

Earl's Diary, Wednesday, June 15, 2016

To all my Loyal Readers, I am on a new adventure to a place I haven't been before. Several years I have wanted to visit Plumas Eureka State Park. Now was my chance. I was invited to attend a small gathering of "egg" trailers, so accepted the invitation.

I left home about 9:00 heading north through Sacramento and hooking up to Interstate 80, heading east over the Sierras. I guess I was a little naive by wearing short sleeve shirt and short leg pants. I knew I was in trouble when I paused at the Gold Run Rest Stop. You need to understand that Gold Run is at the 4000 foot level. When I got there, the wind was blowing and the temperature was in the 40's. A quick walk around the rest stop convinced me that I really made a mistake in my driving attire!

Arriving in the town of Truckee, I sought a spot for a sandwich stop. Climbing out of the truck, the cool air convinced me to quickly walk to the nearest Subway. It didn't take long and I was back on the road again. Shortly after Truckee, Highway 89 heads north. It's a beautiful drive through our eastern Sierras. The small village of Sierraville sits on the edge of a wide section of meadows.

The wind was REALLY blowing and dark clouds hovered over the area. I thought it was going to rain. No! It was not rain! It was small flurries of snow flakes coming down. I thought the wind might try to tip my Scamp over. Fortunately I made it through without mishap.



The community of Grey Eagle soon appeared in my eyesight. It was there that the road to Plumas Eureka State Park turned off for the 5 mile drive up the mountainside. My reserved site waited for me. After parking, my first thing to do was put on long sleeve shirt and long pants! Needless to say, it didn't take too long to get the Lil' Nut set up and ready for occupation. There were only a couple other trailers there, so a



little visiting was in order before fixing my dinner for the evening. The heat from the trailer stove kept the place nice and warm - for a short time.

After supper I piled on more clothes for a short time before climbing into bed. It's a good thing I brought along an extra heavy blanket!

Plumas Eureka is an older state park with many small pads - not conducive to many much larger "stickies". Boon-docking was in order - no hookups! However, I came prepared with my solar panels to keep my battery charged up.



Tomorrow there will be plenty of time for exploring to see what this park is all about. Thanks for coming along with me today. Bye for now - - Earl

Plumas-Eureka State Park was established in 1959, and provides visitors with a glimpse into a fascinating period of California history, as well as opportunities for quiet recreation in a beautiful high Sierra mountain setting.

Here's probably more than you want to know about this park, but, here goes anyway! The event that resulted in the establishment of several communities and later became the key reason for establishing the park was the discovery of gold on the east side of Eureka Peak, (then known as Gold Mountain) by a group of 9 miners on May 23, 1851. What started out as an individual discovery eventually led to over 30 miles of mine shafts with several individual operators and companies.

Earl's Diary - Thursday, June 16, 2016

To all my Loyal Readers: Today dawned partly cloudy with the sun trying to shine through bright fluffy clouds. It did, however, remain mighty cold. Heavy layered clothes were still in order for walking around.

According to the park map old mine buildings were near the campground, so I decided to investigate. The sign indicated the Jamison Mine site was only .1 miles. The path was wide and gently sloping. With my walking stick firmly in hand I headed downhill.

At the bottom of the hill a bridge crossed Jamison Creek. Jamison???? Now we know why this area is known as Upper Jamison (Campground, creek, mine). Jamison must have been one of the first miners in the area? There wasn't any information posted about the area - just a bunch of boarded up buildings.

I'm assuming the largest building with small windows along one side was the ore processing unit. Other buildings were probably miners cabins.



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The buildings seemed to be in the “arrested decay” state. I particularly noticed the crumbling piles of rocks that formed the foundations of all the buildings.

This was supposed to be the Jamison Mine. I only found one indication that a mine was located around here. In back of one of the buildings was a fenced in area in the middle of which appeared to be a large hole in the ground filled with water. The Jamison Mine? Perhaps! There were no signs to indicate what it was.



