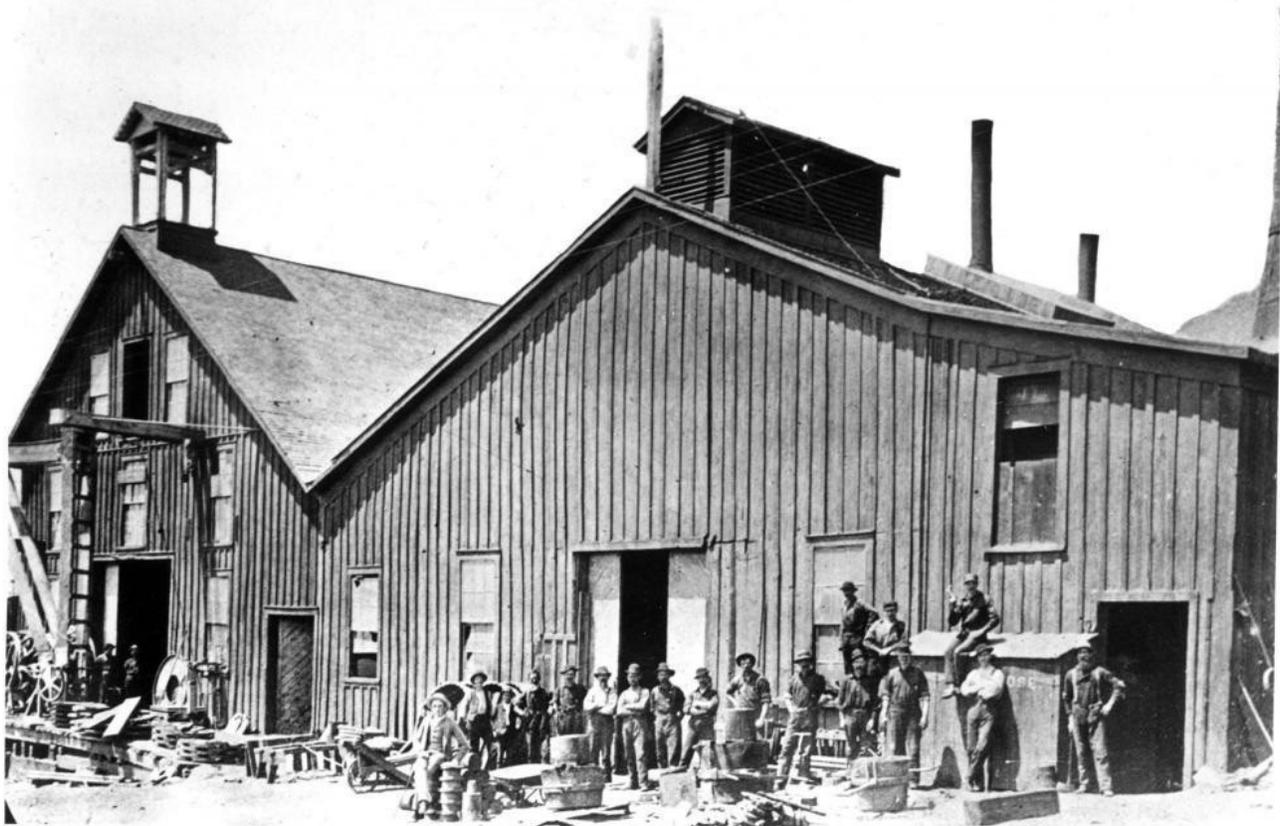


Road Log to the Ophir Grade Road

Mile 0 - There is a state historical plaque for the McCone's or Fulton Foundry near the junction of C street and South Street where the Ophir Grade begins. The Fulton Foundry was an immense facility located near today's water plant. Although there are many surviving Comstock mills and mines, the huge but obsolete Cornish pumps with their monstrous flywheels and the huge foundries that produced the monstrous flywheels disappeared without a trace during wartime scrap drives.



FULTON FOUNDRY
ON THE DIVIDE

Shared with permission from Red Shirt David Toll of The Gold Hill Publishing Company, below is an excerpt from the excellent book “My Memories of the Comstock” by David Toll’s great-grandfather, John Gorham. John Gorham worked in the mines during and after the Bonanza years and was not only an eyewitness to history, he had the vision to record it. He is describing the transport of a huge Cornish Pump flywheel from the Gold Hill Foundry to the New Yellow Jacket Mine (the shaft on the east side of the highway, out Tunnel Road. It’s also sometimes referred to as the East Yellow Jacket).

“So now I take you back to sometime in the early 80’s, I think it was. The machinery had been installed, the pump engine all except the flywheel. That had been let out at contract secured by the George Emmet Foundry in Gold Hill, the Gold Hill Foundry, with George Emmet, proprietor, John Pitchford, chief engineer and designer. It was a momentous hour in the history

of deep mining, anyway, in Gold Hill.

