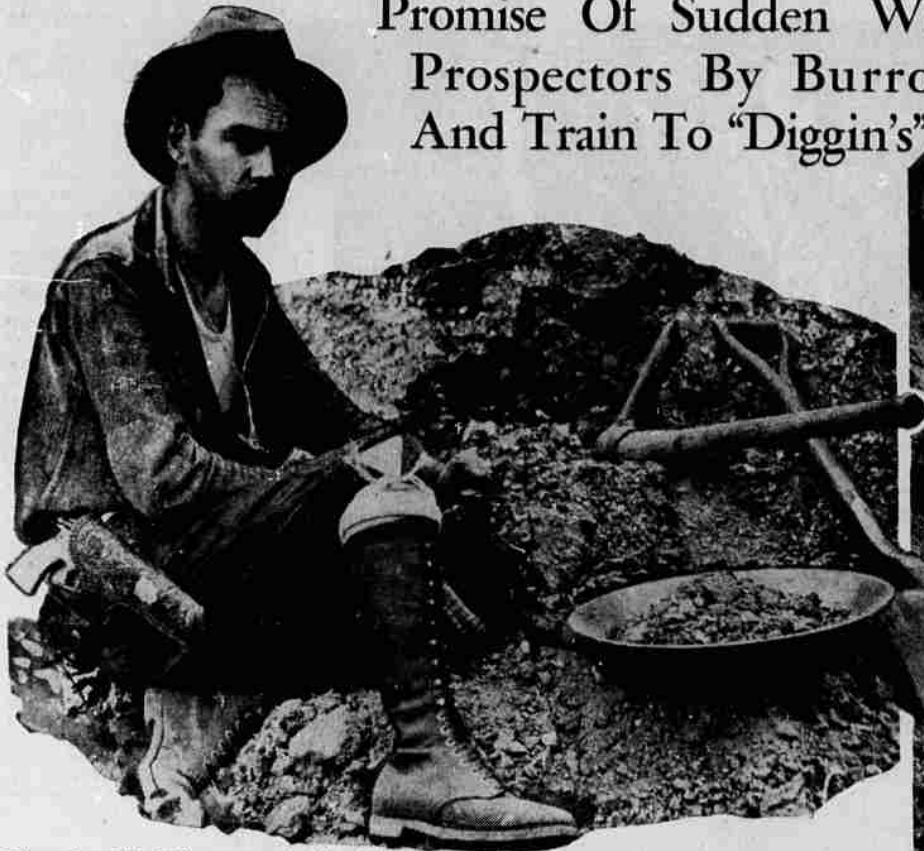
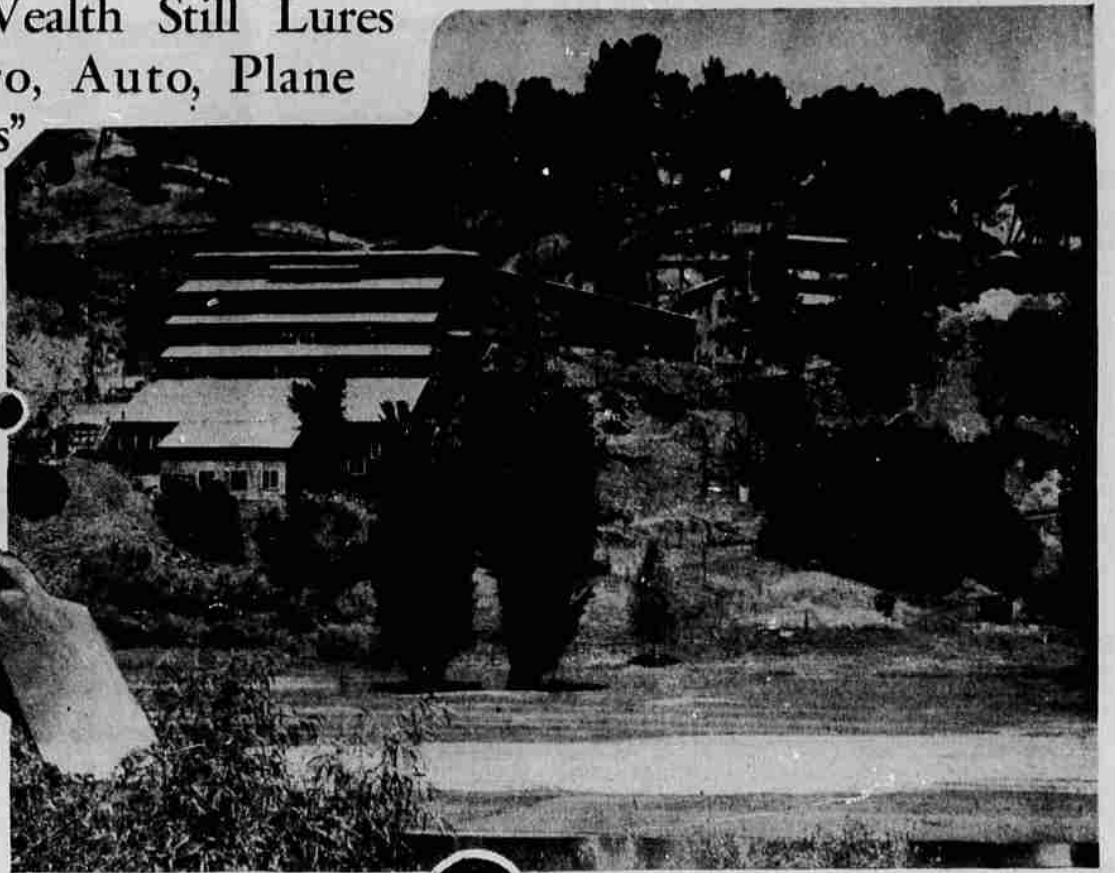


