

Trabing



Mostly about People

By Wally Trabing

What with sprouts sprouting and tourists touring and Miss California candidates diverting minds, you probably don't think of Santa Cruz county as being a mining county.

Well, you're right, it isn't.

But that hasn't stopped ambitious men from trying to make it one from time to time back before TV.

The 1926 report of the state mining bureau reveals quite a spread of mining activity. It shows that between 1894 and 1924 the total recorded value of minerals produced came to nearly \$50 million.

There are tales of gold finds in this county that would make your wallet quiver. Oil keeps knocking at the door.

Deposits of asphaltic and bituminous rock in the county have long been utilized for the street and road building, but not any more.

The largest operation was in the Bonny Doon area near Ice Cream grade. City Street Improvement mine operated for 35 years, hauling thousands of tons down the mountain by a huge steam tractor to the railroad siding called Gordola where it was shipped five miles to Santa Cruz. There were also the Cowell and Thurber mines nearby.

Black sand is found from the mouth of the Pajaro river to Soquel point. Platinum and gold have been taken in small quantities from this sand. But also present, say the experts, are garnet, zircon and hematite. The problem is separation.

The report said cement is the most important single structural material in the mineral output of California and it still is. The state ranks very high in this item.

The top mining output in the

county is in limestone. A huge quarry in the hills above Davenport turns out the rock for the Pacific Coast Aggregates cement plant which produces 2.75 million barrels of cement a year. The quarry was operating before 1907 and is still going strong. About 300 persons are employed in the total operation.

Pacific Limestone Products on Spring and High streets in Santa Cruz has also maintained a large quarry since 1923. The rock is used for the production of poultry grit, cattle and poultry lime, roofing and stucco material and fertilizer.

And believe it or not, several small veins of lignite coal have been found in the county. Prospecting for coal north of Watsonville was active during the early 80s.

Mines were located near Corralitos creek area. One was called Look Coal mine in Redwood canyon about nine miles from Aptos. Developed in 1924 by C. R. Look, about 90 tons were sold in the Santa Cruz area that year.

There were also coal deposits noted on the P. M. Leonard ranch two miles southeast of Aptos.

Gold — and look out for the imagination — has been found on the sides of Ben Lomond mountain in the gulches and creeks. Wild reports of a half million dollars having been taken from these creeks can be picked up for a pocket of foolsgold. The center of gold fever from time to time has been Gold Gulch which runs through Tanglewood near Felton. A merchant, George Fetherston, once spent \$1000 digging out \$500 worth of the stuff.

Granite has been quarried from Ben Lomond mountain in the past. Classified as quartz diorite, it is said to be fair building material. There is also said to be a deposit of granite on Branciforte creek, with a cliff face 700 feet high.

Iron mining in the county? Bet your 1926 boots. The Triumph Steel company had a plant on the beach two miles southeast of Aptos. San Francisco people had it. They used black sand to produce sponge iron, alloy steel and briquetted magnetite. Only the cement foundation is visible today so apparently Triumph was fairly short lived.

Lime was another thing, however. The burning of lime was one of the earliest industries in the county, the first kiln having been built in 1851 by I. E. Davis and A. P. Jordan.

The three big operations were Henry Cowell Lime and Cement; I.X.L. Quarry and Holmes Lime and Cement. The Cowell quarry was two miles northwest of Santa Cruz, the other two were near Felton. The Cowell operation produced from 1865 to 1946.

Although several small mineral springs occur within the county no mineral water is known to be bottled commercially.

There's the Hinns Sulphur Spring near the top of Hinkley ridge about a mile east of Olive Springs; and Olive Springs, near Olive Springs road. St. Francis Springs are on property along banks of the Pajaro river at the seminary.

Molding sand, found at Twin Lakes was once used in the local foundries. Peat has been found near Felton.

Up to 1926, oil had not been successfully caged. There have been numerous wildcatting efforts in the northern half of the county. The only successful production has been Costa No. 1., north of Boulder Creek, which started out at 85 barrels a day in 1955. It is now pumping 11 barrels. The well is right on the county line — actually feet over the line in San Mateo county.

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