The Re-Awakening of an Old Placer Camp

BY ERNEST G. LOCKE

Twenty years ago American cañon, in Humboldt county, Nevada, was the scene of great activity. Hundreds of Chinaman were working the gravel, and recovering millions in gold dust, of which fact ample evidence remains in the hundreds of shallow shafts, and the piles of worked gravel spread over not less than two miles of the river-bed. The first discoveries were probably made by white men, but they proved indifferent to the riches at their hands, so the ground was leased to a Chinaman on a royalty basis. It is said that this Chinaman brought in hundreds of his countrymen to whom he sub-let the ground in blocks of twenty 20 ft. square. Each lessee sunk a shaft to the pay-streak and mined out the ground comprised in the lease. Thousands of piles of tailing attest the energy with which work was conducted. An old Chinaman still living on the ground—the last of five hundred—states that each block of ground 20 ft. square produced from $1500 to $3000 in gold dust and nuggets. The source of the gold has not been definitely traced, but it is believed to have originated in a range of porphyry hills through which the old river cut its bed, and the remains of which can now be examined still carrying gold contents varying from a trace to $15 and $20 per ton. In my mind, there is no doubt that these porphyry pipes provided the placer gold of American cañon, and of the several other cañons lying north and south, which also produced the yellow metal.

Production of American Cañon

It is a difficult matter to endeavor to make an estimate of the aggregate amount of gold taken out of American Cañon. Chinamen are secretive as to their gold, but it is said that the Wells Fargo & Co. Express has a record of several millions of dollars worth carried out by P. L. Bansome gives a reported output of ten millions, and others believe twenty millions to be nearer correct. However, it is certain that the extraction has been good from an area represented by only two miles of river bed, which was the extent of the gold-bearing gravel.

In working the gravel down the river the bedrock was porphyry up to a certain point, where it changed to limestone. The pay-streak lay on a false bedrock of clay, generally about 60 ft. from the surface, being shallower at the upper end of the diggings and increasing in depth at the lower part. A shaft nearly 200 ft. deep was sunk through gravel to the limestone. The pay-streak, however, still retained its position at about 70 ft. from the surface; little or no gold was found below the false bedrock, and none on the limestone.

About half a mile below this shaft the gold spread into a fan-shaped deposit and gradually was lost. The cañon continued, so why did not the gold? It is believed by many that the lower part of the old channel with its gold gravel was faulted and carried northward for about 2000 ft., the upper portion being tilted up to a steep angle. Some time after this occurrence a flow of lava came from the mountains to the west and filled and concealed this faulted part of the channel.

This portion of the old river channel, unnoticed by a generation of prospectors, has recently been discovered, through portions of the gravel having rolled down the hillside from under the lava. There can be no doubt of it being an old river channel—the north rim of the channel (limestone) is visible in several places, but the south rim is buried under the lava; in between, the gravel outcrops at one point, and has been uncovered at several places by pick and shovel. A shaft, now down 130 ft., is presented to go to bedrock, and a tunnel is being driven under the lava toward the south rim. All of this work is in washed gravel, sand, and boulders—pannings show that the gravel contains fine coves of gold, some chinchar, plenty of magnetite, and cubies of hematite; in fact, the porphyry gravels are exactly the same as those worked by the Chinamen in American Cañon, there can be no doubt that the same hills were the sources of both.

Such being the conditions, it is confidently anticipated that when bedrock is reached and the old river channel crossed, out from rim to rim, rich returns will be had.

American Cañon is situated a short distance from the new camp of Rochester, the head of the cañon being no more than one mile north of Newell hill; the diggings are about three miles down the cañon, and many now look forward to seeing there the life and battle of a successful gold district.

Operation of the Great Boulder Mill

From the annual report of this Kalgoolie company, the following is abstracted:

During the year 1912, a total of 193,451 tons (2940 lb.) of sulpho-carbide ore was treated in the sulphide mill for a return of 59,284 oz. of bullion by amalgamation, worth approximately $233,924, and 98,349 oz. of bullion by cyanidation worth approximately $284,850. Also treated 14,467 tons of old tailing for 1294 oz. bullion, worth approximately $248,855, making a total for the year of 158,785 oz. of bullion produced, worth approximately $578,189.

The loss of mercury per ton of ore treated in the sulphide mill has averaged 0.173 oz. The loss of cyanide has been 0.9 lb. per ton of ore treated.

The average assay value of the residue of the ore treated during the year was $1.60 dwt. per ton of 2549 lb. The average assay value of the residue of the old tailing dump is 1.37 dwt. per ton. Costs were $1.93 in the sulphide mill and 82¢ per ton in the cyanide plant, a total of 53.74 per long or $4.44 per short ton.

Dividends paid by gold mines on the Rand during the first half of 1913 total $19,200,000, while those from outside districts, Diamond, coal, and tin mines made a total of $61,000,000.

During the month of July the Elmoro vacuum plant, at the mines of the Sulitjaena company, Norway, produced 850 tons of copper concentrates.