

THE LOST CINNABAR LODE

*Broose Armstrong*

It was around the year 1880, a prospector by the name of Lampson, accompanied by an Indian guide, roamed the hills and canyons between Testament Creek and Mt. Hebo in search of mineral ore. He chipped some interesting looking red rock from a rocky ledge in a small creek and put a sample in his pack-sack.

Lampson and his guide became lost and wandered through an area between Bible Creek and Mt. Hebo. They finally found their way out on the Indian trail from Silver Falls on the Nestucca River to Sheridan.

However, he never had it assayed until the next year when it proved to be a rich grade cinnabar. This started the whole thing. Lampson made a return trip into the mountains where he had made his discovery, hoping to start a mining operation. The canyons and ridges all looked alike to him, which caused a question in his mind as to which creek held his high grade vein of cinnabar.

He was positive the place of his discovery must be beneath a recent landslide in Mina Creek. He reasoned the best way to wash away the landslide was by diverting a stream of water to its top to make it easier to wash the entire slide down Mina Creek, thus exposing his lode.

He imported a group of Chinese laborers to dig a watergrade ditch that extended from an adjoining creek for  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles to his mining site. During the time of the mining operation the Chinese laborers on their day off, once a week, would visit the homesteaders on the Nestucca River to beg for food. There is no doubt their food supply was very meager up at the mine. Each Chinese had a small pail that they would use to put the various bits of food given them. They would stir the conglomeration around in their bucket and eat it on the spot.

Lampson, with his coolies washed off the mountainside, dug vertical and horizontal shafts all to no avail. A blue stream of mud flowed down Mina Creek into the Nestucca river for years. After 10 or 12 years of operation, Lampson died and the laborers all went their way. Why he persisted all these years not producing one drop of mercury nobody will understand.

Ironically, he had a friend by the name of Thacher who, many years later, moved onto Lampson's mining site working all by himself until the 1930's when one of his neighbors found him dead in his cabin.

Two men have worked and died where their dream never matured because they were not digging at the end of the rainbow.

The year 1934, a forest fire broke out near Niagara Point lookout sweeping westward across Pheasant and Niagara Creeks for a distance of 2 miles; this was called the Kay burn. Ranger Leroy Garwood, while firefighting, thought he found the lost cinnabar lode in one of the creeks west of Niagara Point and remarked when he retired he would look into it. Soon after his retirement from the U.S. Forest Service, he died. The lode is still out there for the finding, seen by 2 men that makes it a fact.

*Donated by Frank  
Messner, April 2002*