

DREDGES DESTROY RICH FARM LANDS

The Sacramento, California, Union, in commenting on the havoc wrought on farming lands by the dredgers, gives the following description of them:

The dredgers, which can be seen in operation within less than 20 miles of the city, are not pretty. Combine a river dredger and a modern battleship, and add a half-score of hoisting cranes, pile-drivers, steam hammers and battering rams, and some conception may be had of what one of them is like. A great steel ladder extends in front of the dredger, like an inverted bowsprit. Up and down the ladder march in endless procession bucket-shaped plows with mouths of forged manganese steel. The chain that carries them will support a weight of 500 tons. These keen-edged scoops will cut through solid rock. A marine engine drives them with irresistible force. They delve into the banks ahead of the machine, literally eating up the land. Gorged with rock and sand, the buckets mount the ladder again, and along a huge gantry carried back to a rotating cylindrical screen, into which they discharge their contents at the rate of 13 buckets a minute. Each one of these steel carriers contains five cubic feet of earth, so that an amount of material equal to the contents of three city dump-carts is poured every minute of the day and night into the whirling cylinder.

The material thus thrown on the cylinder is winnowed and sifted and washed until, it is estimated not one-tenth of one per cent of gold contained escapes the collector. The earth is handled at a cost of not more than 4 cents a ton, and one of the machines handles 1000 tons of earth a day. Few tons of earth are there in the northern valleys of this state that do not contain 10 cents worth of gold. Such earth containing not more than 10 cents of gold to the ton yield a profit of 100 per cent, a net gain of \$40 per day, \$1200 a month, \$14,400 a year, for each machine. But land so barren is not yet being worked. Owners of these extraordinary engines can afford to pay \$500 or \$5000 an acre for desirable land, and still make enormous profits off their investment, profits running into the thousands per cent. One machine works over about an acre of ground a month. No matter how fertile the land may have been before the dredger entered upon it, it is forever ruined for agricultural purposes after the engine has passed. It is notorious that during the last few months some of the fairest orchard and farming lands of California have been purchased for the dredging of gold. It is estimated that 100 of these dredgers are at work in the west, most of them in California. This means that each month 100 acres of land is rendered permanently barren. 1,200 acres a year, enough to furnish farm homes for the support of 60 families. The dredgers in use are said to have a life of 50 years, so that if none others are added to their number these dredgers will deduct from the tillable acres of the west 60,000 acres, enough to support 3,000 families, a population of 15,000. But other dredgers will be added, hundreds of them—the fact that a few flecks of gold in a ton of earth

makes it pay to operate them assure this.

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