Thar's Gold In Them Thar Hills Yonder, Maybe

Promise Of Sudden Wealth Still Lures Prospectors By Burro, Auto, Plane And Train To "Diggin's"



The author, Woods Peters, armed with gold pan, shovel, pick and magnifying glass strung around his neck, and six-gun, in case of a "real strike", tests a slide in the placer country.



Melones, site of one of the richest of the forty-nine strikes, still yields its treasure. Last summer the stream to his right relinquished free gold estimated at \$150,000.

By Woods Peters

THE Gold Lottery is still paying off. If you don't believe it, just take a run into the California hills any late summer or fall before the rains start. You may be lucky yourself. If you've once seen the yellow flecks of virgin metal in a gold pan, you'll be everlastingly certain that a fortune will be waiting "just around the next bend."

I buy tickets regularly. Every summer the hills call. Twice I've just missed a strike; next time I'm almost certain to hit it. The gold's there; all you have to do is to find it.

Prowl the Pacific Coast from the Arizona deserts to the Washington line and you'll find your fortune hunters. They are blowing the dry dust of the southwest; they're digging old workings where the Forty Niners were stopped by seepage water; they are diving in swift mountain waters, grubbing in rocky slopes for hidden quartz ledges, following thin veins in the "pocket diggin's", trying every unlikely place where gold most certainly isn't—but they are finding it! Sometimes!

Permit me to give fair warning that the names you read herein are not the true ones. Gold seekers dislike personal publicity; they may think they know how to find gold in the Pacific hills, but they know little of stocks and gilt edged securities. Which leads to the belief they are a pretty shrewd lot, and know some kinds of business methods better than the rest of us.

THERE were about 10,000 men and women testing the rivers and mountain ledges the past summer. They spent about 90 days at the occupation. They netted from nothing to \$35 or \$50 a piece—depending on the locality. And yet Mrs. Cullen cleared an even \$100,000; Jack Stuart \$65,000; and William T. Murdock "sees an easy \$150,000" in the next two summer's work.

I was bitten by the gold bug up in the Plumas National Forest. Not being a mining engineer, I felt it quite likely that a bit of science was the logical way to success. Out of my school books I dug up a map of the Pacific during the tertiary era and overlaid it on a modern day chart. Gold, so I had heard, was first brought down by the ancient tertiary streams. Therefore, what more logical conclusion than that the point where a stream of today cut a tertiary bed would be a gold producer with a minimum of digging.

I found such a point. I dug. I found gold—a few flecks half the size of pin heads. I also found that someone else had dug there recently; and the following day a forest ranger told me, which I later verified, that a fellow from Utah had taken out 40 pounds of the yellow metal two weeks earlier!

