

Stan Gelvin Circle Mining District

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Since 1954.

? How get started?

My dad brought me up here to go mining. He had claims on Squaw Creek. Initially he had some partners, Iron worker partners. They went over there and built a cabin in '52 I believe, and tried mining a little bit in '53 and brought the family in the fall of '54. And we stayed at the hot springs that winter as we did several other winters. We stayed on the creek during the summer and we stayed at the hot springs and rented a cabin there.

? where is Squaw creek?

It runs into Harrison Creek above the mouth of Bottom Dollar 3 miles.

? Hot Springs pretty active?

It was the only hot springs you could drive to. Every weekend and every holiday the parking lot was packed with locals - I mean Fairbanks locals. They came out for the medicinal waters. It started going downhill when the road was finished to Chena Hot Springs. It was much closer by road.

? many miners around?

Just old timers. There was a few mining. PRT, Parker, Raymond, and Hopkins, and Walter Roman, and let's see, not many, just a few guys holding on. Gene Langlow was still mining on Birch Creek by hand. That was about it that I can remember.

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The Reedy Boys had shut down. In fact, Dad bought one of their tractors, a TD-14 when he went into Squaw Creek on his own. The others give up and let him go on his own. He bought that TD-14. It had a smaller blade. They had an RD-7 with a great big ~~blade~~. It was a wide gauge tractor. It wouldn't hardly push nothing, a real early RD-7. The TD-14 had a narrow blade. It would dig bedrock, hydraulic blade.

? How old were you when you started <sup>with Dad?</sup>

✓ Six years old, I know I was helping him do a lot of stuff. By 8 I was driving the tractor and the military 4 by 4 with DC-4 tires on it, we moved to Central in 1956. He bought a place in Central, He set up a saw mill so I helped him with that. We'd log in the winter. Actually, that experience helped me in good stead in later years. He let me run the winch on that military 4 by 4 had a winch on front and he'd ~~let me~~ rig it up to a Chicago boom to load logs. I learned all the crane signals and that's what I did in later years in the Operator's Union was a crane operator.

? Use both feet & hands?

That's a drag line (laughs) It's a crane, <sup>but</sup> with a drag line bucket because you stay pretty busy because you're ~~staying busy~~ doing more than picking - you're dragging the bucket in also. It takes 2 feet and 2 hands.

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? Equipment in those days?

Draglines and cats,

? wash plants?

✓ Just slick plates, my Dad used a sluice box on bedrock with wings in front of it like hydraulic days. First pushed the pile up to the wings, and then he had a little dam he would fill up with water and he'd open a valve and hydraulic it through the box. So it was a ~~combination~~ <sup>a combination</sup> of a cat and hydraulic on Squaw Creek. Pretty low hydraulic pressure, just enough to wash that pile through the ~~on~~ head of the box, ~~at~~ while throwing rocks out by hand.

? Equipment pretty simple? when changed?

✓ It got bigger. The Pipeline was a real boon to the placer miner because there was so much surplus equipment, large tractors, surplus ~~to~~ hydraulic excavators and cats, lots of loaders. Everything they used on the Pipeline. Before then it was hard to find a piece of equipment in AK that wasn't being used. So, you had to import it from the states, high cost of shipping. Our first D-9, ~~we~~ we had to go to Industry City in LA, and bought it there, and had it hydrotrained to whittier, and it came by rail car up to F6K. In 1975 was over \$10,000 just ~~to~~ for freight. I remember the tractor was \$40,000, so it was 25 percent of the machine just to get one landed here. They hadn't started

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surplusing anything then, so we had to go outside to get the first one. The rest of them were Pipeline surplus & picked up along the way, either directly at an auction or after somebody had already bought them and resold them.

I learned equipment mining from not my Dad but from some of the old timers around here. Mainly, Jack Raymond. He had 3 partners, 2 partners and a hired guy, called himself P R & H. Parker, Raymond, and Hopkins. They were high fall miners. They really worked at it, and I learned their techniques of slick plate push or to a slick plate rather than ground shoving through the head of a box, which really helped production, let the rocks slide better. Shingle punch plate over the top of the ripples, so that the rocks would go through better. They used drag lines, too. So, I got exposed to the drag line which is a wonderful piece of machinery for moving dirt, moved dirt cheaply. Only thing is, nowadays you can't find anybody to ~~to~~ run them. The younger generation is all hydraulic orientated, big excavators.

