



The town of Eureka, also known as Eureka Diggings or Eureka North, was located approximately 12 miles northwest of Downieville near the head of Eureka Creek at 5,000 feet elevation. The ridge top area around Eureka was incredibly rich in gold, discovered almost immediately after the start of the Gold Rush. However, because of its ridge top location, water was difficult to obtain once spring runoff had dried up. This difficulty in obtaining water ultimately led to the town's demise, as evidenced by this July 31, 1858 letter to the editor of the Sierra Democrat:

"Mr. Editor:

"...During the water season, Eureka presents a lively appearance, not excelled by any of the mountain towns; but no sooner does this native element begin to slacken, than her energies are weakened, and she puts on the gloomiest and driest look imaginable. Several families have departed for their winter residences, some of who will return in the spring, while many will never seek our hills again, but whose places will be filled by such as are not altogether consumers, but producers. Strangers who pass through here invariably express the opinion that this town has apparently suffered more by the Frazer humbug (note: Frazer references the exodus of miners to Canada in the quest for finding gold on the Frazer River) than any other place in the North. Admitting the fact, she has been purged of a class, who have never assisted in any manner to advance her interests, and who have long been burden to traders and businessmen generally, whose places, though vacant, do not create an 'aching void' to the detriment of those who remain here.

Of mining, there is not much use to write. In that line nothing is now being done; many miners are preparing their diggings for another season, when you may expect to hear of lively times here again, and money more plentiful than ever, as nearly all the miners are out of debt. In politics, but little is doing, though Douglas stock is on the ascendent, as we believe it will be throughout the county of Sierra and the State when the people take the matter in hand on election day.

Yours, etc. BOSWELL"

By 1860, Eureka had more than 800 people living in it

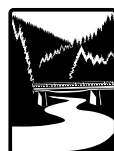
(according to voting records), with six hotels, eight saloons, three stores and two blacksmith shops. There was even a U.S. Post Office.

What is most fascinating about Eureka is that the townspeople completely washed the town out from beneath itself through hydraulic mining. Realizing the entire town was sitting on top of a deposit of gold in the gravel beneath, massive water monitors were supplied by an intricate network of water ditches that were very expensive to build and maintain, used to wash away the hillsides around the town. All that was heard by residents all day was the roaring of water cannons and the rattling of gravel down the hillsides.

It wasn't until the Sawyer Decision of 1884 that Eureka's ironic prosperity came to an end. As the very first environmental regulation in U.S. history, the Sawyer Decision outlawed hydraulic mining because of how destructive it was, discharging millions of tons of sediment from the mountains into the Central Valley, flooding out towns like Marysville and Yuba City.

Evidence of this can be found in the obituary of a former Eureka resident and one-time oldest voter in Sierra County history, printed in the Morning Union on October 1, 1914:

"Jackson Washington Wolfe, familiarly known as "Jack Wolfe", who was the oldest man on the great register of Sierra county, passed away at Downieville at the age of 98 years. The funeral was held yesterday. Jack Wolfe, like many old pioneers, was a man of many experiences. In early manhood he was a deckhand on a Mississippi steamboat and came to California over fifty years ago. He was making money keeping a hotel at Eureka North when the Sawyer injunction closed down the hydraulic mines. Wolfe was a heavy loser and never recovered financially. He went to Downieville and managed to make a living until about a year ago when the weakness of extreme age forced him to enter the county hospital there."



Eureka Diggings and its reddish brown washed hillsides are still prominent today, most easily accessed by taking Cal-Ida Road 18 miles to the diggings.