After walking around a bit, I strolled back up the the campground where I found our other intrepid egg trailer campers huddled around and engaged in conversation. I joined them briefly before heading to my Lil’ Nut and the requisite nap.

Yep! It’s mighty cold!



Later in the afternoon I took a drive to the end of the road - which was farther up the mountain side. I found out why it was so cold in the middle of June. Notice the white stuff in the pictures below - that’s not exposed rock - that’s exposed snow on the ground!

That’s all the excitement I can take for today. Thanks for coming along with me.
- - Earl



Earl's Diary - Friday, June 17, 2016

To all my Loyal Readers, thank you for coming along with me today. The weather this morning was quite chilly. I understand it got down to the very low 30's last night. The warm sun keeps peaking in and out of the fast flowing clouds.

I decided to take a ride into the nearby town of Portola, a distance of 15 miles. I call Portola a town, and not a city. It surely is a rural community with lots of local businesses. The only "chain" business in town is the local Subway.

I had been through this area about 10 years ago and remembered stopping at the railroad museum. I figured it was time to pay another visit.

The museum is actually a collection of old retired relics from the past. Visitors pay an \$8 fee and are free to wander around the 37 acre grounds, looking, climbing on, or peering into the various units. The grounds contain 2 1/2 miles of tracks. I spent 2 hours marveling at some of these giants of railroading history.



A colorful display of retired engines



End of the road



The Big and Small of it all!

A brief history of the Western Pacific:

The Western Pacific Railway was incorporated in 1903 to build from Salt Lake City, Utah, with a connection to the Denver and Rio Grande Railway, and on to Oakland, California. By using the spectacular Feather River Canyon as its entrance into the Sierra Nevada range, the WP kept a gentle slope to its railroad and avoided the tremendous snow removal problems which rival Southern Pacific faced on its much steeper route over Donner Pass. So committed were the builders to maintaining a shallow grade to the line that they built the Williams Loop, where the tracks actually formed a circle and crossed over themselves. The WP crested the Sierras at Beckworth Pass, the lowest saddle of the mountains.

As the WP was always overshadowed by the larger rival the SP, the smaller road learned to be innovative and frugal. While large modern steam locomotives helped the company tackle larger freight cars, the original steam locomotives continued in service until replaced by diesels. When the railroad needed new cabooses, it converted old obsolete wooden boxcars and saved its money for revenue equipment.

The WP also teamed with long-time partner Denver and Rio Grande and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to operate the first passenger train designed around Vista-Dome passenger cars; the California Zephyr. From 1949 to 1970, the CZ was the pride of the railroad.

Today, the Salt Lake City to Oakland mainline serves the Union Pacific in conjunction with the once-rival Southern Pacific line.



End of the line for these box cars





This unit affectionately called a “covered wagon” was purchased to power Western Pacific’s California Zephyr. The cab unit typically joined by two cab-less “B” units, hauled the train between Oakland, California and Salt Lake City, Utah from 1950 until March 22, 1970 when the CZ ended.

The Feather River Rail Society wanted this locomotive for its Western Pacific Railroad collection as it had become the last WP California Zephyr locomotive in existence.



A “B” cab-less unit



A string of lonesome cabooses

The collection includes over 36 locomotives and 120 pieces of rolling stock, as well as an extensive gathering of corporate records, paperwork, artifacts and historic photos and films. Visitors to the Western Pacific Railroad Museum soon discover that this is a hands-on facility where they are encouraged to climb into the cabs of locomotives, sit in the engineer’s seats, and browse through the many cabooses and passenger cars on display.

This was quite a return visit for me. I can’t say it has changed that much in ten years. I photographed many of those same locomotives and cars. Perhaps this time they have just changed positions on the rails. Of course, some of the stock doesn’t even have wheels anymore!



After an afternoon of adventure in, around, and among the train grave yard, I returned to find the intrepid campers once again huddled around a roaring campfire eagerly awaiting preparation of dinner.



The weather report says it's supposed to warm up tomorrow. Oh good! That would be nice! We'll see about that.

