Inside
Results from San Bernardino
Issue Updates
Lost Mines on the Channel
Murphy’s Bar
Nope

Single word reply to your question.

Your question was “Do we have a ruling” wasn’t it?

We don’t have a ruling. We don’t know when there will be a ruling and we don’t know what that ruling will be.

On the following page we discuss the tentative ruling the judge issued which only covers two out of three of the lawsuits. The tentative ruling will likely be the final ruling, except the tentative ruling doesn’t speak to the CEQA case. We’ll really try to post the tentative ruling to the web site in the next day or two. We’ll also try to update the web site.

We probably watch too much TV. We thought there would be a little more fireworks to this, and it wouldn’t just end with a fizzle. If it really ends.

The judge is going to allow the Takings Case to move forward. He shot down the One Subject Case (Walker’s Case) and he gave no indication of how he’ll rule on CEQA.

That’s it in a nutshell.

Big Legal Bills on our desk

We’ve now got a little over $8,000 in legal bills to pay off so we’ll be selling claims reports for every state to try to earn enough money to pay off our existing legal bills.

The “Final” claims report provides you the full information on claims which were forfeited for the period 1 September 2016 to 1 September 2017. The “Advanced” Report provides information on claims which we believe have a good possibility of being forfeited. In a typical year about 50% of the claims on the Advanced Report end up actually being forfeited so you have to do your homework.

We’ll be updating our website this month, we’ll be adding a couple new maps and providing a link to the BLM GLO Records.

New Claims

This year we’re going to try to publish the Claims Report in e-book (Kindle) format which should allow you to download the specific county you want for a much lower price. We’re still trying to figure out how to do this with a report that requires so much data. If you’re good at publishing e-books we could really use some advice.

If you’re looking for new claims we recommend you try to file on them prior to January 1st. After that date you’ll pay an extra $75 (minimum) per filing thanks to the new California law which extracts yet more money out of miners pockets.

In this issue we publish the claim statistics for all the western states. We’ve been doing this every year since we started and each year we add more states. This year we’ve added Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico and Utah to the states in our database. We’re now tracking the status of over 250,000 mining claims.

Still Gold Out There

In this issue we also publish another story on the channel. Before the collapse of gold mining in California the majority of gold came from the channel and each month for several months running we’ve been providing more information on the channel.

We started this effort by focusing on how the channel enriched dredging rivers, but the more we look at historical reports, the more convinced we become that it would still be profitable to actually mine the channel using drift techniques.

What’s become apparent to us is the channel isn’t even close to mined out. A new section of channel was discovered just prior to war closure orders and was never developed. This section of channel was paying a quarter ounce per cubic yard.

The Cover

If you are a fan of mining history you can find a lot of historical photos and prints online. The picture on the cover is a picture which has a public license, meaning you can reuse it without copyright violation.

If you want to find some cool historical photos you can got to Bing (or Google) images and select the filter to the very right. Under license select a license which allows reuse, or select public domain.
Support the WMA

If you look at the claim ownership statistics you’ll see there are over 25,000 claim owners in the west. Now, the way we figure it is if everyone just sent us a buck we could pay off our legal bills and afford to pay for the appeal. For once we’d be out of debt. OK, if you’ve been reading the newsletter – then you know it’s free. If you’ve never contributed to us how about going to our website, clicking on the Pacific Crest Alliance (non-profit) link and donating a buck to the effort? If you donate $50 or more we’ll send you a WMA hat (shown below) and a mining T-shirt (shown below).

Since we returned from mining we’ve been working on the Claims Reports. The BLM closure data for 2017 is finally updated and we’ve posted some 2017 Final Reports for sale. We’ve also posted some versions of the 2018 Nevada Advanced Report for sale. If you’re not interested in commercial properties this series of reports probably isn’t for you. We’re working on trying to assemble some versions of the Nevada Advanced Report which will be more geared towards the small-scale miner. In particular we’re working on putting together a report for western Nevada which will include multiple counties bordering California, and will be affordable.

For WMA members we’ll begin sending out the 2018 Advanced Reports beginning about mid-December. For non-members we’ll begin selling a version in late January. Sometime this month we’ll begin posting Advanced Reports for Idaho, Oregon and Arizona.

