

Placerita Canyon

Romantic Spot That Has Yielded Much
Treasure,
and Where Some History Has Been Made



OLD
ADOBE
IN
PLACERITA
CANYON

PLACER WORKINGS
IN PLACERITA CANYON

placers, seeking the yellow talisman that brings joy to the saddened heart; that lightens toil and, like charity, covers a multitude of sins.

That the padres took from these placers gold in considerable quantities there is no doubt; for, notwithstanding the continued working of the mines up to the present time, there is an occasional strike in a "draw," a side gulch, or a "pot-hole" in the main channel, overlooked by the early miners, that pays well for the working. After the passing of the mission government, when the seasons were favorable, Indians continued to work the little placers. Some of them had become skilled miners, following the broken channels of pay dirt by tunneling, sinking shafts and drifting in the higher levels.

As late as the early sixties the Indians, in quite large numbers, came from the borders of Lower California to work those mines.

In 1871 a white miner, who was running a tunnel, struck into a network of old workings, in which he found rusted mining tools. In the bota were nuggets of gold, amounting to thirty dollars. We can but surmise the fate of the owner. No trace of his remains was found.

Following the Indian miners came the Chinamen, who, with hand sluice, rocker, and pan, persistently washed the gravel all over again.

When the organization of the San Fernando mining district was accomplished, the alien miners were barred out, and the little placers were claimed by white men, who, in a few instances, succeeded in mining the yellow dust in paying quantities.

With the passing of the Indian, the Chinese and the early white miner, there was left to the new order of things a legacy of legends, traditions, stories of ledges of rich ore that the padres had worked, and, before they went away, had covered up all traces of; and of old channels under foothills or mountain edge, where the gravel was so rich that a pan would yield a dollar in gold.

Prospectors have spent much time in searching for the legendary mines. But if the mines exist their secret is still hidden under the growth of chapparal, the tangled matting of which still screens the whole northern slope of the mountains.

Over two decades ago a man who had been a sea captain, lumberman, miner and rancher, and with whom Dame Fortune had coquetted even more than is the custom of the fickle jade, pitched his tent on the plateau, at the head of the Placerita canyon. The great oaks of the padres' time had been cut away, a new generation of trees had taken their places. The channel of the brook had been dug over, and its water turned into ditches along the mountain sides in the canyon. Every gravel bar, point and "draw" had been turned over to bed-rock. The boulders and gravel, systematically piled in heaps, had, in many places, been again buried by the debris of the winter floods.

The "captain" knew something of the history of the canyon, and had heard the legends. But he was most impressed by the incomparable climate and beautiful surroundings, that appealed to his love of nature. He, in first prospecting for gold, found sufficient to induce him to remain. He bought a number of claims, for which he paid the last remnant of his fortune. Being a bachelor, he moved into an adobe hut on his new estate, and went to work with pick and shovel. But fortune has not smiled on him, during all these years of toil and hardships that would appal an ordinary man.

During the last quarter of a century \$100,000 has been expended in futile efforts to mine the Placerita with machinery. In 1891 a company spent \$30,000. Immediately following this failure another company installed an expensive plant, in which both steam and electricity were to play important parts. These are but two notable instances. Men with thousands of dollars, and others with a few hundred, have alike fallen victims to attractive but visionary schemes for mining by processes requiring more water than proved to be available.

Owing to the collapse of the great real estate boom in Southern California about 1888, many men were left stranded in Los Angeles and vicinity. Some

A HUNDRED years ago, when the affairs of the San Fernando mission were under the guidance of the good padres, there was a trail extending northward from the mission across the head of the fertile valley, over the wooded foothills and up in sinuous course the southern slope of the Sierra Madre mountains to a pass; thence it led down a heavily timbered gorge on the north side to the headwaters of the Placerita canyon. Much of the trail is now obliterated by cultivated fields, orchards, railway and wagon road; but over the foothill and mountain it is still visible, though washed and worn by the storms of a century.

It was over this trail the good padres, when the rains were plentiful, led the peaceful inhabitants of the mission, to the little placer gold mines which they had discovered in the Placerita, the Oriso and Oro Fino canyons, and there deftly taught the tractable red man how to obtain the precious metal.

At the foot of the gorge the trail ended in a plateau, shaded by mountain oaks, watered in summer by a tiny crystal brook, that brightened to silvery sheen, then darkened to sapphire blue, as it flowed through sunshine and shadow, down its sandy bed under the overhanging branches of the great trees. In winter the brook became the resurrected river.

Under the oaks, on the green carpet of semi-tropic growth, the Indian miners made their campfires and spread their blankets; and from then until now men have camped there and worked the little