Thanks for coming along on this excursion today. Bye for now.

-- Earl



Earl's Diary - Saturday - June 18, 2016

Dear Loyal Readers, wherever you may be:

Today the weather IS warming up. This morning we had french toast made from real homemade bread!



This morning we visited the park museum. The focal point of the park is the museum building and historic area surrounding it. Originally constructed as the miner's bunkhouse, the museum now serves as a visitor center. Inside, displays depict the natural and cultural history of the park. Outside and across the street from the museum is the historic mining area, where the Mohawk Stamp Mill, Bushman five-stamp mill, stable, mine office, Moriarity House (historic miner's residence) and the blacksmith shop depict life in gold rush-era California.

British mining experts perfected the method of removing the rich ore from within the mountain. At one point, three stamp mills were in operation at various locations on the mountainside, but in time, the ore-crushing operation was concentrated at one mill, the Mohawk. Built in 1876 at a cost of approximately \$50,000 the Mohawk contained 60 stamps, each weighing from 600 to 950 pounds with a drop of 8 1/2 inches - 80 times per minute. Each stamp could crush 2 1/2 tons of ore (a small dump truckload) every 24 hours.



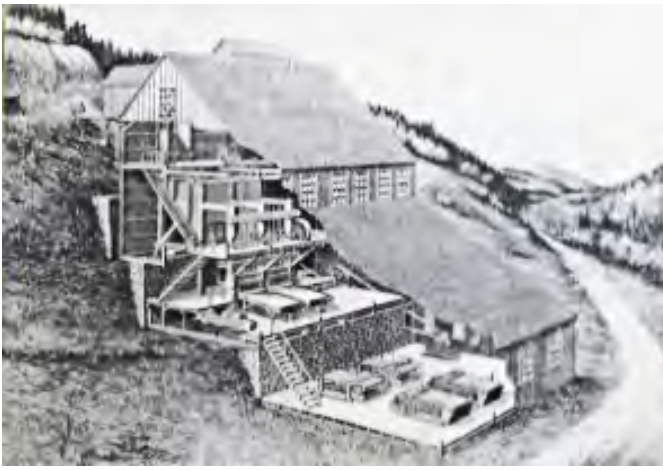


Tram Bucket: This type of metal bucket held the gold-bearing ores brought down by tram lines from the shafts located high on Eureka Peak. These lines reached from the shafts to the stamp mill. Portions of the old cable trams can still be seen on Eureka Peak.

I went looking for the tram ruins but could not easily locate them.

Returning ore buckets sometimes carried miners up the mountain and in the winter possibly served as the first ski lift in California. When mining in the area ceased for good in the 1940's, over 8 million dollars worth of gold had been removed from Gold Mountain!





Old ore grinding wheels. These samples were well worn down.



Huntington Mill: Instead of a stamp mill, some smaller mine operators used this old type of mill to crush gold-bearing quartz pieces of ore up to one-and-a-half inches thick were fed into the mill, then crushed by its central revolving mullers. Water was mixed with the grains which were forced through a mesh screen to an amalgam table where the gold separated from the quartz sand. This mill could be powered by water wheel, steam, gasoline, or electricity.





Water was carried to the mine area by a series of ditches and flumes. Remnants are still visible.



The Assayer's building. While we were there, a docent explained how samples of ore were melted down to determine the gold density and value.

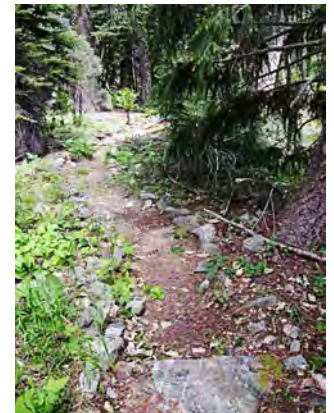
This is me, just to prove I was there! It was a very interesting and educational morning.



