

## FORKS HOUSE

Forks House was a stage stop on the road from Foresthill to Westville. The road forked here with the other road going to Iowa Hill which was 8 miles southwest of Forks House. The Iowa Hill road also led to the town of Damascus and to the trail to the Pioneer Mine and Humbug Canyon. The Damascus post office was moved to Forks House May 17, 1860, and operated in the hotel there until it ceased operating July 25, 1861.

## HUMBUG CANYON

Humbug Canyon is one of the earliest placer mining areas having been explored in 1850. In February of that year, L. P. Burnham, Robert E. Draper and a man by the name of Kirkpatrick, were the first to enter the canyon. They had made an arduous 20 mile journey from Michigan Bluff through snow on the upper ridges.

They found enough gold to induce them to locate claims. These three men were from the State of Mississippi and so they named the small stream Mississippi Cañon. After a few days, they were disgusted with the mining and they left. While climbing the steep hillside on their way back to Michigan Bluff, Kirkpatrick said: "Pshaw, hasn't any gold of any account, it's a regular humbug, and instead of Mississippi we'd better call it Humbug Cañon".

They were met by a group of hopeful miners who had followed their trail from Michigan Bluff. The miners expected the three to have found a rich strike and could not be convinced that it was a humbug. The entire group then descended the canyon and the next day organized a mining district. Robert E. Draper was chosen as Secretary and in his minutes of the meeting wrote: "At a meeting of the miners of *Humbug Cañon* held this ----day of February, 1850," etc.

Humbug is located about 40 miles Northeast of Auburn in a box canyon formed by a small stream that discharges into the North Fork of the American River. The stream comes down in cascades from the South with its headwaters on the Foresthill Divide. In it's four miles of travel, the stream descends from 4,500 feet in elevation to 2,000 feet where it enters the American River.

The early settlers describe a Piute Indian tribe that lived near the river at the mouth of Humbug. They were not warlike and the braves supplied the wants of their families by hunting and fishing. There were less than fifty Indians in the tribe.

This mountain valley selected as a home by these Piutes was covered by virgin sugar pine, spruce, fir and cedar. The area was a game paradise for there could be found deer, foxes, mountain lion, grizzly and brown bear, grouse and quail. Flocks of wild pigeons would often darken the sky.

The male members of the tribe never worked, but were hunters. The squaws gathered acorns, manzanita berries and Indian potatoes. Great holes in the tops of flat rocks give evidence where for generations the Piute squaws crushed acorns and manzanita berries. The skins and hides of the wild animals were tanned and preserved by the squaws and provided most of their clothing. When the gold rush reached the scene this fine hunting area was changed and a few years later the United States government moved the entire tribe to a reservation in the State of Nevada.

The gravel in the bed, banks and benches along the stream and river was exceedingly rich and the gold was recovered easily. Gold bearing gravel was seldom more than three to ten feet in depth. Some estimate of the extent and richness of the diggings is made when,

before 1870, the district from the mouth of Humbug Canyon to several miles upstream to Damascus Canyon had produced more than \$3,000,000 in gold. The flat area at the mouth of Humbug Canyon soon had three stores and became a prosperous mining camp.

Drift mining was soon added to the placer mining and the area supported many mines. In 1881, some of the mines were: Pioneer, Poole, Dorer, Central, Boss, Odgers & Pasco, Keller, Lynn and Potosi & Passaic. Later were the American Eagle, Black Hawk and Southern Cross. Nearby on the North Fork of the North Fork of the American River was the Rawhide Mine owned and operated by the Patricks and Mottrams, relatives of Leopold Richard Dorer.

Of these mines, the Pioneer was the most important. It was located 1,000 feet up the ridge above Humbug Flat at an elevation of 4,000 feet and in 1881 it had over 6,000 feet of tunnels. The ore was brought out of the shafts and down the mountain side by suspended cable cars to the stamp-mill near where the present road crosses Pioneer Canyon. At the mill, the ore was crushed by a ten-stamp mill, treated with cyanide and the gold extracted. The mine was closed in 1918 when the United States government shut down gold mines to save material for World War I.

The Poole Mine is of interest in that it was one of the few mines in the area that had a stamp mill. The mine was discovered about 1854 or 1855 by L. P. Burnham. His interest was purchased in 1879 by A. W. Poole who erected a water driven five-stamp mill on the American River near Humbug Canyon. A tram-way brought ore from the mine to the mill.