? Typical outfit today?

Cat and excavator and maybe a ~~frontend~~ loader for bull cooking around or ~~to~~ moving tailings

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? Wash plants?

When the water quality issue came up, to use less water you had to screen the material, so you were only sluicing, in my case and in a lot of cases, half inch minus. And so it took so much less water, your water problems were reduced right off the bat. Your ponds, you could control your water better. You only needed a six-inch pump rather than a 12-inch pump. That's pretty much how we got into screening. And then it was a much better thing for gold recovery, too. You're only screening the - the finer you can screen it to the size of the gold, the better the recovery will be, but there's a limit because below, half-inch, I've found, you can't have heavy enough wire in the screen for that screen to last very long. Half-inch is about the limit for screening <sup>down</sup> because you're dropping heavier stuff on that.

In my original plant I had gizzly bars that let about 4-inch minus through and that went on to inch-and-a-half over the wire screen, and then the 1 1/2 dropped on the half-inch. That bottom screen I had to replace twice a year. The half-inch screen

? Money into equipment?

To get started now, you have, you need about half a million dollars to get going, and the knowledge to know how to use it.

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That's what's lacking mostly. There's money around and equipment. Knowing how to set it up and use it to work the ground efficiently. Experience, I guess. A lot of guys are gaining experience. It's a steep learning curve.

? What are some of the creeks you've worked on?

I worked on, starting closer to Fbks, upper Birch or lower Eagle, the mouth of Fish Creek and the mouth of Gold Dust Creek. I had 5 claims in there from Fish Creek to Gold Dust Creek, which I later leased and then sold to Green Brothers who played a prominent role in placer mining here, and wound up in Ruby last, I think, on "Al Kangis" ground there.

Then, from there, I'd staked Greenhorn Creek when I was a kid - my first mining on my own was on Greenhorn Creek.

And then, Freddy Wilkinson and I staked Crooked Creek from the mouth of Porcupine, the confluence of Porcupine and Mammoth Creek. We agreed that he'd take the upper half and I'd take the lower half. He ~~got~~ kinda got the short end of the stick, I think. (Laughs) who'd a thought though.

Then, I mined on the Salcha, head of the Salcha one year. I took an outfit in there and left in April here, and it set there until we could get in and the ice melted and we could put in an airstrip.

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to fly our 206 in there with fuel and support the mine. We mined part of one summer there and gave up, mainly because the price of gold was only \$90 an ounce. The logistics and the ground was full of garnets. On bedrock, you take a pan and you'll have a double handful of garnets in the pan. So, they just loaded the ripples. You'd have to have a leg or something. Gold's there. What tipped me off about it, I was flying over hunting and I seen little 12-inch wide hand shovelling boxes laying on the bank. I made a risky tundra landing <sup>to</sup> further look at it. ~~There were~~ <sup>I found some</sup> horse scrapers, little slip scrapers you pull with one horse. There were some shacks, too, that were fallen down. There'd been some work in there. So, I roughed out a little strip to get in with our 206 - we didn't have the 206 yet. We hired a 206. We took apart a Case ~~and~~ tractor with a model 50 John Deere hoe that we'd attached to it. We disassembled it enough <sup>to fly it</sup> that the 206 in there, and then reassembled it for testing. We were encouraged by the results, didn't think about the garnets (gangs) but it panned pretty good. So, that's when we decided to go in. We bought a D-9, built a form foot sluice box with slick plate. I drug it in there in April, built a strip big enough for - meanwhile we'd bought a 206 to fly fuel - fly 3 barrels at a time. But, it was pretty much a bust.

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If it had been along the road somewhere, it would have been mined <sup>on</sup> long ago, where you could drive a fuel tanker to it.

I mined on Ketchum Creek, when the Johnson Brothers who were cousins to the Green Brothers - that's how they got in this country - the Green Bros were mining here first and the Johnson Bros got interested and came up. They wound up with Lower Ketchum. That's about the time Freddy Wilkinson moved in above them up there. Anyway, they mined there a number of years and then they - well, they got to the Tertiary. They were mining downstream and they got to the Tertiary and they didn't understand it and they said: "Oh, the bedrock just dives off real deep, and we're done."

