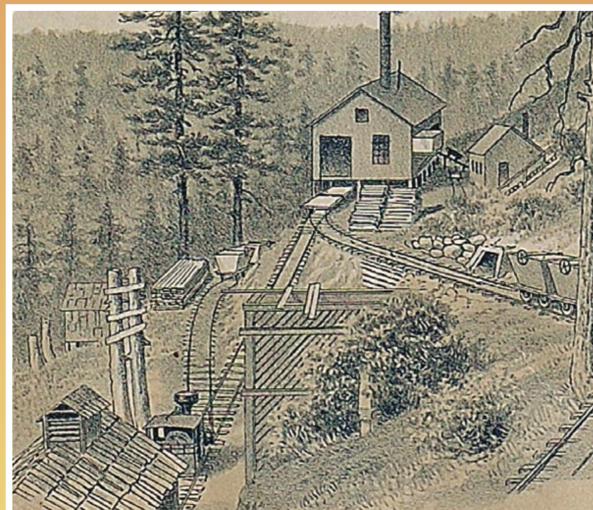
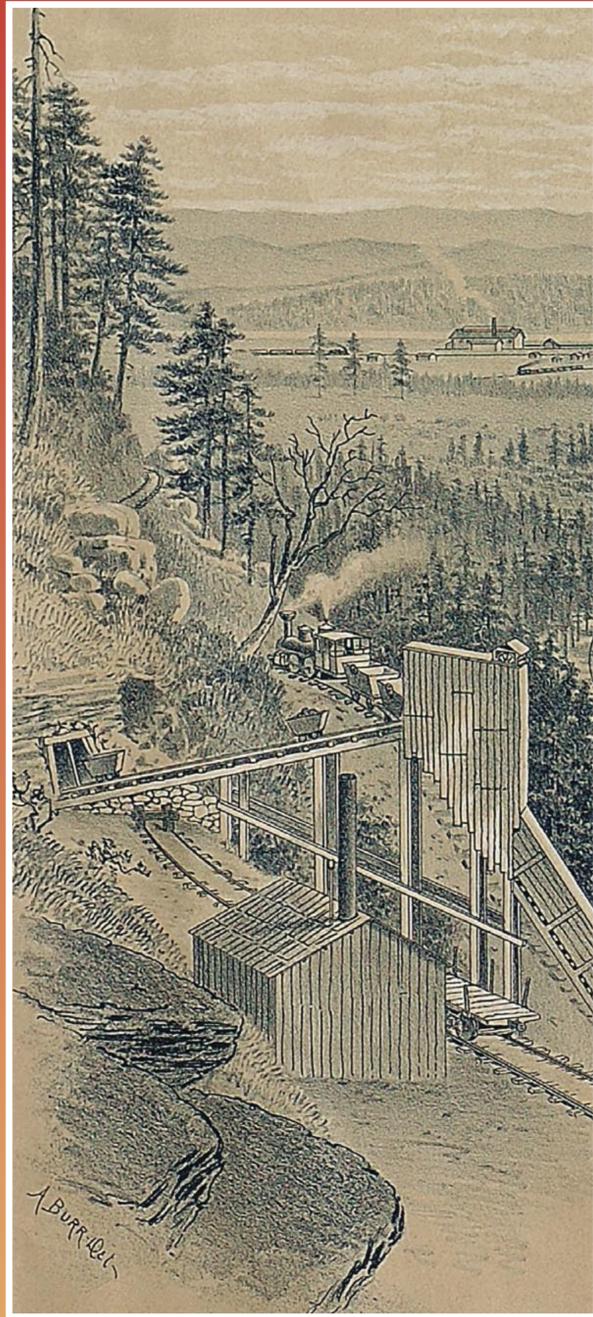


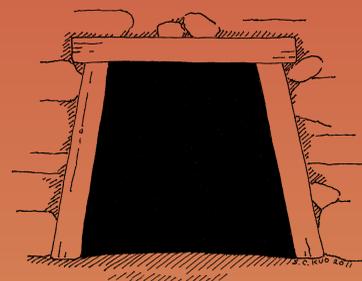
THE PROSSER IRON MINE



“A VERY PECULIAR BODY OF ORE”

The discovery of iron near the village of Oswego was big news in 1861 Oregon. Portland investors jumped at the chance to open the first iron mine and blast furnace on the Pacific Coast. The Oregon Iron Company was incorporated in 1865 and mining operations began in 1867. Three-quarters of the ore for the furnace came from the Prosser mine; the rest came from the Patton Mine on the south side of the lake.

The Prosser Mine is named after Henry and Mary Prosser on whose Donation Land Claim it was located. Mary Prosser later leased and then sold the property to the iron company. According to an 1886 mining report, the Prosser ore bed was “a very peculiar body of ore” because it was sandwiched between two layers of basalt.* The ore was deposited in a depression in the rock and then covered by a lava flow. Afterwards the whole formation was tilted at an angle of about twenty degrees.



The type of ore found in Oswego is called “bog ore” because it was formed when iron-rich spring water came in contact with oxygen in a swamp. Other names for this type of ore are limonite and brown hematite. Its iron content ranged from 27% to 54%.

During the 27 years that the mines were worked, ownership of the company changed twice. In 1878 it was acquired by the Oswego Iron Company and in 1882 it was sold and reincorporated as the Oregon Iron & Steel Company. Mining ceased in 1894 when mounting debts, compounded by a national economic crisis, forced the furnace to shut down.

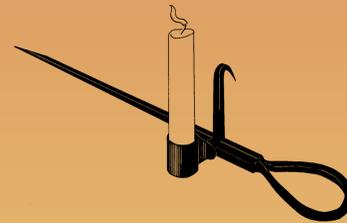
*Raphael Pumpelly, *Report on the Mining Industries of the United States*, Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1886.

The Iron Mountain Trail

The hiking path now called the Iron Mountain Trail was built as a wagon road from the mine to the furnace in 1878 by the Oswego Iron Company. C. W. Burrage, a Portland surveyor, laid out the route. Before the road was built, ore was winched up the side of the mountain and hauled to the furnace by a roundabout route. In 1880, the wagons were replaced with a narrow gauge railroad. Slag from the furnace was used to grade the road and pieces can still be seen, glinting like black obsidian, in the trail.

The Miners

By 1892 the mining crew consisted of fifty to sixty men who extracted 150 to 175 tons a day. Four of the miners in the photo are holding wrought iron candlesticks known as “Sticking Tommies.” The pointed end could be stuck into a rock crevice or wooden beam. An 1893 explosion at the mine illustrates the danger of working around dynamite with candles and oil lamps. Two miners were injured when a drop of burning oil from a miner’s headlamp fell into a box of dynamite caps. One of the men lost his right hand. The miners worked in pairs and were paid \$1.00 a carload. Two men typically mined six loads a day, about twenty tons. If the tunneling was very difficult, they were paid wages to insure they made at least \$3.50 a day.



Left: Two views of the Prosser Mines and the railroad on Iron Mountain. From a Supplement to the *West Shore* magazine, 1888.

Right: Miners pose in front of the mine holding their candlesticks. The man second from right is believed to be James H. Pomeroy, Superintendent of the Mine. Courtesy of the Lake Oswego Public Library

