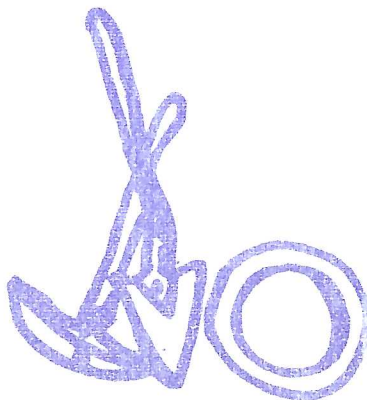


THE STORY OF ELKHORN

A brief history of Elkhorn and the
surrounding area



by Grace M. Crenshaw

During the gold rush days which started in the early 60's Elkhorn was discovered, there was some placer mining done at that time here but it was too early at that time to develop any of the lode claims, no one knows who done the placer mining. It wasn't until the early 70's when placer mines were beginning to be worked out, that the lode claims were opened up, then Elkhorn was discovered as a silver camp.

One of the original owners of the Elkhorn Mine was Peter Wys. Peter Wys was believed to have been poisoned by his partner. (No one seems to know what his partner's name was). The miner's working other mines in Elkhorn among themselves decided to hang him, but he took off over the hills and was never heard of since.

The miners fought among themselves over who would take over the claim, so the representatives of A. M. Holter came to Elkhorn and located the mine and started to develop it.

During this time which was in the early 70's there were no smelters in Montana, so they built a Rasta (early type of mill) to separate the silver from the ore. During this time A. M. Holter sunk a shaft three hundred feet deep on rich silver ore and apparently pinched out at this depth. The mine was then shut down for a short time. A representative of an English Mining Company (England at that time was spending a lot of money developing mines all over the world) and the representative, recognizing from his past experience that this mine could possibly be a great silver mine and recommended that the company buy it. It was purchased from A. M. Holter for several thousand dollars in the 70's. The Company's name was the London-Swansea Developing Co., always referred to here as the English Co. Having a certain sum of money set aside for developing mine; they sunk the mine six hundred feet deep, three hundred feet deeper than A. M. Holter, came into the big ore bodies which later proved to reach back up to the four hundred level, it proved to have very large stopes of very high grade silver ore. They worked the stopes, took only the high grade ore, sorting in the mine also native silver was found in the mine. After the English Co. developed the mine a road was built over the mountains to Jefferson City on to Fort Benton, ore was hauled from Elkhorn, loaded on boats sent down the Missouri and Mississippi River to New Orleans and shipped to Swansea, Wales, where at this time was the largest smelter in the world. (there were very few smelters in existence at this time). This ore was hauled from Elkhorn by ore wagons to Fort Benton and they hauled supplies back to different places on their return trip.

The English Co. built the Big Mill which is located above town, to mill ore, also smelt silver concentrates into silver bars or bullion at an estimated weight of 500 pounds each.

The mill boilers were fired by wood. At this time Elkhorn and the entire country was a heavy forest. It was all cut off by woodcutters for the mill and the families for wood. The mountains at this time was full of woodcutters. The wood was ricked up and hauled into Elkhorn by mule trains, also the English Co. built a narrow gauge rail road extending seven miles out around the mountains to haul this wood in, now known as the Tram Road.

The English Co. imported hundreds of families from England so the men could work in the mine. The men were called Cousin Jacks and the women Cousin Jennies, by other residents of the community.

The Mine and Mill Superintendent shipped one silver bullion a week, if he had the bullion ready to go he put one away (for a rainy day) under the mill floor in case he would not have one for the next shipment. His theory was to keep the mine operating and the people working. This worked out fine after The Silver Panic started in 1893 even tho the silver price had drop considerably the company was still operating at a profit. He got sick and died (having told no one of his plan and the bullion put away) when the new Superintendent couldn't meet the regular shipments the English Co.

ordered the mine shut down in 1898. Then in 1900 English Companies started pulling out of the United States and ordered all mines sold.

