

Rocky Bar Spanish Legend

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Signs of early placer mining and rock remains of old *arastras* (a Mexican variety of mill used for crushing quartz ore) still are to be found near Rocky Bar at the forks of Big and Little Elk Creeks. This site now is known as *Spanishtown*. The name derives from activity of Spaniards or Mexicans who are known to have mined there shortly after discovery of the South Boise mines early in the spring of 1863. *Arastras*, constructed primarily from wood and rock available locally in the mining region, were used in large numbers in the Rocky Bar area in 1864 by all kinds of miners—not just by Spaniards and Mexicans. In the case of the *Spanishtown* *arastras* and mining, however, newspaper references to Spanish-speaking miners in that locality are to be found as early as 1866. A decade later, abandoned cabins of Spanish occupants were noticed at *Spanishtown* by newcomers to the Rocky Bar area. And in later years, a well-developed story of early Spanish mining at *Spanishtown* grew up in Rocky Bar.

As the later tradition has it, Spaniards came to run a large mine at *Spanishtown* long before the California gold rush. Where they came from or how they got to such a remote spot as *Spanishtown* is not too clear in the legend. When Alexander Ross brought a Hudson's Bay Company expedition through some of those imaginary mining traces in 1824, any such evidence was absent. If mining had been carried on there before 1860 (when mining actually began in Idaho), and if traces of very old mining at *Spanishtown* were visible late in the nineteenth century, those who prospected there in 1863 ought to have noticed such evidence. No such reports have turned up on the early accounts of the South Boise gold rush, however. By the time that this tradition of old Spanish mining actually developed, the work of Spanish-speaking miners known to have been there in 1866 was visible. Presumably this was the Spanish activity which led to the tradition about old Spanish workings at *Spanishtown*.

To suppose that a colony of Spaniards came from an extremely distant base in something like the sixteenth (or even the eighteenth) century in order to mine for a time at *Spanishtown*—as the legend has it—is fantastic. As a matter of fact, Spaniards who lived in California did not bother to discover or develop the far more extensive mines of that area during those years. But the Rocky Bar Spanish tradition frequently is repeated even though positive evidence to support such a supposition of pre-nineteenth century mining at *Spanishtown* is lacking entirely. This same kind of legend has sprung up in some other parts of the mining West. In some places, the

old Spanish mining legend is more plausible than others. The Rocky Bar-Spanishtown area is one of the least reasonable places that could be found to develop an old Spanish legend. See Ference Morton Szasz, ed., *Great Mysteries of the West* (Golden, CO: 1993), 219-231, for additional information.

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