It was Don Cameron's father, Theodric, in partnership with landowner George Simmons, who turned the farm into a full-production mining operation, she says.

"Gold was very valuable then, it produced so much more than a farm," she says. "It turned out to be a big mine — very productive."

According to "Gold and Silver in Oregon," published by the Oregon State Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, the value of gravels worked ranged from 12½ to 33½ per yard, at \$20 an ounce.

"Total production to 1933 was estimated at about \$500,000," the book

notes. Production since then may have been as much as \$100,000, it continues.

"The U.S. Bureau of Mines Minerals Yearbook review of 1939 reports that during the year (operating season was generally from four to nine months) 75,000 cubic yards of gravel were hydraulicked at the Esterly mine and 421 ounces of gold and 25 ounces of silver recovered," it concludes. Also, the ratio of platinum to gold was estimated at 1 to 50.

At the height of production, the pits covered more than 30 acres of the 3,000 acre mine property.

A wooden flume was built to operate the mine. The flume ran from the mountains of California in the south, down miles of ravines to power huge "giants" that scoured the pasture, creating three gaping holes.

"You had to be so careful with them," Cameron said. Like heavy, high-pressure garden nozzles, the giants would blast water at the edge between the bottom and side of the pit, carving away until a huge chunk of the wall would fall in, providing mineral to be run through the sluice boxes.

"The mine ran day and night," Cameron says. "You couldn't let the water go to waste."

After it was used for mining, the water was drained north to the east fork of the Illinois River through a

(Continued on Page 2)



ers included Don Cam- owner in the mine, inheriting his father's interest. This photo dates from 1915.

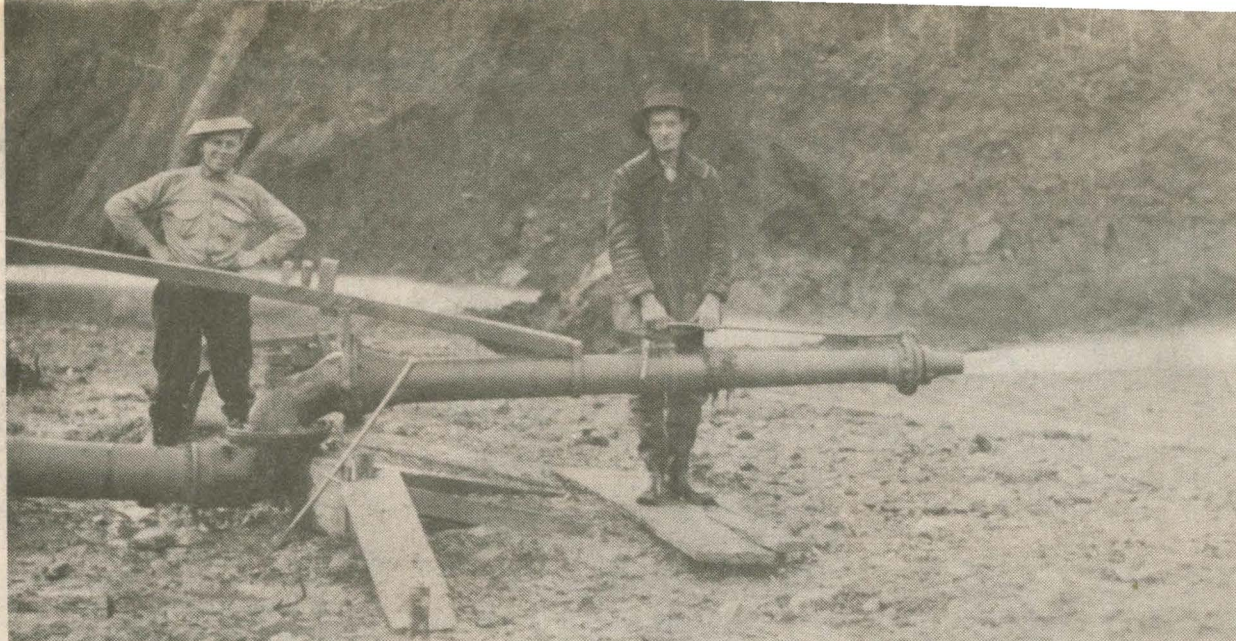


We'll honor anybody's service coupon or ad.