Jim Holt commiserated with me. Jim is an old timer working claims in that same area. "You never can tell," he said. "You just gotta follow your hunches. Take me, for instance, and my pard—an' if yuh ever write this yarn, yuh might ask my pard tuh come back, will yuh?"

So should his "pard" read this, he'll know of whom I am writing, and know, I hope, that Jim was sincere in his plea.

IT SEEMS, so Jim Holt told me, that he had felt gold was to be found back there in the Plumas country. There was a certain hillside where he thought it ought to lie. Science, of course, was against it. His partner was a mining engineer; he saw no evidence of gold bearing strata. But the two men had worked together for years. To please Old Jim, he dug with him. For 60 feet they drifted into the hillside, until the younger engineer became disgusted. Jim insisted: "Just another day," he begged. Hard words came. The partner walked out. "Run your own damn mine," he suggested. "I'll find someone with good sense."

Jim Holt watched him down the canyon and out of sight. He turned back into the drift, looked at the broken "face" that had shattered the friendship of a dozen years. Sudden anger swept him; he hurled his pick toward the rock, and behind the suddenly trickling fragments—loomed gold!

Jim has taken out a couple of hundred thousand



Hard rock drift—Somewhere back in this hole lies a fortune. The lone miner is following a thin thread of "color" seeking a paying vein or fabulous "pocket."

and dollars worth. Half of it is in secure hiding. "Tell my pard to come back; that half is his," he says.

A rancher nearby confirms the story. "You never can tell where you'll find the peaky stuff," he says. He's been ranching in a little valley high up in the Plumas country for "nigh onto 40 year", but gave up the search for gold long ago. Then two years ago there came a youngster from Sacramento. He was driving a car of somewhat ancient vintage, had a bed and tent strapped on, and a bright and shiny gold pan.

He pulled up beside the ranch house and asked permission to camp there. The next morning, after a bit of reading in some small book, he mounted the ranch house steps with a paper in his hand.

"May I prospect here in your pasture?" he asked. "Fine. Thanks; then will you sign this release for me?"

The "release" was an assignment of all mineral right in that specific area bounded by the cow corral, an isolated oak tree, and rock cairns he had erected at two points along the little meandering meadow stream.

"Heck," said the rancher. "I been living here most o' my life, an' if you can find any gold in these hyere lands, yore shore welcome." He signed his name.

THE kid has been taking out \$40 to \$50 a day ever since, medium gold located in coarse gravel about 18 inches below the surface soil!

One of the most aggravating things to the old timer is the question: "Where can I find me some gold?"

Up in the Grass Valley country, far from any settlement, I ran onto a typical prospector. He was trudging along a by-road, driving two burrows before him. I pulled up.

"Howdy, neighbor. How's luck?"

He looked me over without comment.

"Finding anything?" I asked.

"Finding what?" he demanded. "I'm a sheep herder. Got a flock over thar."

"Over thar?" was a tangled expanse of mountain and canyon, where nothing but a wild goat could have found footing. "Sure," I agreed. "I've been looking for a herder. I want a picture. I'm a newspaperman." We talked a few minutes until suddenly:

"Yuh know, Mister, I been lyin' to yuh. I'm so plumb fed up on these hyar city fellers who want tuh know whar tuh find gold. By gum, hif'n I knew whar tuh find it, I'd be findin' hit myself, an' not tellin' someone else."

He's the fellow, I learned later, who pensioned a mule for life for taking out over a million dollars for him in the early days. Where's the million? He doesn't know, now. "But I've shore had a swell time in my day."

There's some who do know where their fortunes lie, though. Mrs. Cullen is one. She has it down in additional claims that "I'm sure will bring me ten times what I had."

MRS. CULLEN was a newspaper woman. Health and what-not had forced her into the hills where she put down an option on 250 acres, including a small store and service station. I had known her from way back, and the fates had never smiled too fully on her until she gambled on that option.

She had had it about a year when I ran onto her again. "Come on in, Woods; come on in. Do you want a claim? I've one you can have for the working of it," she promised. "I'd like to pass on a bit of my luck."

Her few spare hours of the past 12 months had gone into explorations of that 250 acres. She had located 11 quartz claims here and there. Four of them she had sold the day before for a neat \$100,000; one-fourth down in cold cash, and additional fourths each 90 days until cleared.

