

CORNUCOPIA WAS once the hub of a prosperous and promising mining district. Now it has been almost forgotten by everyone as it lies in ruin and decay amidst the rushing white water of Pine Creek and the evergreens.

Crumbling ruins remain of once-famous mine

CORNUCOPIA—Located in scenic Pine Valley in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest approximately 65 miles northwest of Baker lies the crumbling remains of the once booming Cornucopia gold mines.

The historic mine is abandoned now everyone has departed. The only sounds are the birds and the rushing white water of Pine Creek as it winds its way through the old camp.

Signs are posted everywhere to warn visitors that the mine and mill are still dangerous. The Cornucopia took its deadly toll when it was operating, men were killed many thousands of feet below ground by premature blasts, cave-ins, fires and avalanches.

Sparking mountain springs flow where once mine carts hauled ore from the earth. The mill buildings are tumbled down — crushed by 30-foot snowfalls. The sun has bleached the boards almost pure white. Birds nest in cubby-holes once reserved for miner's mail. The smell of the evergreens is everywhere.

With the exception of a seasonal caretaker and occasional visitors, the 'Copia has been forgotten by all. Few remember the fortunes gorged from its bowels. The 'Copia produced more than half of all the gold and silver mined in Eastern Oregon during its prime.

Gold was first discovered in the early 1880s in the Eagle Creek mountain range near the upper end of Pine Valley. 'Cornucopia soon became the hub of this prosperous and promising mining district.

The mine began producing a limited amount during its early operation. In 1889, reports indicate the entire district produced nearly \$74,000. This marked the beginning of a steady output until the mine's abandonment on October 31, 1941.

News of Cornucopia's promise spread quickly in the gold mines scattered throughout the West. Miners flocked to the rugged area to make their fortune. Included among the new men were several miners from Cornucopia, Nev., who

suggested the name Cornucopia for the new camp. Cornucopia comes from the Latin and means "horn of plenty." It is an old fashioned term, which was often dubbed on projects where men hoped for success.

The town of Cornucopia is described in 1885 vintage periodical as having one frame house with many tents and log cabins, which were hastily built to accommodate the big rush. "The town can boast of five saloons, one store, two restaurants, a barber shop and butcher shop," the article said.

Once the sixth largest gold mine in the United States, the 'Copia boomed several times during its brief but violent history. 'Copia ore was so full of gold that the nuggets could be shaken from it.

Gold mines with exotic names like the "Last Chance," "Red Jacket," "Wild Irishman" and "Queen of the West" contributed to the prodigious output of the Cornucopia Gold Mines Company.

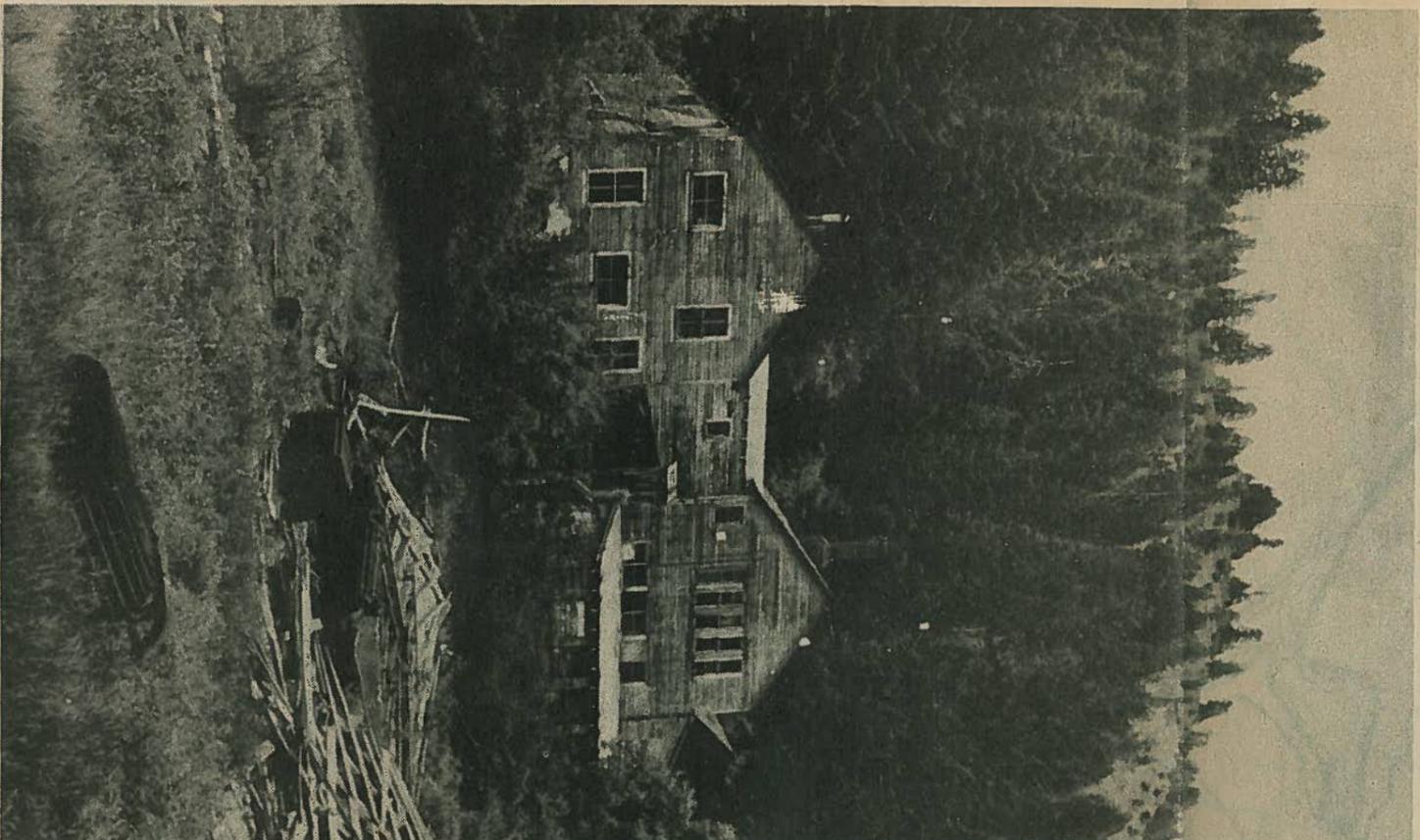
The bustling mine with its 3,600 foot Coulter shaft and more than 30-miles of subterranean shafts was known as the El Dorado of Eastern Oregon. More than 15-million dollars were taken away from there.

Records indicate a peak work force of 350-men with their families lived in the wild back country of Pine Valley. Horses carried out the mineral bearing quartz ore until roads were hacked through the forest.

High transportation costs coupled with severe weather conditions — Cornucopia had an average 264 inches of snow each year — hastened the eventual closing of the mine and mill.

The Cornucopia is idle now. Rusted machinery is strewn throughout the camp. Forest animals scamper around the old buildings on Main Street as the forest inches closer each year.

The mines gave up millions during their prime and some old timers believe there are millions more remaining. But until economic conditions drastically change, the 'Copia will continue its lonely vigil in the forest.



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