

Finding a Gold Mine; Wild Flowers at Rough and Ready Park

By PRISCILLA AVERILL
Mail Tribune Correspondent

Grants Pass—The history of any gold mining region is usually rife with legends of mysterious "lost" mines and of miners who have located a rich strike only to die without revealing the secret of its location.

In Josephine county another chapter is being added to this hoary mystery tale — only in reverse. This time it is a mysterious "found" mine, and the mystery is: who lost it? and when?

The mine, an early-day gold placer operation, was unearthed in the Illinois valley this winter by George Reynolds, an amateur sourdough from Grants Pass.

Prospecting some land which he and a partner had purchased along Briggs creek, Reynolds had spotted some rotting timbers sticking out of the creek bank. They apparently had been exposed when the creek had washed out part of the bank. Something about them suggested they were old riffles.

Part of Raceway

Digging back along their length, he found they were part of the raceway of an old placer mine, now five feet underground. Still clinging around the riffles were the fine bits of gold which they had been set down to catch. Beyond them the raceway stretched back some unknown distance into the ground.

Reynolds had little idea of the date of the mine's origin, but of one thing he was sure: the operation had been hastily and unwillingly abandoned one day in the past. No miner would have gone to all the trouble of laying pole riffles in a long raceway without ever returning for the fruits of his labor. Anyone intending to abandon a mine would have taken up the riffles and cleaned them of their gold.

Why hadn't the unknown miner come back? Had he met with an accident or been killed during the lusty, brawling early days of gold mining in these parts? Or had he perhaps been one of the Chinese who were driven out in a fight with the white miners



George Reynolds, discoverer of an old abandoned mine along Briggs creek in the Illinois valley, shows some of the fine gold taken from the sluiceway which he built at the end of the old raceway. Reynolds found the mine last winter and now wonders who lost it and when.

back before the turn of the century?

Spare Time Digging

Since first uncovering the mine, Reynolds has spent most of his spare time digging—digging back along the old raceway and digging back into history to try to discover its origins. So far he has dug out about 35 feet, aided at one time by a troop of Grants Pass Boy Scouts, uncovering coarser gold all the time. He figures the cut may go back hundreds of feet more.

His digging back into history, however, has not yet yielded any pay dirt. Reynolds knows that the property, which he owns in partnership with Grants Pass logger and miner Wes Pieren, was first patented in 1914 as the Barr mine. Its 160 acres of patented ground consisted of 8 claims of 20 acres each. The pat-

ents were first applied for in 1901. There is no record of the lost workings among them.

One of the patented claims, however, lies on ground directly above the old cut. The remains of its raceway can be seen extending back for about 100 feet on the surface, some five feet above Reynolds' diggings. This would seem to indicate the old workings were lost and well covered by the ravages of time before 1901.

Was Mining Activity

It is known there was considerable mining activity along Briggs creek in the 1870's. It is also known that a lot of gold was taken out in those days which was never recorded.

What kills this theory for Reynolds, however, is that the riffles in the raceway are nailed with round nails, and he figures that nails used before the turn of the century would be square.

Reynolds is sure the mine must have been worked by more than one miner because some of the boulders were so heavy it would have taken more than one man to move them. An old cabin on the property has long since burned down. Another more recent (but still ancient) cabin stands.

Had Several Owners

Reynolds found the property had had several owners before it was acquired by Barr about 1900. It was first staked out by a farmer named Farren, who moved there in 1880. Farren had put in a ditch from Briggs creek for mining purposes. The Chinese were mining on Briggs creek when Farren arrived.

Ralph, Chester and Fred Moore bought an interest in the property before 1910, and one winter took out \$1,700 in gold from the upper pits. This was all coarse gold, with many \$4 and \$5 nuggets. The largest recorded, worth more than \$130, would bring considerably more today.

The next owners, Cougar Consolidated Mining company of Denver, installed hydraulic pipe and ran a big operation. It was worked once more by the Moore boys in the 1940's.

Curiously, all this activity was on land that was around, and even on top of, the old sluice — which might have held its secret locked forever if a wayward current hadn't finally come along to wash away part of the bank which was its tomb.



This photo shows the mine's old raceway with riffles as unearthed by Reynolds, who may be seen working in the background. Reynolds found the old mine when he spotted some rotting timbers sticking out of the bank along Briggs creek.

By LETHA COOKE
Mail Tribune Correspondent

A traveler on southern Oregon's Highway 199 may not notice modest signs denoting "Rough and Ready Creek State Park."

