

WORLD PLACER JOURNAL

World Placer Journal - 2006 - Volume 6 [ABSTRACT] Gold recovery on rubber mats in Mongolia - the term 'matadoring'

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ABSTRACT

A classic paper describing the environmental problems in a gold rush valley, and how they might be mitigated before it is too late..



WASHING GRAVEL ON A RUBBER MAT sat on a sand-filled sack in a river.

Girls and women become highly skilled at swirling the mat to recover gold, including gold from tailings.



WASHING GRAVEL IN WINTER - taking advantage of water flowing from a natural spring.

With all streams and ponds frozen over, the few springs still flowing become magnets for artisanal miners who bring bowls and pans to keep on recovering gold.

Rubber mats are used across the world as sluice liners by mining companies, artisanal and small-scale miners and recreational miners. As far as the author is aware only in Mongolia do artisanal miners use rubber mats as substitutes for gold pans. The term 'matadoring' is proposed to describe the process, for while casual observers refer to it as panning, it resembles panning only in the wide sense of being a process of gold recovery driven directly by both hands without recourse to handles, levers, pedals, levers, motors or mechanical means.

Matadoring commences when the miner using both hands grasps two adjacent corners of a mat and, keeping the corners upturned, slaps the mat on the water surface. To do this in comfort the operator sits legs splayed on a sand-filled flour sack in shallow water, or with less comfort crouched by the water.

Half a shovelful of gravel is put on the buoyant rubber mat by the operator or by a second miner. The operator drives the mat by rather complicated movements of the arms, wrists and hands to cause the mat to slice through the top centimetre of water, causing a wave-fronted tidal surge of water to charge onto the mat. Generally the tide is confined for a while on the mat by the operator tweaking the mat to increase its concavity, accompanied by orbital motion to swirl the trapped water. Particles of clay and silt are driven into suspension by this turbulence, and sometimes the water may foam for a few moments due to trapped air being ejected from the sediment. The process of slicing and swirling continues for some time, until the operator has reduced the volume considerably. Brief pauses may occur to remove oversize by one hand while keeping the mat balanced in the other hand. Often one of more fresh loads will



WASHING TAILINGS - by spade and mat.

Artisanal miners digging tailings from the bed of the Tuul River, to rewash on a rubber mat. The mat is being twisted from side to side across the surface of the water, skimming a slice of water to surge across the mat.

be shoveled onto the mat. Finally the operator decides the matadoring is complete and carries the mat and its cargo of concentrate to the shore. Once ashore, the operator increases the curvature on the mat to form a chute and may even insert it snugly in a green bowl where the curvature of the mat pressed against the curved wall of the bowl is enough to maintain the mat reasonably balanced and upright. The operator or assistant then uses a second bowl to slosh water on the mat to flush the concentrate into the green bowl. Once in the green bowl the concentrate can be easily upgraded further by brief bowling if necessary or individual pieces of gold retrieved directly.

Matadoring seems to require less effort than using a North American gold pan, permits a more relaxing body posture, and may rival or surpass panning for speed of processing.

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