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Mining Mania

Mining took place mostly in the upper canyon. At Mineral Fork, Regulator Johnson dug 1000 ft. into the mountain, and shipped out \$200,000 worth of gold ore. Legend says that the quality of gold from his mine was so high and the quantity so large that Johnson could regulate the price of gold at the U.S. Mint, thus the name “Regulator” Johnson.

In 1871 there were only 200 claims staked in the canyon. By 1872 there were 650 claims and the mining boom had begun. The Big Cottonwood Mining District boasted a population of 500. Argenta (the Latin word for silver) was a small mining camp located at present-day Cardiff Flat. It had a post office, store, hotel and a population of 200. The local laundry was owned by a Chinese man who took care of troublemakers by starching their underwear until it could stand up by itself.

Argenta began to disappear in 1892 as the boom came to an end. Only a few large mines remained. The Prince of Wales Mine above Silver Fork shipped out about \$1.4 million in silver ore. The Cardiff Mine was the largest and last producer in Big Cottonwood, in continuous operation from 1915 until 1925, then periodically until 1961. It shipped out almost \$2 million in silver ore.

The Maxfield Mine was worked until the winter of 1916 when a snow slide destroyed the pumping system, and the mine filled with water. During prohibition it may have been purloined for use as a whiskey still where “only the squirrels would detect the delicately scented air of an alcoholic paradise.” The famous Blind Miner, James Newman, lost his sight in a blast in 1929, but continued to mine by himself for 30 more years, cutting over 1600 ft. straight into the mountain. The mine opening is still visible from the road.