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Gold Hunting in the Black Hills

By D. S. Kingery

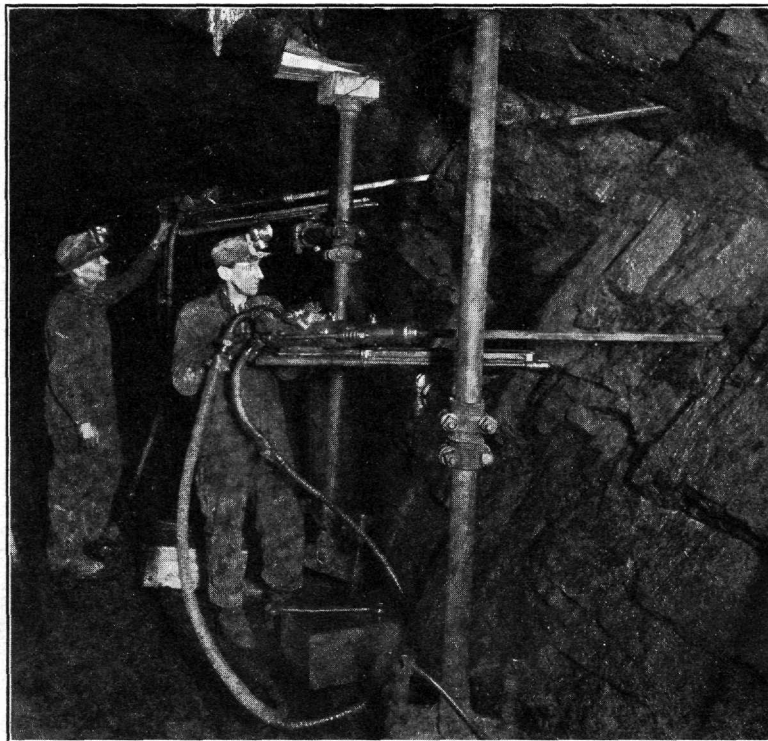
WHO was it that made the remark about gold being where you find it? Well, whoever it was, he had the right idea. Allow me to add the modern version which I formed from my experiences of last summer, "Gold is not where you look for it." I think you may quote me on this. In fact I will stake my professional name on it.

It was early one morning last August that the author and three companions, equipped with skillets, coffee pot, and blankets,—not to mention a Chevrolet coupe—started for the gold country of the Black Hills. We firmly believed that there was "gold in them thar hills."

Our way naturally took us through the states of Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and into South Dakota. We spent one night in the midst of the Bad Lands of South Dakota. I remember looking around over that desolate desert in which nothing lives except jack-rabbits, prairie-dogs, and snakes of various kinds, and wondering how many other gold seekers had passed that way since the first stampede to the hills about sixty-five years ago. These men slept under the same stars, had the same hopes and objective that we had. Most of them have no doubt passed away, but still we follow in their trail, not in a covered wagon taking months for the trip, but in a car taking four days. When I crawled between my blankets that night and looked up at the moon and stars shining so brightly, the following verse, written by Robert Service, in which he describes the Alaskan gold rush, came to my mind:

"Were you ever out in the great alone,
When the moon appeared most clear;
And the icy mountains hemmed you in,
With a silence you most could hear;
With only the call of the timber wolf,
And you camped there in the cold;
A half-mad thing in a stark mad world
Crazed for the muck called gold."

On reaching the Black Hills we decided to locate on



—Courtesy Experiment Station.

Gold Mining in So. Dakota

Spring Creek, a small creek flowing in a southwesterly direction. Our location was to be about twenty-seven miles from Rapid City. I could tell at once when we reached this that we had arrived at least sixty years too late, for the stream's course had been changed so many times that I doubt if anyone could tell where it originally had been.

We decided to stay, however, and began to build camp. We constructed a lean-to shelter big enough for all of us to sleep in and covered the floor with pine boughs to sleep on. We then built a fireplace nearby and cooked supper. By this time it was quite dark; we built a pleasant fire in front of our shelter and sat around resting and making plans for the future.

The next morning we got up fairly early, had breakfast, and proceeded to look around. I panned several shovels of dirt with no success, but we located several

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quartz veins and what we thought was a spring. I prospected these veins for several days, bringing some samples back with me, but they were of no value at all. We found several old sluices and a rocker which we carried back to our camp and set up, intending to use them in our gold recovery.

Placer gold is supposed to be located near bed rock, where due to its high gravity and the swirling action of the stream it has had a chance to collect. But after digging and working all afternoon we were apparently no closer to gold than before. I panned several pans of dirt without a trace of a color. There would be plenty of magnetite, garnets, and tourmaline collected in the pan but no gold colors. All that we accomplished was to work up an enormous thirst which no amount of water from the spring seemed to quench. I thought it a bit strange that after drinking it for some time the more I drank the more I seemed to require, and so from then on I drank my water direct from the creek. I was certainly glad of it later, for the next morning I had three mighty sick boys to work with and the amount of Epsom salts that I dished out was enormous. Knowing that it must have been the water that made them sick, I looked carefully around the spring and noticed a whitish cast to the water around the edges and near the bottom. We later found evidences of the mineral arsenopyrite around in the hills, so we knew then that the spring contained arsenic which had been dissolved out of this mineral, and that this was what had made us sick.

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After three or four days we began to find colors of gold occasionally, but in no quantity. At this rate, I calculated, the three of us, working eight to ten hours a day, shoveling dirt into the sluices and then panning it, could make about twenty-five cents a day between us.

Our cooking was done up in fine shape provided you liked beans which we had on the average of twice a day. Once I tried to make biscuits!

To relieve the monotony of our work we took several trips around to the scenic points of the Black Hills. We visited the graves of Wild Bill Hickock and Calamity Jane and went over to Rushmore mountain where the faces of Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson are being carved in the solid granite of the mountain. These figures can be seen for miles.

After being in the Black Hills for about a month we had mined about two dollars' worth of gold; seeing that we could not get rich very quickly, we decided to pull out and travel on to Yellowstone Park. We left behind the Black Hills with all of its gold.

Automobile Demonstrator (who has spent about four tedious hours trying to sell Uncle Eben a used car):
"Now, I'll throw in the clutch."

Uncle Eben: "Wall, then I'll take her. I just knew that if I held out long enough you'd give me somethin' free."