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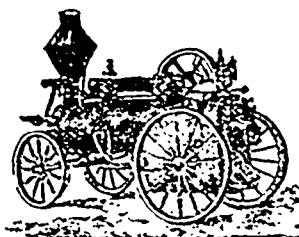
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MINING.

EARLY MINING OPERATIONS ON THE COMSTOCK.

Written for the Engineering and Mining Journal by Dan de Quille.
(CONCLUDED).

Tunnels also abounded in early days. They were run into the hills all over the country. Long after the sinking of round shafts was dropped the running of tunnels continued. They are to be seen of all lengths, from the mere start of 10 or 20 ft., to such as are from 500 to 2,000 ft. When the big snow-storms of the winter of 1859-60 surprised the silver hunters, many of them took refuge in the tunnels they had commenced. By widening a portion of the tunnel a few feet inside of its mouth very comfortable quarters were made, as the ground was firm and dry.

In the floors of many of these old tunnels shafts were sunk by the early prospectors, and these have cost the lives of many persons and rendered many more cripples for the remainder of their days. Persons—both men and boys—urged on by curiosity, venture back into the darkness of the old tunnels, and before they are aware of the presence of a shaft have made a fearful plunge of 50 or 100 ft. The discovery of persons so trapped has at times seemed almost miraculous. Several persons have been discovered by the merest chance and rescued, battered and broken in limb, when almost at the last gasp, and after they had lost all hope of ever again seeing the light of day.

After the first rush and excitement of prospecting was over, and the owners of mining claims settled down to the steady work of developing the veins on which they had located, substantially timbered square shafts began to be seen, and soon all working shafts began to be made with two or more compartments. At first there was a compartment for pumping and one for hoisting; then soon followed three compartment shafts, two being for use in hoisting ore and waste rock. This, however, was after steam hoisting and pumping machinery began to be set up pretty generally.

The first steam machinery for hoisting and pumping was erected at the Ophir, where the first discovery of silver ore was made. As soon as men from California obtained control of the mine they began to sink upon the vein, which was found to dip to the west. An incline was started which followed the dip of the vein. A donkey engine of 15 H. P. was set up at the top of the incline to do the hoisting and run a pump, the column of which was only about four inches in diameter. To the old Gold Cation placer miners this plant of machinery seemed very powerful, and they were never tired of admiring it. Listening to the puffing and wheezing little engine, and watching the creaking and spluttering pump, an admiring old Johnstown one day said: "By mighty, with that air big steam ingen' these 'ere Californi' fellers will purty soon turn old Sunrise Peak inside out!"

The company timbered their incline in a substantial manner, laid in it a track for lowering and hoisting ore cars, and the depth being trifling, were able to bring out ore very rapidly, for they were working in the heart of the first bonanza ever opened on the Comstock. There was nothing to do but dig down the ore and shovel it into the cars. In much of the soft, decomposed silver ore one could see bright spangles of free gold. Such was much of the ore, sacked for shipment.

The Mexican and other mines near the Ophir were opened by means of inclines that followed the dip of the vein, but at the Gould & Curry, where the rich ore was next found (about half a mile south of the Ophir), a tunnel 250 feet in length was run to the vein at a considerable depth beneath the croppings. Winzes were then sunk upon the ore and drifts run along the vein, upon which chambers were opened in the bonanza. Once the ore-chimney was found, drifts were run and winzes sunk with a astonishing rapidity. The mine was at first worked through tunnels. In all three tunnels were run, the lowest being 2,000 feet long, and tapping the vein at a depth of 425 feet. They did not begin sinking their first big working shaft until 1864. The Savage mine, which adjoins the Gould & Curry on the south, was opened by means of a shaft. The bonanza in the Gould & Curry was in the southern part of the claim, and had an inclination to the southward, which at a depth of about 500 ft. carried it into Savage ground. The southward pitch of the chimney being early observed, the Savage Company had a pretty sure thing when they began sinking their shaft.

Although they first began working the lode at Gold Hill by means of pits sunk in the rich, decomposed, gold-bearing quartz of the surface, they soon set to work at sinking large vertical shafts, using steam power in hoisting and pumping. All the first engines were small, though then looked upon as being quite powerful enough for any work that would ever be done on the lode. When, in these early days, a few "cranks" talked of sinking to the depth of 1,000 feet on the lode, most mining men turned and walked away from them, not wishing to seem to countenance any such wild and ridiculous proposition.

In 1861 Superintendent Deidesheimer, of the Ophir, asked for an engine of 45 H. P., and 8-in. pump and improved hoisting apparatus. The officers of the company thought this terribly extravagant at first, and the stockholders said they might as well shut down the mine at once "if all that came out of it was to go for machinery." They could not see the utility of such "tremendous power" as their superintendent said he must have. Had such machinery as the Ophir now possesses been asked for every member of the company would have fallen in a faint at the mere mention of it and its probable cost.

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