The Poole stamp mill was removed in the 1960's by Lutie and Andrew Dorer, and Joe and Richard Merz. It was taken to the property of Lutie Dorer near Baker Ranch where it remained until

the 1980's when it was taken to Auburn by Wendel Robie. It was donated to the Native Sons of the Golden West by the Dorer family. Plans and specifications for the mill framework were donated by Richard Merz and the mill was erected in Old Auburn, and dedicated on September 28, 1996.

The Southern Cross Mine was about three miles down the American River from the mouth of Humbug Canyon. A water-driven generator in a power house mid-way between the Southern Cross Mine and Humbug Canyon. The power house furnished the electricity to operate the mill and a large compressor that supplied air for the drills in the mine. The power house was about 50 feet above the river and the water was brought to it by flume from a dam just below where Humbug Creek enters the American River. The location of the flume is barely visible above the North bank of the river where its route was carved into the rock. The large discharge pipe from the power house is still in place to show its site above the river. The mill and other structures burned in 1913 and the mine never reopened.

Humbug Canyon was accessible only by trails for much of its existence. Most of the supplies were brought in by pack train from Towle seven miles away on the Central Pacific (now Southern Pacific) Railroad. Another steep trail led up the ridge past the Pioneer Mine and the town of Damascus. A dirt road then went to the Forks House where it met the main road to Foresthill. The road also went to the nearby town of Iowa Hill.

The trail from Towle led down a steep ridge to the American River where it crossed the river on a suspension bridge at Euchre Bar. The bridge collapsed in 1890 under the weight of snow and ice while being crossed by Leopold Richard 'Lee' Dorer and his cousin, Thomas Patrick. Lee Dorer struck a cable and was thrown into the water, and

Richard Merz  
806 Coloma St  
Folsom, CA 95630-2833

seriously injured. His horse and a mule struck the rocks below the bridge and were killed. It was replaced by another suspension bridge that lasted until the 1960's. Damaged by age, wear and high water, it was replaced by another suspension bridge. The material for the earlier bridges was brought in by horse but the material for last bridge was lifted in by helicopter. Nearby was a house where the toll keeper lived. It was in use until the 1960's when the US Forest Service burned it down to prevent its use. The last occupant was a Mrs. Crosby.

The trail from Euchre Bar to Humbug Canyon follows the South side of the American River and is a relatively easy trail. About mid-way it passes the site of the Southern Cross Mine. The remains of the stamp-mill are visible as is the entrance to the tunnel which opens onto the American River. For many years an ore car rested just inside the tunnel entrance. Vandals later pushed it into the river where it lay for several years until high water swept it away. A mile or so above the Southern Cross and on the North side of the river is the site of the power house that furnished electricity for the mine.

At one point the trail has been carved out of an outcropping of rock. It is here that some times pack animals would crowd the rock sides and push themselves over the edge to be killed on the rocks far below. Directly across the river from the Southern Cross was the Blackhawk Mine.

The trail proceeded to Humbug Flat and then up the steep ridge to the Pioneer Mine. Along the way the trail hugs the steep hillside and raises to several hundred feet above the river. From the 1920's when automobiles came on the scene, the trail from the Pioneer Mine was the main access to Humbug Canyon. Cars would park at Level 7 mine tunnel and the trail began there. In the 1930's, the road was extended down the ridge to

Level 3. It was about a mile walk from there but in that distance, the trail dropped over 1,000 feet in elevation.

The pack trains were the lifeblood for the miners. The packers were a hardy bunch and had to make the round-trip to Towle almost every week. Lee Dorer ran a pack train in the late 1890's and early 1900's. His cousin, William Patrick, took over the pack train from him and operated it from 1904 to 1906. He also brought the supplies to the Rawhide Mine that was located on the North Fork of the North Fork of the American River.

The pack-train was then operated by Hop Gee. He first packed for the Chinese and would take in supplies and return to Towle with roofing shakes. He also brought in supplies for other miners along the river and did the packing until about 1912 or 1914. Hop Gee was a sturdy man and his many trips with his pack horses had given him muscular legs. The calves of his legs were so muscular that he could not fully gather his high boots together with their laces. He was somewhat indifferent to his pack animals. While resting them, he would not release their heavy packs so that they could rest in comfort.

