



## MINES OF CHOTEAU COUNTY, MONTANA.

Until within the past eighteen months the mineral resources of Choteau county have been as a sealed book to the prospecting world. It was known that there were gold, silver and copper bearing ores and placer mines in the Bear Paw and Little Rocky mountains, and in the Sweet Grass hills, but their extent and richness could only be surmised. The whole of the northern portion of the county, or about 20,000 square miles of it, were locked up in the vast Indian reservation, which extended from the summit of the main range of the Rockies to the western boundary of North Dakota, and the white man who couldn't boast the possession of a squaw wife was summarily ejected from the sacred soil as soon as his presence upon it was known to its guardian angels—the Indian agents.

Yet, notwithstanding the vigilance of Indian detectives and the jealous watchfulness of squaw men, now and then an adventurous prospector would enter the forbidden grounds and ply his vocation. The favorable report made by one of these interlopers created the great stampede to the Bear Paws in 1878. Miners from every portion of Montana, California, Nevada and the Black Hills rushed there, but not finding a fortune under every rock they turned over, they returned to their old camping grounds, leaving a few of the more sanguine to continue the work of developing prospects, begun under most encouraging conditions. The few, however, were soon driven off by the Indians, and the echoes of the Bear Paws again remained unbroken by the clang of pick or shovel. But sufficient work had been done to prove the existence of fine bodies of silver bearing lodes, and of extensive placer mines.

There are a few parties in Helena to-day who were interested in the development of the Black Diamond claims, located some twelve or fifteen miles from the present town of Chinook. A shaft was sunk down upon it sixty feet in depth in a fine body of galena ore, sampling fifty-six per cent. in lead, and from seventy-five to eighty ounces in silver. The Indians drove off the men in charge, and the work was abandoned. This was ten or eleven years ago. The lode has since been re-located by Tom O'Hanlon, and is now known as the Bear Paw. It is a valuable property and will some day prove a bonanza to the fortunate owner. Other promising lodes were also discovered, but owing to the interference of the Indians and other circumstances over which the prospector had no control, the work of development was discontinued.

Col. J. J. Donnelly, now a resident of Fort Benton, was among the stamperers at that time. He discovered large areas of auriferous gravel upon which an abundance of water can be conducted at a comparatively insignificant outlay of capital. Sufficient pressure for hydraulic mining and excellent dumping grounds could also be obtained. That the Bear Paw mountains are ribbed with gold bearing quartz is attested by the fact that "colors" can be found in every stream flowing from them. Some beautiful specimens of quartz containing gold have been picked up in the mountains, and considerable of the metal has been washed from some of the smaller streams.

Gold in paying quantities has also been found in the Little Rockies, a group of mountains east of the Bear Paw, and connected with them by a chain of hills or smaller mountains. A stampede to the Little Rockies, several years ago, was checked by the authorities, as the "diggings" were embraced in the

Indian reservation. Enough, however, was learned concerning them to satisfy experienced placer miners that they offer to-day the finest field for prospecting, with reasonable hope of success, in Montana. Since the opening of the reservation, a few parties have gone in there and located claims, but as they are men without means, or experience in mining, they have accomplished little outside of the necessary work to hold their locations from year to year. The time will come, however, when the Bear Paw and Little Rockies will be as noted for their mineral output as the great valleys and broad plateaus surrounding them are now famous for their magnificent farming areas and broad, boundless grazing resources. Both of these groups of mountains are within Choteau county's 27,000 square miles of territory.

The Sweet Grass hills are about eighty miles north of Fort Benton and eight or ten miles south of the forty-ninth parallel of latitude—the boundary line between Montana and our British neighbors. These so-called hills are composed of three buttes—East, Middle and West. During the past summer somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 men have been engaged in prospecting in them, with most encouraging results. Over fifty locations have been made in the East Butte and recorded in the clerk and recorder's office of the county in Fort Benton, while over 100 remain unrecorded. Nearly all the prospecting and work of development have been confined to the East Butte. Some of the lodes are very wide, the Iron Chief being fifty-six feet wide at the surface. Their trend is northeast and southwest, with little or no dip or inclination. The wide lodes carry low grade copper ores, while others are very rich in silver. Several shipments of selected ores have been made to the east, which ran all the way from 180 ounces to 250 ounces to the ton, but the poverty of the owners, their primitive mode of mining and long wagon haul to the nearest railroad station, were a bar to continuous development. Sufficient work, however, has been done in the East Butte to establish the great value of its lodes beyond reasonable doubt. Several interests have been recently secured there by Fort Benton and other parties at good figures for sellers, and another year will witness extensive developments in that promising section.

Several gold bearing quartz lodes have been discovered in the Middle Butte, but little work has been done upon them, nearly all the miners in that section being engaged in placer mining. A scarcity of water alone prevents extensive placer mining, the gravel, during the summer, being hauled five miles for washing. Yet fair to good wages are made. Several thousand dollars of Middle Butte gold have been sold to the Fort Benton banks during this season. But little or no prospecting has been done in the West Butte, though extensive coal measures are known to exist in the vicinity. The three buttes cover an area of fifteen miles by thirty, or about 450 square miles. They are 6,800 feet above sea level.

But, without question, the most valuable property located in the hills is the great marble quarry. It is situated upon the northern slope of the East Butte, and is four and one-half miles long by one-quarter of a mile in width. The marble is pure white, and will polish as smooth as glass. It is now all covered by fillings. The quarry was discovered by members of the boundary survey party in 1874, and specimens secured and sent to the Smithsonian institute. Colonel Donnelly was of the