

GOLD MINING ON THE FORESTHILL DIVIDE

By NORMAN McLEOD

Beginning in 1849, when the news of California's fabulous mineral wealth had spread throughout the globe, countless thousands of mining hopefuls streamed to the Golden State via wagon trains from the East and sailing ships from all over the world, most of them converging on the mushrooming settlement of Coloma in El-dorado County, the site of the original discovery on January 24, 1848.

With such a demanding population pressure it was natural that newcomers spread out in all directions in search of new claims. Many fanned out in a northerly direction, exploring the Middle and North Forks of the American River in Placer County.

A miners' foot trail soon became a major thoroughfare between Coloma and the Foresthill Divide. As early as the summer of 1848 a party of sailors off an abandoned ship berthed in San Francisco Bay found its way up the Middle Fork Canyon as far as Rector's Bar (in the shadow of what later was founded as the town of Michigan City). Probably these were the very first argonauts on the Foresthill Divide.

The Middle Fork was first found to be incredibly rich in gold deposits of the kind requiring only the use of long-bladed knives for "picking" between rock layers. Settlements on the various river bars sprang up all along the deep canyons on both the Middle and North Forks.

The first known settler on the divide was Dr. F. Walton Todd who in June of 1849 erected a cabin and trading post in a beautiful region to become known as "Todd's Valley".

In the fall of 1849 placer mining was being done on Barnes' Bar on the North Fork. Here rumors persisted of rich dry diggings in the uplands near the ridgetop, where gold was being mined by a character named Yankee Jim. Rather than spend the winter in the river canyon, a party of six men set out in November to locate this mysterious Yankee Jim. They eventually found him asleep in daytime under a rude log lean-to, two miles southwest of Brushy Canyon.

He proved to be an anti-social character from Maine, a rough sort and a truly bad actor. But he socialized enough to show the party a spot where the diggings were good.

A town sprang up in the area, quite naturally named Yankee Jim's.

By the middle of 1850 the new settlement was the most important village on the Forsthill Divide.

Yankee Jim drifted into the dangerous occupation of horse stealing. In the end his trade was terminally disrupted by a hanging rope.

Initial placer mining began in 1850 in Todd's Valley and in the vicinity of the newly constructed Forest House on the ridge. In March of 1850 gold was found near Bird's Store, near the future site of Michigan Bluff.

In 1851 rich diggings were located on Georgia Hill, near Yankee Jim's. This opened up probably the richest surface mine ever found in the state.

The severely wet winter of 1852-53 loosened an earth mass at the head of Jenny Lind Canyon, near the town of Foresthill. A landslide resulted, after which gold chunks worth up to \$2500 daily were found glistening on the loose gravel. This discovery led to the development of the famous Jenny Lind Deep Mine, one of the most bountiful on the divide.

Other mining claims were established quickly near the Jenny Lind. They were: Deidesheimer, Rough & Ready, New Jersey, Independent, Northwood & Fast, Gore, Paragon, Alabama, Dardanelles, and others. The original site of the town of Foresthill was situated in the close vicinity of these mines under the ridge.

It is said that the claims within rifle shot of the town's express office "produced not less than 10 million dollars". The first 10 years of Foresthill's existence were its most prosperous.

Gold mining gradually spread throughout the entire Foresthill Divide, continuing well into the 20th century. Additional towns were founded: Sunny South, Deadwood, Centerville, Damascus, Last Chance, Yorkville, and others.

No accurate count is possible of the wealth in gold removed from the Foresthill Divide. It is estimated that over 50 million dollars worth of the precious metal were mined.

During the early years of prospecting on the Foresthill Divide some exciting and highly profitable gold discoveries were made. On June 2, 1853, the Railroad Company of Sarahville (Bath) found a nugget worth \$750.

In 1853 the claim of Finley & Co., Michigan Bluff, was paying \$1,000 a day, with 11 men working. The Forst Hill claim was paying from \$1,800 to \$2,000 per day, owned by Brown & Snyder.

On September 18, 1852, The Sub-Marine Co., operating on the Placer side of the Middle Fork, with 13 men, was averaging 3,000 per day, with some days as high as \$4,000.

On December 4, 1852, at new diggings at Yankee Jim's, the reported yield was \$13.00 to the bucket. A miner named Willis working in Baltimore Ravine, found a gold nugget worth \$112.

On May 2, 1854, the Grisley Company of Todd's Valley took out \$380 in gold. On February 10, 1855, the Hazel Green Co. of Iowa Hill, divided \$13,000 among its employees, the result of a fortnight's digging.

On May 2, 1855, 100 ounces of gold dust were removed from the Dardanelles Claim near the Forest House, of which \$400 were taken from a single pan.

On March 7, 1855, the New York Tunnel Co., working in Brushy Canyon, two miles northeast of Yankee Jim's, struck yield as much as \$400 to \$500 to the pan. During April and May 1855, the Jameson Claim at Iowa Hill netted \$20,000 profit in four weeks' time, to be divided among 10 employees.

June 16, 1855. The Empire Mine at Michigan Bluff appears to be the richest mine in the entire state. It is common practice to wash out up to seven ounces of gold in a single pan of dirt, one day's yield reported at 50 ounces.

On August 17, 1855, a gold lump weighing 35 ounces was found on the claim of Lawrence & Co., Bird's Flat.

January 26, 1856. The Dardanelles Claim near Yankee Jim's yielded 334 ounces of gold after 5-1/2 days of washing. This was equal to \$6,000.

