

100 Years of Conservation and Public Service on the Medicine Bow

"Thar's Gold in Them Thar Hills"

The presence of precious metals in the Medicine Bow Mountains had been suspected quite early. Several accounts state that Captain Douglas, a member of the Sir George Gore's hunting expedition, found gold in the Medicine Bow Mountains in 1856 and that Douglas Creek was named for him. F.V. Hayden of the US Geological Survey stated that "valuable specimens of ores and placer gold" were brought to him from the mountains southwest of Fort Steele. John Mullison, an early ranger, described early shafts and signs of mining on Upper Brush Creek that had been pointed out to him by Ute Indians in 1870.

The Douglas Creek District was formed as a result of the discovery of gold by Iram Moore in the fall of 1868 in stream gravels on a tributary of Douglas Creek. This area later became known as Moore's Gulch and was the first well documented gold discovery in the Medicine Bow Mountains. Miners rushed to the area. Using panning, sluice boxes, and rockers, they extracted an estimated \$8000 worth of gold in the spring of 1869. Dr. Knight, U of Wy, estimated that \$229,000 (12,040 oz.) was produced in the Douglas Creek District by 1893. Eventually these placer deposits were traced back to lodes. Lode mines were soon discovered in quartz veins at Keystone, New Rambler, Douglas, and Florence.

The Douglas mine was located on the west bank of Douglas Creek. It was discovered in 1870. A 7-foot wide ore body was found.

The Keystone Mine vein consisted of "free gold". In 1890, a twenty-stamp mill was constructed on the property. Operations ceased in 1893. The total production was estimated at \$96,999. The mine shaft was sealed in the 1950's.

Gold was found in small pockets, but in small quantities at the Florence Mine. Operations ceased in 1889 and the machinery was sold to the Keystone Mine. By 1906 the total production from this mine was \$50,000.

The New Rambler Mine was first opened for gold, but emphasis shifted to copper in 1900. Production figures in 1906 showed that 1,928 dry tons of ore were shipped. In 1918, the mine buildings were destroyed by fire and mining ceased. The New Rambler mine was probably the only property in the region actually to market any platinum.

The Gold Hill district was established in 1890. According to Louis Coughlin, the first strike was made in 1888 by Benjamin Arundell, who later served as a ranger on the Hayden forest. He could not get financial backing until 1890 when a general rush began. Laramie, Saratoga, Carbon, and Arlington all began to construct wagon roads into the area. The *Saratoga Sun* described winter at the Gold Hill Camp:

"It has been no easy matter to keep Gold Hill from being snowed under this winter. Accurate records have been kept, and these show that snow fall has totalled 329 inches or more than 27 feet in four months."

In its heyday, there were about 500 people at Gold Hill, with four saloons, several groceries and hotels. The Gold Hill district flourished until 1905 and had a brief rebirth in 1931.

The discovery of gold deposits in stream gravels on Centennial Ridge led to significant lode discoveries in 1875-1876. The district was established as a result of this activity in 1876. Accounts vary on the actual discovery of gold and the Centennial Mine. The *Centennial Post*, 1908, carried a story on the mine's discovery, relating how a group of hunters crossing the mountains stopped to rest and found gold glimmering among the rocks. They picked up samples and showed them to Col. Downey of Laramie. The samples were tested and pronounced to be pure gold. The Centennial Mine was the chief producer of the district. The mine's total production was placed at \$90,000. An ore sample from the mine won first prize at the Paris Exposition in 1876. The vein was traced until a fault was encountered and never relocated. A ten stamp mill was built at the base of the mountain and connected to the mine by means of a 425-foot tramway.