After returning to camp I was wondering what to do with a couple hours before dinner. While at the visitor center I picked up an intriguing pamphlet called "Talking Forest Nature Trail". Ah Ha! It is near the campground, so let's go take a look and see what all the "talking" is about.

According to the trail guide: Welcome to the Talking Forest Nature Trail, so named because if you take the time to stop and listen, you may get a chance to hear the forest "speaking" to you.

The short loop trail led me through all the major ecosystems of the mountain:



Meadow



Riparian

Riparian comes from the latin *riparius*, which means "of or pertaining to the bank of a river".



Chaparral

Chaparral is borrowed from the Spanish word *chaparro* which describes "small and dwarf evergreen oak". Manzanita, good example.





Today, Plumas-Eureka's "gold" is the great variety of plants and animals that exist within park boundaries. Black bear, deer, weasel, mink, marten, mountain lion, bobcat, fox, and a host of other mammals are seen through the summer months. Mountain meadows and forested glades are often dotted with an assortment of Sierra wildflowers.



While down by the river I spied a red patch across the stream. I couldn't believe my eyes when it proved to be a clump of rare snow flowers. Now I had a problem because they were on the opposite side of the river and I couldn't find anyway to get safely across. I set my telephoto lens, hoping to get at least one good shot. Here is what I came up with:



That was a real find! You don't see these plants everywhere!

After my brief walk, I returned to camp where the group was participating in an impromptu game of ladder ball.



Not everyone participated

This has been a day of exploration.
Thanks for coming along with me today. Bye for now - - Earl

Earl's Diary - Sunday, June 19, 2016

Greetings to all my Loyal Readers,
The great news is that it's warming up! Unfortunately most of the gathering are headed for home. I took this opportunity to do some more sightseeing near the park.

As I drove toward the Visitor Center, I stopped to take a couple pictures along side the road. After taking the pictures my wandering eyes spied more patches of red on the ground. Right near where I saw standing was another patch of snow plants. I couldn't hardly believe what I was seeing! They were so close, if I wasn't watching, I could have stepped on them. Needless to say, I was down on all fours in the "bottoms up" position taking closeup pictures.



Snow plants break through the forest floor when the last patches of snow are melting away in spring. They have no chlorophyll; it derives nutrition from fungi underneath the soil that live near conifers.



The Moriarty House is part of the Plumas Eureka State Park. Docents usually give tours of the house - except this day the house was closed so all I could do is take a good look at the outside of the house. Notice once again the rock foundation.

The Moriarty House symbolizes the miner's transition from fortune-seeking individualist to wage earner and family man. Its balloon frame construction and board and batten siding were common in the 1870s to 1880s. John James and Margaret Ann Moriarty lived here with their eight children from 1896 to 1917. They were a typical miner's family with an immigrant background. The home's furnishings show the self-sufficient life style necessary for survival in this mountain environment.



In its hey-day Eureka Mills, high up on the mountainside, was primarily a family town. Jamison City down near the creek was the place for single miners to live.

The mountain side took on quite a village appearance. There were two stores, a hotel with a saloon, two other saloons, a bootmaker's shop, livery stable and a few dwellings. People would often ride the empty ore carts back up the mountain to the townsite. After completion of the Mohawk Mill in 1878, Johnsville became the primary town for miners and their families.



Today Johnsville appears to be a sleepy little mountain community adjacent to Plumas Eureka State Park. The road runs right through the middle on its way to the sky area higher on the mountain. The town contains some newer looking homes as well as some older ones. It certainly didn't take long to drive through the three blocks of the town. It appeared that there might be one open business - or maybe not. There was also one church.



The original Johnsville Hotel - now a private residence.

Dear Readers, this has been a most interesting and educational outing for me. I had wanted to visit this park for a long time. This was a most opportune time to do it. Although the warm weather did not cooperate, it was all worth the chill to do it. Today was my final visiting day. Tomorrow I return home. I hope you have enjoyed the visit with me. So, until our next visit, wherever that may be - Thanks for coming along with me - - Earl