

Gilpin County

Bay State District

Gilpin is the second smallest county in Colorado, but has the second highest gold production. Several months after the big discovery on Clear Creek, gold was discovered by John Gregory near Blackhawk in 1859. A few months later, the placers and veins in Russell Gulch initiated a major rush into this mountainous area. Early lode mining was restricted to oxidized ore, which normally reached 40- to 100-feet below the surface. The construction of the Hill smelter in Blackhawk in 1868 enabled extraction of metals from the unoxidized sulfide ores. Later, the completion of the railroad from Denver to Blackhawk spurred production again. Mining diminished early in the 20th century and has proceeded only sporadically since 1909.

The first discoveries in the area occurred in Gamble Gulch in 1859 (Koschmann and Bergendahl, 1968). Stamp mills processed the oxidized ore and the level mining activity followed the same pattern as in Clear Creek County. Much placer activity occurred in the various gulches, especially near Rollinsville. The geology is much the same as in Clear Creek County, with Precambrian bedrock of the Idaho Springs Formation cut by Boulder Creek Granite with Tertiary intrusions of quartz monzonite and bostonite porphyries. Fissure fillings include pyritic gold that, where unweathered, is rather low grade but has been enhanced by oxidation.

The basic geology includes interlayered Precambrian gneisses and schists, intruded by Precambrian granites of the Boulder Creek and Silver Plume family, with later Tertiary intrusions associated with mineralization.

Minor lode gold producers include the **Bay State District** (consisting mainly of the Bay State Tunnel in the far southeast corner of Gilpin County), and the **Hawkeye** and **Wisconsin Districts** contiguous with the North Gilpin District. The geology of these districts is the same as those adjacent.

Records exist of the organization of the Bay State District on July 19, 1859 (Marshall, 1920), with the district delineated as occupying the area from the mouth of the North Fork of Clear Creek to the mouth of Russell Gulch, including the creek's tributaries. The district appears in Henderson (1926), but little information is available.

References:

Henderson, C.W. 1926. Mining in Colorado, a history of discovery, development and production. U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 138.

Koschmann, A.H. and Bergendahl, M.H. 1968. Principal Gold-Producing Districts of the United States. U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 610.

Marshall, Thomas H. (ed.). 1920. *Early Records of Gilpin County, Colorado, 1859 - 1861*. W. F. Robinson Printing Company, Denver, Colorado. 313 p. in J.F. Willard (ed.) *The University of Colorado Historical Collections Volume II*, Boulder, Colorado.