

FORKS HOUSE

Forks House was a stage stop on the road from Foresthill to Westville. The road forked here with the other road going to Iowa Hill which was 8 miles southwest of Forks House. The Iowa Hill road also led to the town of Damascus and to the trail to the Pioneer Mine and Humbug Canyon. The Damascus post office was moved to Forks House May 17, 1860, and operated in the hotel there until it ceased operating July 25, 1861.

HUMBUG CANYON

Humbug Canyon is one of the earliest placer mining areas having been explored in 1850. In February of that year, L. P. Burnham, Robert E. Draper and a man by the name of Kirkpatrick, were the first to enter the canyon. They had made an arduous 20 mile journey from Michigan Bluff through snow on the upper ridges.

They found enough gold to induce them to locate claims. These three men were from the State of Mississippi and so they named the small stream Mississippi Cañon. After a few days, they were disgusted with the mining and they left. While climbing the steep hillside on their way back to Michigan Bluff, Kirkpatrick said: "Pshaw, hasn't any gold of any account, it's a regular humbug, and instead of Mississippi we'd better call it Humbug Cañon".

They were met by a group of hopeful miners who had followed their trail from Michigan Bluff. The miners expected the three to have found a rich strike and could not be convinced that it was a humbug. The entire group then descended the canyon and the next day organized a mining district. Robert E. Draper was chosen as Secretary and in his minutes of the meeting wrote: "At a meeting of the miners of *Humbug Cañon* held this ----day of February, 1850," etc.

Humbug is located about 40 miles Northeast of Auburn in a box canyon formed by a small stream that discharges into the North Fork of the American River. The stream comes down in cascades from the South with its headwaters on the Foresthill Divide. In it's four miles of travel, the stream descends from 4,500 feet in elevation to 2,000 feet where it enters the American River.

The early settlers describe a Piute Indian tribe that lived near the river at the mouth of Humbug. They were not warlike and the braves supplied the wants of their families by hunting and fishing. There were less than fifty Indians in the tribe.

This mountain valley selected as a home by these Piutes was covered by virgin sugar pine, spruce, fir and cedar. The area was a game paradise for there could be found deer, foxes, mountain lion, grizzly and brown bear, grouse and quail. Flocks of wild pigeons would often darken the sky.

The male members of the tribe never worked, but were hunters. The squaws gathered acorns, manzanita berries and Indian potatoes. Great holes in the tops of flat rocks give evidence where for generations the Piute squaws crushed acorns and manzanita berries. The skins and hides of the wild animals were tanned and preserved by the squaws and provided most of their clothing. When the gold rush reached the scene this fine hunting area was changed and a few years later the United States government moved the entire tribe to a reservation in the State of Nevada.

The gravel in the bed, banks and benches along the stream and river was exceedingly rich and the gold was recovered easily. Gold bearing gravel was seldom more than three to ten feet in depth. Some estimate of the extent and richness of the diggings is made when,