Auriferous Gravels in Placer County, 1885

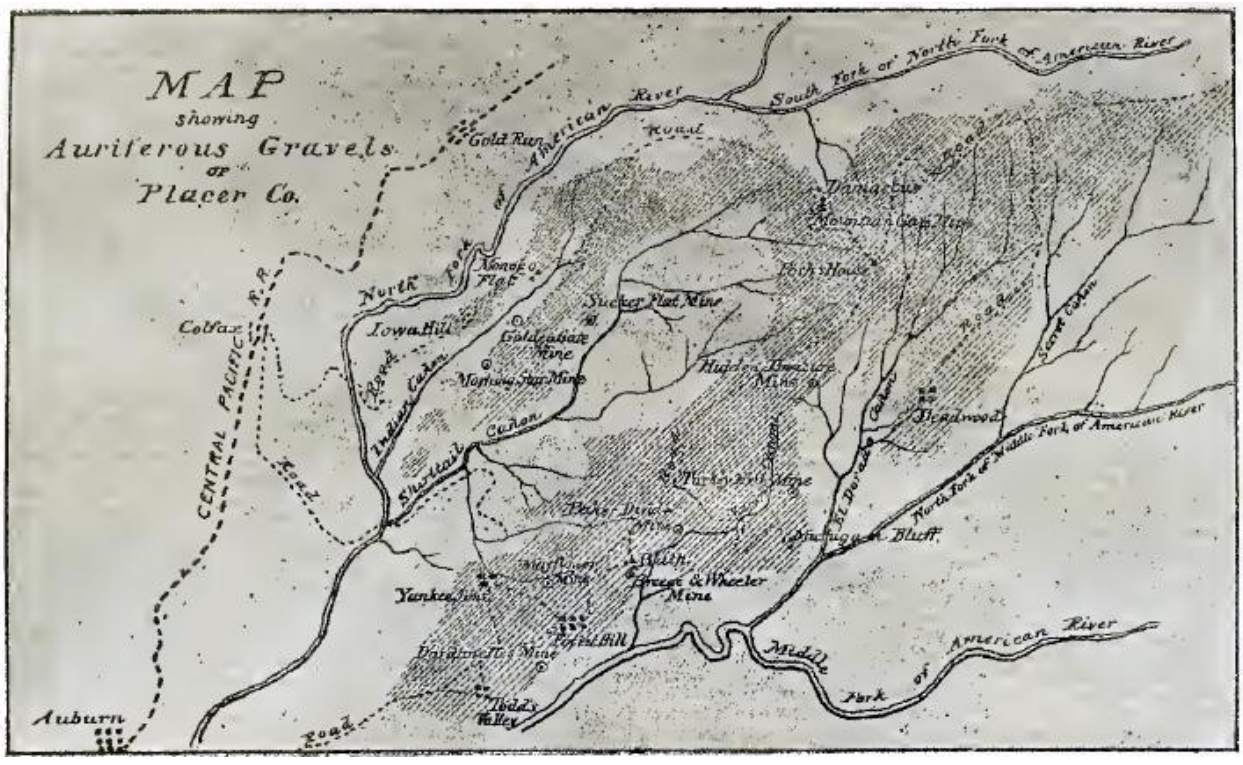
The placer mines of this county were among the earliest discovered and worked in this State, and in permanence, richness and gross aggregate of yield in the years since they were first operated they compare well with the mines of any other section of the State.

Placer county is peculiarly well situated for the development of deposits of its precious metals. The old overland emigrant road crosses the summit of the Sierras in the eastern portion of the county and descending toward the Sacramento valley crosses the higher deposits of deep gravel that form the great drift and hydraulic mines, and then on to the lower foothills, reaching the extensive shallow placers worked by the more primitive mining methods. The main line of the Central Pacific Railroad runs through the county, rendering the greater portion of the mining districts directly accessible. Comparatively short wagon roads from the railroad towns give communication with other mining sections.

The western part of the mining section consists of low rolling hills, intersected by numerous ravines and narrow valleys, lying between Bear river on the north and American river on the south, the highest elevation not exceeding 1500 feet. The northern of these ridges, or "divides," as they are locally termed, lies between Bear river canyon on the north and the canyon of the North and the American river on the south.

The mining towns of Gold Run and Dutch Flat, and the extensive placer mines in their vicinity, are on this "divide," which is traversed by the railroad. Between the North Fork of the American river and Shirt-tail canyon is the Iowa Mill "divide," and between Shirt tail canyon and the Middle Fork of the American river is the Forest Hill "divide." These two unite above the sources of Shirt-tail canyon, and together with several smaller and less important divides, joining on the south, where they lie between tributaries of the Middle Fork of the American river, and form one main ridge, which runs far toward the summit of the mountain, and is known as the "Forks House divide."

In the lower foothills the country rock is granite. Shallow auriferous placers have been worked extensively all over this granite section but are now entirely worked out and abandoned.



There is also one range of deep gravels, in some places capped with lava, commencing at a point about one mile west of Auburn and running thence southwesterly to a point about 12 miles southwest of Rocklin. These deep gravels seem to be the detritus of a very large dead river. They have been prospected and have been worked by drifting and hydraulicking at several points to be referred to farther on.

On the summits of the ridges, between the canyons, are found the remains of at least two great trachytic lava flows, varying from a few feet to several hundred in depth. of some places the lava has been entirely eroded off, while others it seems never to have covered.

Lying between the slate and lava, and in some instances between two lava flows are found the gravelly detritus of ancient buried river systems, varying from a few inches to 300, and even 400 feet in depth. These gravels are more or less auriferous and have produced the greater portion of the gold yield of the county. The auriferous gravels, both as regards extent arid richness, are found concentrated in lines of depression in the underlying country or bed rock, as it is termed by the miners. These depressions are evidently old river channels, which, as a more correct knowledge of them is gained, seem to have been made by streams larger than those at present flowing through these grounds. Occasional quartz lodes are found, but the general character of the mines is placer.

The accompanying map of a portion of this placer mining district from the Mint Directors' report will give a better idea of the relative position of the mining claims and the boundaries and extent of the gravel deposits. The shaded portions show the limits of the lava flow.

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