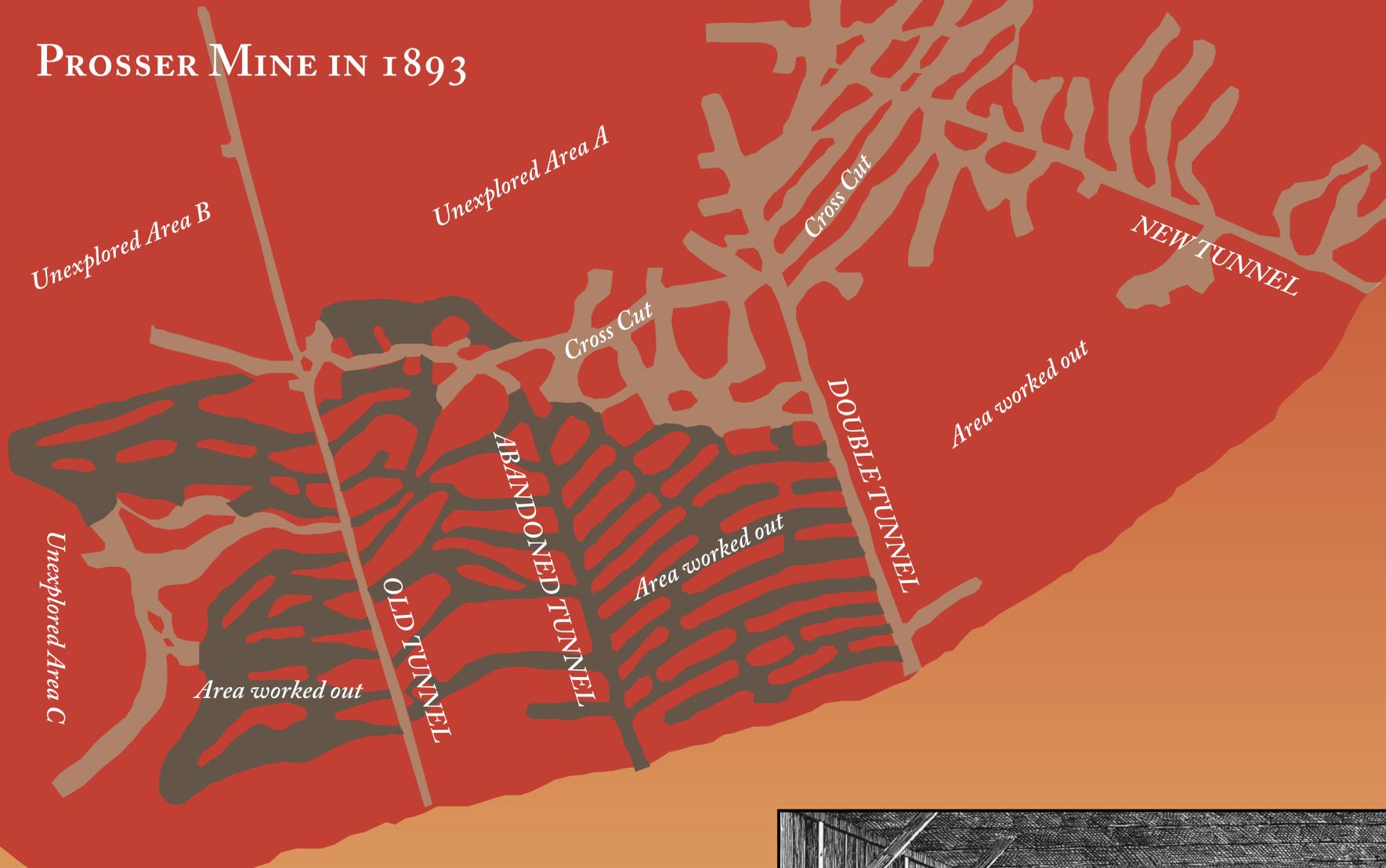


INTO THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH

PROSSER MINE IN 1893



Map by Corinna Campbell-Sack. Based on the Oregon Iron & Steel Company's 1893 map of the Prosser Mine.



AN EXPEDITION TO THE MINES

The following description of a visit to the mines was published in *The Oregonian* newspaper on February 6, 1892. Today the mine entrances are blocked because it is unsafe to venture inside.



