

Siskiyou's 'Big Ditch' Going Strong After 100 Years, Much Service

By J. O. McKINNEY

YREKA — A monument more than 90 miles long was erected more than 100 years ago to the gold industry that then dominated the area. Miles of this monument remain today, and functions as its builders intended. That was to transport water. But the gold industry is no longer a vital factor there.

The monument? It is a big ditch. Some say it is 92 miles long. Some say 96 miles. Either figure shows it is more than twice the length of Panama Canal.

Many folk have seen this ditch and failed to recognize it. Here is

how to identify this historical construction. Some six miles north of the town of Weed on U.S. Highway 99, one may see a tree-lined marker along the side of the hills to the left when traveling north. At times one may see the chalk-rock dike that holds the water. This is the location of the ditch that takes water from Parks Creek, and once transported it to Yreka, and even to Hawkinsville. The water now flows but a short distance past Gazelle.

One unusual thing about the appearance of the ditch line is that one would think the water flows from right to left. The opposite is

true.

Dug by Chinese labor, this ditch cost \$25,000 per mile. Multiply this figure by the number of miles, and one sees that water came high in those days. Yreka today would not go that high for a water supply even better than what the big ditch brought. It would not be financially sound to do so. Yet 100 years ago it was done, despite that it never did pay in gold mining benefits. Over the years agriculture has profited greatly from water carried by the old canal.

The ownership of this ditch was a transient thing for many years.

First one individual, or company would acquire title to it, and while it was partly a benefit, it also was partly a white elephant. Then the owners would "unload" it onto someone else. Today a few ranchers around Gazelle hold water rights to this ditch, but the northern two-thirds is no longer used for anything.

Water from this old landmark was responsible for an agricultural venture that once paid handsomely in the vicinity of Gazelle. That was the culture of sugar-beet seed. That industry has now gone the way of placer mining in Siskiyou County, but like mining it

paid its way for several years. Most of the benefits today from the ditch is on range lands where huge herds of cattle graze on the grass watered by the old canal.

Alex Rosborough, pioneer resident of Yreka, remembers well the early days of the ditch's use. His father was one of the engineers who surveyed the line. While there are myths that the ditch was dug with the water following the diggers and showing the levels, there were competent engineers on the job. The water flowed uniformly with a drop of two inches to each 100 feet of ditch. That does not appear much drop, but it moves the water at a nice speed.

One of the troubles developed in the canal was that much of the land over which it runs is porous in nature. Loads of clay were often dumped into the canal and allowed to chink leaks in the sides and bottoms. Many freshets washed away sections of the canal, and had to be rebuilt. One can see remains of such disasters now when driving along the highway and studying the old waterway's course. Gulleys lead from the ditch to lower slopes, which show where breaks have occurred.

But in this year of 1959, there is still water flowing in this canal where construction was begun in 1852, and completed four years later. It is not used to wash gold, but does feed the roots of vegetation that produces wealth just as sound as gold bullion. The faith of these miners has now been justified, for they proved that expenditures of huge sums for a thing needed badly is an investment instead of an expense.

THOROUGH JOB

ANSONIA, Conn. (UPI) — Andrew Sadellco couldn't tell police that thieves who looted his home took everything but the barn door. They took that, too.



A DECEPTIVE SIGHT is this portion of the big ditch in Siskiyou County. At first appearance the water in the ditch, marked by the dark line along the lower hills, would

appear to flow from right to left. But the opposite is true. Built 100 years ago to carry water to the gold field, the ditch is still operating.

—Photo by McKinney



IT MIGHT SEEM SMALL in comparison to some of today's big irrigation jobs, but the old ditch still carries a good head of water to the pasture lands around Gazelle.