Well, I kind of knew better because I'd already mined on the Tertiary on Crooked Creek. So, I offered to buy them out, buy their equipment and stuff, and they were actually leasing the ground. I said, If I can get the lease, if you help me get the lease for the ground, I'll buy all your equipment. Oh, yeah. They were happy to do that, and so, I bought their drag line and they had a 175 Michigan loader, and their wash plant. It was actually a copy of my Torgerson Feeder, my first wash plant. They came and looked at mine and built it the same way. Their camp and miscellaneous stuff. They actually had a D-8K and a 245. They'd already made arrangements to sell that to somebody else and I ~~really~~

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didn't <sup>really</sup> want it, to pay that too. Then they sent me to the fellow that owned the ground. I can't recall his name - Billy Laning! He comes from an old mining family. I went to see Billy. He says, "Oh, that's pretty well mined out, and there's a lot of reclamation liability there. What if I just give you that ground?"

And I says, oh, that's fine with me. So he quit claimed all that ground to me. The next spring I took my churn drill in there and proved out the existence of the Tertiary type deposit. I actually pulled out a 1000 ounces by myself with a dragline show. I was already down-sized by then, and turned Crooked Creek over to my step son.

I set up a one-man operation with a dragline. I went in the morning and fired up my D-9, pushed all I could close to the drag line where I could reach it with the drag line. It would be about 500 yards, and then I'd fire the drag line up, pick up a load of pay, drop it in the plant, went on around, drop the bucket, and pull across the end of the box and get a little sand, and across the coarse oversize coming off the Grizzly, pick that up, go around drop it in the pile. I just went around 360 degrees, did that. When I had that 500 yards in, I went home. Some days I'd be done by 3 o'clock, and other days it wouldn't be until 7, if I had to swap a drag cable or something - it takes time for one guy to do.

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So, it was the best one-man operation I ever had. Because of the drag line, with an 80 foot boom. You gotta have a long boom to reach.

I never mined on Deadwood except by hand when I was a kid. I used to take my mom's model A Ford. I'd nail together a wooden sluicelox, go up there and shovel in near the mouth of Switch Creek, just something to do. Be able to borrow my mom's model A.

That's about all the creeks I've mined on.

? Tertiary gravels?

I didn't know what they were until I started drilling on Crooked Creek. And even then I didn't understand it until ~~the~~ after I'd done my drilling and decided to open up a small trench cut and see what that amounted to down there, that was the same color change <sup>and that's</sup> where the pay was, the last foot, when the water came out of the drill hole ~~and~~ in the boiler red or orange, that's where the pay was. I thought it was just a reddish colored bedrock.

Doing an open cut with a dozer to check the drill holes on one line, we could see that it was a gravel, an ancient layer of gravel. We still didn't understand it. We didn't know if gold was coming out of that or was just concentrated on that. As it turns out, it acts as a fake bedrock. It's kind of impervious to water because a lot of the rocks turn to clay, decompose, so it acts like, it stops the gold.

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Then, I didn't realize that all the creeks that drain into the Crooked Creek valley, when they come out of the hills they come across that same - I think Portage Creek was the next time that I actually saw that.

Bob Casey, who was a life-long Alaskan, actually him and another guy were by the name of Jack Tripes were running the hot springs when we lived there in the winters, when my Dad was mining on Squaw Creek.

He started mining and came to that Tertiary unit. And I went over to look at it, and sure enough, it was the same thing, a little different color, more of a tan color, but the same layer of ancient gravels and the granite bedrock as is the case on Portage ~~is~~ drops off vertical. I guess the edge of the Tertiary Fault or some kind of major fault.

Anyway, <sup>they</sup> on Ketchum Creek, the Johnsons uncovered it and didn't understand it. They said: "It goes real deep, and we can't hit bedrock." They were having some other problems, too. They just needed an excuse to quit mining. The brothers had wives that didn't get along. (laughs)

Anyway, that was good for me because I had figured there was the existence of a pay streak below that and I drilled it.