Final Reports for 2018 won’t be available until late August / early September.

Join or buy something by going to:
https://www.sierrarivers.com

$19.95
Embroidered logo on Fruit of the Loom all cotton T-shirt. Pick and shovel, no ads, no logos, just a clean T-shirt to use out mining. Also available in black.

$19.95
Embroidered “Gold” logo with pick underneath on Fruit of the Loom all cotton T-shirt. No ads, no other logos. In grey or black.

$11.95
Mesh back velcro patch with WMA patch included.
This year we’re tracking 11 states for our annual claim information report.

This past year we added Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah and New Mexico to the states we track mining claim information.

The below table provides the numbers for mining claims throughout the West. In general there was an increase in claim ownership with Oregon seeing the biggest jump (percentage) in claims, followed by Idaho.

For the period September 1, 2016 to September 1, 2017 the number of federal mining claims increased by about 5,500 total. We’re glad to see California’s recent dip has been reversed and we saw an increase in claims which more than offset the annual closure of claims. This seems to indicate people are still optimistic about the chances of resuming mining sometime soon in California.

### Active Mining Claims by State

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<th>STATE</th>
<th>PLACER</th>
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3
2018 CLAIM STATISTICS

Claim Ownership by State

From a statistics standpoint we were curious about claim ownership. We’ve long known the majority of claim owners own more than a single claim, but we never ran the numbers to see how claims were distributed by state.

There are 25,642 claim owners across the West with the most claim owners being in California. This is somewhat unexpected as you’d believe the most claim owners would be in Nevada. Nevada has eight times the number of claims as California, yet only half the claim owners.

When you look at the distribution of claim ownership it becomes apparent claim distribution is strongly associated with small-scale mining. In states where there is the opportunity for a single person to run a dredge, highbanker, or open a pocket mine, there are more claim owners, and fewer claims per owner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>CLAIMOWNERS</th>
<th>AVG Claims Per Owner</th>
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<td>18.3</td>
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<td>WY</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>35.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>25642</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Nevada millions of tons of material must be moved to make a profit. This requires large capital investments and a lot of mining claims to support the operation. Consequently you see on average 60 claims per owner in Nevada versus 3 claims per owner in California.

Claim Abandonments / Forfeitures by State

For the period 1 September 2016 to 1 September 2017

The last statistic we follow is the number of claims each year which were closed or abandoned by their owners.

The table represents a fairly typical year, no real surprises.
The Tentative Ruling Background

After 5 years of anticipation, raising money, doing research and writing reports the best we can tell you is our long awaited trial just kind of fizzled out.

October 17th, in San Bernardino Superior Court, brought a few surprises, at least temporary surprises, but we have no final ruling on any of the issues.

The day prior, Judge Gilbert Ochoa released his preliminary ruling on the three cases.

One thing becomes clear reading the tentative ruling: these are very complex cases. Just sorting through the history of the cases takes 10 pages.

There is a side note in this tentative ruling worth mentioning. In November 2015 the Karuks dropped out of the CEQA lawsuit. We were never really sure what the final outcome of their petition to drop was, but now we are (Page 8 of tentative ruling and footnote).

In 2012 we dredgers filed the CEQA lawsuit claiming the preparation of the 2012 Suction Dredging Environmental Review violated the law. The Karuk tribe also challenged the EIR. Dredgers filed suit saying no further EIR should have been done, the law only required the 1994 EIR. The environmentalist groups filed suit claiming CDFW didn’t go far enough.

From 2013 to 2015 the environmentalists and the dredgers participated in a series of settlement discussions which eventually broke down.

Once the settlement discussions ended the dredgers petitioned to obtain a ruling on the federal preemption issue, in which the judge ruled in our favor subsequent to the Appeals court ruling in favor of Rinehart.

This ruling on preemption meant the State couldn’t ban the use of suction dredges and the path was cleared to begin legal dredging again across the state.

The environmentalists went running back to the California legislature and asked for new laws to ban dredging. In fact, as they admit, they asked the legislature to provide them the same relief they had asked the court to provide them.

Once the environmental groups had passed their new bill they told CDFW they were willing to drop their lawsuit in exchange for $350,000.