“Reaching the city of Oswego, which is seven miles above Portland on the Willamette River, the party were placed on a small “binky” engine, and under the chaperonage of J. H. Pomeroy, the affable superintendent of the mines, they were soon whizzing along the pine-fringed shores of [the lake] towards the scene of mining operations. The mine is three miles from the city and the ride along the sloping hillsides and through rocky gorges is a beautiful one.”

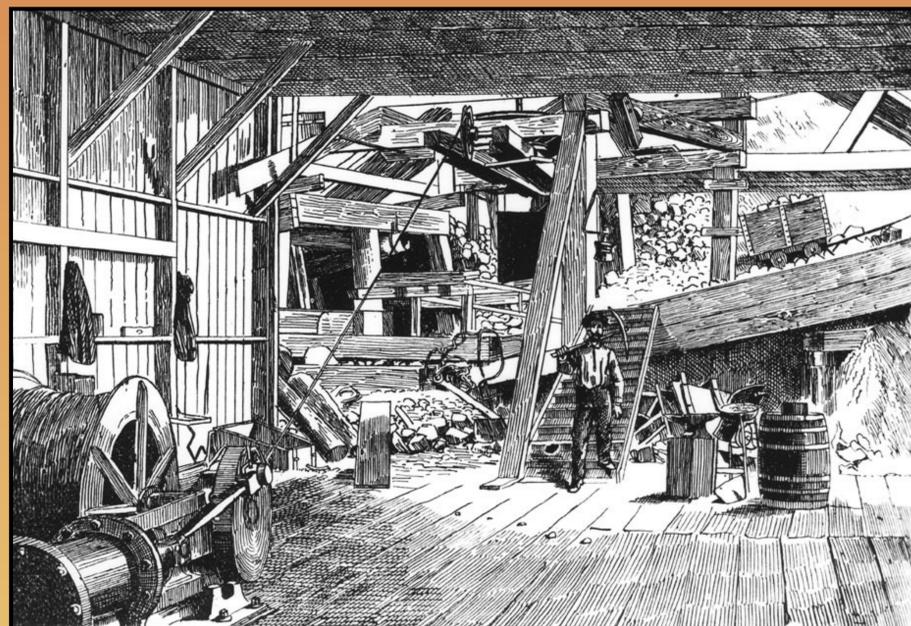
“At the mines Superintendent Pomeroy fitted the party out with torches, and then began a gradual though awe-inspiring descent into the bowels of the earth. The walk is somewhat muddy and slippery, and were it not for the ties of the small track on which the ore cars run, but little footing would be afforded the underground explorer. The continual dropping of water from the roof of the tunnel reminded one that there is a world above, although no rays of light penetrated the caverns that now are illumined only by the dim light of a few flickering torches.... About a mile and a quarter of tunneling was explored, the greatest lateral depth of any one being 1430 feet.”

“In one of the tunnels... the spreading roots of a large tree expanded over the heads of the party. The wood is yet sound, but the bark and outside is carbonized, showing that at some early day the tree was suddenly entombed by the lava of a volcano. The veins of ore vary in thickness from five to seven feet.... The tunnels are supported by pillars two feet square and although they are placed from two to three feet apart the strain on them from the weight of the earth above is so great that some are splintered as if they had been struck by lightning and new ones have to be put in all the time.”



DRIFT MINING

The Prosser Mine was a drift mine, meaning ore was extracted by digging horizontal, rather than vertical, tunnels into the mountainside. Over the 27 years the mine was worked, four tunnels were driven into the mountain side. Lateral tunnels or “drifts” created a lattice of open areas called “rooms.” The miners left pillars of untouched rock to support the roof. After all the ore in an area had been mined, the pillars were removed starting at the farthest point from the entrance. This allowed ore in the pillars to be collected, but it was dangerous as the ceiling collapsed. Entrances to these mined-out areas were sealed off. Small rail cars filled with ore were drawn by cable to the entrance and tipped into a bunker. Finally, the ore was sifted into two grades and hauled in rail cars down to the furnace.



Above and right: Illustrations from “Iron Manufacture at Oswego,” the *West Shore* magazine, November 2, 1889.

Left: Mine cross-section by Susanna Campbell Kuo. Based on an 1883 longitudinal section of the “Old Tunnel.”