And then on Deadwood Creek the same thing. Actually, for Jeff Nable and Karl Hanneman, in 1980 when I got my first hydraulic excavator they hired me to after I was done mining in the fall, I walked it, nobody had a dorvboy around then, all the way from Crooked Creek to -

Deadwood Creek and dug holes for them that fall, well into the freezing season. I had to build a big bonfire every day and put the bucket over it to thaw the frozen, it was slumb full of frozen dirt from digging the previous day.

We did a bunch of digging and we actually defined the contact between the Tertiary and the blue schist that's prevalent there on the lower end of Deadwood. We dug one hole that came out, half the hole was the schist and half was tertiary - it was vertical. It amazed us. That's the first time I knew it went vertical, because I hadn't mined up to the contact on Crooked. And the pay, it just slides out on to that. I found since that there's a ~~#~~ the first quarter mile or so below it's pretty weak. So it don't start dropping until it gets out over that a ways. So near the contact it ain't that great.

? gravel from an old river?

I've drilled 90 feet on Crooked Creek into it, and never hit true bedrock. It drills real easy, & it's frozen. One day we drilled 90 feet with a churn drill, open hole, and we come back the next day to keep going and the hole had actually shrunk. So we had to ream all the way down and that's a son of a gun. It sticks and then you've got all this crap to bail out, because it falls into the bottom of the hole - so we give up. We figured 90 feet if we didn't find nothing.

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Interestingly though, when you pan it, you get exactly the same concentrates, the same little black magnetite rocks, nice string of black sand as you do in the pay gravel at the contact, but no gold. It's possible that there is gold in that but it's so finely distributed that it takes - who knows how much it's worn down already and concentrated that. So - I'm not sure and no geologist can tell <sup>me</sup> whether that gold actually came from mastodon, ~~or~~ mammoth or it came out of the Tertiary, just kept settling down as it wore down and concentrating. I've never been able to convince myself that I panned anything out of it. I've actually sluiced some of it at the end of a cut, just and didn't get anything.

? a lot of that gravel?

I guess maybe in another million years, if there is gold in it, it'll be good to mine again when the valley's another 500 feet ~~low~~ lower (laughs). Who knows how thick it is? I don't know.

I can tell you, here in Central they drilled a water well, and I was right front and center to all if they hit bedrock and they did. It was just up the street from here across from the powerhouse. 180 feet if I remember right, and they hit blue schist. At 15 feet they hit it around here - the hardpan - they call it hard pan - ~~it's that Tertiary~~ when they try to drive a sand point <sup>in</sup> it's that Tertiary, it's a color change

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So, it's under here, too. It's more of a tan color. Actually, even up on Crooked Creek on the lower claims it turned to a tan color. But there's a band within 3 claims of the fault where it's real red and orange close to the fault. I don't know, water's percolated up through there and changed the color or what, but the lower end is tan. And Deadwood is tan and Ketchum is tan and Portage is tan too, like the lower Crooked Creek, more out in the valley here a tan color.

So, there's a blue schist down there at 120 feet.

? Gold price down to \$300 an ounce?

I just retired for about ten years - not quite 10 years. I quit in '99 I think. I had the kids working for me then - my daughter and son. ~~that~~ I was more or less mining for them, so they would have a job. I wasn't making any money at the time.

It got so bad it was costing me money, so I quit. When ever it went above a thousand - I sold all my gear and my wife passed away, and I got hooked up with another gal, and I told her: "well, if it ever hits a thousand dollars an ounce, I'll go back to mining if you'll help me. And sure enough it happened. But I had a chance to update my equipment. It's been good. We've had a good time working together, just the 2 of us.

? Creeks gone over 4 or 5 times?

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I'm not real familiar with a lot of the other mining districts, ~~but~~ since the price of gold went up, I knew but I don't know what's been done. I haven't kept track. But, the Circle District is getting pretty lean. A lot of guys are trying ground that is marginal even at today's price of gold. Everybody's looking for ground. There's just not that much available. There's still some bodies of real low grade stuff on the lower ends of some creeks. It needs to be \$2500 an ounce to be mineable. So, it's slowly dying. It's definitely slowly dying in this area. If we don't find something like a big hard rock or something, it won't be too many years until there will be hardly anything going on no matter what the price of gold is. It's been sifted over 2, 3 times.

