

ORE LORE

Town of Horsefly owes birth to Cariboo gold rush in mid-1800s

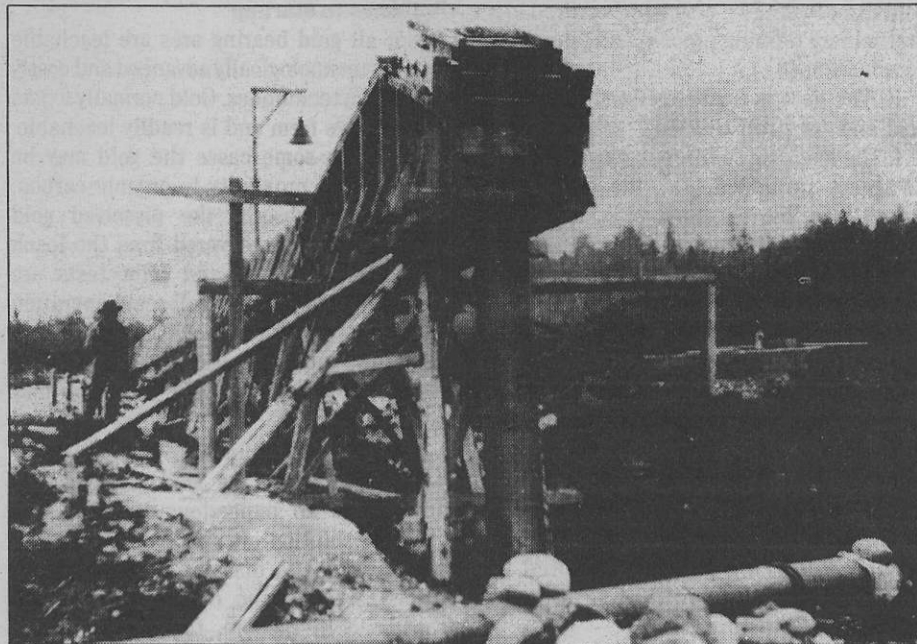
Gold! This magic word drew many a man west and then north, causing them to leave their families and steady jobs to risk hardship, starvation, and physical danger—all for that elusive yellow metal. Some, a very few, found the gold and made fortunes in 1849 in California and in 1859-62 in the Cariboo area of British Columbia.

Early discovery of gold in British Columbia centered on the bars of the Fraser River. Soon these bars became overpopulated and worked out, so the gold seekers moved ever further north, making their way along the precipitous cliffs above the Fraser.

Rumors began flying that on the Fraser, on a river further north—the Horsefly—there was evidence of blue clay, which was similar to the stratification some of the prospectors had found in California at the sites of the large lodes. Sometimes called the Blue Lead (a rich deposit of gold well-known in California), the gold in the Horsefly River was said to present the same characteristics.

The first gold found in the Cariboo is verified as being in the Horsefly River in 1859. But there is a question as to which party was the first to arrive at the river in that important summer. One record says a party consisting of H.O. Bowe and others made a discovery of gold about 10 miles above the mouth of the Horsefly River in April 1859. The following month (whether it was May is uncertain) another party, including John McLean, also found gold at the same point. Mr. McLean may be the same man who joined Peter Curran Dunlevey's party and discovered gold on the river with him.

Mr. Dunlevey, a native of America, was one of the many miners to move further north seeking gold. He followed Aaron Post to the mouth of the Chilcotin River, and it was here that he and his men met an Indian, Tomaah, a runner for the Hudson Bay Co.



Hydraulic elevator at Ward's Mine on the Horsefly River, Horsefly, British Columbia. R.T. Ward took over the claims, known as the Horsefly Gold Mining Co. Ltd., in 1891.

who was on his way to Fort Alexandria.

When Tomaah learned that the men sought gold, he told them of a river northeast of Lac La Hache where there was much gold. Another Indian, Baptiste, led the party to where the present town of Horsefly is located. They are credited with the first discovery of gold in the Cariboo. Only 12 hours later another party arrived. There are accounts of at least four groups finding gold in the Horsefly River in that first year, 1859.

At about the same time as Mr. Dunlevey arrived, other men continued up the Fraser River to the Quesnel River. Ben MacDonald was the first to find gold here, also in 1859.

From the Horsefly River, men went north to Keithley and Antler Creeks, and reached Barkerville, making rich strikes there in 1861.

Many miners remained in Horsefly rather than moving on north. For many years they

were content with small placer operations. Naturally a town grew to meet their needs. The cluster of log cabins included hotels, a store post office, and, it is said, even a house of ill repute.

The population was largely transient, as miners came and went through the area from 1860 to about 1884. In 1878, a Report of the Bureau of Mines reports, "I have also visited the Horsefly Country and found about 40 men there, one-half the number being white men. Nearly all the Chinamen are in one claim, which is paying well."

Thaddeus Harper obtained sizable leases in the area in 1884, and later started the first hydraulic mine in the area, and with it, sparked a second gold rush in Horsefly in 1887.

The Harper brothers, Jerome and Thaddeus, were interested in mining and owned several claims throughout the Cariboo. They also did much to shape the ranching industry in this part of the country.

