

## **Cherokee**

On a knoll half way between Oroville and Paradise stands the near-ghost town of Cherokee. This area is known as one of the most colorful in northern California. Not only were the first diamonds in the U.S. found at Cherokee as early as 1853, but the world's largest and most complete hydraulic gold mine was located here. The gold and diamonds are gone but the memory of the hydraulic operation is still vivid. Bluffs over 700 ft. high surround the pit where nine-inch nozzles once shot 40 million gallons of water per day against the placer channel.

Quartz tailings in Messilla Valley below town still provide gravel for various construction projects. Dams and canals now supply water for communities in the area. The workings were so important that President Rutherford B. Hayes and Gen. W.T. Sherman included them on their Western itinerary in the political campaign of 1881.

Cherokee was settled in 1849 and was named for a group of Oklahoma Cherokee Indians who had been led to the site in that same year by their reservation school teacher, S. O. Potter, of Maine. The first stores were erected by Welch tin miners in 1853. So rich was the ground in Sawmill Ravine that claims were limited to 100 square feet...and over 1000 claims were filed.

It soon became evident that the claims had to be consolidated if the deep channel was ever to be exploited properly. As much as \$17,000 per acre was paid for properties as one consolidation after another was formed, culminating in the Spring Valley Hydraulic Gold Co. in 1880. In addition to the 2000 acre mine, over 12,000 acres of land were purchased in the valley to impound tailings, enabling the company to continue operations after the Anti-Debris Act closed every other hydraulic mine in the state.

One of the most impressive wonders of the operation was the 1500 foot-long Eureka Tunnel, which was drilled under the town and lined with sluice-boxes to catch the gold-bearing gravel being washed from the cliffs. It was considered the largest sluice-box in the world. Carved out of bedrock, the 9x12 foot tunnel is still intact.

The visitor to Cherokee may also view the well-kept pioneer cemetery, which is currently a maze of wildflowers and lilac blossoms mingling among white marble tombstones which originally came from Italy and were used en route as ballast in sailing ships. James Lenhoff, *Sacramento Union*, April 9, 1969. Reprinted in *California Places*, Volume 5, FSR, Paradise Genealogical Library