One hundred thousand dollars could have well supported her for the rest of her days, but—

"I can see a million, easily. This morning I



Photographs by The Author

An old timer—Such prospectors are still seen in the farther spots of California. They fail, however, to prove a source of information for the mining beginner. "Dad burn hit, if I knew whar tuh find gold, I'd go find hit!"

purchased another 350 acres down near Sonora in the pocket mining area. Its a gamble, sure, but I'll hit it all right, and when you hit it there—you hit it!"

You do; when you do! Jack Stuart did in the first week of his work.

The Sonora pockets are reputed to be the biggest gamble in all the West's gold fields. Despite the Forty Niners, the country there is still full of gold. Around Sonora the quartz ledges carry thin lines of yellow metal that are merely the promise of what lies beyond. Sometimes these lines are but mere threads, barely discernable, twisting their way through the white crystalline rock. Sometimes they widen to pencil width. To follow them means moving rock to the extent of their depth, and to whatever extra distance may be necessary to permit the passage of the miner.

There's no profit in those threads themselves. Each dollar of gold costs tremendous, unbelievable labor. Usually it doesn't even pay for the purchase of powder for blasting. But somewhere back there, "in my mine, anyway," there is a pocket filled with virgin gold. Jewelry rock! All you have to do is pick it out with a pen knife. You're rich, man, you're rich!

THAT'S what Jack Stuart did. He drove through the rock, following the elusive vein for five days, and struck his pocket—\$65,000 in one lump sum. But Jack's wiser than most. They tell me he has gone to school to learn mining, and banked the difference to start him again after he gets out.

Last summer I put my vaunted science to work with another miss chalked up. That's two in a row. Next year, I'll certainly strike it.

I had read the tales of Melones, that fabulous place on the Stanislaus river where the Old Timers had found the coarsest of all '49 gold. The place drew its name from that gold, which resembled, so the stories say, the large seeds or "melones" of melons. It was everywhere along the narrow base of the canyon valley. One could pick up a fortune in a day's panning. And it is still found, in the hard rock far above the river, where a thundering mill is operating 24 hours a day breaking it free from the quartz.

But the Forty Niners had not wasted time going into the river. They had found all they could handle above the water line. No one, so far as I knew, had ever tried diving. Therefore—

But the south side of the Stanislaus failed even of color. The thermometer stood at 112 degrees. For a half hour I watched some man unloading a small boat from a truck across the stream. He didn't know much about fishing, I

decided, if he thought he would find a catch in the vicinity of chloride vats. I left him to his unsuccessful occupation, and headed back to camp. The Stanislaus, so far as I was concerned, was definitely out!

Two days later a bright-eyed young woman came into the camp. "Did you see my husband down at Melones?" she demanded. "He was in a boat."

MY SUDDEN suspicion was verified. Forty yards from where I had been working William T. Murdock had tried my idea of diving. He was pulling \$20 nuggets. He had, so his letter to his wife stated, "an easy \$150,000 in sight in the next two summers." That's all you have to do; just look in the right place.

How do you find gold? It's really very easy. There are just a few simple instructions that should be followed, and gold will certainly be revealed just around the next bend.

Equipment may be as little as a gold pan, a rock hammer, pick and shovel, augmented with a hand magnifying glass, small bottle of mercury and a container to carry the treasure. (For the latter I use a small pill bottle, on the basis that a real strike will take care of itself.)

Should you prefer free gold searching, you proceed into the gold country, to any stream, and work up it panning samples at frequent intervals. The base of a rapid or waterfall is usually paying ground. A knife or broken spoon is an aid in digging between the rocks. Of course you may need derricks, blasting powder and determination to remove the larger rocks, but gold is there, if you can get at it.

Hard rock mining proceeds in the same fashion. You work up the stream until the gold vanishes. Presumably it has come, like water, from some ledge higher up that is undergoing weathering. Proceed up the bank, panning additional samples, until all trace again vanishes. Then dig in; somewhere inside is a quartz ledge that maybe will pay.

The third method is the most profitable. Make arrangements with the gods of the hills to bring you luck, along the line of the instances I have sketched herein. It's easiest on the back, and might get your name into print when you cash in at the nearest government assay office.

But if none of those appeal, there is still a fourth method that is apparently infallible. Just proceed me by two weeks to wherever I plan to go, or follow me and dig somewhere else, keeping within sight. That method experience has proven most trustworthy. I should like to try it myself, were I twina.