



Granite

According to “Oregon’s Golden Years,” by Miles F. Potter, Harvey Robbins was the first settler to arrive there — in 1862, the same year that gold was discovered. In 1878, when the town sought a post office, there already was another Independence. The governor selected Granite to be the name.

Granite grew as innovations in hard-rock mining made it more profitable. At one point, the town had a 30-room hotel with a 20-room annex, and several smaller hotels and boarding houses. It also boasted a church, a school, city water, and telephone service to the mines and to the outside world. Potter wrote: “Four lively saloons made good business at times for the little wooden jail. Also in sight, at the foot of the hill, was Granite’s Chinatown.

The mining slowed, however, and the population dwindled, leaving dozens of structures to the ghostly memories of boom times.

Today Granite has about three dozen year-round residents, but draws many part-timers and visitors for hunting, ATV riding, prospecting and snowmobiling.

Austin and Bates

Through the years, Austin was a lumber, sheep, cattle and mining town. Miles F. Potter writes in “Oregon’s Golden Years,” that the Oregon Lumber Company founded the town of Bates about a mile downriver. As the new mill went into operation, that town grew and Austin shrank. “The decline of the Sumpter Valley Railroad started in 1933 when the road was abandoned from Prairie City to Bates and Austin. All passenger service was suspended four years later, and the final scheduled run was in April 1947,” Potter wrote.

While not “haunted” (perhaps) in the traditional sense, these communities became ghost towns nonetheless.

A few residents still call Austin home. As for Bates, while all the mill structures and houses are gone, the site has been resurrected as an Oregon State Parks campground.

Sumpter

If you are looking to soak up the ambience of an old mining hub, Sumpter is the place to head. The town is just across Grant County’s eastern border in Baker County.

Sumpter boomed with gold mining and dredging from the late 1800s into the early 1900s.

Today, the town has about 190 residents and draws visitors to hunt, fish, ride snowmobiles and ATVs and pan for gold. It is noted for huge flea markets held on three major holiday weekends: Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day.

Highlights include the Sumpter Valley Dredge State Heritage Area, which features trails, wetlands and historic information. The centerpiece is the old Sumpter Valley Dredge. According to Oregon State Parks, the 1,240-ton dredge extracted some \$4.5 million in gold. It plied the Powder River, navigating in a pond of its own creation in the quest for gold and operated 24 hours a day, year-round at the height of the gold era.

Also in the area, the historic Sumpter Valley Railroad is Oregon’s only narrow-gauge heritage railroad. The volunteer owned and operated railway offers tourist excursions and special events — including “train robberies” by the Gold Rush Bandits — throughout the summer season.

Hamilton

Located in northwestern Grant County, between Long Creek and Monument. Named for pioneer stockman John Hamilton — first settled in 1872.

Now just a few buildings remain of what was once a hub for cattle, sheep and stage traffic. In Hamilton’s heyday, the town had two saloons, two livery stables, a hotel, a racetrack, three stores and a post office, which operated from 1884 to 1959.

www.historicsumpter.com • www.oregonstateparks.org
www.sumptervalleyrailroad.org