The brothers were born in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, Jerome in 1826 and Thaddeus in 1829. The first mention of the Harpers in British Columbia is in 1859 when Jerome was reportedly operating a sawmill on Long Flats near Yale.

From 1861 until 1888, the Harpers acquired vast amount of land in British Columbia—a total of approximately 38,572 acres. Much of this land was used for the cattle importing business which Jerome began in the 1860s. Cattle was purchased in Washington and Oregon during the winter and held until spring. In May, Jerome would start a drive of about 400 head of steers, 50 head of milk cows, and 50 head of horses, destined for Barkerville. Usually 1,400 head would be used in a season to feed the miners living in Barkerville.

In 1870, Jerome became ill and went to California, where he died four years later.

By the late 1870s, the cattle industry was in a depressed state so Thaddeus turned his attention to mining. A report in 1888 said,

"Mr. Harper has not met with the success anticipated, but Dan McCullum and Co. have opened a claim five miles below with fair prospects."

The Harper claim, which was known as Harper's Camp, was worked extensively for a time, then sold or leased to R.T. Ward in 1891. It is not known if Thaddeus Harper remained in the area, but he was known to have suffered an accident with a horse, perhaps in Lac La Hache, and died in Victoria in 1898.

Mr. Ward took over the operation of Harper's holdings in 1891, known as the Horsefly Gold Mining Co. Ltd. The Miocene Gravel Mining Co. Ltd., run by Senator R.H. Campbell, was also operating in Horsefly. In addition, Dan McCullum was working a small hydraulic operation called the Discovery Co. about five miles down Horsefly River from Harper's Camp.

In 1893 the Minister of Mines reports that John B. Hobson, a noted mining engineer, "took over the Horsefly Hydraulic Mining Co. with 30 whites and 30 Japanese." It was reported that in the years 1894-96 Mr. Hobson recovered \$150,000 in gold. After that, increasing difficulty in breaking the ore up proved to be too expensive.

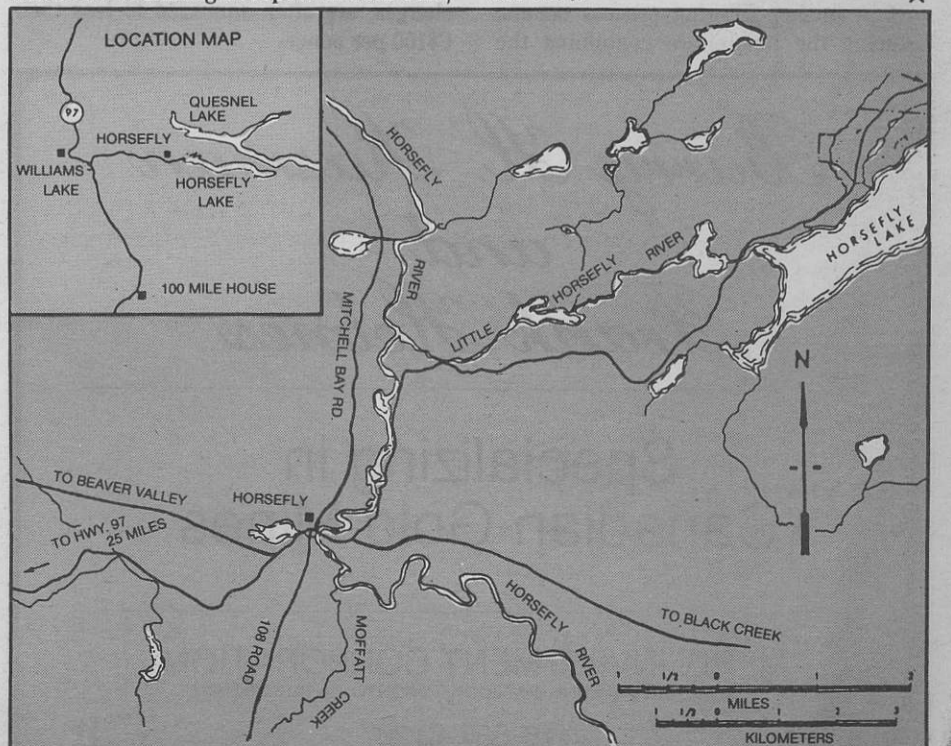
Other operations in Horsefly were also having their difficulties. The Miocene shaft was flooded at the depth of 500 feet, killing some miners. Worst of all, no gold was ever found in that shaft. In 1902 the paystreak of the Horsefly Gold Mining Co. was exhausted and mining ceased. But Mr. Hobson continued his activities on property previously acquired some 35 miles from the site of the Horsefly Mine—namely the Bullion pit near the present town of Likely.

Hard times followed, as in many other mining towns worldwide after the gold ran out. But many of the early pioneers stayed on, ranching, trapping, and doing anything they could find to do. It did not cost much to live in this country, but it was very difficult to earn the little bit that was needed. Today, mining continues in the area.

