

NUGGETS FROM THE PAST

Personal notes from Gene Markley's Gold Camps Class

By Norman McLeod

My wife and I settled in Foresthill in July, 1978. That fall we joined the local historical society and I was appointed immediately to the position of Historian. This was a job enjoyed for over the next 20 years. That same fall in 1978 I joined Gene Markley's Gold Camps Class in Auburn. This was an excellent move. For the next 10 years I accompanied him on Saturday hikes deep into nearly every canyon on the Foresthill Divide, plus some on other divides. Markley was a gold mine of information on the Gold Rush and with my notebook in hand I prospected.

Here are some of the notes I made while following Gene into another area Bullion Creek. Sunny South and Bullion townsites.

Sunny South, home of the Hidden Treasure Mine, one of the richest mines on the divide.

Bullion townsite, population 1,000. Fire in the 1920s destroyed the town. A large concrete vault - into which we all entered - is all that remains of the town. It was part of a two story office building.

French House was a way station that stood on top of a hill, near Red Star Mine.

We walked down to the Middle Fork River on old miners' trail to Crater Pool. Virgin forest.

Green Valley, south of Gold Run....old hotel ruins on the North Fork of the American.

Miller's Defeat...just below Duncan's Peak, where an Irish rich placer diggings was taken over by a group of Italians in hand-to-hand fighting.

Maine Bar on the Middle Fork. In 1857 there were 30 buildings in the vicinity, including the St. Nicholas Hotel and a Fandango house. It was located nine miles from the confluence with the North Fork. The river here was sluiced for 13 miles to divert the river. Miners at Cranville's claim worked 14-hour shifts. Every spring the huge flume would wash out and float to Sacramento.

Quartz is silicon dioxide. Quartz is nature's scab. It filled cracks in the earth during a geologic upheaval.

Trinidad Mine....on Sailor Flat Trail. IT ONCE WAS OWNED AND OPERATED BY THE Salvation Army...Some buildings still standing. Strenuous hike but scenic.

Bogus Thunder...old mining town on North Fork of the Middle Fork. Access from Deadwood on old foot trail. Deep in canyon...no ruins. It was named after several loud river falls.

The so-called Mother Lode ended from the south at Placerville.

Azure Lake...most beautiful lake in northern California. Access from Emerald Bay, Lake Tahoe into edge of Desolation Wilderness.

Ford's Bar...site of first crossing of Middle Fork of the American on original trail,

Coloma to Yankee Jim's. Located below Todd Valley.

In 1929 there was one house still standing in Damascus. Today...nothing.

In 1928 Bartlett Finning died in Foresthill, leaving an estate producing an annual income of \$10,000.

Phillip Diederheimer took \$300,000 from his Foresthill claim then left for Washoe in Nevada where his invention for timbering the silver mines saved the Comstock and made him a multi-millionaire...

Gold was first discovered by a Mexican in California in 1842 in Placerita Canyon near Newhall, southern California.

In Foresthill in 1857 was William H. Hardy, a partner of the General Store, who went to Arizona in 1865 and founded Hardysville there, six miles north of Fort Mojave. He became a member of the Arizona territorial legislature.

John W. Mackay of Comstock fame, first mined on the Middle Fork underneath Michigan Bluff.

The Stanford home in Michigan Bluff was purchased from the Stanfords in 1855 by A. C. Bowen, a 49er from Vermont. He added three rooms, forming the "L" that we see today. Later, he married Jennie Boque of Vermont, who was a schoolteacher. The young miners in town implored her to teach them. At first she refused but after much persuasion she consented to teach them in her home. Consequently, the Stanford Home became the first schoolhouse in Michigan Bluff.

In 1853 John Studebaker (of South Bend, Ind.) came west in a wagon train and settled in Placerville, where he built wagons for free meals. He built 16 wagons. When he returned to the states he had 50 cents in his pocket. Later he manufactured automobiles.

Bake Over was a mining settlement on the Middle Fork, seven miles from Michigan Bluff into a deep canyon. This strenuous hike of 14 miles was one of the most difficult made with Markley. On the trip was a pretty young office girl, It was her first hike with Markley. She almost didn't make it back.

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