We believed this violated the U.S. Constitution and the California Constitution. Both constitutions require three separate, and equal, branches of government.

It appeared to us the environmentalists had deceived the court, and wasted all of our time, by seeking judicial remedy, while at the same time asking the legislature to make the exact same decision they were asking the court for.

In a normal world the Court should have exploded over this – at least in our opinion, but we’re not lawyers or judges.

The Court approved the settlement agreement in which California paid the environmentalists $350,000 in legal fees and even allowed them to reenter the court case should things not be going their way.

The Takings Case

A case we haven't covered much is a class action lawsuit by a group of claim owners we refer to as the "Takings Case."

After the 2012 regulations closed thousands of mining claims to dredging a group filed a lawsuit claiming the classification of their mining claims to "Class A - closed to dredging" meant the government had unconstitutionally taken property without compensation.

The State countered by saying mining claim owners know they must comply with regulations, and therefore there could never be a taking of property, even when the State hand rendered all economic value worthless.

ALL FIZZLE, NO SIZZLE

San Bernardino trial brings no resolution
The State's defense centered on a history of mining cases which held a state could regulate mining claims within their borders. Even if those claims were on federal land. The miners, in response, argued all property is subject to regulation, but federal mining claims should be protected under the 5th Amendment as any other property is and when the State makes regulations which destroy the value, then the owners should be compensated.

Takings is a very complex, and litigated area of law. It's very difficult to prove a taking of property and courts tend to favor the government (don't they always?).

During the settlement discussions the State proposed the Takings lawsuit could take 10 to 20 years and they would require an assessment of each and every mining claim prior to any court proceedings. A process which would be enormously expensive and would likely result in all existing claim owners being long since dead before justice could be obtained.

This is a natural defense of the State - drive us broke and wait us out.

What's interesting about the tentative ruling is it appears the judge has found some merit in the miner's claim of unconstitutional taking.

It appears to us the judge has fired a very powerful shot across the State's bow. One, that quite frankly, we thought was unlikely.

Now, it's still a very long way to go to obtain any sort of judicial relief, but essentially what the judge has told the State is there is a good probability the dredgers have a takings case.

So?

Well, what's the only thing which actually scares government (other than insurrection)? It's the thought of having to pay off thousands of people for unconstitutionally taking their property. A bill which could be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The One Subject Case

In a surprise to us, actually a complete reversal of what we expected (did we mention we’re not lawyers), the judge tentatively has ruled the passage of AB 120 and SB 1018 didn't violate the California Constitutions "One Subject Rule." (Article IV, § 9, California Constitution).

The dredgers had claimed the passage of AB 120 and SB 1018, which both expanded the definition of a dredge, extended the dredging ban indefinitely and changed substantial CEQA requirements, violated the one subject rule because they were passed as budget trailer bills.

The dredgers, and Keith Walker in particular, had brought suit claiming the annual budget bill can't be used to substantially change existing statutes.

Article IV, § 9 of the California Constitution provides:

“A statute shall embrace but one subject, which shall be expressed in its title. If a statute embraces a subject not expressed in its title, only the part not expressed is void. A statute may not be amended by reference to its title. A section of a statute may not be amended unless the section is re-enacted as amended.” (Cal. Const., Art. IV, § 9.)

Courts have recognized that “[t]he single subject clause has as its ‘primary and universally recognized purpose’ the prevention of log-rolling by the Legislature, i.e., combining several proposals in a single bill so that legislators, by combining their votes, obtain a majority for a measure which would not have been approved if divided into separate bills.”

The Court found the language of the two trailer bills did not substantially modify the existing statutes and therefore there was no violation of the single subject requirement.

The CEQA / APA Case

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and Administrative Procedures Act (ACA) case was filed by PLP / WMA in 2012 and has been entirely funded by the two groups. We currently split all legal cost 50/50.
In this case we challenged multiple aspects of the environmental impact report. Primarily we challenged the baseline they used to assess change from. This is a complicated case and has languished in the court for 5 years even though the law requires these type of cases to be at the top of the list for trial.

Under CEQA an EIR is final once its issued and can't be challenged except under extraordinary circumstances. The 1994 EIR, and the resultant regulations, constituted a final EIR. It was not challenged by the environmental groups in 1994 and was therefore final. Under the law it could not be challenged.

