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Mining started in the Plumas-Eureka area in the spring of 1851, when nine prospectors moved down Jamison Creek looking for new gold fields. While they were camped at the foot of Gold Mountain—now Eureka Peak—a few climbed up and found a rich quartz outcropping. So the prospectors and their friends formed the original 36-member Eureka Company to mine and process the gold.



The Plumas Eureka Company

A number of other small mining companies sprang up to work the rich veins of the area, but the easily worked deposits were soon gone. The companies found that a great deal of capital would be required to buy mining machinery, dig tunnels, construct flumes, and do all the other things necessary to extract and process the less accessible ore. In 1871 a group of British investors, who had already formed a company to mine the Sierra Buttes, founded the Plumas Eureka Company to consolidate the small claims and begin mining on a businesslike basis.

During their first two years of operations, the British owners poured money for development into their new enterprise. They built a new mill to replace two old mills, enlarged and improved tunnels, and bought new extraction machinery. Their investment paid off; by 1881 the mine had more than repaid their original investment, and it continued to operate profitably for another twenty years. However, by 1890 the quality and quantity of ore had begun to decline, and in the early 1900s the company sold the property.

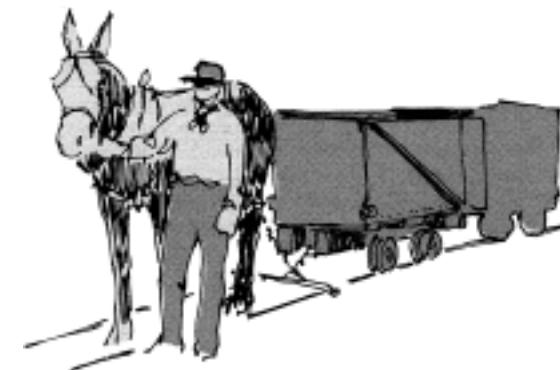
When mining in this area ceased for good in the 1940s, over \$8 million in gold had been taken from the 65 miles of tunnels in Eureka Peak.

Mine Operations

The Plumas-Eureka Mine was in many ways a typical hardrock operation. Its tunnels followed the quartz veins—sometimes several feet wide, sometimes only a few inches—as they meandered through the mountain. Most of the ore was worth only about \$8 per ton. The British company's efficient management usually kept extraction costs well below that amount, so that the mine showed a profit.

Black powder and then dynamite were used to blast the ore loose. Ore that was considered rich enough to be worth processing first went through mechanical crushers, then through the stamps. The fine white sand left from this operation was processed with mercury or chlorine so a chemical reaction could extract the gold.

In 1888, 173 men worked in the mine, and 12 more had jobs in the mill. Many more people made a living by reprocessing the mill tailings or working the rejected ore.



POWDER HOUSE Built of nonflammable material a safe distance from the mine entrances and structures, the powder house first stored black powder and then dynamite.



OVERHEAD TRAM Ore was brought from tunnels higher up on the 7,447-foot mountain partly by means of this gravity-powered tram. In 1888 there were three trams in use, two 1,700 feet long and the third 800 feet. Returning ore buckets sometimes carried miners up the mountainside, and the tram also once served as a ski lift.

MOHAWK MILL Built in 1878 at a cost of around \$50,000, the Mohawk was the second and lower mill built by the Plumas Eureka Company. The ore came to a spot behind and above the mill. If it was worth processing, it entered the mill at the top and crushers reduced it to marble-sized pieces before it reached the stamps.

The Mohawk Mill had 20 stamps operating in December of 1878 and 60 stamps by 1880—their slamming could be heard for miles up and down the canyons. Weighing from 600 to 950 pounds, they were raised and dropped a distance of 8 1/2 inches about 80 times per minute, crushing the ore to a fine white sand. Each stamp could crush 2 1/2 tons of ore—a small dump truck load—every 24 hours.

Two batteries of the stamps are still in place; many of the others went to process the ore of the nearby Jamison Mine. A partial restoration of the Mohawk Mill was completed in 1962 at a cost of \$50,000.



Mohawk Mill

EUREKA TUNNEL Started in 1876 to tap the quartz vein at a lower level and provide a means of bringing ore from the upper workings, by 1888 the Eureka Tunnel was over 6,000 feet long and averaged 6 feet wide. The tunnels were drilled at a very slight incline so that a minimum of mule power—mules were preferred to horses in the mines because of the horses' habit of throwing up their heads when startled and hitting them on the roof—was required to move the ore carts, each of which carried around a ton, to the mill hoppers.

STABLE The mine superintendent's personal horse as well as the company horses were kept here. It was restored in 1969 and now houses machinery from the mines.

UTILITY BUILDING This building, probably used for offices as well as storage, was originally built on loose rocks at ground level. This type of foundation, combined with the area's heavy snows, explains the rapid deterioration and disappearance of the old mine buildings. One room was used for assaying; the assay equipment in the museum came from here.



Utility Building

BLACKSMITH SHOP An important man in the mining community, the blacksmith manufactured and repaired all sorts of iron tools and implements—ore buckets, horseshoes, kitchen tools, and wagon and machinery parts. He worked the huge bellows by hand to force air across the coals, creating temperatures high enough to melt iron. The tire shrinker in front of the shop was used to fit steel wagon rims. The mill's original blacksmith shop was near the stamp mill; this one, moved from the Gaston Ranch in 1961, is approximately the same age and style.



Stable

CHILI WHEELS Before the advent of more sophisticated machinery, miners used these wheels to crush gold-bearing quartz. Called Chili wheels because the idea was brought to the California gold fields by Chilean miners, these were probably around 9 feet in diameter when new; they wore down rapidly with heavy use.



Blacksmith Shop

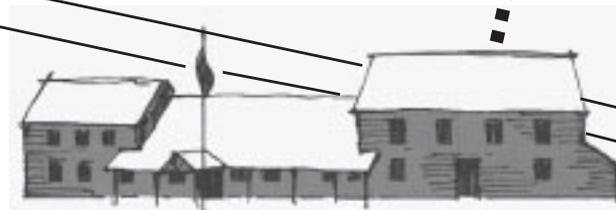


Chili Wheels

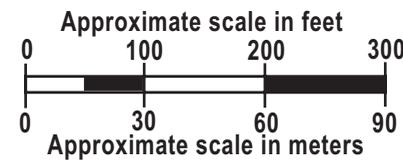
MORIARITY HOUSE From 1896 to 1917, this house was the home of John and Edna Moriarity and their eight children. The house consisted of a kitchen, parlor, bedroom and dining room. Due to its small size, the children would climb a ladder from the parlor to the attic to sleep each night.



Moriarity House



Bunkhouse (Park Headquarters and Museum)



To Eureka Tunnel

To Campground

To Campground and Eureka Tunnel

To Graeagle

BUNKHOUSE Some of the miners lived in the bunkhouse that now houses the museum, where mining artifacts are displayed. When this building was restored in 1973, traces were uncovered of several fires that the stovepipes had started in the roof. The basement of the bunkhouse now houses a small theater for programs, movies, and slide shows on the cultural and natural history of the park.