I have to rely on memory, but the day came when the casting was complete, and was ready to be hauled from lower Gold Hill to the New Yellow Jacket. I think the weight was forty thousand pounds, and it was about 50 feet in diameter. Due to its size it could not be brought through the usual road, for it would have to pass through a tunnel, and the diameter forbade. So it had to be hauled up the steep main street, to the Divide. Who could haul it, who could superintend such a trip and tour?

Who could load and unload it? Remember, the main street was itself tortuous and had at times as much as 20 percent pitch.

Well, there was one man, and his assistant: Tom Gallagher and his assistant, Ed Swift.

There was an exhibition of skill, my children. Fifty horses (maybe to be accurate, forty-eight), hitched to tremendous wagons, groaning under the weight of this tremendous casting, the greatest haul that had ever been attempted in Nevada. It was a thrilling sight to watch the management of that haul, around corners where the leaders could not haul, and the strain fell on those nearer, just missing the posts on turns, the quiet control of the animals and their response, over the Divide down C Street, where the load broke into a sewer and was hoisted out; down Taylor Street, into another sewer; hoisted out again, a section of Finlan's wood yard cut away. I cannot tell you more, but it was an epic of horse power and man's intelligence. It arrived, was unloaded, hoisted up and swung on to the great shaft of the pump engine."

The Ophir Grade road was built in 1860 by the Ophir Mining Company to facilitate the hauling of ore to the mills in the Washoe Valley. It was operated as a toll road until 1871 when its popularity declined due to the completion of the V & T Railroad from Carson City to Reno. It gained back popularity to some extent due to the discovery of ore bodies in the Jumbo District in the 1880's. The Virginia and Gold Hill Water Company built what is now know as The Marlette Lake water system in 1873 and it roughly follows the route of the Ophir Grade Road. The pipeline supplies water from the mountains to the west via gravity and the pressure at the lowest points in the pipeline is 800 psi. The water system was designed by Hermann Schussler, who was also hired by Adolph Sutro as the chief engineer at the Sutro Tunnel. The water system was an engineering and construction marvel of its day and still is of great interest. Some of the original riveted pipeline, built by the Risdon Iron Works of San Francisco, has been replaced but some riveted sections may still be in place.

Traces of the exposed pipeline are visible along the Ophir Grade.

Mile 0.1 – The photos show Gold Hill taken about 1880 and Gold Hill in 2021.



737. Gold Hill—General view, from the Ophir Grade,
Looking South.

Gold Hill ca. 1875 – Home to 12,000 Residents



Gold Hill 2021

Note the exploration drill rig at work at the left side of the photo. 160 years after the first discovery, miners are still pursuing the Comstock's golden secrets.

Mile 0.5 – The ravine on the high side of the road is called Confidence Ravine. Below the road is a relatively small open pit mine called the Imperial Pit. It is the Old Red Ledge location, site of the first discovery of high grade silver by James “Old Virginny” Finney, for whom Virginia City was named, and his friends. Previous mining had been in placer deposits and this was the first Comstock vein material. In April, 1876, the Imperial, Empire, Bacon, Eclipse, French, Bowers and Consolidated Gold Quartz mines merged to form the Consolidated Imperial Mine. Over \$9 million (in 19th century dollars) was recovered by the Consolidated Imperial Mining Co and its predecessors at this site between 1859 and 1891.



Imperial Pit

In 1921, United Comstock Mines Co (later acquired by the Comstock Merger Mines Co.) began mining the lower grade ore left in the original Red Ledge. They recovered about \$8 million in gold and silver before the enterprise failed in 1926.

The area was last mined by Houston Oil and Minerals “HOM” in 1981. HOM stopped mining because they ran out of land and were not able to purchase more. The ore body still exists under the highway and under Greiner’s Bend.

Mile 0.75 – There is a good view down Gold Canyon toward Silver City, showing some of the workings, old and new.