However, with every law, people find a way around it. The State, in the case known as Karuk I, claimed there was new information which was not known at the time of the 1994 EIR and therefore they needed to re-do the EIR.

This was false. In documents filed as part of the court case the State claimed there were 22 new studies regarding salmon which were significant new information, and this new information justified conducting a statewide EIR.

We reviewed every study the State claimed was new information and found not a single study added anything to the record which was not already known in 1994. Therefore it was illegal to prepare a new EIR.

The State responded that the Alameda Court in 2009 issued an order requiring a new EIR, but the Alameda Court simply required additional analysis of the impact of dredging on threatened and endangered fish in three rivers: the Klamath, Scott and Salmon. The order was limited in scope and did not require a statewide EIR.

We all know what happened once the statewide EIR was prepared.

Our primary argument in the CEQA case centers on the use of the wrong baseline. We argue all prior effects on the environment should have been part of the baseline. In other words we argue the prior 60 years of dredging was part of the environment and the effects of 150 years of mining should have been considered. They were not.

The judge, in his tentative ruling, said the CEQA/APA cases had not been thoroughly briefed and more information was needed.

Our lawyer only received 15 minutes to make his oral arguments on this case. Not nearly enough time to highlight what we believed were the fatal flaws in the EIR.

The State argues we are merely disgruntled over the results, and we are just unhappy with the science. This is a common argument because when challenging an EIR you can't argue the science was wrong. So if the judge believes we're just challenging the science - we lose.

Instead we argued the technical construction of the EIR in numerous court filings. With an administrative record (all the documents which make up the case) over 200,000 pages long it's unlikely the judge has the time or ability to review them all. Instead we merely reference to the more important ones in our briefing.

Our attorney, James Buchal believes it could be months before we have a final ruling. When the final ruling is issued we will have a final decision on all three matters before Judge Ochoa.

**Summary**

The Tentative Ruling provides a mixed bag for us. It appears to kill the One Subject challenge taking those cases off the table. At the same time the judge, in a surprise ruling, reinforces the strength of the Takings Case.

No action was taken in the Tentative Ruling on CEQA and there is no indication on how the judge will rule.

If we lose CEQA/ APA then we'll need to appeal. It’s likely the dredgers will win the takings argument, but this won't be a ruling (likely) it will instead just allow the case to go forward.

We believe in the final ruling the judge will stick with his tentative ruling on the one subject rule.

Right now we’re batting 50% and it's still far from over.
Who doesn't love a good lost mine story?

A rich mine, lost to history, worth untold millions in gold, just waiting to be found.

But, what if, you knew where this mine was? What would you do?

We tend to believe a lost mine is simply a hole in the ground and all you need to do is remove a few boards from the entrance and then go fill a few saddle bags with gold. The story is even better if you get shot somewhere on the way home and a couple generations of crazy treasure hunters keep looking for your mine.

Those are good stories, but often that lost mine is right in front of us.

A few years ago a friend sent me an old report prepared apparently to raise money for a drift mining venture near where I currently mine. I'm very familiar with the area and I love history, so he guessed right when he thought I'd be interested in the report.

Where he got it from I don't know, but I do know there are a great many miners out there who are also collectors of historical mining documents, maps and relics. He's one of them.

I believe the report was prepared in the either the 1930's or the 1940's. The report mentions the closing of drift mines in World War I, but doesn't mention anything about closures due to the World War II Order (Rule L-208) which leads you to a time period between the end of World War I (1919) and the closure order (1942).

This places the author, who states he is the son of a mining engineer, with first hand knowledge of operating drift mines. And, as the son of a mining engineer with over forty years experience in the area, he has extensive historical knowledge of drift mining operations. No where on the report is the name of the author.

Fundamentally we're dredgers, but there's few of us who wouldn't hang up the dredge and switch to drift mining - if it was feasible.

Interestingly, the author's father was the mine engineer for a long-running profitable drift mine I've been trying to find for a couple of years. For several summers I spent days searching an area for the remains of a drift mine which operated for over thirty years, often running two shifts of miners and operating 12 months a year. I thought if I could ever find the mine the tailing pile would be really rich. From historical reports I had calculated there would be over $10 million in gold lost in the tailings and this was based on a conservative estimate of the mine losing only 10% of gold through the sluice. Most drift mines lost far more than that, but if the mine only lost 10% there was an awful lot of gold in those tailings.

