

The "Chispa."

The old-time placer miners talked of "colors," "chispas " and "nuggets." The colors are the fine particles of gold obtained in prospecting with the pan. They range in size from the mere dust of gold that forms a yellow, streak in the bottom of the pan to grains worth a fraction of a cent or a cent. As for the nuggets, it is unnecessary to particularly describe those big ugly lumps of gold which all have seen and nobody wants to own. The chispa is a piece of gold worth from ten cents to half a dollar. The Spanish word "chispa" is very expressive when applied to such a little spangle of gold. In Spanish "chispa" means a spark of fire, also a very small diamond is called a chispa, because of its sparkle. A chispa of bright quartz gold, or of any gold that is not rusty, seen among black sand in washing out a pan of gravel, looks much like a spark of fire—seems to be alive. The word chispa used as a mining term to denote a small, bright fragment of gold is very expressive. The bit of gold shines out like- a spark of fire. The old-time miners were always glad to find plenty of chispas in their rockers and toms. They were not only pleasing to the eye, but they counted up much faster than did the very fine dust. We do not hear so much said of the chispas these times as in the good old days when the "boys"—then all young and gay—were gathering in the golden harvest of the great placers. Many of the mining terms in use among the Mexicans are very expressive and appropriate, but few of them are now heard among Pacific coast miners. We are no longer dependent on Mexico, Germany or any other country for our knowledge of mining processes. With the development of American mines came American methods.

Dan De Quille, Virginia City, Nevada, June 15, '96..

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Note: Dan De Quill (*say it fast*) was the pen name for William Wright, along with Samuel Clements/Mark Twain, was a journalist for the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise; his writing was noted for his simple terms and humor.