Thars Gold in Them Thar Hills
A Historical Account of The Bohemia Mining District Calapooya Mtns, Oregon

Ed Buchner
Geo 522
March 17, 2003
Introduction

High in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon, thirty-five miles southeast of Cottage Grove, lies a vast tract of land with much to tell of. This piece of land is the home of the once bustling mining district referred to as Bohemia. At the Willamette Umpqua divide at 5000 feet elevation lays the center of the Bohemia Mining District on the saddle between Mount Bohemia and Mount Fairview. From this point the rugged landscape within five miles in any direction was part of the mining district (see Appendix A). First discovered in 1858 was the gold that the region is well known for across Oregon. At one point in time many believed that the Bohemia area would grow to become the largest most successful gold mining district in the US (Warner, 1904). Sadly this was not the case. Bohemia was plagued by many factors over the years preventing the area from going beyond a small, bustling, mining town.

Much of the information given in the following pages comes from a wonderful account of the Bohemia Mining District done by Ray Nelson of Cottage Grove. Ray Nelson dedicated much of his life to prospecting in the Bohemia District (Oregonian, 1963). Ray was also concerned with the many tales of fame and fortune deriving from the district (Oregonian, 1963). Nelson’s father was the steam engineer for the Annie Mine, his first years salary paid for his trip to the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893 where he saw one of the first electric plants. On his return from Chicago he proceeded to build Cottage Groves first electric plant and install the city’s original incandescent lighting system. The Vesuvius mine; one of the more successful and also recently mysterious mines, was bought by Nelson in the 1950’s or early 1960’s. Many of the facts if not directly cited came from this account of Facts and Yarns of the Bohemia Gold Mines.
**First Gold**

In the summer of 1858 O.P. Adams, W.W. Oglesby, Rufus Adams, and William Shields started up Sharps Creek and attempted mining. They did find gold, however, lacking proper mining equipment made it tough for gaining much more than a mere livelihood. Later in the year two of the party traveled to Josephine County and observed the mining operations there. On their return they built sluice boxes, which enabled them to do quite well for themselves. The following year the group split up and attempted placer mining in many of the streams in the area. Several people ended up in the upper headwaters of the streams coming off of Mount Bohemia and Mount Fairview but did not find any gold in the streams. Little did they know that the ground they were walking over was full of the mineral and in the future would provide many miners with riches. With the Civil War at the start of the 1860’s the region was dormant. No word was heard of gold mining in the region until 1963.

James Johnson, born in the eastern European country of Bohemia, had just killed an Indian in Roseburg and was running from the law with his buddy George Ramsey. They made their way up the North Umpqua River to Steamboat Creek and then City Creek. Here in the Calapooya Mountains they believed they could hide from the law until "things cooled off." Bohemia Johnson, as his friends called him, was distracted during their travel up City creek by the glitter of gold quartz in the stream. The location where this gold quartz was found is three-quarters of a mile south of the summit of Mount Bohemia. Johnson and Ramsey climbed up to the summit and found that they were at the headwaters of Sharps Creek. They left the region via the trails following Sharps Creek down to the Row River and out to Cottage Grove.

In the following two summers of 1864 and 1865 there was a surge of development in the area. Among the first to arrive was the original group from 1858 and 59 who had traipsed across the area and not found a sign of gold. In 1866 the first “town” meeting was held in the new miners camp. The following year another meeting was held to set the rules.
to govern the new mining district. The Miners Code of Laws resulting from this meeting were:

Article 1. The District shall be known as the BOHEMIA DISTRICT, and shall extend six miles in every direction from discovery of Johnson’s ledge.

Article 2. Claims taken in 1866 and laid over by miners meeting in last October shall be good till June 1, 1867.

Article 5. Claims shall be 100 yards by 25 yards.

Article 6. One claim only to each person, and two to the original locator.

Article 12. Water running through Bohemia City is reserved to the town.

Article 13. Town lots shall be 50 by 75 feet, and shall be held by building a house thereon, or by fencing in the property.

With these laws the town of Bohemia City was formed. In the following year a few cabins, hotel, saloon, and a branch office of the Douglas County Recorder’s Office.

