

Photo by Nan Cerqui

Immigrants believed the streets of America were paved with it. King Tut insisted his tomb be decorated with it. Fort Worth is full of it. And University geology major Rick Streiff stakes his livelihood on the fact that all that glitters sometimes actually is

GOLD

When Al Churchill discovered the President Mine in 1897, miners extracted gold with a pickaxe and sweat.

Today, a geology major and a business graduate use dynamite and technology to blast their share from the mine.

Not that all the sweat's gone from the operation. Rick Streiff works hard preparing the mine for what he hopes will be another gold find. The 23-year-old geology student

Stories by
JOHN CROWLEY

got hired there as a watchman, "picking and chipping" all the while, but he watched well, and rose to resident miner. As a resident he acquired the knowledge and experience he hopes to put to work for himself.

"We're sure there's more gold in here — lots more," says Streiff. "Our challenge is to solve the geologic puzzle and find it." And looking for gold can be puzzling.

Although Churchill's contemporaries were more likely to discover rich gold deposits, rarely does a modern miner find such "free gold" in the Bohemia Mining district. "Gold is usually found in quartz, and is generally mixed with other elements," Streiff explains. "You've got to blast it out and crush the rock to get the gold."

Because it takes 20 to 30 sticks of dynamite to get through about four feet of rock, this can be a major operation. The rocks

loosened by the blast must be cleared by hand and loaded into ore cars for a trip to a crushing mill.

When the rough ore has been reduced to near powder, it's run through a "concentrating table," a giant panning machine that shakes back and forth — to separate the heavier elements from the lighter ones to produce the elemental concentrates.

If the miner is interested only in gold, he may fine-pan it on the spot; more sophisticated equipment is required to separate and recover all elements present.

Streiff is familiar with these operations. As a high school student, he panned and studied prospecting. After he and a friend visited the Star Mine in the Bohemia district, Streiff knew he'd found his calling.

He got hired there as a watchman, "picking and chipping" all the while, but he watched well, and rose to resident miner. As a resident he acquired the knowledge and experience he hopes to put to work for himself.

Partner Holloman came to prospecting indirectly. After graduating from the University in International Business, he tried his hand at pro golfing. "I played the circuit for a while, but found out the traveling got to me," he said. "I prefer to settle down, and I like working in the great outdoors — whether I strike it rich or not."

Undoubtedly, though, hitting paydirt is on their minds as the partners ready their mine for a successful dig. With Streiff's girlfriend,

Nan Cerqui, and their rock hound Bo, they've been "winterizing" the area. A rugged two-mile road, their sole access, winds over a 5,000-foot mountain pass and must be protected against winter run-off.

The miners have just reopened a 350-foot tunnel, and are now concentrating on another 150-foot channel. They await results of a preliminary assay — an ore analysis to determine ore value — before planning their next move.

"Most small mines fail," Streiff says. "When a prospector finds some gold, usually he rushes to build his own mill, sinking all his money into it. Then he finds there's no money left to explore for gold. End of gold rush."

To be profitable — or as Streiff says, to be interesting — a mine must produce ore containing about one-half ounce of gold per ton of rock. The last shipment of ore from the President Mine yielded about one ounce per ton. Streiff's predecessors have met with varying degrees of success here.

Fortunes have been made and lost in the Bohemia Mining district. These slopes, about 35 miles southeast of Cottage Grove, have seen riches found and hopes dashed.

The district takes its name from the nationality of James Johnson, who with his partner, George Ramsey, searched the area for gold in 1863. Small amounts of stream gold had been found nearby. While dressing a deer, Johnson noticed the glint of some gold quartz in the headwaters of City Creek. They brought a sample down to Cottage Grove and the gold rush was on.

Within just a few years, over 100 claims were made, and a small town — Bohemia

City — rose on the banks of City Creek. Complete with cabins, saloon, hotel, and a branch of the Douglas County Recorder's office, the town housed about 600.