The sons of Lee Dorer took over the pack trains for the family when they became old enough and continued this work until they left the Canyon in 1922. Richard, the oldest son, and Lutie did most of the packing with help from their younger brothers Andy, Ray and Arnold.

When the mines were reopened briefly in 1934 and 1935, the pack trains were again used to bring in supplies for the American Mining Company that had leased the mining rights in Humbug Canyon from Lee Dorer. This was one of the last, if not the last, mining areas on the Foresthill Divide to be served by pack train.

The heavier mining equipment was

brought by wagon from Emigrant Gap to the top of the ridge on the North side of the American River. The equipment was then slid down the ridge to a point near a mine and then moved by horses to its final site. The equipment included massive stamp mills and the power house generators weighing many tons. Once down in the canyon, the equipment was to remain forever except for the small pieces that vandals later removed.

The moving of heavy equipment and supplies was repeated in 1934/1935 for the American Mining Company. The route this time was down the ridge above Humbug on the South side of the American River. Mining equipment, building material and other supplies were brought by truck to the top of the ridge above where the Pioneer Mine is located. A crude but sturdy sled would be built from small trees and lumber. The supplies would be firmly fastened to the sled with ropes and a team of horses hitched. The horses would drag the cumbersome sled and its load of up to one ton to a point where the ridge fell away at a steep angle.

Two long ropes were fastened to the sled. One of the two men handling the sled would snub his rope around a nearby tree while the second man began his trip down the steep slope carrying another rope. The sled would be shoved away to begin a rapid descent down the ridge held back only by the rope snubbed around a tree. The horse would plunge ahead of the sled while the second man hastened down the slope over rocks and brush until the rope in the hands of the first man nearly reached its end. The second man would then quickly snub his rope around a tree and begin slowing the progress of the sled until the other man could run down the hill, pass the sled and wait for the sled to reach him so he could snub his rope. The horse would be used to pull the sled whenever the slope of the ridge flattened out. This process was continued until the sled arrived at the bottom of the ridge some 2,000 feet

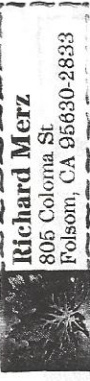
below where they had started this dangerous descent. The horse would then drag the sled the remaining distance to the mining settlement in Humbug.

In a few days, the men would return to the top of the ridge and repeat their dangerous work with another load of supplies and material.

One of the men who made many of these journeys with the sled was Joe Merz who was the husband of Theresa, daughter of Lee Dorer. He weighed 180 pounds when he began this arduous work in the spring of 1934. By summer's end, he was down to 145 pounds because of the strenuous labor.

The way into Humbug improved in the late 1940's when Ray Dorer, son of Lee Dorer, widened the trail from the Pioneer Mine to Humbug Canyon. With pick, shovel and dynamite, Ray made the trail just wide enough for a Jeep vehicle. The trail was a series of switch-backs for most of its length. At each switch-back, a ramp was built as the trail was too narrow to make a wide enough turn for the Jeep. As the vehicle reached the switch-back, it would be run onto the ramp and would then proceed backwards to the next switch-back. This frontward-backward method was continued until the trail reached somewhat level ground far below. At most points along the route the edge of the trail overlooked a drop of several hundred feet.

The route to Humbug was greatly improved in 1959 when a logging road was constructed. The Dorer Family sold the timber in Humbug and part of the sale was for the construction of a road that could be used after the timber was removed. It is a more circuitous route of nearly 4 miles but can be traveled by most vehicles. It is not as arduous as the old foot-trail and certainly not as exhilarating as the Jeep ride but it still offers some magnificent scenery.



was carried seven miles over rocky mountainous trails and through tangled underbush to the Pioneer Mine. Dr. L.B. Barnes of Newcastle was summoned. He had the boy brought back to Auburn where Lundstrom died January 3rd of a broken back.

### **EUCHRE BAR BRIDGE FROM HUMBUG TO TOWLE BREAKS. ANIMALS KILLED, MEN LIVE.**

Lee R. Dorer escaped serious injury on several occasions. In January, 1890, he and Thomas Patrick were enroute from Humbug to Towle. As they traveled north and reached the American River, they found six inches of wet snow on the Euchre Bar suspension bridge. The bridge spanned the North Fork of the American River on the route of the trail. Dorer rode a horse and Patrick a mule. As they reached the center of the bridge, it collapsed. The horse and mule landed on the rocks below and were killed. The men were thrown clear of the bridge and landed in six feet of water. Dorer struck a cable and was seriously injured. Both men finally reached the river's bank. Patrick managed to get to the E.L. Ford camp down the river, and a Chinaman ran to Humbug and gave the alarm. Miners soon came and took the injured men to their homes up the river. Patrick was laid up a week, but Lee Dorer did not recover for a month. Another suspension bridge was erected to replace the fallen bridge.

