

PIONEER WAS PRECEDED BY PROSPECTOR

Poet Reynolds Proses Pioneering of Rock-Knocker Who Dug Up Original Worth of the Great West

By J. C. REYNOLDS

It is owing almost altogether to the prospector that the vast territory west of, and including the Rocky mountains, was settled in such short order. The prospector with his burros would adventure far ahead of the settlements, find gold or some other valuable minerals, spill the information and then would come the rush of perhaps thousands of hardy men who wished to share in quickly gotten riches. Not all were lucky and not all could prospect or mine, but once on the ground they soon became aware of the possibilities of the country, and while some established a mining camp and started in business of one sort or another, others found openings for their various trades and still others settled on the surrounding lands and took to ranching or cattle raising. Then the average prospector, feeling that the country was too full of people and his toes were in danger of being tramped on, would pack his burros and strike out for some new spot where he felt there was not so much danger of being crowded. Go where you will in all this western land and inquire as to when and how it was first settled and you will always find that the prospector was the guy who found something good in the mineral line to begin with, and that was what attracted the first settlers, though naturally in time people branched out to considerable distances away, but stayed with the country just the same.

Prospecting in early days while the west was still wild was an occupation that would furnish a man with about all the thrills he needed. And it is a fine, clean business, hunting for the hidden riches of old Mother Earth and constantly adding to the wealth of the world. Almost all other occupations consist in simply transferring wealth from some other person's pockets into your own. There is something very fascinating to the prospector in this game of hide and go seek. To live close to Mother Nature, to commune with her, learn to read her most carefully guarded secrets, is an ideal existence.

That is the reason why forest rangers are so devoted to their jobs and prefer that kind of life to anything else that may be offered, although many of them could make far more money in some other line of industry. To a gold hunter who has learned to read the surface signs, Mother Nature speaks in guarded whispers that he can understand. Grass, or the color of the grass, bushes, or the color of the bushes, or the kind of bushes, will tell him something. Even an insignificant badger hole or a tiny stream of water sometimes speaks volumes. I have talked with hundreds of people who are forest-bred and with loggers who spend their whole time in the woods and make their living from the forests, who didn't know there are five kinds of dead trees and that each kind has its own particular message for him who wants to receive it.

There are trees that are killed by fire, trees that are killed by lightning, trees that are killed by the ravages of bugs, trees that die of old age. Then there are trees whose roots are poisoned by the minerals in quartz ledges or in mineralized dikes, in whose crevices they have found lodgment, and such trees generally are dead part of the way up while the tops are still green. To the close observer there are distinctive signs about such a tree that can never

be mistaken for anything but just exactly what it is.

In California, I found a quartz lead once in just that way. A quartz lead was known to cross a certain mountainside, but the topsoil was deep and though 60 prospect holes of from six to 20 feet deep had been sunk on the ground through which it was supposed to run, it had never been encountered. For two weeks I crossed this mountain daily to get to a place higher up where I was prospecting at the time. One afternoon as I was returning to camp I happened to stop for a look around and at once noticed a tree like I speak of whose roots had been poisoned by the copper and iron and arsenic in the mineral deposit below it. About 200 yards beyond it I saw another, and following along in the same direction I discovered others all in a line, while the rest of the forest on each side was just the plain, ordinary stand of various kinds of trees like one sees anywhere. So I knew well enough that a mineralized ledge ran in that direction as indicated by the half-dead, green-topped firs. Next morning I brought my tools and started digging right at the base of the tree I had noticed first, and two feet under the surface I found the ledge that proved to be three feet wide and which brought us \$6000 three months afterward. I neglected to say that there were three of us, which made \$2000 apiece.

A prospector should never get to believing he knows it all, as every mining district has its own peculiar characteristics, which may be altogether different from anything he has ever encountered, and must be learned carefully before he can consider himself at all familiar with conditions in that locality. The first California miners that came to Leadville said it was impossible that big gold values could be found in sandstone. Yet it was so.

In Nevada, where there was no quartz to be found, I inquired of the prospectors where they were getting the gold that showed up in long strings in the pans. And when they told me they were getting it from the crystallized lime so abundant in that vicinity, I certainly thought they were trying to kid me. But it was so. Throughout the west Jasper quartz is supposed to be barren. Yet I found a dike of Jasper quartz in Colorado, some of which assayed as high as \$60 a ton in gold alone. My partner and I found a chunk of Jasper that had a round gold nugget in it as large as a pea. We had this sawed in halves and each one of us had his half set into a gold ring which we wore just to show to fellows who would argue that no gold was ever found in Jasper quartz. I have even seen gold in marble in California and I can assure you if I hadn't seen it, I would never have believed it. So it don't pay a fellow to know too much about a lot of these things, because oftentimes he has to back up and acknowledge he is wrong. And that seems to hurt a lot of wise guys that I have met in my ramblings.