Most recently, Mt. Calvary Resources Ltd. has begun exploration on their property which lies on the Cariboo-Quesnel Gold Belt covering an area that includes the town of Likely. Their joint venture partner is Carolin Mines Ltd. Dome Mines has discovered the QR deposit, with two million tons of ore grading 0.2 ounces of gold per ton. Tillicum Gold Mines Ltd. is also involved in the area. Recent estimates indicate that at least 100 junior, major, and independent exploration companies will be exploring over 5,000 mineral claims for precious metals in the Horsefly area in 1984.

These companies are proving there's still gold in them thar hills.

We are thankful to the Horsefly Historical Society for information and art work contained in this article. A booklet on the history of Horsefly may be ordered from Mrs. Roger Erickson, Box 148, Horsefly, British Columbia VOL 1L0, telephone 604-620-3304.



The historic mining town of Horsefly lies in south central British Columbia. Gold was first discovered

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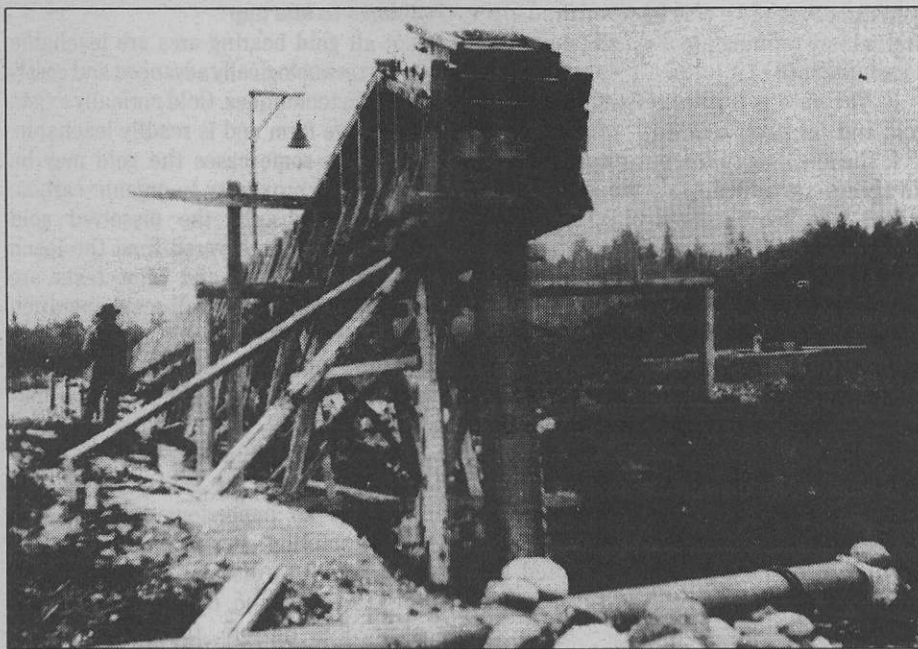
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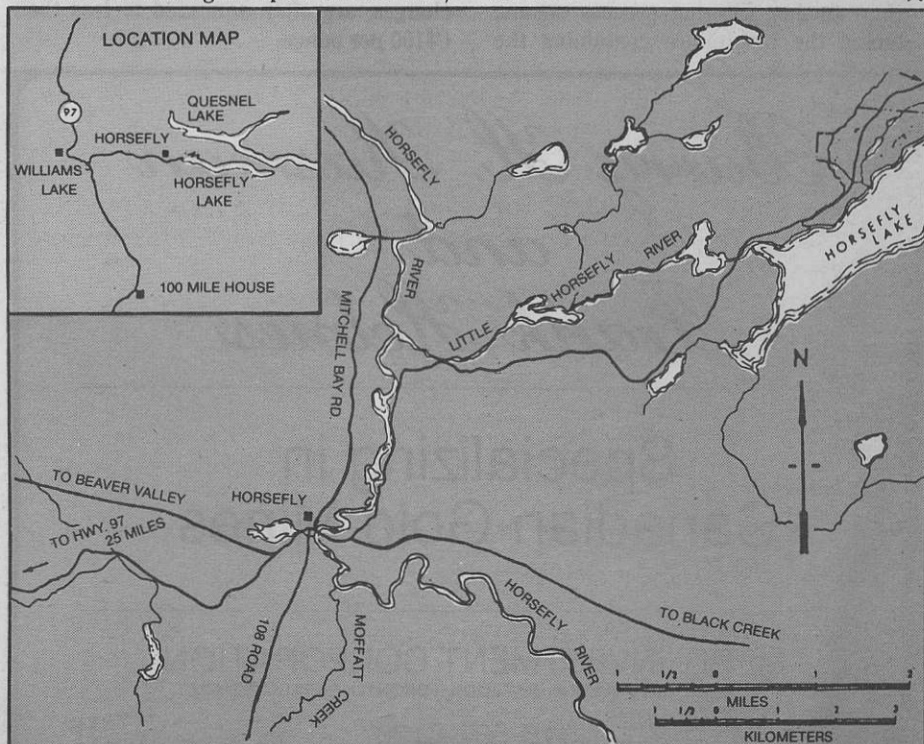
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The historic mining town of Horsefly lies in south central British Columbia. Gold was first discovered near here in 1859, sparking a rush of prospectors into the Cariboo district.