During August, 1860, three miners working at Paradise, took out \$3,000 in one week. On August 13, 1864, a nugget of pure gold weighing 6-1/2 pounds was found on American Bar on the North Fork.

December 30, 1865. The Oro Tunnel near Forest Hill, after one week's work by four miners, yielded over 100 ounces of pure gold.

November 23, 1867. Henrick Robards, a miner working on the North Fork took out \$15,000 in pure gold, in three days.

One of the richest mines on the divide was the Paragon Mine near Forest Hill, owned by Breece & Wheeler. First operated as a drift mine, it later was opened up to hydraulic mining. For over

twenty years (up to 1881) this mine reported a profit of close to \$13,000 a month. Only a few men were employed in its operation.

Some of these rich strikes were merely so-called "flashes in the pan." Others developed into gold-producing mines of substantial wealth. One such Mine was the Pioneer, located on the southern rim of Humbug Canyon, dating back to 1854. This was the deepest and most extensively worked mine in the county, ranking second in total gold production. A 20-stamp mill was erected in 1889 that operated until 1922, when the mill shut down.

Total production of the mine since 1889 was over \$900,000. There is no record of production prior to 1889, thus it may be construed that total profit since 1854 was in the millions.

Another substantial producer was the BIG DIPPER MINE in Iowa Hill District, that began as a hydraulic operation in 1858, continuing until 1881, during which time it produced up to \$200,000. Thereafter it operated as a drift (tunnel) mine until 1902, producing in this period over one million dollars.

The BIG GUN MINE at Michigan Bluff was hydraulic, beginning in 1854 and continuing intermittently until after 1901. Production up until 1882 was claimed to have been about one million dollars.

Located one and a quarter miles northeast of Last Chance, the HOME TICKET DRIFT MINE operated from 1855 until 1918. It was worked extensively through an adit nearly 5,000 feet deep. In 1921 the mine was reopened with little success. During the winter of 1934-35, 18 to 32 carloads of one ton each were delivered to the mill that was operated by ditch water from Grouse Canyon one and a quarter miles away. In 1935 only two men were working the mine. Total production figures are unavailable.

A most prominent operation was the HIDDEN TREASURE MINE, discovered by William Cameron in 1875. For many years it was the largest producer among drift mines in the state. It was worked successfully for 32 years, with a gross production reported as over \$4,000,000. Its main portal was situated in the settlement of Sunny South. A crew of 120 miners washed 275 1-ton carloads of gravel in 24 hours at a total cost of \$1.10 a ton in 1889-90. At the time the tunnel was 7700 feet deep. Two-thirds of the crew were Chinese paid \$1.75 per day, while whites received \$3.00 per day.

Mining continued through the Sunny South portal until 1896, when

activities were moved to the Dam Claim tunnel in Centerville. Eventually this tunnel was mined as deep as 10,100 feet by 1902, when it connected with the MOUNTAIN GATE adit bored in from the opposite side of the Foresthill Divide.

The HIDDEN TREASURE MINE was the first to be electrified in the state, its power used to run an electric locomotive that hauled gravel trains of 15 to 30 carloads each.

Three miles southeast of Foresthill is the THREE QUEENS MINE, deep inside the Middle Fork Canyon. This 20th century mine began operation in 1907, when a production of \$30,000 was reported. FOUR ACRES MINING COMPANY controlled the function from 1926 to 1928, when output was reported at \$80,000. M. Savage, owner of the original THREE QUEENS MINE, resumed work in 1930 and for many years thereafter the mine produced gold.

The MAYFLOWER MINE (about two miles north of Foresthill) originally was a hydraulic operation. It grew from an area of 370 acres to over 3,000 acres. Its chief production period was between 1888 and 1899 when about \$1,600,000 were realized. Its ore was crushed in a 20-stamp mill using 850-lb. stamps dropping 100 times a minute, 24 hours a day.

Work started in the RED POINT MINE in 1866, an adit that burrowed deep into an ancient channel located between Westville and Damascus. It was first operated by a French company, until 1903, when a different lessee under the direction of Superintendent John A. Ferguson worked the mine until 1916. Its main tunnel reached a depth of 20,620 feet, to within one and a quarter miles of Westville to the south. Its gross production was 56,000 ounces of gold.

Low operating costs of the mine were due to overall efficiency and the hiring of Chinese labor at \$1.75 per shift, compared to \$3.50 for whites. Fifty miners were employed, washing about 100 tons of gravel a day. A compressed air locomotive was used for hauling ore cars. This engine is displayed today in front of the Foresthill Memorial Hall.

Two miles southeast of Foresthill, at the former site of Bath, is the PARAGON MINE, a consolidation of several claims. Originally a drift mine, first worked in 1852, its output up to 1871 was \$750,000. In 1864 a stamp mill was installed. Hydraulic mining replaced drifting and in 1874 the mine was worked on a large scale. From 1888 to 1901 production was over \$500,000. Up to 1902 the total reported output was \$2,651,000, with dividends of \$600,000 being paid. This mine remained in operation until

fairly recent times and at present is under the watchful eye of a caretaker. Hopefully, it may be reopened when the price of gold warrants it.

The DARDANELLES MINE is another first worked in 1853 as a drift mine, then later resorting to hydraulicking. It is reported that 3,630,000 cubic yards of gravel were washed away by 1889, with an average yeild of 13 cents a cubic yard.

In 1878 thme reported total production of some of Foresthill's mines was as follows:

THE INDEPENDENCE:	\$450,000
NEW JERSEY:	850,000
DE IDESHEIMER:	650,000
JENNY LIND:	1,100,000

Of course, all the above mines continued beyond 1878 to produce more gold.

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