

TUSCARORA DISTRICT

The Tuscarora District is in Elko County on the southeastern slope of Mount Blitzen in the Independence Range, about 50 miles northwest of Elko. The gold placers were discovered in 1867 by the Beard brothers, and several years later the rich silver and gold veins were found. The placer deposits were worked extensively for many years, first by Americans and later by Chinese placer miners. Complete data on the production of placer gold are not available, but, according to Emmons,¹⁵ the placers are reported to have yielded \$7,000,000. An interesting sidelight on placer gold production at Tuscarora was given to the writer by Roy L. Primeaux who is familiar with the history.

¹⁵Emmons, William H., Some Mining Camps in Elko, Lander, and Eureka Counties, Nevada: U. S. Geol. Survey Bull. 408, 1910, p. 59.

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¹⁶Whitehill, H.
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of the camp over a period of many years. According to Mr. Primeaux, the Wells Fargo express rate on gold was so high in the early days that much of the gold was consigned to San Francisco by bullion buyers as hardware in order to avoid the high express rate.

In the same year that the Beard brothers made their discovery of placer gold at Tuscarora, news of the strike reached Austin, Nevada, and over 100 men left Austin in a band that year, bound for the new strike. The band was well equipped and armed against hostile Indians, who made prospecting in Nevada both adventurous and dangerous at that time. Many of these pioneers remained at Tuscarora and found the placer diggings profitable. J. Ross Browne, a distinguished mining geologist of the time, described the placers as being three miles long, five feet deep, and rather narrow. He predicted that a score of men could make from \$10 to \$20 per day by hand washing the gravels.

At first the deposits were worked by Americans principally by ground sluicing. Water for placer operations was supplied through two ditches constructed in 1868 and 1869 with Chinese labor. The Beard brothers' ditch was four miles long and brought water to the diggings from McCann Creek; the other ditch was six miles in length and conveyed water from Three Mile and Six Mile Creeks. In 1900, these pioneer ditches were abandoned and the water rights acquired by ranchers.

In ground sluicing in the early days, horn silver and some native silver was found in the clean-ups; this fact led the early prospectors to the rich silver veins in the vicinity, which became large producers. Rich silver float also was discovered, and for five or six years in the seventies, the Winslow 10-stamp mill operated solely on float ore.

In the seventies, the Beard brothers and others leased their placer holdings to Chinese on a royalty basis of 10 percent of the bullion recovered. According to Mr. Primeaux, at one time there were about 2,500 Chinese at work in the diggings. The Chinese produced from \$2 to \$15 per day per man.¹⁶ The Chinese worked only during the spring and summer months when water was available. During the fall and winter they cut sagebrush for the steam plants in the nearby silver mills. Yen Tin, one of the last survivors of the Chinese placer miners, died at Tuscarora in 1927. In 1934, several boys playing in the camp discovered a cache of gold dust and nuggets, valued at \$1,200, that had been hid by Yen Tin near his cabin.

¹⁶ Whitehill, H. R., Biennial Report of the State Mineralogist, State of Nevada, 1871-1872, p. 24.

A surprising feature of the early placer operations is the relatively small area worked in proportion to the production of \$7,000,000 with which the Tuscarora placers are credited. The workings are confined to the gullies on the gently sloping sagebrush-covered hills bordering the west side of Independence Valley. Typical old workings, now almost obscured by cloud-burst action, are shown in figure 22. Eureka Gulch and Gardner Ravine are known to have been very rich. The flat, shallow ravines draining south into Independence Valley also yielded well.

The depth of the gravel worked in former operations varied from four to ten feet. The gold occurs as dust and nuggets largely concentrated on bedrock. The largest nugget found in

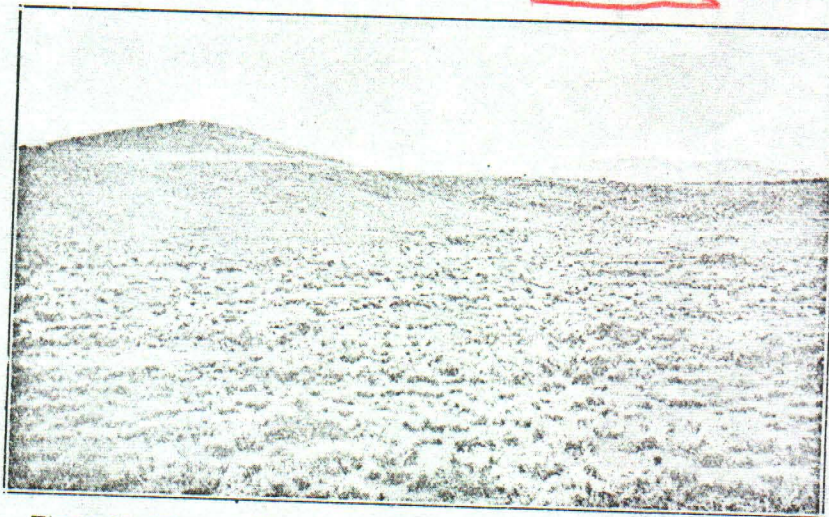


Figure 22. Placer tailings from old workings in the Tuscarora District.

the District weighed nine pounds, although it contained considerable quartz. Nuggets weighing up to one ounce were common. The bedrock is largely rhyolite, which is the principal rock of the District. The source of the gold is presumably the gold veins that occur in rhyolite and andesite north and west of the diggings.

After 1900 only small sporadic placer operations were carried on. In recent years a small amount of gold has been recovered by individuals. The Harris claims, one and one-half miles west of Tuscarora, have been worked for a number of years by an operator who uses a Chinese rocker. In 1931, a group of men sluiced the gravel in Review Gulch, a short distance west of town. Water was obtained from several springs in the vicinity.

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¹⁷ Emmons, William L. and Eureka

This work was confined to the lower part of the gulch in an area that may have been overlooked by the early placer miners. In the same year some placer mining also was done in Stovepipe Gulch, water for sluicing being obtained from the old Stovepipe mine shaft. In 1934 and 1935, a few itinerant placer miners prospected the District for virgin areas rich enough to be worked by hand methods, but the results of this work were not encouraging.

A United States Geological Survey report by Emmons, in 1910,¹⁷ states: "A large acreage of ground west of Tuscarora has been located and sampled with drills. It is said that much of this ground will pay to work with dredges, and two companies are planning such operations. A large number of samples are reported to have given an average of about 14 cents (based on gold value of \$20.67 per ounce) per cubic yard."

No dredge has operated in the District, and, if the above information can be checked by additional sampling and the other factors are favorable, this ground may offer interesting dredging possibilities. Perhaps sufficient water for dredging purposes can be obtained from the old Dexter gold mine at Tuscarora, now flooded. A large volume of water was encountered in the underground workings of this mine when it was worked in the early days.