

THE HUNT FOR GOLD - TEXADA'S EARLY PROSPECTORS

Harry Trim's discovery of a rich iron ore deposit in 1871 propelled Texada into international prominence, luring prospectors from far and wide. Cornwall native Alfred Gill found gold in 1876 and Nanaimo's Raper cousins successfully worked their Little Billie claim in 1880.

The news was out and the race was on! By 1899, for example, over 150 mining claims had been staked on Texada.

Many prospectors were veterans of the gold rushes in California, Australia and BC's Cariboo, but many were novices. Gold-seekers scrambled to find any available transportation to the island. Texada was a rough place to traverse but old-timers said the gold deposits on this island were the richest ever seen.

Heather Harbord (in *Texada Tapestry*) describes the arrivals:

Full of hope they came, packs a-jangle with tin plates, hammers, chisels, axes and gold pans, their moleskin pants held up by sturdy leather braces over warm, long-wearing, Stanfield's woollen underwear.

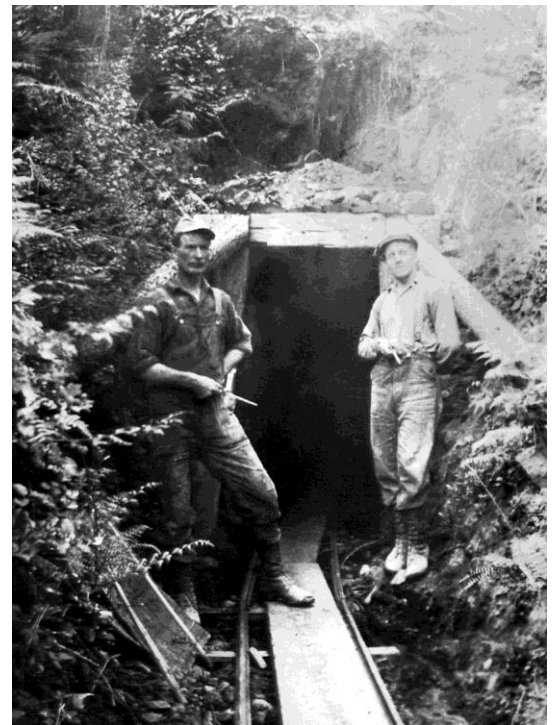
The names given to their claims reflected the prospectors' personalities and their dreams of wealth: Gold Bug, Hidden Treasure, Blue Bell, Unicorn, Silver Tip, Charles Dickens, Margery, Paris, Yellow Jacket.

Successful strikes seemed plentiful such as the 2-foot wide gold seam at Rapers' Nutcracker claim or the 9-foot long vein found in 1887 by Calvin Miller at the Golden Slipper. In 1889 Hugh Kirk found a nugget "as large as a goose egg."

Very few were as lucky as Walter Planta. In 1901, while eating lunch, Planta discovered a 7-foot long gold seam when he casually pulled aside some moss covering a rock!

Not all stories ended happily, however. Most prospectors grew old before they grew rich. Hugh Kirk's skeleton was discovered in 1894 beside his simple cabin. The story of Charlie Anderson (the "Lucky Swede") tells of a man who became a millionaire in the Klondike gold rush of 1896 only to lose it all. He relocated to Texada to continue his hunt for gold but died here in poverty.

Prospecting was a tough life and, for all the effort, luck could be good or bad. Despite this, men kept searching. As pioneer Texada prospector Ed Russ maintained, "It isn't the gold but the finding of it that matters."



Peter Lock

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