The Longmaid Bros. of Helena, Montana bought the mine in 1902 for supposed price of \$20,000. A new process of milling ore was discovered at this time, the Longmaid's started to remodel the mill for this new process, discovered several bars of silver bullion under the mill floor, enough silver to pay for the cost of remodeling the mill, pumping the water out of the mine and the purchase price of the mine. In 1905 the Big Elkhorn Mine started operating again. Due to the tremendous amount of low grade ore broken and ready to haul out and mill, this made it a big paying mine which lasted until 1912 when they shut down. The Longmaid Bros. took out an estimated million dollars in profit.

About 1916 or 1917 the Longmaid's sold the Elkhorn Mine to Stackpool of Mexico and Henising of Butte, Montana and later D. C. Walker of Butte became one-third owner. These people are still the owners and the mine has ran on a small scale often since.

The English Co. sunk the mine to a depth of 2200 feet on an incline shaft, then the Longmaid's to 2300 feet, one hundred feet deeper. It is estimated to be 1200 feet in vertical depth. It is believed the Big Elkhorn Mine produced between 40 and 78 million dollars up to this time, as before 1900 there were no records kept it is hard to have the true amount.

At this time there were several other mines operating in this area. The U & D; Dunston; Relief; Elkhorn Queen; Union and the Gould & Currey to the west, all big producers in gold and silver.

At peak time there were 1500 men employes, estimated 400 woodcutters in the mountains to supply wood for the mill of the Big Elkhorn Mine.

In the heyday of Elkhorn, there were lodges, churches, 22 saloons, dance halls, houses of ill-fame and various stores and business establishments which were necessary for the American way of life.

The railroad came into Elkhorn in 1888 and the the woodcutters went out of business over night. The woodcutters had several thousand cords of wood ricked up to be hauled in, they were wondering why the mule trains didn't come for their wood, the word seeped thru the mountains that the first train that came into Elkhorn had two carloads of coal on it. They came into town, demanded pay for this wood, but it was not needed, riots were started, they sent to Boulder for the sheriff and several deputies to keep order.

The Northern Pacific ran two passenger trains between Elkhorn and Helena, Montana, two each way a day and several ore trains a day.

In 1916 five miles of track was abandoned and taken up, this was to Queen Siding a distance of one and half miles by wagon road and a drop of 1000 feet in elevation.

The Elkhorn Queen Mine is two miles south of Elkhorn. One and half miles below Elkhorn on present day road was a railroad siding for the Elkhorn Queen Mine and the Gould & Currey to load their ore for shipment. This is known now as Queen Siding. By railroad from Queen Siding to Elkhorn it is five miles to the Big Hill. It is one and one-half miles from Queen Siding to Elkhorn by road but a rise of 1000 feet in elevation. Elevation at Queen Siding is 5619 feet and Elkhorn 6619. The railroad had to wind around the mountain on a grade to get here.

One of the early discoverers, Mack S. Moran, who discovered the Horeau Mine. Had some high grade ore but not enough to make a large mine of it at this time. In 1917 he sold this mine to the Pittsmead Mining Co. nicknamed the East Butte of Butte, Montana. The Pittsmead built a large 100 ton capacity mill to process this large body of low grade gold ore. This mill operated from 1920 to 1926, apparently ran out of ore and closed down. From 1926 on only intermittent mining has been done in this area and only small amounts of ore has been shipped.

Due to high cost of operations and the low price of metal mining at present is not a stand still here and all over the west. There is a few prospectors alive yet, who have hopes for a rise in the price of metal and a big discovery which will make the town boom again.

The Gould & Currey Mine west of Elkhorn one mile. Legend that old prospectors had sour-tough starter for making bread and hotcakes which gave the camp the nickname of "Sour-tough Gulch", later mine was called "Sour-tough Mine".

