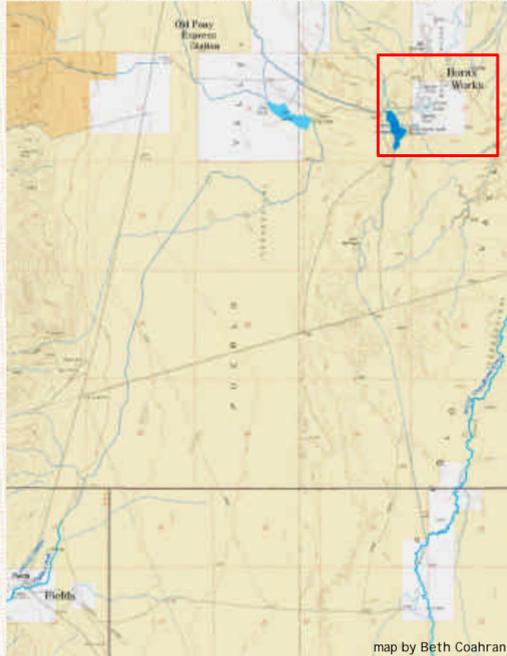


Rose Valley Borax Company



The old Rose Valley Borax Company is located 5.6 miles northeast of the town of Fields.

Photographs courtesy of Jim McDade and the Oregon Historical Society. Poster created by Brian P. McCabe and dedicated to Kiera Mei Hua McCabe.



Workers collected the raw borate deposits by scraping the ground. The material was put into two 6,000 gallon steel boiling tanks and filled with a blend of sulfuric acid and 97° water from Hot Lake. Using sage brush for fuel, the mixture was boiled for about 2 hours and then allowed to cool over night.

The Rose Valley Borax Company in southern Harney County was the only continuous borax harvesting venture in Oregon. Wanting to add to their existing borax operation in Nevada and drawn by reports of extensive alkali deposits in the Alvord Valley, Charles L. Taylor and John M. Fulton purchased Hot Lake and 3,000 acres of adjoining land where they established the surface mining works in 1898 under the name "Twenty Mule Team Borax Company." Because the Pacific Coast Borax Company of California legally owned the copyright to that name, in 1902 the Oregon firm became known as the Rose Valley Borax Company. The new moniker reflected the abundance of wild roses growing near springs in the valley. With the change of name also came a change of ownership. Christian S. Ollgard, a chemist and the manager of the Alvord concern, owned and operated the business for the next five years. The depletion of rich alkali deposits and the increasing cost of transporting the product to market contributed to the closure of the company in 1907.

All of the labor force employed at the mine were Chinese, hired through an employment agency in Carson City, Nevada. Approximately 25 to 30 workers may have lived in company provided sod houses at the site. Except for 2 weeks off to celebrate the Chinese New Year season, they toiled 7 days a week, year round, for \$1.50 a day.



After draining the boric acid solution from the boiling tanks, it was poured into 1,200 gallon galvanized crystallizing tanks. Crystals formed on hanger pipes suspended into the liquid and on the sides of the tanks. After 4 to 6 days, the crystals were removed using wooden mallets and the borax crystals were bagged in 90 lb. sacks. One day's production yielded about 80 to 100 sacks.



From left: Stella M. McDade, Christian Ollgard, housekeeper and Ollgard's daughters.



This 1953 photograph depicts the buildings that still stood at the mining location 46 years after its closure. Today, the site is on private land owned by The Nature Conservancy and nothing of the structures remains.



The sacks were shipped to Winnemucca, NV using 2 mule teams and 8 wagons. A round trip took 16 days. The first three wagons carried borax totaling about 55,000 lbs. The last wagon was filled with oats, mule shoes, extra harnesses, tools and supplies for the trek. During the winter and spring 20 to 24 mules were used; 16 to 18 during the summer when roads were dry.