

Gilpin County

Pactolus Placers

The Pactolus Placer District is located within the **North Gilpin District**, which is described in Bastin and Hill (1917) and Lovering and Goddard (1950) as a large area (approximately 35 square miles) stretching from North Clear Creek to the Boulder County line, east from Mammoth Gulch and Kingston Peak to the Eastern border of the Central City Quadrangle. The North Gilpin District is composed of a number of smaller mining districts that grew out of the 19th century gold boom. It is made up of the significant gold-producing districts of **Pine-Kingston-Apex** and **Perigo**, along with areas that have been called the **Illinois, Gamble Gulch, Union** (or **Gold Dirt**), **South Boulder** and the **Rollinsville Placers**. The **Wisconsin, Phoenix** and **Kansas Districts** are contiguous with the other North Gilpin districts and display the same geologic characteristics.

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.

In the South Boulder Creek drainage, placer mining was carried out in Lump, Moon and Gamble Gulches. The latter was significant enough to warrant recognition as the Gamble Gulch District. Also at the north end of Gilpin County, the Pactolus and Rollinsville Placers are underlain by outwash gravels and, according to Parker (1974), the most productive gravels were rather fine and lying on Precambrian bedrock. The principal placer area in Gamble Gulch was about 1.5 miles long and 500 feet wide at the widest point. The Rollinsville Placer was slightly larger (Parker, *Ibid*). Placer activity occurred in nearly all the gulches within the existing districts of Gilpin County.

The Pactolus Placer District lay along South Boulder Creek from around the town of Pactolus to the Boulder County line. According to Parker (1974), one of the earliest placer discoveries in the state was made at the "Deadwood Diggings," near the mouth of Beaver Creek, which would be within the Pactolus Placer District. The deposits lie in outwash gravels, with an average depth of 16 feet. The gold was coarse, with nuggets up to a quarter ounce. Placer activity began in about the 1870s and lasted into the 1940s, but was intermittent in the 1930s (Dunn, 2003). Lovering and Goddard (1950) state that "a floating dredge recovered 7,796 ounces of gold from the Pactolus Placer on South Boulder Creek during 1937 to 1941" so the district was a prolific producer, averaging .0073 ounces per yard.

References:

Bastin, E.S. and Hill, J.M. 1917. Economic Geology of Gilpin County and Adjacent Parts of Clear Creek and Boulder Counties, Colorado. U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 94.

Dunn, Lisa. 2003. Colorado Mining Districts: A Reference. Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colorado.

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

Lovering, T.S. and Goddard, E.N. 1950. Geology and ore deposits of the Front Range, Colorado. U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 223.

Parker, Ben H. Jr, 1974, Gold Placers of Colorado; Colorado School of Mines Quarterly 69 (3).