I never found it. I knew from my research the mine was located near an old town which had switched names from the original, to a new name and the location descriptions told me where it should be, but it wasn't.

I soon began to suspect the road it was on wasn't the original road. At some point in history the road had moved and consequently the town was somewhere else. Find the town, find the mine.

After a few summers of looking I gave up on it. Last summer I spent some time at the Recorder's office copying some location documents hoping that would lead me to the mine. The documents were of little help.

The location was based off the town site I couldn't find.

So it was with some interest I read the Report. Knowing his father was the chief engineer of one of the richest mines of the channel, and knowing the author had first hand experience in these mines I read the Report closely looking for clues.

It wasn't exactly a lost mine. I knew exactly where he was proposing to open a drift mine. I thought it was mined out.

So did everyone else.

It wasn't.

In the late 1800's, after the close of the hydraulic mines, the miners began drifting which is just following the bedrock. The hydraulic mines operated by washing the overburden away from the buried channel to reach the rich gravel near the bedrock. Drift mines operated by digging tunnels into the channel and only working the bedrock, leaving hundreds of feet of overburden overhead.

The location and characteristics of the channel were well known and most of the channel was drifted out over the span of fifty years.
Except, one day... someone made a mistake. A rather expensive mistake, but a common one. They missed the channel.

If you know the history of drift mining you know there are a lot of expensive tunnels out there which missed the channel. They came in too high, too low, or just didn't hit it. After a lot of money thrown down a black hole, they abandoned the tunnel.

So apparently one day they're digging a 2400 foot tunnel to hit the channel and miscalculated where the channel was. They went too far and hit a lava wall.

Thinking they were still some distance away they persisted with their tunnel and broke through the lava wall into the channel, except it wasn't the channel, it was an entirely undiscovered channel.

It was a parallel channel to the rich channel which had been mined for so long. Completely unknown to both the hydraulic miners and the historic drift miners. An entirely new, undiscovered channel which they called the back channel.

For years I had heard the terms front channel and back channel in reports. This was the first report which described what they were. Apparently for an extensive period of time when the Tertiary Rivers were live and lava flows were occuring a flow blocked the original rich channel, rivers being what they are sought a way around the blockage and created a new, parallel channel and began laying down new gravel, and more gold.

It was this back channel which was not worked out, and there was a whole lot of it when the wars closed down the mines.

After the war there were several attempts to re-open the existing drifts, but none succeeded and the old drift mines were lost to history.

In the Report the author argued at least six contiguous blocks of claims (120 acres) would be required to make a run at the back channel profitable.

OK, interesting, and I filed that away because I knew where this block of property was. Unknown to the existing claim owners who were in the canyon mining a few pennyweight a day, they were located on millions of dollars of gold - it was just under their feet.

Last year the entire block of claims, and more, became available after being abandoned by several claim holders who were dredging in the canyon.

The author, who's family offered $350,000 (in todays dollars) for a 20 acre claim, would today be able to pick up the whole block for merely the cost of filing the claim documents.

Yeah, it's a lost and found mine.

So, what do you do with it? Can you open a drift mine in California? Probably not, but certainly the gold is there.

According to the author only a 300 yard tunnel is required to reach the channel and he's identified the exact location the tunnel should go in.

The author additionally provided the average yield from the drift mines located in the same area and stated 1/4 ounce per cubic yard was the average. The channel he proposes working is 5,000 feet long and 200' wide. You can do the math.

So, for the price of a 1500' tunnel the return would be untold millions.

Just imagine if these claims weren't located in California. Instead of a few dredgers scraping out a few pennyweight you could open an actual mine and recover millions.

I haven't given up on the thought yet. Those claims are still lying fallow like a field waiting for spring. That lost mine is still out there, and I still think there's a huge tailing pile waiting for me, if I can just find the damned town. Yeah - it's not that easy. Not like there's big forest service markers saying "This was the site of ...." 