View from Gold Hill toward Silver City

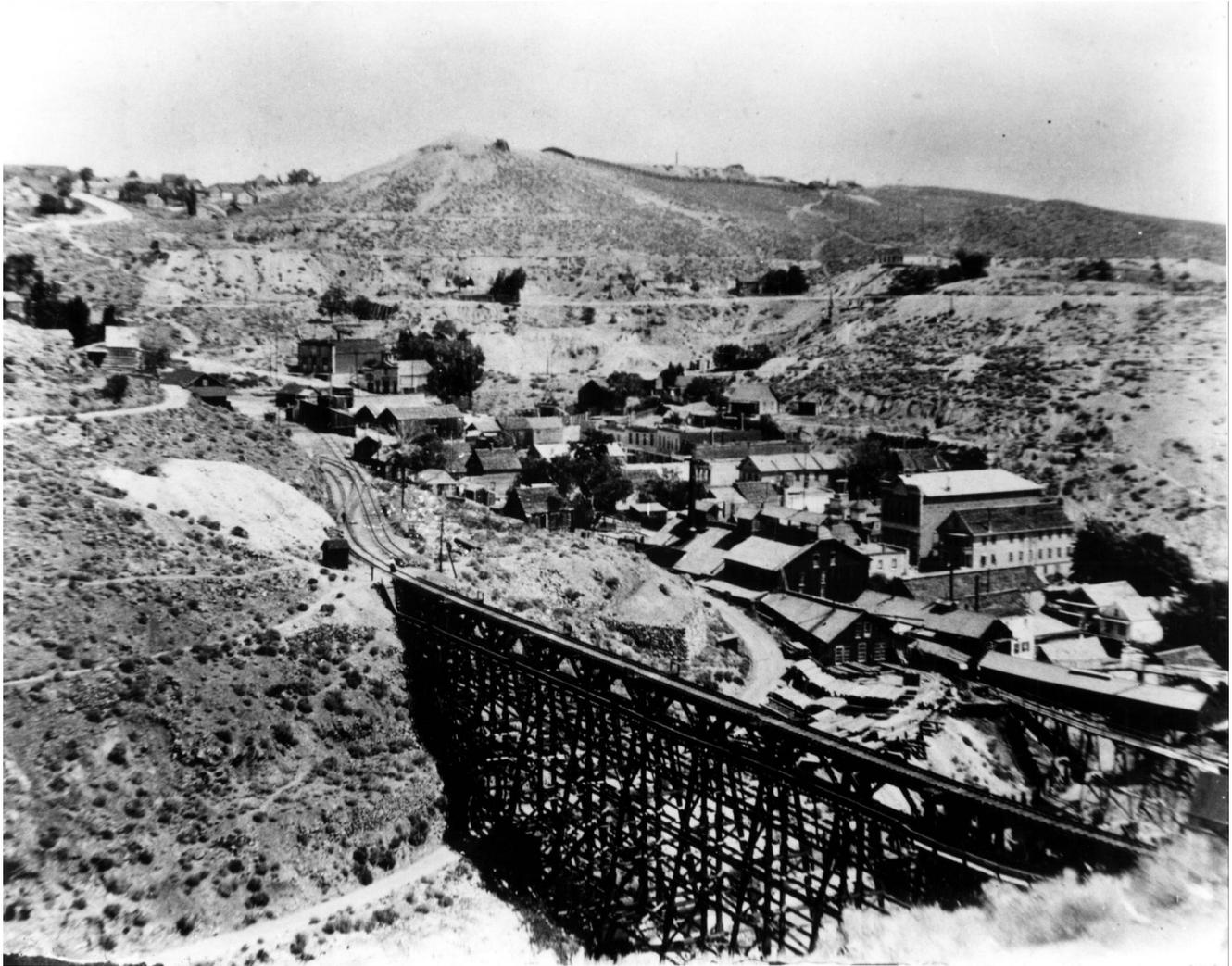
Mile 1.1– The ravine above and below is the Crown Point Ravine. The famous V&T Trestle once spanned across it. The no longer used trestle, 85 feet high and 500 feet long, was dismantled in the 1930's by a subsidiary of the Sutro Tunnel Company, the Sutro Tunnel Coalition to make room for a surface mining operation.

The Coalition obtained a loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and built the Crown Point Mill. The mill profitably processed ore from the Crown Point and Yellow Jacket mines and the loan was repaid in less than 3 years. The Crown Point Mine and Mill made money until 1942 when they were shut down by the government war order, decreeing that miners were needed to mine strategic war materials and putting a stop to gold mining.

Tonogold is now exploring in the area and there is a chance that the Crown Point Mine may once again produce silver and gold.



Crown Point Ravine



Crown Point Trestle and Gold Hill in their Heyday.

The Headframe and Shaft of the Kentuck Mine, where John Mackay first made his fortune, were located on the south side of the ravine and were destroyed during the 1930's surface mining operation.

Mile 1.4 – The rock outcropping on the hill to the west, above the road, is shown as The Crown Point on some maps and on other maps as Suicide Rock.

