

The History of Placer Gold Mining

The Capital Region River Valley Park was the main area for gold mining along the entire length of the North Saskatchewan River.

The presence of gold in the gravels of the region was first noted by James Hector in 1857, near Fort Edmonton.

In successive years, Thomas Clover and his associates mined the Capital Region River Valley Park for gold.

In 1898, George Dawson, Director of the Geological Survey of Canada, did fieldwork in the region, studying gold dredging on the North Saskatchewan River.

Gold mining in the Capital Region River Valley Park reached its peak between 1895 and 1907. During that time, approximately 300 miners worked the principal paying bars within 100km of Edmonton. These miners used either pans or "grizzlies". The miners of 1872 earned about 4 dollars per day (general wages at the time were about five dollars per day).

James Gibbons invented the grizzly mining method, and was able to produce nearly an ounce of gold per day, on average. He spent years mining the gravels of the North Saskatchewan River between Big Island and Fort Saskatchewan. Gibbons and other prospectors later settled on Miner's Flat, which is the present-day Laurier Park (near the Valley Zoo).

A grizzly separates the coarse materials from the fine-grained ones. Large rocks would drop down either side of the device, while finer sand collected into a sluice box. A coarse wool blanket lined the bottom of the sluice box; this caught the fine black sand which contained the gold and platinum (20:1) flakes. A modified form of grizzly is still used by hobby miners today.

By the early 1890's, dredges allowed miners to extract more gold from the midstream portion of the river, as well as the submerged areas of sand and gravel bars. Eventually, there were "dippers", spoons", and steam-powered dredges.

Combined grizzly and dredge operations between 1895 and 1897 produced a total of 7500 troy ounces of gold; the period of highest production of gold in the history of the Capital Region River Valley Park.

By 1898, many of the miners left for the Yukon to seek their fortune in the Klondike Gold



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Rush. The annual gold production consequently dropped to 1200 ounces that year.

Due to a dramatic increase in the price of gold in 1978–1981, the Capital Region River Valley Park experienced a resurgence of gold production. Gravel and sand operations increased the efficiency of their gold (and platinum) recovery circuits. As a result, since 1981, the production of gold in the region has stayed at a high level.

Sources

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