

Copper Mining in Placer County

Excerpts from an August 7, 1992 Auburn Sentinel article by Bill Wilson.

. . .Even while gold was still dominating conversations , copper was discovered in 1863 in the county, and numerous mining companies were organized. When gold mining declined and copper prices soared, there was a rush to mine the new metal. Several busy new towns sprang up and an Auburn newspaper reported that there was a “rampage on for copper.”

The most productive new settlements were located in the Gardner District near Bear River east of Sheridan in an area that later became known as Thermalands. Before the copper “rampage” was over, the communities of Van Trent, Wilsonville and Superior were developed along what became known as the Sierra foothill copper belt.

The foothill vein was discovered to be eight feet in width and was mined at depths of more than 65 feet. There also were a number of productive mines in what was known as the Auburn District, and the county’s leading citizens jumped to invest in them. Some of the investors quick to put up money were Joseph Walkup, who later would become California’s lieutenant governor; Tapp Mitchell, editor of the Placer Herald; and John Boggs, a legendary local sheriff.

The Dairy Farm Mine was the better known of the Gardner District mines, and the town of Van Trent was developed around it and became a thriving community within several years. A U. S. Post Office was established there when the copper mine was at peak production. The town got it’s name from the dairy located south of the mine.

Located on 160 acres near McCourtney and Karchner roads nine miles northeast of Sheridan, the Dairy Farm Mine had underground shafts and a large “glory hole” a large open excavation where copper ore was extracted. The mine operation had a machine shop, 100-ton plant for surface ores, electric hoist, office building, boarding house and cottages where as many as 400 lived at one time. . .

The copper mine operated until about 1917 and most people moved away. There was some mining activity at Van Trent in the 1930's when an operation . . .was set up to work the mine tailings for gold. The gold recovery operation continued for some three years and was a moderate success. Some 20 years later the mining equipment was dismantled and hauled to Virginia City Nevada where it was used to extract silver from tailings.

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