**Johnson’s Mine**

The claim that Johnson first made and worked is now known as the Mystery Mine. Johnson attests that the gold there must have been only a pocket because it gave out at a mere depth of six feet. Many still hold the belief that the mine Johnson actually was getting his gold from was somewhere else; this other supposed mine is still a mystery. There are many mines in the region, if not in the district nearby, that are of mystery. Many tales are abounding telling of mountain men emerging from the canyons with mules laden with rich gold ore. These mines have been hunted after for a century or more now and none have yet to be found.

**The First Stamp Mill**

The gold in the mountains of the Bohemia district was in the quartz veins, which weaved their way among the ridges. To separate the gold from the quartz parent material a mill was used. There are many different styles of mills to do this now, however, at that point in time the only economical way was a stamp mill. A stamp mill has a number of mallets that are dropped continuously on the ore, crushing it into a fine powder. This fine
powder is then mixed with water and run across a table coated with mercury. The gold sticks to the mercury and the remaining “dirt” is washed away. In the beginning this process did not extract the entire gold content and as much as fifty percent went downstream of the mill. These streams that the wash went down are now rich placer mining streams.

In the early to mid 1870’s the first five stamp mill was purchased and moved into the Knott Mine. To get the mill up into the Bohemia district a new road was built by a crew of 30 to 300 men, entirely by hand. Knott bought the mill in San Francisco and it was shipped up the Pacific Coast to Portland. Then on a riverboat up the Willamette it went to Cottage Grove where it was loaded on a wagon, which took it as far as the mouth of Sharps Creek. From Sharps Creek the mill was pulled on a sled by a team of oxen over the Knott trail. The mill ran for several years with mixed results. The knowledge of milling practices was limited as was water which was needed to run the mill. In 1877 the mill building was destroyed by snow and interest in the district was lost. For nearly fifteen years the camp was deserted.

One possible explanation of the desertion of the district may be depression. During time period from 1873 to 1885 there was a cycle of depression and prosperity (Web, 2003a). The first depression lasted from 1873 through 1878; at this time this was the most severe depression that the US had seen. Following this, there was a brief period of recovery, which lasted a short four years. Because of the brevity of the recovery time period interest did not have time to build in the mining district. The dormant district was not re-inhabited until 1890, after a period of five years of economic prosperity.

**A Fresh Start**

In the summer of 1889 an article is written in the Cottage Grove Leader. This article described the mining district and talked about the vast wealth still in the ground up in the mountains. It may not be related but the following year there was interest in the district. The now Dr. Oglesby Pearson discovered the Annie Mine while OP Adams, Joseph Kennedy,
James Musick and others rebuilt the camp. From here the Bohemia mining boom was started.

The Musick Mine

James Musick, a prominent miner from California, came to the site of the Old Bohemia City looking for mining claims for him and Los Angeles friends in 1891. Here within what is described as a stone throws distance from the site of Old Bohemia City Musick found one of the most productive quartz ledges in the district. Here he staked two claims and started the Bohemia Gold Mine and Mill Company with the help of Davis, Cook and Brady.

In the following spring of 1892 the company purchased a five stamp mill. By that October the mill had been hauled up the mountain and the engine and boiler installed. At about this time the snow began to fall and the mine was only able to operate for nine days before shutting down for the winter. The following table is a timeline of mill activity and profits from 1892 through 1899. In 1897 a bridge known as Red Bridge was built across the Row River at the mouth of Sharp’s Creek. This allowed the wagon road to extend to the foot of the mountain making transportation directly up the west side of the mountain a possibility. In 1898 Musick took advantage of this and finished the road grade to the company mines. The county contributed $700 and multiple miners also donated an undisclosed amount of money to assist in the road building. After the completion of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1890’s $</th>
<th>2001 $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 days</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>76,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>208,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>1894</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-February</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mine and Road Development</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sold to Calapooya Mining &amp; Tunnel Co.</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>85,000</td>
<td>1,750,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calapooya Mining &amp; Tunnel Co. Value</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
<td>60,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
road Cook built a sawmill, new mill building, bunkhouses, and a new 10 stamp mill. Mining operations were halted early that year due to early snow resulting in drifts up to 26 feet deep. In the following year the mine was sold and intensive development began; the mine ran more continuous and in 1902 was consolidated with the Champion and Helena Mines to form the Calapooya Mining and Tunnel Company.