By 1867 a mill to crush the ore had been built, running successfully until a heavy snow destroyed the mill building in 1877. Interest in the area waned; the fickle prospectors moved on, and Bohemia City emptied out and stayed that way for several years.

Gold fever erupted anew in 1891 when James Musick, a California prospector, discovered a rich ledge of the precious stuff, renewing interest in the area. Soon after, other gold seekers were crying, "Eureka!" Bohemia's golden days had begun.

During this heyday a hardy prospector named Churchill discovered the President Mine. With the limited technology of the day, much of the gold could not be recovered. "The old-time miners would wash about half of their findings away," says Streiff. "There was nothing they could do about it."

Nonetheless, Churchill made a go of it, and in 1910 he took a partner, a man named Patton, and the two worked the mine until Churchill's death in 1921. Patton then reclaimed the mineral rights himself and performed the bulk of tunneling and production. He continued into the 40s, when nature and man conspired to change his fortunes.

Patton had built the treacherous road over the mountain (the cynical U.S. Forest

Service predicted it would take over two years; Patton did it in 93 days), and over it he hauled enough materials to construct his own mill. He had just completed it when the first snow of the season turned into a mud-and-rock slide that ruined the mill.

Not too long after that, a partner cracked Patton over the head and made off with a good part of his fortune. Patton's interest diminished.

A few years later Bohemia Minerals bought the President and other mines in the area, and brought it out a modest amount of gold. But mining was not the main interest of the Bohemia Lumber subsidiary, and in the early 60s the company deeded the mine to Hal Barton, a geologic consultant who had performed assessment duties for them. Then last year, Barton sold the mine to Streiff.

Now the partners ready their site for better days. Along with the mine they inherited three claims active since the 1920s, and have reactivated two other claims from that period. Staunch party-members, Churchill and Patton named all of them after Republican presidents.

Barton likes to tell about the time he visited Patton's cabin for dinner. As he approached, Patton's dogs began yelping loudly. "Shut up, you damn Democrats!" yelled Patton. "You're always begging for something."

Currently, Streiff and Holloman are working on Coolidge.

"As we've plotted the vein so far," Streiff says, "it looks like we'll have a couple more claims pretty soon." Each claim can cover a maximum of 20 acres, and at least \$100 worth of work must be performed annually on each claim to retain the rights.

"In the old days, that was a sizable amount of work," Streiff observed. "But these days, you can do that in a weekend."

They're more than met that requirement this year. All summer Holloman worked at the mine, and on weekends Streiff heads through the rugged terrain and over the mountain road to join him working the claims.

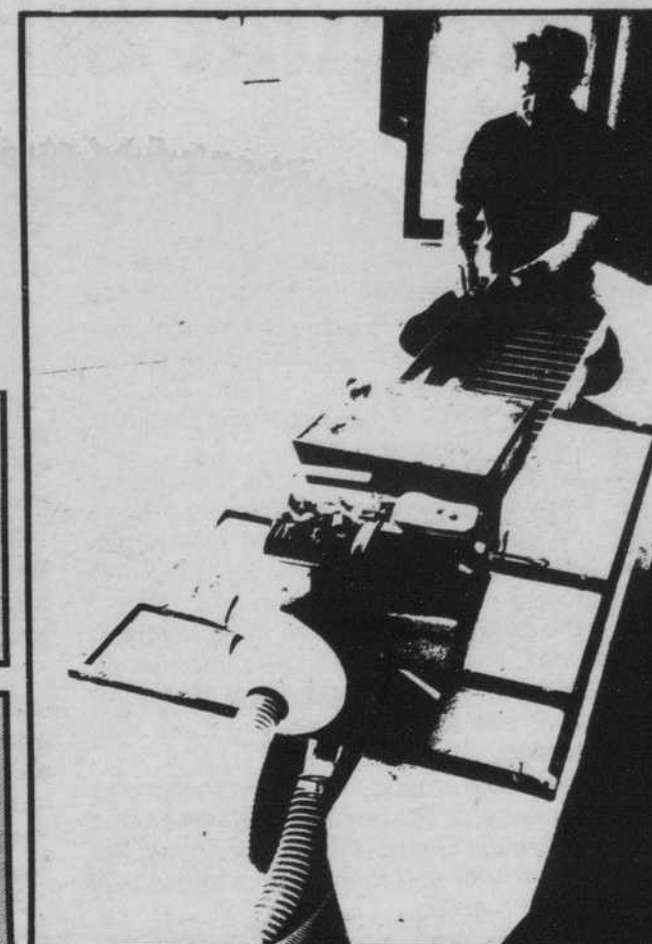
Streiff says he's at home in the hills. Last summer he worked in the area as a minerals technician for the U.S. Forest Service working in part with district research to determine areas of historical significance. The Forest Service has set aside the Bohemia district as a special area, and Streiff's findings are helping to formulate the Umpqua National Forest land-use management plan.