At heart we're all prospectors and the thought of even owning a mining claim with a lot of gold under your feet is pretty cool. Maybe someday California will go broke, people will rise up and throw out all the laws which drove it broke and the mines will resume. On that day my great grandchildren will be rich.

Until then I just hope they remember to pay the annual maintenance fees.
We tend to work in seasons.

If you’re a miner you have mining season, winter, pre-mining season and then mining season. There’s a short period in there called hunting season which fills a gap between mining season and winter.

To be honest I’ve lost interest in football. It’s not necessarily the “protests” by a bunch of millionaire prima donnas, but the game was losing my interest well before that.

When I grew up you knew the names of the players on a team. Now it’s just a deck of playing cards which are reshuffled every year. How do you get behind a team of mercenaries?

No offense to mercenaries.

Seasons. Will there be a dredging season next year?

That depends on two things. Rinehart and CEQA.

The Takings Case has no bearing on whether we’ll ever be able to dredge again. It’s a good case and I’m glad to see the judge agreeing with the dredgers who said the government owes them money for the loss of value of their claims. But, the writing is on the wall. The State will drag that case out for the next 100 years. Even if tomorrow the State decided they’ll pay every claim owner $20,000 each it still won’t affect dredging season.

The loss on the Single Subject Case doesn’t hurt us much. A win would have been a big deal, but it wouldn’t have changed the regulations or the EIR. A win would have overturned AB 120 and SB 1018, but more importantly it would have prevented the environmentalists from doing it again. That door is now wide open.

We have two cases we must win. Rinehart and CEQA.

If Rinehart isn’t picked up by the U.S. Supreme Court, then the California Supreme Court’s ruling stands - which says the State can ban anything they want, for any reason they want. If the ruling stands then the State need not ever re-open dredging. Why would they? There is no legal reason for them to, and it certainly appears environmentalists and crazies run California. Do you think the legislature would take any action to restore dredging? Yeah, me neither.

CEQA matters because even if Rinehart wins, the State clearly has the authority to regulate the environmental effects of mining. Those regulations need to be based on something, and the Suction Dredge EIR is what they’re based on.

So, it still ain’t over. Hang in there.
Flanagan, the fifth generation Californian, can look down on Okies because his 20 year old draft dodger ancestor headed to California to get drunk and find gold.

But, never let it be said Bob Flanagan, the downstream claim owner from me, would intentionally insult an Okie and to prove how attuned he is to cultural sensitivities he tells Rocky he shouldn’t call people Okies.

Rocky Stone, the bartender, apparently isn’t attuned at all to the nuances of California cultural hierarchy.

"You can’t use that word." Flanagan says as he puts his beer bottle back on the bar and picks at the label.

"Damned?" Rocky asks.

"No, the "O" word." Flanagan replies.

"Okie?"

"Right. We can’t say that word because it’s insensitive to immigrants."

"Mexicans don’t like to be called Okies?" Rocky asks.

"No, Okies don’t like to be called Okies." Flanagan replies.

"Wait," Rocky says as he grabs a bar napkin and a pen, "I need to add the "O" word, to the "N", "P", "Q" and "D" words which I can’t say. I run a bar after all and I can’t be offending customers, at least not paying customers."

"Yeah, I heard they renamed the Digger Pine to the scrappy pine or something, but I didn’t know we had to say "D word" instead of Digger." I said.

"I meant D for Dumb ass." Rocky says. "But this list leaves me very few words I can use in conversation with you two."

Rocky gets this way as winter starts to settle in. The people who drag their RVs up to the lake have slowed to a trickle, there’s no snow for snowmobilers and even the undocumented dredgers have quit for the season. Which pretty much leaves Flanagan and I as the lone patrons of Murphy’s Bar.

Being on the short list of customers at the Bar doesn’t garner us as much special treatment as you may think. Sometimes it seems as if he’d rather we not stop by at all, but this time of year the hunters have cleared out and at the end of each dredging season Flanagan wants to go looking for new dredging areas.

So naturally we meet up at Murphy’s Bar to head out and look for new claims.
For those of you who are, shall we say more seasoned miners, you know a bar is a perfectly logical place to meet up and have a couple of beers prior to heading into some rugged canyons. Beer doesn’t really affect your balance much at our age.

Flanagan has this idea if we move every year it will be harder for Fish and Game cops to bust us.