The Annie Mine

As mentioned before Dr. William Oglesby, one of the original miners of Sharps Creek, discovered the Annie Mine. The Annie Mine was located near the summit of Grouse Mountain. This mine was also a “stones throw” from a previous mine, the Knott Mine. The first year, 1890, the ore from the mine was milled using a hand powered “jig” mill. Thankfully the following year the old Knott mill was bought and moved farther downhill, to

The Musick Mine – Late 1890’s or early 1900’s (Nelson, 1959)
make it possible for more water collection. This second year the mine produced $10,000 and in the following year, 1892, the mine is reported to have produced $16,000 in gold.

In 1893 the mine was opened early and Andy Nelson, the father of Ray Nelson, arrived to find only the smoke stacks protruding from the snow. Nelson and the small crew proceeded to dig out the boiler and overhaul the equipment under the snow. When the rest of the team arrived they were sent to work cutting the tops out of trees where they protruded from the snow to fuel the boiler. This may have not been as uncommon as Nelson makes it sound; on my two trips to area this winter I saw on several occasions the stumps of trees standing ten to fifteen feet high in areas of mining activity. Also in 1893 the development began in improving the mine operations by installing a tramway, water pipe, and improving the trail to the mine into a road. The year 1893 was a year of depression panic and labor was available cheap, it is rumored that the crew building the road was compensated for their work by been provided room (tent) and board. The weekly bonus was a keg of whiskey, to keep moral high. The mine ran steady under the ownership of the Annie Consolidated Company up until its sale in 1896 to the Noonday mining company of Chicago.
In a new chapter on the history of the Annie mine, the Noonday Mining Company invested a large amount of capital. The Noonday Company developed nine claims in all with a total of 5300 feet of tunnel and the most elaborate tramway in the district capable of hauling 500 pounds per bucket with 40 buckets. Also built was the fanciest 20 stamp mill complete with eight concentrating tables, two boilers, and a 60 horsepower high-speed engine. This setup was very adept at processing the quartz ores present in the mines. However, after only two weeks the mines ran out of quartz ore and only sulphide ores were being extracted. A stamp mill is not capable of processing these sulphide ores; so after a fourteen-day run the mines were abandoned. This mine sat dormant for many years until the development of the flotation mill.
**Champion Mill**

There were many mining corporations interested in the Bohemia mining district during the 1890’s. The Hartford Corporation of Chicago was one these, this company developed the infamous Champion Mine. This mining operation initially consisted of 13 claims in 1895 and a report from 1898 details the operations of a five stamp mill. In 1899 the mines were sold and by 1902 was incorporated into the aforementioned Calapooya Mining and Tunnel Company. Plans were set for completing 7000 feet of tunnel and constructing a electrical power plant on the Row River to provide power to all of the mines. Included in this company were the mines: Champion, Mitchell, Graber, Hoff, and all territory between the head of Champion Creek and the Musick Mine.

Also in planning was a railroad from Cottage Grove to Red Bridge, which would make the mining and export of the sulphide ores more feasible. This railroad was started in 1902 and within a month had extended five miles and a local depot station built. Also during this time rich quartz ore was located and milling resumed. An offer was made on purchasing the mine in 1903 and the Calapooya Mining and Tunnel Company, Helena Consolidated Mining and Milling, Musick Mining and Milling, and the Broadway group were consolidated under the name of Oregon Securities Company from New Jersey. This same company also acquired the Oregon and Southeastern Railroad.

**Old Gold**

As repeated many times in the Bohemia District, once again gold was discovered very near previous workings. C.B. Bruneau, a Cottage Grove photographer, was bit by the gold bug in 1896. After working for one of the outfits he asked around to see if there were any places that he might work himself as a hobby, he was told to dig in a particular bank of the Annie Trail which was know to have insignificant gold fines in it. Bruneau did just that, however, he found more than just fines. By 1899 Bruneau and the Jennings brothers had made six claims and divided them into two groups, Helena No 1 and Helena No 2. The ledge that these claims were located on was one of the largest at four to five feet wide.
The ores spilling from these mines were valued at $30,000 per ton, which was the highest of any in the district. At first the ore was processed with a hand-operated stamp that paid for a five stamp mill within a few short weeks. Rapidly following the five stamp mill came a 10 stamp running 24 hours a day. By 1902 the teams of men had reached the sulphide ores that were not processed adequately by the stamp mills. In 1903 this company was assimilated like many others into the Oregon Securities Company.

