

## “The Dulzura Gold Rush”

*The Dulzura district is the most extensive and richest gold bearing deposit in the world today.*

--Col. J. Lovick Johnson, mining engineer, in *San Diego Union*, March 20, 1908

*I have been mining many years and I wouldn't give \$10 for all the values in the Dulzura district.*

--J. C. Perrett, mining engineer, in *Los Angeles Examiner*, March 19, 1908

In the spring of 1908, as San Diegans waited impatiently for the appearance of the “Great White Fleet,” their attention was diverted by a startling news break. A major gold strike was reported in the city’s backyard. Only forty miles to the southeast, gold had been discovered in the rough hills near the hamlet of Dulzura.

Announcing the news on March 4, the *San Diego Union* reported the ore was “free milling,” meaning the gold could be extracted with little processing, and assays had found the ore was “high grade,” averaging an exceptional \$30 per ton. A reputed expert witness at the scene—mining engineer O.J. Kennedy, excitedly compared the strike to Colorado’s great gold rush of the 1890s: “It looks like a second Cripple Creek to me!”

News of the strike went nationwide. NEW GOLD RUSH ON was the headline in the *New York Times*, which reported prospectors were swarming to the scene from all over the Southwest. The newspaper cited Wyatt Earp, “the famous gun fighter and miner,” among the eager gold seekers. “I have sent my samples to Los Angeles, and feel sure of great results,” boasted Earp. “I predict the greatest boom in history.”

By the second week in March the rutted dirt roads to Dulzura filled daily with horse-drawn wagons or prospectors on foot, “tramping steadily alongside donkeys loaded with provisions and mining equipment.” Automobiles—rarely seen in that area in 1908—came too. Dulzura historian Dorothy Schmid remembered “thirty cars came in one day and we thought the traffic was fierce.”



Captain Small

Many of the “tenderfoots” seemed surprised at the lack of local accommodations. “It is a case of prospector and capitalist sleeping on the same hay in the barn together, and under the same wagon-beds,” remarked an observer. The only “hotel” in Dulzura was the barn of H. F. Small, a retired sea captain from Maine who now ran a small store with his son. A prospector returning to San Diego reported to the *Union* that the conditions were rough:

*Mr. Small, the only resident of Dulzura, and his aged father cooked breakfast yesterday morning for thirty-six men. These were as many as they could provide for, and the rest had to forage for themselves. Mr. Small's barn is crowded every night with prospectors. They are sleeping in the open and many are without blankets.*

Conditions eased in mid-March when “enterprising spirits” began to arrive with food and equipment. One entrepreneur from Los Angeles appeared driving a four-horse team and a wagon filled with spring mattresses and three big tents. Pitched in the heart of the mining district, the tents served as the local hotel.

Not all the hopeful miners were solitary prospectors. The district attracted experienced men from the gold fields of Colorado and Nevada and speculators from Los Angeles. A few prominent San Diegans joined in. One local syndicate included Mayor John F. Forward, County Assessor Montgomery Moulton, and William B. Gross, the developer of Grossmont. The group secured a lease on an old property called the Golden Artery Mine and began sinking shafts in the hillsides.

The lessee of the Golden Artery claim was the Donohoe family who had mined in the area since the 1890s. The brothers Alonzo and Stuart Donohoe had never profited much from their diggings and did not expect anyone else to, either. But they were happy to profit from the leases and also from a town site three miles from Dulzura they leased to mining promoters.

Initially dubbed “Mulligan’s Flat” the site was surveyed and divided into twenty blocks and then promoted with the more dignified name of Manzanita. Streets running north and south were called First, Second, and Third, while east and west streets were named Pasadena, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

But the good news from Dulzura ground to halt on March 19, when the *Los Angeles Examiner* broke a news story with a stunning headline: EXAMINER ASSAYS PROVE DULZURA ORE WORTHLESS.

The article’s lead declared:

*The Dulzura mining district, located near San Diego, has been proved a worthless proposition throughout. Samples of rock carefully selected by experts for the ‘Examiner’ have been assayed in Los Angeles and the results show that the ore does not run \$1 a ton in metal of any description.*

The *Examiner* story claimed that reporters had visited the site of the Donohoe mine and found nothing but waste rock on the ground and not a rock of value in the whole district. “We did find a crowd of disgusted prospectors.”

Disheartened and defensive, the *Union* produced quotes from a series of mining experts that vouched for the potential of the Dulzura district. Their chief witness was the “prominent mining engineer” Col. J. Lovick Johnson, who declared that the “immense bodies of ore at Dulzura” would shortly bring large numbers of people from Los Angeles. “Los Angeles is filled with Nevada mining stock,” he added, “and that is one reason why the Dulzura district is receiving a hammering.”

But in the days that followed, reports from Dulzura slowed to a trickle in the San Diego newspapers. Clearly, no one was getting rich. “It will take capital to get the ore out,” the *Union*

admitted. While it had boasted of fabulously valuable ore earlier in the month, the newspaper now conceded, “It is a low grade proposition.”

The denouement seemed to come in April when the biggest news story of the year re-emerged with the anchoring of the Great White Fleet off Coronado. A *Los Angeles Times* reporter visiting Dulzura found the district “practically depopulated by a general stampede to witness the arrival of the great American fleet.” He could not find more than fifty or sixty miners in the whole region.



Miners building a road in Dulzura. *San Diego Union*, March 20, 1908.

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