Probably half of my prospecting has been done on a grub-stake, which works out all right if you happen to connect in with the right parties. If you are unlucky enough to have as partners the wrong kind of people, it is not so good. Any man being grub-staked is supposed to be broke, whether he is or not, the same as any man applying for a job at a tie-camp is supposed to be without means to purchase tools, provisions or a camp outfit, and these are furnished without question before he starts to work.

The usual method in grub-staking anyone was as follows: The parties of the first part agreed to furnish the party of the second part, the prospector, with a complete outfit of whatever was needed during the term of the contract. A camp outfit, cooking utensils, portage for blacksmithing, guns, ammunition and pack animals if necessary, half wages and half of whatever was found. If miner's wages were \$3.50 per day, the prospector received \$1.75 per day for spending money. If he

found anything worth while, his backers were to furnish a stamp-mill, or any machinery needed for handling the ore. And at the end of the season, or termination of the grub-stake, all the camp outfit, guns, pack animals, etc., were to be the property of the prospector. Of course many grub-stakes were made in different ways. I am only outlining the method mostly used. For myself I generally had a first-class outfit of my own, animals, guns and everything needed and only used the grub-stake as a matter of policy and convenience. I didn't always have good partners, though, and in time became opposed to having any partners at all and became convinced I would do far better to go it alone. That way I could work to suit myself, had no apologies to make to anybody, and no one to contrary me in regard as to where I should prospect, or how.

With partners I generally worked too hard in my efforts to make a suitable showing to them.

In early days it was no trick at all to sell a hole in the ground that showed any amount of mineral value. The country was full of people who wanted to take a chance on mining, enthused by the numbers of really fine mines being discovered and the immense fortunes many of them produced. Pretty near all of the prospectors had claims around in the hills to sell and any time they were in town they would have no trouble in meeting someone who wanted to get into the mining game if they could buy in reasonably. A great many of the prospectors held their claims far too high, but I found that by putting the price right, I would have no trouble in selling any of my claims for cash. I made it a point to tell the exact truth in regard to any claim I sold and also in every instance underestimated its assay value, so that the purchaser would find it a little bit better than what I had represented. I also found it paid me to take pains to put a good front on any tunnel I wished to sell. A purchaser cannot help but be influenced by the first impression he gets of a claim. If he sees only any ugly hole in the ground that causes him to stoop to crawl inside, he gets a bad impression of the layout right there, unless he is either a thorough mining man who knows his stuff, or can be shown something inside that is really rich. Whereas, if when he approaches a tunnel he finds it high and roomy, with stout, hewed timbers in front and perhaps a door with which the tools can be locked up inside, and everything looking shipshape, he thinks to himself, "Now here is something worth while, else why would this trouble have been taken to make everything secure?" That is simply human nature, or perhaps you might call it psychology. Anyway, it always worked fine for me. In those days the law only required one to expose 10 feet of his vein, and as there were hundreds of veins exposed for 50 or 100 feet, all one had to do for the first year's assessment was to stake it out and, of course, get it recorded in 90 days afterward. It was policy though to build a good trail to the claim, so a city man could get up to it without becoming dizzy on

the high slopes and cliffs of the rugged mountainsides.

I used to have my best luck selling claims to club members in the cities. Prosperous merchants and other city dwellers have their clubs at which they get together and discuss affairs of all kinds. Those days they all had the mining fever. Take a mining claim that would assay an ounce of gold, or better, per ton on the surface, in a not too remote locality, if they could purchase such a property for say \$1200 or \$1500 cash, they would be only too glad to take advantage of such a bargain. They would put four or five men to work developing the ground and at their clubs they could saunter around with their thumbs in their vest holes and an expensive cigar between their teeth and discuss their mining property out in the hills and the progress that was being made on it. They got a great kick out of that. And though none of the claims I sold ever made a great mine, some indeed paid for a while before being worked out and if I had had more claims to sell in that vicinity, I could have sold them to the same parties easily enough.

You may think that in selling all these claims I took a chance of parting with some rich bonanza that might have made me rich. I will not only say that if I had a claim that I was certain, after thorough examination of the formation surrounding it, would turn out to be a big mine, I wouldn't have sold it. I knew my stuff too well for anything like that. I never sold but one claim in my life that amounted to anything and that barely paid expenses and a little better for about 10 years.

In speaking of selling claims, of course it was understood that I could not give a title to the ground. But the government allows anyone to sell their improvements, which is generally referred to as selling a claim. One must do \$100 worth of work on a claim each year for five consecutive years before he can get a deed for it.

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