

*Macruder Corridor
Historical Files*

MINING AND PROSPECTING IN THE MACRUDER "CORRIDOR"

The written records do not record any working prospects or mineral development prior to 1900. It is known that many prospectors and miners traveled through the area in the "gold rush days" and the silver boom era. These prospectors and miners undoubtedly panned the streams for gold and prospected for silver and other minerals without success. Most of the travel was along the Nez Perce Trail and the Samuel Parker Trail. The latter trail was known in part as the Shoup-Elk City Trail and was used for travel to the mines at Shoup, Idaho.

Placer gold was apparently discovered in Storm and Deep Creeks by the 1900's or earlier. The diggings were not rich or extensive. The Storm Creek placers were in a small area at Storm Creek Flat. They were abandoned by 1930 or earlier. The Deep Creek and Slow Gulch (Slow Creek) placers were worked from the early 1900's until the late 1950's before being abandoned as uneconomic. The most active period of placer mining was in the 1920's and 1930's, - especially during the depression years. Many of the early prospectors and miners were from the Hughes Creek placer mines near Alta, Montana. They included such oldtimers as Beaver Jack, for whom Beaver Jack Mountain was named, and Nick Wynn, for whom Nick and Wynn Creeks were named. (Also, the former lookout at the head of these creeks was named Nick Wynn after his trapper cabin near it.) Another oldtimer who prospected the "Corridor" was Ole Tangen who now lives in a Hamilton rest home. Ole still thinks Nell's Half Acre Creek and vicinity is worth prospecting.

James Kerlee had a placer claim on Deep Creek which he worked extensively early in the century. His cabin was at the mouth of Kerlee Creek and his claim was called the Daisy Placer. Kerlee was at his claim in November 1921. He left the claim prior to Thanksgiving to return to his home and family on Tin Cup Creek in Montana. He never completed the snowshoe trip over the trail and was found dead about one mile west of Fales Flat. Apparently he died of a heart attack.

J. M. (John, better known as Blondie) Smith and his wife, Belle P. Smith, located their first claim on Deep Creek in November 1929. It was called the Silver Tip. It was located near where "Otter Creek empties into Slow Creek" and near the Kerlee cabin and Daisy Placer. Blondie located seven other claims for himself, his wife, and others during the period 1934 to 1939. These claims were the Black Bear for Belle P. Smith, Joe Storm, and R. W. Harsell; the Silver Tip No. 2 for himself, Florence Fryer, J. H. Gordon, John P. Downey, and Belle P. Smith; the Deep Creek Placer for himself, which joined the "Topnotch" on the west and the Junction Mining Claim on the east; the Elkhorn Placer for Florence Fryer;

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the Grizzly Placer, which is on Deep Creek and joins Dizzy Lizzy on the east and Spruce on the west end, for himself; the Dizzy Lizzy for J. P. Downey; and the Black Bear relocated for H. W. Harsell and Belle P. Smith. Blondie and his wife lived in their double cabin and sluiced the various claims until World War II, when they moved out. After the war they worked on the claims each summer until about 1955, when Blondie dug two or three shafts to bedrock and called in a mining engineer to evaluate the claims. The engineer's report was: Blondie had \$50,000 in gold but it would cost \$50,000 to recover it. Blondie died several years ago and his claims have been inactive since that time except for visits by Mrs. Smith.

The claim owned by J. H. (Harvey) Cave, at the mouth of Slow Gulch, still has two cabins, and some members of his family visit the claim annually. Cave purchased the claim (Gold Nugget Placer) from H. W. Harsell on September 16, 1935, for \$400. Harsell, a sometime partner in claims with Blondie Smith, located the claim on July 29, 1934.

Numerous other claims were located on Deep Creek by various locators from the 1870's through the 1930's. Many of the locations were made by seasonal Forest Service employees and Civilian Conservation Corps overhead as well as others who were active in panning, sluicing, and trying to develop placer claims as a livelihood better than relief or as a supplement to summer income. Stan Greenup was one of the locators and his notice was still in the tobacco can a short distance below the mouth of MacGregor Creek in the early 1950's.

Other locations with evidence of past mining are as follows:

Selway River at the mouth of Lunch Creek where Stan Greenup remembers seeing the remains of a log crib dam across the river and ditches on the flat during the early 1930's. High water has washed away all evidence of the dam, and weathering and occupancy have obliterated the ditches.

In the late 1920's and early 1930's the Patton Brothers worked placer claims on Indian Creek Flat at its junction with the Selway River. The remains of these placer operations are no longer recognizable because of high water action, fish channel construction, etc.

In the early 1950's, a prospector, name now forgotten, worked a claim across the Selway River from Sheep Creek Grade Flat for several summers. The mineral he was seeking was gold, but he would not say much about it.

There was a claim staked in 1964 at the head of French Creek. Mineralization claimed is not known. It has three prospect holes.

As far as is known, no lode mining claims were ever worked in the "Corridor", and the western part of the "Corridor" shows practically no evidence of prospecting of any kind.

Like all mining areas, the "Corridor" has its legends of lost mines or rich strikes. One legend is the ledge of gold found by a wounded outlaw running from the "law" in Montana. The young outlaw camped one night near the Idaho-Montana line and, while avoiding the main trails, this camp was somewhere south of the Nez Perce trail. The next morning, while wrangling his horses, he picked up a sample of a ledge rich in gold. However, he was so sick from his wound he was unable to do more than pick up the sample and hurry on to Elk City, where he stayed at a tavern until he died. Before dying, he showed the tavern keeper the ore sample he had picked up and tried to tell him where he had found the gold rich rock. Being unfamiliar with the country and sick from his wound, his recollections and directions were poor and vague so, the hunt still goes on for the ledge. Clyde Blake, who first heard the story at Elk City about 1911, made a trip into the Two Buck Spring vicinity with Walt Langley to locate the ledge in the 1960's. Clyde had worked for the Forest Service for 40 years and was retired at the time. Needless to say, the ledge was not found.

Indian Creek is the supposed site for Indian Blake's mine. Blake had a mine somewhere on Indian Creek which he worked for gold several summers with reported success. He and his Nez Perce Indian wife always kept the location secret, hence the hunting for it by a Tom Smith and others. Blake was a brother of Clyde Blake, both of whom were relatives of the Victor Blakes and Mrs. Blake of the Gallogly family.

Storm Creek Flat is 40 acres in size and has rich placer ground according to some accounts. Actually, it is about 3 to 5 acres in area. One of the mining partners of "Blondie" Smith, Joe Storm mentioned previously, likely gave his name to Storm Creek Flat and Storm Creek.

Uranium prospecting was done in the Bell's Half Acre Mountain area with Geiger counters in the 1950's. This resulted from the Idaho Bureau of Mines Bulletin citing the area as having geological structure possible for uranium deposits. It is adjacent to the West Fork of the Bitterroot where uranium prospecting was also done.

The U.S. Bureau of Mines surveyed the Selway River and Deep Creek for black sands containing rare earth minerals in the 1950's. The report was they found some sands but not in commercial quantities.

Later prospecting was some examination of minor copper bearing ore showings in the area north of Deep Creek by the Bear Creek Mining Company.

The U.S. Geological Survey examined part of the "Corridor" adjoining the Salmon River Breaks Primitive Area for mineral potential during 1968 and 1969. The report of their examination and findings will be available about 1970.