In addition, Streiff serves as vice-president of the Bohemia Mine Owners' Association, a group of mining enthusiasts who meet once a month to talk shop and keep up with recent mining legislation. He especially savors the post; at the turn of the century Churchill, discoverer of Streiff's mine, served as president of that organization.

And just as the old prospector did, Streiff's got big hopes for the President Mine. "You can say I've got gold fever — a mild case."

GOLD PRICE TODAY
\$222.00 oz.

GOLD PRICE TODAY
\$217.25 oz.



Emerald photos

Darrell Rossell has been in the gold business for years. Not in some New York financial office, but in the wilderness, sifting the precious metal from mountain streams with a simple dredge. He also runs a specialty store in Springfield, selling all the tools of his trade to weekend goldminers.

Anyone can find gold according to merchant

Darrell Rossell sells dreams.

With his wife Rose, Rossell runs Goldfinders in Springfield. Here gold prospectors of all levels can find the tools and expertise they need to pursue their dreams of striking it rich.

"Anyone can find gold," Rossell confided. "All it takes is an hour or so with a pan. You can find gold in any spring around." In fact, within eighty miles of Eugene are four mining districts, according to Rossell, and through each one run gold-bearing streams.

In his shop Rossell buys gold, sells gold, and talks gold. He fashions the precious stuff into jewelry, and helps others with gold fever hunt their piece of the lode.

Underwater dredging is his specialty. With a floating three-inch gold dredge made by Keene Engineering, Rossell scours stream beds. A mix of water, sand and gravel is drawn through a suction hose, and sent washing over a rippled "sluice box." The heavy gold particles sink into a special reservoir.

"If you take the time, you can make quite a profit. With two or three days, the proper equipment and the right stream, you can pull in between \$50 and \$500 a day."

Rossell recalls when he unwittingly helped some fellow dredgers do even better than that. "They were working a ways behind us, and complaining that

we were muddying the water. So we obliged and moved on a bit. Come to find out later they raised about four ounces in less than two hours from that exact spot."

Let that amount seem a trifling, gold was selling Tuesday for \$222 an ounce, a record. In 1970 the price was \$35. "The price fluctuates according to a very fickle market," Rossell pointed out. "All it takes is for the U.S. Treasury to announce a gold sale, and the price drops thirty or forty dollars an ounce."

Like most prospectors, Rossell's had gold in mind for a long time. For the last five years, though, he's been prospecting in earnest, and this spring he bought Goldfinders, where he'd been trading. This small storefront in the McKenzie West Plaza stocks metal detectors, sifters, pans, pickaxes, miners' helmets, and even a flintlock and black powder, for any "b'ars" encountered while fortune hunting.

After taking over in April, Rossell averaged one dredging operation a week until the seasonal lull and a mechanics injury slowed him down. Now he dredges occasionally and supplies others.

A true prospector, though, the dream of finding The Big One stays with him. "I think about it all the time," he says wistfully.

"But dreaming doesn't bring in money for groceries."

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