I’ve argued the town of Hard Rock is a sanctuary town, and therefore the Fish and Game cops can’t ask us about our legal status if they catch us dredging. I prefer to stay where we’re at, but winter is slow, so I’m willing to head into some place new and do a little sampling.

Flanagan pulls out his map and opens it on the bar.

Bob Flanagan is the type who spends his time not dredging, doing research on dredging, reading books on dredging and reading maps on dredging locations.

I spend my time not dredging, well, not dredging.

For some reason a small ravine the other side of the ridge from Starvation Gulch, named Preacher Ravine, has got his interest.

From the map Preacher Ravine doesn’t look so great for dredging, but Flanagan said the ravine cut the channel and he’s heard there’s big nuggets in there.

This doesn’t explain why no one else has bothered to put a claim on it. This point is lost on Flanagan once he’s on the hunt.

“I’ve spent three weeks researching the area. I went to the state archives and spent two days pulling mining records. I’ve read every report I can find.” Flanagan says as Rocky and I watch him circle areas on the map.

“There was a big hydraulic mine up here called the Rex, and then up until 1930 there were two drift mines on these side ravines.”

Flanagan draws another circle.

“I spent 4 hours on Google Earth last night looking at imagery and it looks like all the tailings from these mines went down Preacher Ravine.”

“Right.” I say and nod my head at Rocky for another beer. No need to say anything, he knows my bottle is empty.

Flanagan pulls out a couple of sketch maps from his pack and lays them on the bar next to the map.

“I pulled these maps from Lindgren’s report on the tertiary channels. You can see the channel is cut almost in half by Preacher Ravine, so for thousands of years gold has been eroding into the Ravine.”

Rocky leans over the bar and looks at the map.

“That’s Preacher Ravine?” He asks pointing to one of Flanagan’s circles.

“Might be.” Flanagan says realizing Rocky might be looking at claim jumping him. I’m not sure it’s claim jumping though if there’s not a claim there.

“Yeah, I’ve heard about that.” He says.

“How?” Flanagan replies.

“I run a bar in mining country, how do you think I hear things?” Rocky responds.

Rocky reaches in back of the cash register and pulls out what looks to be a quarter ounce nugget.

“Yeah, some folks were in here a couple weeks ago, they ran up a pretty good bar tab and didn’t have any cash so I took a nugget as payment.”

“Wait,” I say, “You let someone run up a bar tab and it wasn’t us?”

“They weren’t from around here so I figured they either had cash or credit card, and they damned sure didn’t look like miners, so yeah, I let them run up a tab.”

“And they didn’t have any money?” I ask.

“No but they had a lot of gold they said they took from Preacher Ravine.”

Flanagan’s jaw drops. His weeks of research shot down in flames.

“Rocky says, “Some club filed claims in there and these guys came up for the weekend. They had a lot of gold.”

“Damned Okies.” Flanagan says as he folds up his map and orders another beer.
Weird things happen in the Sierras and this story is short without any embellishment. Far be it from me to add decorations to a story.

It could have been a pine cone dropping. It was the time of the year when the squirrels were cutting the green pine cones from the branches and letting them drop to the ground where they would eat the seeds.

Sugar pine cones can be huge, and heavy, when they’re green.

So, it could have been a pine cone dropping.

I mine up pretty high in the Sierras and camp off a seldom used road. If a couple of four wheelers drive down it during a day, then it’s a busy day, but by evening there’s no one on the road. My camp is well off the road, but you can still hear the engine noise of trucks or ATVs.

Most nights I’m 12 miles from the nearest human being – at least by road. I suppose as the crow flies there might be someone over the next ridge, but it would be a pretty tough walk to get there.

I had just pounded out a sample of quartz and was panning out the gold (yeah, it was a really nice sample – don’t ask). If you’ve had a nice pan of gold you know how you get focused on what you’re doing.

So I’m looking at a really nice pan – if you know what I mean, completely focused on what I’m doing when I hear a rock hit the dirt about 20 yards from me.

Near where I’m camping there is the edge of a hydraulic pit so the unmined ground provides a sort of cliff. It’s about 50 foot higher than the mined ground and covered in pines.

