Gold Mining Prospects For Jobless Found False Hope.

The bubble of hope that large numbers of America's unemployed can find a livelihood in small placer gold-mining was broken by Harry L. Hopkins, Works Progress Administrator, today when he released findings of a survey of this field by the WPA's National Research Project on Reemployment Opportunities.

Although as many as 28,000 miners of this type sold some gold during 1935, according to the report, their average earnings were pitifully small. They worked an average of 45 days each during the year, and grossed an average of only $1.60 for each working day, or $72 per year. Other thousands who prospected without success could not be checked, because no sales to bullion dealers were recorded by them.

"Magazine and newspaper articles and interviews have speculated throughout the depression on the romantic opportunities for jobless men in prospecting for gold," said Mr. Hopkins, "but this is the first time that the earnings of these prospectors and their actual number have been measured."

Corrington Gill, Assistant Administrator, stated this conclusion in submitting the study:

"It demonstrates conclusively the futility of following the suggestion, frequently made in recent years, that large numbers of people be encouraged to become gold miners as a means of solving the unemployment problem."
The study covers placer mining in 17 states, divided into the Pacific Coast, Rocky Mountain and Southern Appalachian areas. It was carried out through a cooperative arrangement between the WPA's National Research Project on Reemployment Opportunities, of which David Weintraub is director, and the United States Bureau of Mines. The report was prepared by Charles White Merrill, Charles W. Henderson and O. E. Kiessling of the Bureau.

On the whole, it is a story of itinerant men and women who, when they lost their jobs at home, trekked in search of the "end of the rainbow." Usually they had no training or experience in mining and were foredoomed to fail. About three-fourths of them worked for only a short time in the diggings, and found that the income was low and uncertain. About one-third of them had drawn on public relief at some time between 1933 and 1936.

Many of the prospectors touched by the survey had skilled training and experience but had been unable to find jobs in the fields of their training. These included mechanics, carpenters, iron and steel structural workers, blacksmiths, truck drivers, engineers, contractors, welders, plumbers, well drillers and a wide variety of other occupations.

The predominant opinion among those interviewed was that they were "too old" to get jobs at their own trades, though almost an equal number were eager to return. A few were staying in the open for their health.

Three-fourths of the miners studied were over 40 years old, and about one-half were over 50. There were very few men under 30. The majority of the prospectors had no dependents, although a few had families. Several of the dependent wives worked with their husbands.

The report gives about a score of selected "case histories." These include the brief stories of such people as the former vice-president of a
limestone company, four young sailors, a musician and his wife, a carpenter, a gassed war veteran, two young city women and an architect and his wife. While on the whole they fared better than the average, few of them would stay at placer mining if they could return to their former jobs.

The study is the second of a series of "Mineral Technology and Output per Man Studies", which are part of a broad research effort by the WPA to explore job-opportunities in numerous American industries.