

Gilpin County

North Clear Creek Placers

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 gold 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. Placer gold along North Clear Creek is derived from low-grade pyritic gold veins in the gulches (Parker, 1974).

Most of the historic mining areas in this small county are considered either part of the Central City or North Gilpin Districts by various reporters.

The North Clear Creek placers were upstream from the town of Blackhawk. Parker (1974) notes particularly heavy activity at Pickle Gulch and Missouri Gulch and upstream from the mouths of these gulches. The district at some point overlaps with the **Fairfield District** to the north. The creeks and flood plains were worked by a variety of methods: surface bar mining, drifting, hydraulicking, dredging, and dragline operations. Originally they were dry operations and then hydraulicking by the 1900s to 1941 (Dunn, 2003). Lovering and Goddard (1950) comment that a dry-land dredge was operated in North Clear Creek near Blackhawk from 1937 to 1941 that was, for a time, the largest gold-producer in the county.

References:

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