On the West Side

Until 1897 much of the “company mines” were on the east side of Bohemia Saddle. The Vesuvius mine was purchased by several Swiss miners, in 1897, who developed the mine and located others in the vicinity. In 1900 they had moved the old Knott mill over the top of the Saddle. This mine carried on much like the other unknown mines of the district until 1902 when a single round was fired and the resulting ore was valued at $29,000 per ton. F.J. Hard, a Colorado miner, heard of this find and made an offer that the Swiss could not refuse. Hard had been in the Bohemia district since 1894 and by 1903 he had purchased 30 claims and located as many more.

Immense development began in improving the mine workings. Over ten miles of road were constructed, which today continue to be used as routes into the district. By 1908 as small city had arisen, this included the mill, its 1800 foot tramway, assay office, saw mill, and three story structure housing the store, office, bunk house, cook house, and post office. By 1921 there was over 7000 feet of tunnel. With onset of World War I in the mid 1910’s the mines in the area that were still producing quartz ore found themselves short of labor. The Vesuvius managed to keep in modest operation until 1921 when the death of FJ Hard was followed by the death of his son, leaving on the wife and daughter to manage the mines. At this point the mines went all but dormant, in the following years the mines were purchased from the government and only activity was the payment of property taxes. Over the following years much of the equipment was stolen, buildings burned down, and tunnels collapsed. In 1949 the mines were leased out and the High-potential mines company
reopened the mines, there is no report of the returns from this effort. Ray Nelson in the early 1960’s is known to have bought the mines, but again no report of any gold production.
The Small Fry

The operations with a history are those that have had incredible developments and also capital invested. The Bohemia District has many other mines, by 1902 there were over 2000 mining claims on record. Many of these did not develop beyond small placer mines or scratches on the surface of the mountain. However, they played a large role over the years in the development of the district. Often those that developed the larger mines first got started in the smaller, not so productive, operations.

Oregon Securities Company

As mentioned before many of the mines near Champion saddle were consolidated into first the Calapooya Mining and Tunnel Company and then into the Oregon Securities Company. The result of this merge was quite significant, now all the tunnels that were desperately trying to avoid each other could now be linked and the equipment pooled to form an immense mining operation. Three 10-stamp mills were placed side by side at the Champion mill site and ores from the many mines were transported to this site for processing. These mills were powered by a pelton wheel type electrical power plant as was the railway linking the mines. By 1905 the mills were ready to begin production, in the first nine months approximately $85,000 in gold was processed. Over several years the quartz ore at both the Musick and Champion mine turn into sulphide ores resulting in halt of mining at those two sites. The tramway and tunnel system proposed at the Helena never came to be and the ores from this mine never made it to the mills. In 1907 a depression panic swept over the district and the Oregon Securities Company was reorganized as the West Coast Mines Company, under this name operations continued sporadically.

Between the Wars

After World War I mining was difficult, labor costs rose drastically from 1919 on. With increasing labor cost the price of gold stayed steady making it difficult to profit from mining activities. Across the US this was the case and many mining operations were halted. As a result the Bohemia district was once again deserted after its longest run yet. Only a
few die-hards persisted, operating the larger mines with smaller mills manned by themselves and possibly a few employees. The first break occurred in 1935 when George Stowell and Robert Betts built a Flotation Mill at the Champion mine. The flotation process was capable of extracting the other metals contained within the sulphide ores that were now being pulled from the mines. However, due to economics the capital needed to run the mill was not available so there it sat until 1939 when H & H Mines bought or leased the center of the district.

At this point everyone was sure that again the Bohemia District would boom with activity. The mines were reopened and mineral surveys performed disclosing an estimated value of $2,700,000 still in the ground. A new flotation mill was built utilizing the most recent technologies and staffed by competent milling engineers. Gold, Silver, Lead, Copper, and Zinc were all pulled from the ore by this new process. The operation charged ahead full steam until the beginning of World War II when first a scarcity of men hindered the operations and then a moratorium was placed on gold mining forcing the company to abandon its development.