A little over a year later, Lee Dorer suffered another accident in the vicinity of the Euchre Bridge mishap. While crossing the tramway with a car at the Dorer mine, a wheel on the car broke and the car jumped the track. In trying to save himself, he missed his footing and fell a distance of about 20 feet. He was very fortunate, however, and sustained no further injury than a sprained wrist. He was laid up for repairs for a short duration.

For the curious, the origin of the name of Humbug may prove of interest. There are two stories actually in existence. One story is that several miners, hearing of the richness of the gravel in that area, traveled to the district and proceeded to try their luck. Their efforts proved fruitless and so they called the area a "humbug". The other story is that the Chinese gave the name "Humbug" to the little canyon due to the numerous Lady Bugs that are prevalent at the mouth of Humbug Canyon, and made a humming noise. Which is true? Take your choice.

### **FOUNDATIONS AND PILES OF DEBRIS MARK OLD CAMP SITES**

The area around Humbug is spotted with former sites of mines, mining camps and settlements; to

boy. A son, Bob, today resides in Foresthill. The Humbug school closed when Ray and Andy graduated. An enrollment of six was required.

Ray recalled the family had 25 cows at one time. The Dorers possessed an orchard consisting of apple, pear, cherry and other fruit trees, some of which are still alive. One of Ray's jobs as a boy was to carry a gallon jug of apple cider up the side of the canyon to the miners of the Pioneer Mine and sell it for 50 cents.

Lutie lived in Humbug 18 years. He killed his first deer at age 11. From then on it was his job to keep the family supplied in fresh meat. "We killed only about three deer a year," he said. "When I was young my dad would go out and shoot a deer before breakfast."

Lutie harbored no sentiment for his boyhood home, once he left. "I remember it as a place for little but hard work," he recalled. "My dad worked my tail off and later, in the mines, it was even worse." In 1980 he visited the old Dorer homestead, his first visit in ten years.

When Lutie was 13 he was given the job of driving the pack mule train to Towle (on the railroad) and back in one day, a round trip distance of 14 miles. This was once a week in rain, shine or snow, and it entailed climbing 2,000 feet on a switchback trail from the river to the railroad. He drove the mules alone most of the time, walking the entire distance.

family to have lived in so remote and beautiful an Eden as Humbug Canyon.



**Photographed about 70 years ago in front of the one-room schoolhouse in Humbug Canyon are from left Lutie and Richard Dorer, Annie Hanson, Wilhelmina Dorer, Henry Hanson, Aggie Hanson and John Hanson.**

# by Jackass Line



Hays Gee the chairman ran the pack train from Towles to the mines along the North Fork of the American River, & Humbug supplying them with provisions and mail. He had a string of pack mules, about 7 or 8, that were sure footed to travel the 8 miles over steep and narrow paths to mines such as Euchre Bar, Southern Cross and Pioneer. He would sometimes bring in boxes of dynamite tied to the backs of the mules. At one point along the narrow trail which was cut out of sheer bedrock the mule carrying a wide load of boxes of dynamite was crowded off the trail, falling some 200 feet to the river below and was killed. This was the only means of travel to the remote mines along the river and Humbug. You can now drive down a winding road to Humbug Bar from Foresthill.

**PACK MULES WENT OVERBOARD. OLD PIONEER MINE**  
**CABLE BREAKS. LUNSTROM FALLS**

## STONE HOUSE

Located at the junction of Humbug Canyon and the North Fork American

...Verdon, Switzerland. He brought  
his bride to Humbug Canyon and later homesteaded  
early all the level portion of the box canyon.

...for some 300 feet, the trail has been bl  
forming a triangular space for travel. From this p  
the trail, you can view the bed of the canyon  
than 350 feet below. It is a gorgeous view.



...ck House located at junction of Humbug Canyon and North Fork of American  
...er, built around 1850. House in background is the Hanson House.



# A SEASON