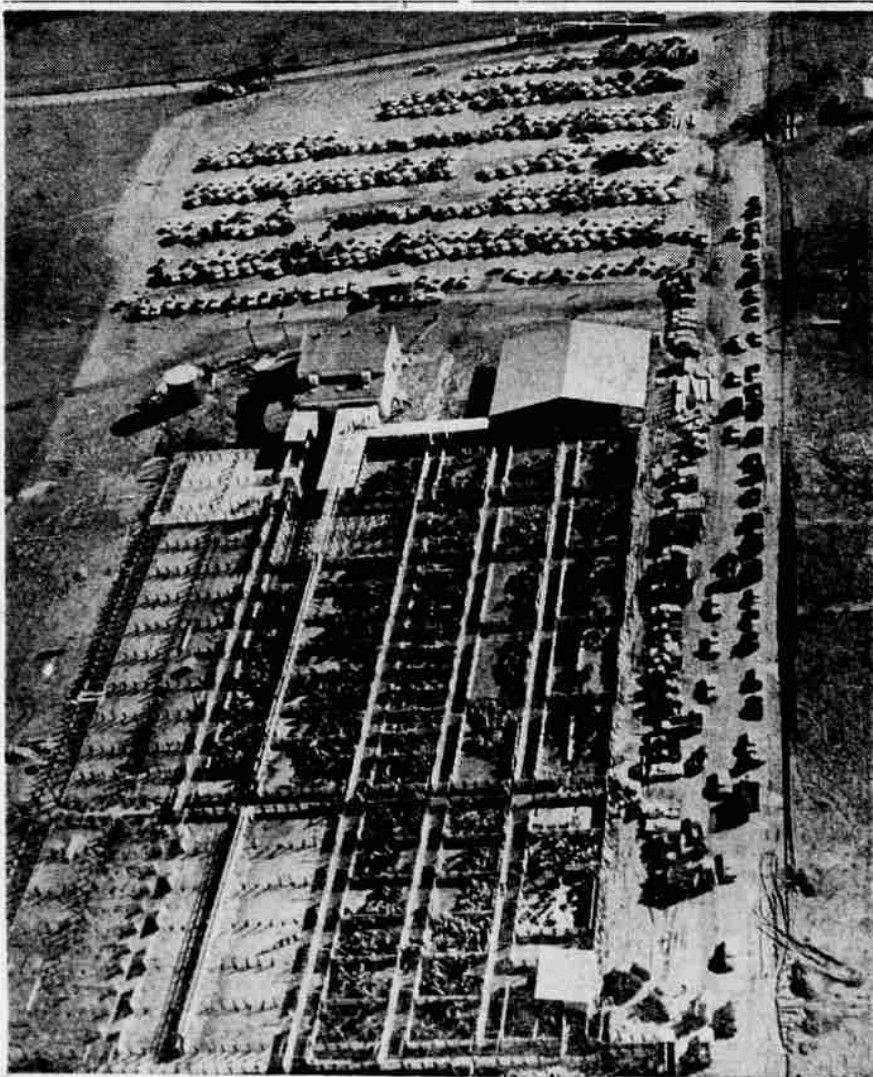
Old Saloons Not So Evil

TULSA, Okla. (UPI) — Open saloons, the kind Carrie Nation used to chop up, weren't so bad in the good old days, the man who administers the tough Kansas liquor law recalled on a visit here.

W. E. Murphy, Wichita auto dealer who is Kansas alcoholic beverage control administrator, insisted that today's "cocktail bars" are much worse by comparison. Murphy drew the comparison in

a talk before a committee which is seeking an effective liquor control law for Oklahoma. Oklahoma is one of two states in the union which are constitutionally dry. The other is Mississippi.

"The old so-called saloon with sawdust on the floor was a place of respectability," Murphy recalled. "They didn't allow women in there. There were no stools in front of the bar. They didn't serve drunk people."



WITH MORE THAN 1,700 HEAD OF CATTLE in pens and over a thousand persons present, the Red Bluff Auction Yard, branch of the Valley Livestock Marketing Association, held dedicatory rites and staged its first sale January 12. This was the view from the air, with the cattle in the pens and hundreds of automobiles in the parking area. The auction yard is 11 miles north of Red Bluff.