

Richard Merz

The Dorer Family Five-Stamp Mill Humbug Canyon

The five-stamp mill was erected by A. W. Poole in 1879 near where Humbug Creek enters the North Fork of the American River. It was used to process ore brought by a tramway from the nearby Poole Mine and was powered by water.

After it's use was discontinued (sometime in the late 1800's or early 1900's), the mill languished in a small niche in the steep bank above the North Fork of the American River. The wooden frame had disappeared; probably the large timbers were used in other mining operations.

In about 1970, the Dorer Family decided that the mill should be removed so that it could be put on view in Foresthill. A few years before, a road had been hacked out of the canyon and the area could be reached by vehicles down this twisty and dusty three mile road.

Family members gathered at the site and began the difficult task of dragging each heavy piece of the mill about 100 feet up a nearly vertical bank to a primitive road. Gathered there were Lutie and Andy Dorer, sons of Leopold Dorer and grandsons of Richard Dorer who was one of the first settlers of Humbug Canyon; Joe Merz, husband of Theresa Dorer Merz and the daughter of Leopold Dorer; and, Richard Merz, son of Joe and Theresa, and grandson of Leopold Dorer.

Lutie had a Dodge Power Wagon with a winch. A cable was lowered and attached to a piece of the mill; the pieces were the five stems, cam shaft and battery. Each stem weighed about 500 hundred pounds, the cam shaft about 1,000 pounds and the battery over 1,000 pounds. The cable could not be lowered in a direct line from the winch to the mill and so had to be run at various angles by the use of snatch blocks fastened to trees growing from the steep bank. Andy Dorer and Joe Merz descended the bank and attached the cable to a piece of the mill.

Each piece was pulled up the bank until it was near one of the snatch blocks. The piece was then held in place by separate cables that Andy, Joe and Richard attached to the nearest tree. Richard would then clamber up and down the bank relocating the cable and snatch blocks so that the piece of the mill could be pulled a few more feet up

the bank to the next snatch block. Four or five changes for each piece had to be made in the direction of the cable before they reached the road. Lutie would then drag the piece about 100 feet up the road to a large oak tree. All this took a long three day weekend to accomplish.

Several weeks later, they returned to Humbug Canyon to complete the rest of the task. Lutie fastened a stout block to the limb of the oak tree. A cable was run through the block with one end attached to a piece of the mill and the other end fastened to the rear of Richard's Jeep. On the first attempt, the weight of the mill was too much and the Jeep could not lift it. Andy's Jeep was then chained to the front of Richard's Jeep and the two vehicles together could then lift each piece high enough to drive Lutie's truck under it and then be lowered onto the bed of the truck.

During the lifting of the battery, Richard felt his Jeep lurch and knew that the cable had snapped. Ducking his head, he heard the cable whistle through the air and then strike nearby trees. He glanced over his shoulder to see if anyone had been in the path of the whipping cable but they had cautiously stood behind trees and thick brush while the lifting was being done. But, several trees and bushes were badly bruised, and a swath of ground was swept clean of grass, leaves and rocks!

Several trips had to be made by Lutie to haul the mill up the steep road and to his home near Baker Ranch. At his home, Lutie used a hand operated winch to lift the mill pieces from the truck.

The mill was kept on Lutie's farm for several years when he arranged with Wendel Robie and the Native Sons of the Golden West to have it brought to Auburn.

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The following information about the five-stamp mill now located in Old Auburn is taken from a reprint of "History of Placer County" by Thompson & West, 1882, page 218.

"The 'Poole' was also discovered at an early day, about 1854 or 1855, by L. P. Burnham, and was worked for some time with a rude five-stamp mill by Burnham & Poole. Burnham's interest was purchased by Poole & Co. In 1879, who erected a five-stamp mill near Humbug Cañon, and built a tramway from the mine to the mill. The Superintendent is Mr. Parker, who states that the quartz taken from the mine yields from \$18.00 to \$28.00 per ton, and has paid all the expenses and cost of development."

The five-stamp mill is described as being a quartz mill and was water powered.