The only places I ever mined that were virgin was on Greenhorn Creek. I took out the bottom where they'd hand mined before I got into the bench because I didn't want to bury any goodies. So I got the mercury and the gold, and the nails and bullets - but it was still pretty good. When I took it rim to rim on the bottom.

The rest of the ground... of course, I was here from day one so I could have any ground I wanted. It was basically all open when I was a kid, other than Switch Creek was the only other one actually held, and some of the patented ground, of course. So, I got Crooked Creek which was virgin and the benches on Greenhorn. And then I staked some other creeks, too, but didn't mine them.

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? Snow coming down. When's the season here?

It varies quite a bit. Here's a good example. Last year I started the earliest I've ever started in my career on my son's birthday, April 26. I started washing and I was done on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. This year I couldn't start. I tried to start, but couldn't start until May 20<sup>th</sup> - so, almost a month later. So you've got two months difference one way or another. The 20<sup>th</sup> was probably my average start on Crooked Creek over the years. Mainly because in the early days I had to have so much water, you had to wait until there was enough water in the creek. It would start melting but there wasn't enough to run an old straight box where you're washing the boulders and everything through the box. With the wash plant, as soon as the ponds melt, you're good to go, if you've got prepped ahead of time.

✓ One of the big secrets to making money mining, you do all your prep work after the season, the washing season is over - you do your stripping, you build your pond, get your plant set up so when the water thaws out you can start washing. And I always figured 100 days is about the max.

Yeah, if you could mine year round it'd be a different story.

? Water starts freezing in the wash plant?

Yeah, if an if it doesn't thaw out during the day, get above freezing during the day, you're close. It just keeps building and building and building.

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? Deadwood had a different name?

Hog 'Em gulch! Somebody was doing some logging in there.

? BLM about claims ... miners?

They had their own rules. I think it was district by district just was shook out in Alaska. The miners association ... the miners, they had a lot of power. ~~to~~ Somebody they didn't want around, they could run them off. It held water.

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I've seen Freddy Wilkins with a sledge hammer beating a foot ice off the sides of his sluice box when he used a straight sluice box on Miller Creek. It gets too miserable. Then the clean up - there's been more than once where I said "I'll stay there till spring." (Laughs) an early clean up in the spring. Just froze in, ~~and~~ too cold to try to bring in heaters and all that and thaw it out. Just leave it. Nobody's going to walk off with it. It's frozen in there.

Dredges, they had a little longer season. They didn't get any earlier start, but they could go sometimes into December, because they were working below water. As long as the pond ice didn't get so thick that it impeded them, they ~~g~~ could go longer. In places they got an earlier start in the spring, like in Foks area where they had the ground thawed. They would actually cut the ice out of the ponds and ~~use~~ the winches to hoist it out of the pond and get to digging, below water it was thawed. Soon as it got warm enough in the air temp, the smaller dredges though, they were usually battling frozen ground and in later years like on Coal Creek and Woodchopper they used natural thawing. They gave up on cold water thawing, too labor intensive. During the war years there were better jobs for people. They had a hard time keeping help, higher paying jobs. They learned to use a lot less men to run the dredges than they did in earlier days.

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They cut corners wherever they could. Used cats, too, to strip the muck away from the gravel and just let the sun thaw ahead. They had to get a year or two ahead, and then they built dams and flooded it in the fall, flood the area so it wouldn't freeze clean back to bedrock. Even if the water drained out later, there was ice, air pockets act like insulation, with snow on top - a lot of tricks.

? Where did dredges work in this area?

They worked on Mammoth and Mastador, and up Independence a little ways which is a tributary of Mastador. Mammoth Creek begins where Independence and Mastador come together. It's Mammoth Creek from there to the mouth of Porcupine. Crooked Creek below the mouth of Porcupine. In the old days a lot of times they changed the name of the creek along the way so that they could stake a claim on each creek. (Laughs)

? One claim on each creek?

If you were a discoverer, I think you got the discovery claim and one claim, now, I'm not sure about Alaska, but I'm pretty sure about that in the Klondike.

And then you could get a... a power of attorney and stake for other people which was done a little excess