

Towns and Places on the Foresthill Divide

A brief statement is provided here for each of the towns listed below. The location of these towns is shown on the Locations Map. Many are described in the Historical Markers pages.

China Wall

Deadwood

Forest Hill

Grizzly Bear House/Butcher Ranch

Humbug Canyon (Damascus)

Iowa Hill

Last Chance

Michigan Bluff

Shirttail Canyon

Sunny South (Hidden Treasure Mine)

Todd's Valley

Yankee Jim's

China Wall

Is now a staging area/parking lot for snow activities/sled dog racing, etc. It marks one of the many ditches constructed during the Gold Rush to transport water for hydraulic mining. At the north end of the parking lot is a great view of the Humbug Creek drainage into the North Fork of the American River. Cuts visible on the hillside of the far ridge mark the Central Pacific (now the Union Pacific) Railroad built by Leland Stanford and his partners. On a clear day, in the distance are the Sutter Buttes and the Coast Range.

Deadwood

Settled in 1852, today only a few scattered remains mark the spot where this town once flourished. It was accessed by a trail from Michigan Bluff and Last Chance.

Forest Hill (Foresthill)

Is located on a broad ridge between the North and Middle Forks of the American River on the gold bearing gravel bead of an ancient river. In the spring of 1850, miners came to the Forest Hill Divide in large numbers. There was one route from Auburn through Yankee Jim's and one from Coloma. At the junction of these trails, the Forest House Hotel and Trading Post was built. The height of the mining activity in Forest Hill began in 1853 after a winter landslide at the head of Jenny Lind Canyon (now Snyder Canyon) exposed numerous nuggets of gold. The Jenny Lind Mine produced about \$2,500 of gold a day for a while, up to a total output over \$1 million in 1880. The combined production of all the mines in the Forest Hill area was estimated at \$10 million by 1868 with gold selling for \$16 an ounce. In the 1860's, there were about 125,000 feet of hard-rock (drift) tunnels dug into the hillsides in, around, and under Forest Hill. By 1857, this area had become an important center for among the many gold camps on the divide. In 1862, the Hardy-Kennedy Building was erected – the first fireproof store in Forest Hill. This building, now known as the Langstaff Building, is still being used by merchants of Foresthill. By 1880, Forest Hill was one of the largest towns in Placer County. The town had an 80-foot wide main street befitting such an important place.

Grizzly Bear House/Butcher Ranch

This was originally a farming settlement located on the Stony Hill Turnpike that ran along the divide between the North and Middle Forks of the American River. During the gold rush, it had a post office, a

drugstore, two hotels, a blacksmith shop, and a carpenter's shop and a population of 250.

Humbug Canyon (Damascus)

This canyon was originally named Mississippi Canyon, but was renamed in 1850 to Humbug Canyon by discouraged miners. Dr. D.W. Strong discovered gold in 1852 in quartz gravel on a point between two branches of Humbug Canyon. This location was originally known as Strong's Diggings until a post office was established with the name Damascus.

Iowa Hill

Located on a ridge between the American River and Indian Canyon, Iowa Hill began growing in 1853 around the Jamison Claim, famous for its gold production. The Jamison was drift mined and later hydraulically mined. The North Star Mine in this area was the first in the state to use a stamp mill to break up cemented gravel that was extracted from the mine. At one time during the boom days, there was a proposal to divide Placer County and make Iowa Hill the county seat. During the area's good times, daily stages ran to Illinoistown (now Colfax) and connected with stages for Dutch Flat and Auburn. The road to Colfax (now paved) is still used today and is still very steep and narrow – a real thrill ride, especially when meeting oncoming traffic.

An 1861 historian said: "The business portion of Iowa Hill consists of three large grocery stores, four hotels, five dry-goods and clothing stores, one fancy store, three variety stores, one brewery and soda factory, two hardware and tinware stores, and two butcher shops, besides the usual number of bowling alleys, billiard and lager beer saloons. Iowa Hill also has a splendid Catholic Church, a Methodist Church, a Masonic Lodge, and a Lodge of Independent Order of Odd Fellows, also a public school and a theater."

Three times, the town was destroyed by fire. Now the town consists of a one-room schoolhouse for kindergarten through 8th graders, a volunteer firehouse, community club and park, and a charming combination store, post office, tavern, and café. It still does not have telephone or electric service, public water supply, or daily mail service. The local graveyards provide a fascinating glimpse of the past as there is a log (written) telling of the fates of those who are buried there. Several miners died as a result of a dam breaking upriver during a rainstorm. Mining was clearly a dangerous occupation and caused many premature deaths.

Last Chance

Mining community established in 1852, east of Michigan Bluff. There is a narrow 14 mile trail along steep mountainsides between Last Chance, Deadwood, and Michigan Bluff which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 26, 1995, and is now a segment of the Western States Trail. This trail, once a toll-road, crosses two deep river canyons and is the most arduous part of a longer route used by 19th century gold miners.

Michigan Bluff

Located adjacent to the Big Gun Diggings which was the site of a major gold find. Hydraulic mining was used extensively in this area until 1884 when it became strictly regulated. Leland Stanford sold goods to miners. He later went on to build the Central Pacific Railroad and was elected Governor of California. He was the founder of Stanford University.

Shirrtail Canyon

Sugar Pine Reservoir is located at the upper end of Shirrtail Canyon. Shirrtail Creek flows into the North Fork of the American River just above the once historic Barnes Bar. The canyon got its name

when two men named Tuttle and Van Zandt came upon an almost nude man mining along the water's edge. He was wearing nothing but a shirt. The men asked the miner what the creek was called and he replied, glancing at his bare legs, "don't know any name for it yet, but we might as well call it Shirt-tail as anything else." discouraged miners. Dr. D.W. Strong discovered gold in 1852 in quartz gravel on a point between two branches of Humbug Canyon. This location was originally known as Strong's Diggings until a post office was established with the name Damascus.

Sunny South (Hidden Treasure Mine)

On the south end of Damascus Channel separated by a channel running across it, another mine was established with the name of Hidden Treasure. This location was called Sunny South because of its fine, warm climate.

Todd's Valley

A store and hotel were established here in 1849 by Dr. Todd.

Yankee Jim's

Hydraulic Mining began in 1852 near Yankee Jim's. This method of mining used a monitor to spray water under high pressure against hillsides to wash away the dirt and gravel from an ancient riverbed. The runoff was diverted through a sluice where the heavy gold settled to the bottom and was trapped in the ridges. The Duncan Hotel was built in Yankee Jim's in 1870 when mining was flourishing and was the oldest landmark in the community until it burned in July 1929.