There is no explanation to tell that here, within a small rugged area lies one of the world's most elaborate displays of natural flora. Definite boundaries are not designated, except that the park follows both sides of Rough and Ready creek for some distance in either direction.

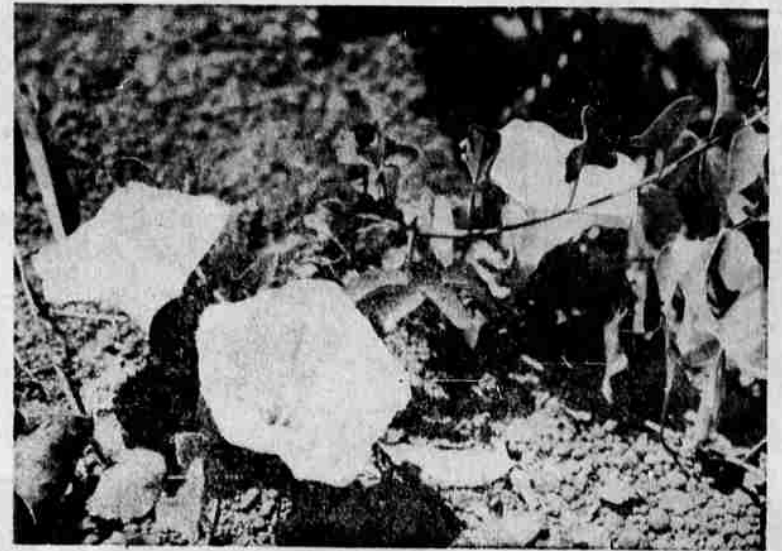
The area is well-known by botanists and laymen, however, who for years, even before this part of Josephine county was set aside as a park area, have traveled from far to see the wild flowers.

April Most Prolific

March, April, and May, with perhaps April the most prolific, are the best months to see the abundance of color and variety. There are only about two months of the year when at least one variety cannot be found.

Seasons being unpredictable, sometimes the show starts in mid-February, and often winter makes a return trip to play tricks on premature spring harbingers. Tender blossoms of gold stars and grass widows are left shamefully hanging their despoiled faces.

The weather, governed by Pacific storms, brings warm rain over coastal ranges into the valleys, and mountain altitudes produce



Morning glory bloom all summer at Rough and Ready Creek State Park off Highway 199 in the Illinois Valley.

an overlapping of climatic conditions. This hybrid atmosphere is considered partly responsible for flowers known as endemics, exclusive to Rough and Ready flat and a large part of this southern Oregon county.

Grotesque Oaks

Scattered along in groups or singly, grotesque oaks

and small scrubby pine represent nature's own perfection, enthusiastically pursued by fans of Japanese bonsai. Manzanita and mesquite border open spots where the extravaganzas of variety not only of colors, but numbers of varieties grow.

Rough and Ready creek tumbles from the mountains clear and cold and green. Sometimes filled to overflowing by warm rain and melting snow, it carries sand and leafmold into crevices of rocks and piles it against the higher shrubs, thus improving soil conditions for low growing al-pines.

From early spring until latest fall, multitudes of flowers grace the rocky terrain.

Determining Factor

Periods of rainfall in spring seem to be the determining factor for some species. If conditions are unfavorable certain varieties do not appear until a spring when sun and rain are conducive to their requirements.

One elegant pixie is known to remain dormant for two years. About the middle of May, its rose lipped tubular corolla, spotted with yellow in the throat, makes its appearance.

Many varieties of wild flowers bloom during the spring and early summer, while in later months — August and September — desert plants dominate the scene. Mutations Occur Frequently

Not to be forgotten or ignored are the mutations occurring with frequency, possible only in the midst of a teeming efflorescence. Pure white arabis, odd combinations of color in fritillaria and intense pigmentation of broom rape, Orobanchae are noticeable to a casual observer.

Botanists with keener knowledge and ambition to delve profoundly into private lives of plants have recognized many digressions and classified them as endemics.

It seems almost impossible that here, in an area of 30 acres, in prolific splendor, during three seasons of the year, flowers of desert, mountain, meadow and prairie grow. Conditions are right in one spot or another during rain, cold, heat or drought to satisfy the individual demands of countless varieties.



Alpine phlox, shown above, is a rose colored flower which harmonizes with the green grasses and gray desert driftwood manzanita at Rough and Ready Creek State park.



Another of the plants adding color and beauty to Rough and Ready Creek State park is this arrow leaved balsam root. Each month finds different wild flowers at the little-known park, making it a haven for flower lovers.