

Travelin' in Time -- Town rose and fell with mining

Dottie Smith, Redding Record Searchlight, 6-4-10

The location

Ingot is about 12 miles east of Bella Vista, or approximately one mile east of the Diddy Wells Fire Station beside Highway 299. Cow Creek runs through the town mostly alongside Highway 299.

The history

Ingot was known as Silverton as early as 1852, when it was a silver mining boom town. Years later the town became known as Ingot, after the word for a mass of metal cast in a form convenient for transporting or storage.

When the first real silver discovery was made, mining claims were made in all directions and a town was staked off and named Silverton. The town included 40 to 50 buildings, two stores, a livery stable, meat market, three boardinghouses and many saloons.

Also built was an extensive and costly furnace building and a water ditch to supply it with enough water to make it operate. After the first run, it was found that the ore was nothing but pot metal. That cast a dark gloom over Silverton, and before long the boomtown became a ghost town.

Some of the buildings were torn down, while others were moved to other locations. Soon after, a forest fire destroyed what was left, including the costly furnace building.

In 1862, seven claims of the Copper Hill Mine group were mined for its gold and silver. In 1873, Marcus Peck purchased those claims for \$6,000. Three years later, he discovered ore in an adjoining ledge and patented it as the Afterthought, a miner's term for an adjoining claim located after the establishment of a major claim.

Access to his claims was initially very difficult because it was located in a canyon. In the beginning, he and his workers lashed sacks of ore on their backs and packed it up a hill to a wagon road where it was loaded onto wagons and shipped to far away places, including Baltimore, to be refined.

The results were so favorable Peck immediately began making improvements on the property. He built roads and erected furnaces to process the ore. A small reverberatory furnace and a water-jacketed furnace were built in 1875 to process the ore, but both failed.

Peck sold his property in 1889 to foundryman and lumberman Joe Enright, who quickly set about improving the property even more. Enright was already the owner of a sawmill, a five-mile-long wooden flume on Hatchet Mountain, and the Shasta Lumber Company, destined to become one of Shasta County's largest lumber operations.

In 1912, he purchased the Anderson-Bella Vista Railroad, a 15.6-mile-long railroad system that hauled lumber from his Bella Vista planing mill to the Southern Pacific railroad yard at Anderson. He changed the railroad name to the California, Shasta and Eastern Railway Co. and made plans to extend the rail line from Bella Vista to Ingot. But the plan never materialized.

Instead, a small steam locomotive pulled a 20-car train with 5-ton ore cars from the mine to the smelter at Ingot. But the smelter did not work sufficiently. To get the ore processed, an 8.5-mile long aerial tramway was built in 1925 between Ingot and Bully Hill to carry the ore from Ingot to the Bully Hill smelter for processing.

Ingot had come to life again with boardinghouses for the employees, a restaurant, a hotel, and employee houses. Enough people lived there to warrant a post office. In 1904 the Ingot Post Office was established to serve a population of approximately 200 residents.

In 1940, the town was dwindling once again, causing the post office to be discontinued. In 1942, the town of Ingot was annexed to Bella Vista.

The mine continued to have many owners over the years. The last active owner was Coronado Copper & Zinc Company, who operated until 1952.

The present

The roadside sign states that Ingot is populated with 30 people. All that remains from its glory days are a few houses, the remains of the Afterthought Mine stamp mill, an arrastra (crude, early method to crush ore) beside Cow Creek, some rock walls, a few sections of the old railroad grade, and a big bare spot where the smelter once stood. And so, another mining town has faded into history.