Electricity was brought to the Elkhorn Mill in 1896 from Jefferson City over the mountains. Where at that time the Helena Light and Railway had a hydro-electric plant operating but it only lasted for a few years. The first time electricity was in general use in Elkhorn was in 1918, when the East Butte brought the power line in from Boulder. The big transformer weighing about 30 tons was hauled into Elkhorn on a wagon specially built for it, pulled by 24 head of horses. The wagon still remains here in the lower part of town.

The railroad was taken out of Elkhorn in 1918 and only came up as far as Quartz Spring until 1930, when it was taken out of there. The present day road is partly on the old railroad bed.

The telephone and telegraph came in with the railroad, the last telephone in Elkhorn was in 1929, the line was abandoned. Last legal saloon in town was operated by Joe-Py-Golly in 1933, during prohibition there were several saloons in town.

The tailing dams below town and the one further down were hauled out during World War II for flux at the smelter in East Helena, Montana.

There wasn't a direct road from Elkhorn to Boulder until after the railroad came into Boulder, two years before it came to Elkhorn. They built a road direct over the mountains to Boulder a distance of eight miles, shorter by twelve miles than the present day road, which became necessary when automobiles came into general use. Before that they went on the Jefferson City road turning off on the Indian Road to Boulder. There was also a road cut over the mountains to Sandersburg, also the farmers had a road up from the Boulder valley almost the same way as the present day road, to sell their produce to the people of Elkhorn.

There is still R.F.D. mail route to Elkhorn three times a week.

"CEMETERY"

The Cemetery of Elkhorn is over the mountains south of Elkhorn. The first people buried in the graveyard are not known. The discoverer of the Elkhorn Mine, Mack S. Moran, is buried there, his grave is just to your left as you enter the cemetery. He died in 1918. The tombstone was placed on his grave in 1911 by the Elkhorn Mining Co. The present graveyard was started by the Elkhorn Mining Co. in 1896. The old part of the graveyard, which is in the trees to the west. Graves in the old part of the graveyard are no longer known to the names of them. In the graveyard and in the cemetery, the part in the valley, many graves of miners and prospectors have been found. One of the first graves was that of John S. Moran, who died in 1896. The cemetery was started in 1896. The cemetery was started in 1896.

about three years, from 1888 to 1891. Several families lost more than one child. At one time only two children under the age of five years were left in Elkhorn, after this epidemic.

The Cemetery was fenced by the Forest Service, there is only one other Cemetery within the National Forest and that is at Phillipsburg, Montana.

Under the direction of the Educational Director from the Montana State Training School at Boulder, the boys are clearing out sagebrush and rocks, repairing fences around graves and plan in time in marking all the graves which can be identified.

Perhaps ask why did they put the graveyard on a side of a mountain, no doubt all the ground in Elkhorn was owned by someone. It is a beautiful place for the cemetery as you can leave town here early in the morning and go up over the mountain and the sun is already shining on the graveyard.

We welcome you to visit our town, but remember that this "Historic Town" within the Deer Lodge National Forest belongs to several people, who are paying taxes on every house, stick, stone and blade of grass. Many of us have a heritage here, parents were born here and grandparents and great grandparents came when the town was founded. Let's keep it as long as we can, so our children can say my parents, grandparents, great grandparents and great great grandparents were here when it was founded.

PLEASE BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR MATCHES AND CIGARETTES AS YOU ARE GOING THRU the old buildings eg. ONE SPARK could just leave a BIG BLACK SCAR HERE.

Some families live here the year round, others have homes, where they spend the summer months, others weekends and vacations. All buildings that have locks on or boarded up are not to be entered, lot of them have "no trespassing" signs on, but others don't, we feel if we have no signs on our home, (as you don't put one on your home when you leave for the day or your vacation) if they are locked they should be safe. The old buildings with no doors or windows, stick you head in, take a look or walk thru, but do not rip a board off the floor, wall or ceiling or any fronts of buildings, time and weather takes its toll each year, there isn't enough boards in the town for each of you to take a souvenir home, so just remember someone else will be along to have a look too.