Bring in anybody's current local Mechanical service special coupon or ad and we'll meet their price. We know our parts and labor are competitively priced and we want to prove it to you!

of h



TWO OF THE early miners included Don Cameron, left, and Clay Ramsey. Cameron was part

owner in the mine, inheriting his father's interest. This photo dates from 1915.

By BARB
Of the We
CAVE JUNCTIO
considered one of
tive placer mine in
Today wood duc
formed when the
gradually filled
know the private
the Esterly Lakes.

Yet in its heyda
1800s through abou
of thousands of do
and platinum
washed from wha
cow pasture on a
Oregon farm.

Pioneer Illinois
owned and worke
left their names to



HUGE MINE PITS, dug by hydraulic nozzles called "giants" Logan mine. A ravine was dug to the north of the p
arved down into a cow pasture to create the Simmons, Cameron, water to the east fork of the Illinois River. This pho

Esterly Mine

Grants Pass Courier, January 27, 1937

NIXON INVESTS LARGE SUM IN NEW EQUIPMENT

One of the largest placer operations in Josephine county and perhaps one of the best equipped is the old Esterly mine, now actively operated by Earl K. Nixon. It is not far from Takilma, at the old town of Waldo.

Although in normal years the mine is operating by Thanksgiving or shortly after, no work has been done there this season because of the low water. The hydraulic method is used and a large volume of water is necessary to work the four large pits where the bedrock is hosed down by the 'giants' into the sluice boxes.

Mr. Nixon has operated the mine since June, 1934, and up to the present time has taken out \$31,000. A large amount of development work has been done during this time and the investment in equipment and expenditures for labor and supplies totals close to \$75,000.

The year of most activity during Mr. Nixon's operation was 1935 when \$27,000 was spent for labor alone and the total expenditure was close to \$45,000. In other years between \$15,000 and \$20,000 was spent for labor and between \$9,000 and \$10,000 for supplies.

One of the above photographs, taken last season when the mine was in full operation, shows a view of one of the pits with a man in the background hosing down the bedrock into the sluice. The flood lights for night operation and piping may also be seen.

A hard freeze in the early part of January resulted in heavy damage to pipe lines on the property. The

snow covered the entire site for a depth of several feet.

Mr. Nixon and a crew of men worked night and day during the worst of the freeze, using every available method to prevent the pipes from freezing and bursting. Jumping on the pipe from the bank was one method employed to keep the ice from forming. This served to dislodge the ice formation and keep the water flowing. It was an unpleasant vigil which the party will not soon forget but resulted in saving several sections of the pipe line. Breaks occurred in some places in spite of all the crew could do to prevent it.

To the rear of the attractive Colonial type mansion which marks the Esterly property are the machinery sheds, work shop, chemical laboratory, and drafting room. The buildings are situated on the upper side of a slope with platforms built out a distance of some 30 or 40 feet. A small sawmill is on the property for cutting timbers in building sluices, etc.

There are four pits on the site, all on quite level ground. Due to the regularity, elevators have been installed to speed up operations. Three of the four pits are being sub-leased by Mr. Nixon at the present time. Three men are employed in each pit, making a total crew of 16 to 20 men when the mine is in full operation, counting night crews and the men in the shop. All pits are equipped with flood lights for night work.

The Esterly mine has been a rich placer and a good producer for many years past. It was developed to a high state of efficiency by the late George Esterly who installed a large part of the machinery used at present. A wild life enthusiast, Mr. Esterly would allow no hunting on his property and ducks and other wild fowl used to seek refuge there, also attracted by food which was provided for them. They became tame to an amazing degree and would come to be fed when summoned by a blast on a tin whistle.

There were several operators of the Esterly mine, formerly known also as the Llano de Oro mine, previous to Mr. Esterly's ownership. Jim Logan is said to be one of the first to operate it on a large scale with high-pressure streams or giants. Logan was financed by George Simmons, his father-in-law, and an interest was sold to a third man, Cameron. The three formed a company known as Simmons, Logan and Cameron.