

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

BOISE RIVER PLACERS

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Compared with Boise Basin, placers along the middle fork and main course of the river were harder to prospect, more difficult to process, and less productive after they were located and worked. Aside from their proximity to valuable basin properties, they might have gone unnoticed much longer than they did. Richer placers generally are deposited close to lodes from which they are eroded. Some of the finer particles of gold gradually float downstream where they eventually repose in sand and gravel bars up to hundreds of miles from their source. Some of the finest particles move on out into the Pacific Ocean where no practical recovery system has yet been devised. River placers along the Boise River have been distributed in non-commercial quantities in valley bench lands as well as in more recent channel gravel. Occasional bars in bends along former channels, often high above more recent stream beds, contained enough fine gold to interest nineteenth-century prospectors. They hardly could appreciate how much gold was involved, because a substantial part of these values came in particles too fine to be seen by the best microscopes available. Prospectors normally did not pack along high-quality microscopes, and even if they had, they could not have handled such fine gold anyway.

Not later than the summer of 1864, river placers above Boise were gaining recognition in the area where Lucky Peak dam was completed in 1952. Additional discoveries at Boise King (near Pfeiffer and Swanholm creeks) followed in June, 1867, and an early hydraulic ditch from Black Warrior Creek served that area. Others above More's Creek and above the south fork at Cottonwood Creek were found in the summer of 1869. Mining was underway near Twin Springs eight years later; after two more decades, a large siphon project supplied water for a massive hydraulic operation good for \$150,000 on some high bars there. Some large scale Chinese operations high on the ridges near the Black Warrior also contributed to middle-fork production, and a Black Warrior lode location in August, 1903, led to considerable additional activity there from 1904 to 1906. Dredging of \$200,000 during 1940-1942 and 1946 above the Boise King accounted for most of the remaining Boise River production.