It sounded like a big rock. Not a rock which slid down the face, because there aren’t any in the face, it’s all dirt. No, it sounded like a big rock. But, I admit it could have been a pine cone.

My first thought was “Ah, crap, here we go again.”

My second thought was “There’s a lot of gold in this pan.” So I went back to panning and ignored it.

A few minutes later the same sound again, but the rock was chucked a little further this time.

That got my attention. I set the pan down got up and walked over to the edge of the ravine and looked at the hill – nothing. I stood there for some minutes believing it was another miner who camped in the area trying to play a joke. That’s pretty risky business as he knew most of the miners in the area had some type of firearm and the normal response to rocks being thrown off a cliff might be to put some 40 caliber back up that way.

Not seeing anything I sat back down and began panning again.

From about 75 yards away I hear a loud “tree knock.” I know, you’re thinking I’ve been watching too many of these bigfoot reality shows, but that’s what I heard. I’m just reporting the facts here.

Well, that definitely wasn’t a pine cone.

By now it’s getting towards sunset, but it’s still light enough to see. I’m thinking by now it’s just all too staged, but I’m wondering how the other miner managed to slip through the dry woods without making any noise to get from where the rocks were thrown to where the knock came from.

I go back to panning after standing there for a few minutes. Fight or flight? Third option, get the gold out of the pan.

Yeah, you know what happens next. A third rock.

It’s possible it was all pine cones.

A few days later another miner who camps at the same spot returned. I told him the story.

Without blinking he just says, “Ignore it, it goes away.”

He then tells me a story of the exact same thing happening to him a few years earlier. He also tells me he’s heard loud screams at night.

A few days later I stop in to see some other miners at a nearby camp. Just to say hi and have a beer with them. Without me saying a word about my pine cone experience they tell me about loud screams they’ve heard in the area at night.

I listen without saying anything as they begin to tell me about the weird things they’ve heard.

It might just all be pine cones, and I admit we could all just be crazy miners.
When you’ve got a database with over a quarter million claims in it you can do some fun stuff with the data. For example we’ve found the vast majority of people actually name their claims something unique.

But, if you’re wondering the most popular name for a mining claim across the west is...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of Claims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last Chance</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Eagle</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucky Strike</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Jay</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Star</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bonanza</td>
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<td>Ruby</td>
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<td>Blue Bell</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold King</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

There’s a lot of unique names out there, or perhaps unusual, some of which we’re surprised BLM allowed to be filed as they’re certain to offend someone.

We were going to list some of those names, but decided against it – our better judgment stepping in on this one.

Because we cover over a quarter million claims across all the states we can see who owns what claims, and how many they own by State, County or Township.

So who owns the most claims across the West?

No surprise – It’s Newmont with over 16,200 total claims. How would you like to be the guy responsible for keeping track of all those and preparing the annual maintenance filings.

Second biggest claim holder? Yeah, this one is a bit of a surprise, at least to us – it’s Uranium One with 6,100 federal mining claims. The name may ring a bell as it’s come up in association with the Russian / Clinton scandal and the transfer of Uranium assets to Russia.

All told there are 56 companies who own more than 1,000 mining claims each.

Later in the newsletter we print some other statistics, but perhaps the most interesting one is on claim ownership. California has the most claim owners – more than any other state, yet the average number of claims held per owner (about 3) is the fewest of any state – other than Oregon.

California is definitely a small-scale mining state.

We’ve been curious about another thing. Where the Mother Lode really is so we’ve been plotting the locations of lode mines on Arc GIS. We’ll probably post this map soon, but right now it really appears THE Mother Lode is centered right on the town of Alleghany. This is based on plotting the density of lode claims across the Sierras.

All that placer gold came from somewhere – so we believe there is a well defined belt of quartz out there somewhere. Plotting all the lode mines will help us visualize how this belt ran.
When in Downieville, stay where the miners stay at the Downieville River Inn. With room sizes and small cabins to meet your needs you can stay for a night or a month. Conveniently located just steps from the courthouse you can do your claims research or annual filings within minutes. The Inn is located just steps from the Yuba River and includes a heated swimming pool and rooms with kitchenettes for long term stays.

Ask for the “Miners Rate” to receive a discount for your room rate.

Call Diane at (530) 289-3308