**After the Wars**

Following World War II and the lift on the ban of gold mining the Bohemia District once again attempted to come to life. Higher prices were being paid for lead, zinc and copper and with the installation of flotation mills the companies were able to profit from this inflation. Between the years 1945 and 1959 the mines were bought and sold many times, ultimately the majority of the mines wound up in the hands of local Cottage Grove miners. With the increased labor costs and low gold prices the lead, zinc and copper ores were carrying the burden of costs. With the increase of foreign materials these minerals were not able to support the mines and one final time the mining district entered a recession. Today much of the mining district lies at the divide of the Umpqua and Willamette basins, waiting for the costs of labor and profit of ore to become balanced and allow for equitable operations.
Bohemia in 21st Century

As mentioned before the district now sits and waits, there are a few mines in operation, but as many prospectors believe there is much more ore in the ground than is being mined. There are few remains of the large corporate mining operations of the early 20th century. These consist of tailing piles and collapsed buildings; recently there have been efforts at rebuilding some of the more prominent historical buildings. The following photos depict what much of the Bohemia District looks like today.
The Lasting Effects

As with any mine there are detrimental environmental repercussions associated with mining, the Bohemia District was no exception. In the reports of miners working the tunnels during the heyday there is mention of how acidic the mines were, often air pipes for delivering air into the mines were eaten through after only a few hours. The acids would eat the iron and the copper residues would replace it making for high maintenance costs. Today this acid mine drainage pours from the mouth of the mines downstream to the Willamette River.

Also associated with mines are the by-products of the milling process. The stamp and flotation mills both produced a large amount of sediment, which flows downstream, clogging Salmon and Steelhead spawning grounds. Also the mercury residue from the Stamp Mills have been attributed to causing water contamination in the area, this may also be the result
of quicksilver rich ore that is also present in the area, no conclusive investigations have been conducted to determine the true source of the problem. Although there is no reports of contamination from the flotation mills, in other parts of the world these type of mills are often associated with EPA Superfund projects. The sediments from the mines, as mentioned, travel downstream. Where these sediments settle there are often placer claims in the stream, which also attribute to sedimentation problems. The DEQ has been forced to place laws in effect governing when activity can be done at these placer mines.

In the early 1900’s the Bohemia Lumber Company was started and much of its timber source came from the Bohemia Mining District. Often the company would provide the capital for an individual to start a mining claim, in trade Bohemia Lumber Company got the rights to the timber on the claim. At one time this was legal, now it is not for obvious reasons. The remnants of these operations are still visible today.

**Summation**

Prior to the discovery of precious metals in the district the area was used by many native cultures. The Calapooya divide, which Bohemia saddle was a part of, served as a trading route to the native peoples from the Klamath, Deschutes, Umpqua and Willamette (Honey, 1981). White settlers traveled this divide in the 1860’s and their reports tell of many developed trails and traces of camps. Also because of the elevation and terrain of the region it is believed that vision quests may have bee performed at the summits of Bohemia and Fairview mountains. The unique terrain and location has made this area popular for centuries in the native cultures.

Non-native peoples also found the area of interest, initially for reasons other than gold. After the discovery of gold in the 1860’s more interests were developed and the area grew in population. In many writings from the early mining days visitors wrote of the majesty of the mining district, many were amazed with the terrain and environment. Over the time period of fifty years following the discovery of gold the area was utilized heavy as a source of livelihood. Today the region is a tourist destination.
Although not a destination for travelers from afar the Bohemia District is a
destination for those interested in the mysterious history found in hole-in-the- wall locations
across Oregon. There are multiple county and state recreation areas consisting of
campgrounds and picnic areas. Also the Bureau of Land Management manages several
recreational mining areas within the district. These are primarily places for the family to
visit and try their hand at gold panning. The many roads and trails built over the course of
the districts development are now hiking trails and off-road vehicle trails. The Noonday
trail, built for bringing the equipment to the Noonday mine, can now be traveled by four-
wheel drive vehicles. It is often regarded as a technical trail and many are amazed with the
difficulty posed, to modern vehicles adept at off-road, travel by the trail.

The Bohemia District has waxed and waned with activity over the centuries. This
surely is not the end of mining in the district; it is proven as a producer of fine ore and
when the price is right there is surely to be another mining boom in the region. However,
today it sits in the shadow of the Cascade Mountains slowly reveling the history of fame and
fortunes pulled from the ground on the slopes of Bohemia and Fairview Mountains in the
Calapooya Divide.
Bibliography

Unknown Web Authors
www.sunybroome.edu/~ruggieri_p/Sos/RISEINDCAP.PPT


Lane County Historical Society.  Lane County Historian vol. XXVI, No.2.  1981.

Appendix A

Miscellaneous maps of the
Bohemia Mining District Region