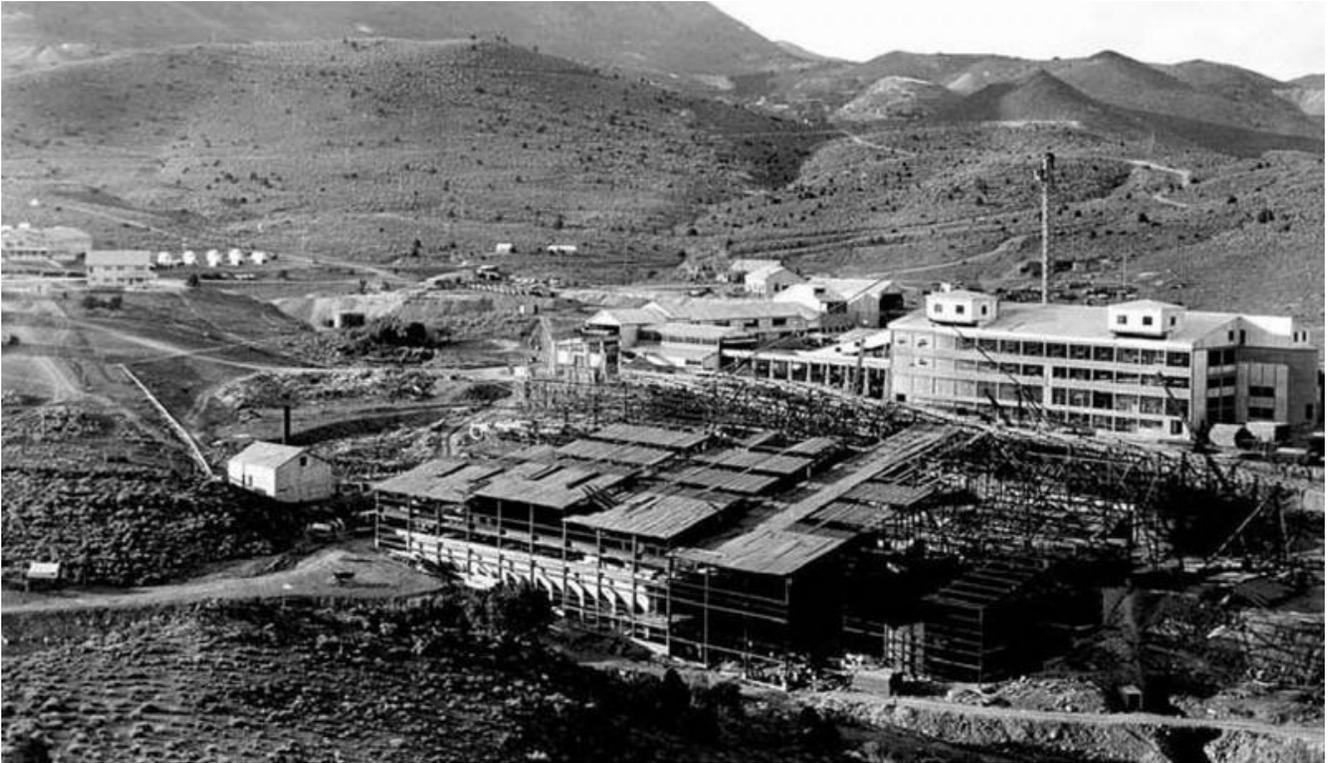
Mile 1.6 – The pit below to the east is the Overman Pit area. The Overman mine was an underground mine and was worked as a surface mine in the 20th century. The open pit was created on the V&T right of-way-after the V&T was shut down and had to be mostly filled in again in 2005 when the V&T was re-started.

Tonogold is doing exploratory drilling in the Gold Hill area from the Kentuck, Belcher, Yellow Jacket and Overman mine in 2021.

Mile 1.9 – Comstock Mining, Inc.’s mill is in the valley below the road. It was in operation from 2012 to 2016 and processed 60,000 ounces of gold and 734,000 ounces of silver.

The townsite of American City is to the southeast and was first established in the late 1800’s due to mining activity in the area. Promoters campaigned unsuccessfully to move the Nevada state capital to American City.

In 1922, a mill was constructed in American Flat by the United Comstock Mining Co., which would process ore brought to the mill from a tunnel from Virginia City before failing in 1926.



American Flat Mill in the 1920’s

The metal of the empty structure was removed for use in the World War II war effort, leaving mostly just the skeletal concrete remains of numerous buildings and cyanide vats.



Portion of American Flat Ruins in the 1990's.

Decreed a public safety hazard on BLM land, the American Flat Mill was demolished in 2014. The American Flat Mill site is also noteworthy for being the site of the Epic 1970's blockbuster movie "The Godmonster of Indian Flats."

Mile 3.4 – This is where the route to the Doin's leaves the Ophir Grade Road. There was once a toll station in the flat area. The road to the left mostly follows the path of the Marlette Water System pipeline leads past the Virginia & Gold Hill Water Company pond. It used to be a good fishing hole and the scene of Bonanza era fish fries and parties but the pond is now lined with plastic and is now fenced.

This is the end of the road log for the Ophir Grade Road. The road to the Doin's site is to the right and uphill. You're about halfway there.