

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - WARRENS

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Historic-site reports contain information designed to assist in two preservation functions. One is preservation planning at the local level. The other is the work of federal agencies in carrying out their responsibilities to comply with historic-preservation requirements prescribed by federal statutes and regulations. These reports summarize local archaeological, historical, and geographical contexts; existing surveys of historic sites; architectural, engineering, industrial; and other cultural resources; and available maps and literature concerning each area. Natural geographical, rather than governmental, boundaries have been used to identify seventy-two areas that vary greatly in size. Site reports reflect a broad cultural and geographical disparity characteristic of diverse regional components found in Idaho, but the areas are designed to incorporate cultural elements of immediate local significance that need to be taken into account for preservation planning.

1. Geographical context: Like much of central Idaho, Warren's is on a high, mountainous plateau cut by spectacular canyons, many of them (including those near Warren's) deeper than Colorado River's Grand Canyon. Mineral and forest resources are prominent in this area, but topographic features have prevented development of transportation routes aside from modest roads necessary for access to mines and timber sales. Elevations range from 2,050' on Salmon river to 5,907' at Warren's and 8,110' at Burgdorf Summit.

2. Prehistory and significant archaeological sites: After the last great Missoula-Spokane flood, which surged and splashed from Pasco up Snake River past Lewiston into Idaho some 12,000 years ago, people moved back into Snake and Clearwater canyons, where they have been active ever since. Traces of human occupation of higher canyon and prairie country also go back for eight thousand years or so, and lower Clearwater pit houses have been in use for five thousand years or more.

3. Cultural resource surveys and archaeological literature:

4. Historical summary: Prospectors radiating out from Florence struck gold in Warren's basin in the summer of 1862, and organized a mining district there, July 22. Led by James Warren, the discovery party of eighteen men had made a difficult trip across the mile-deep canyon of the Salmon to their new, decidedly isolated diggings in the high country to the south of their base camp at Florence. Less than a month later, about 200 men had started to work on the Warren's placers. Then, with a hard winter at hand before much could be done to develop the area, a merchant's pack train arrived with supplies, September 8, and a log cabin store was hastily put together to save the new community. When the 1862 mining season came to an end in November, Warren's had a force of 375 men at work. Already the camp stood second only to Florence in the Clearwater and Salmon River mining country.

Compared to Florence, Warren's diggings seemed modest. Many claims paid well, but few contained anything like the really spectacular bonanzas which had made Florence so fabulous. One Warren's company of sixteen men--most of them busy stripping away waste surface gravel--boasted a recovery of \$2,796 an ounce (about \$15 in Warren's) of gold a day. Because Warren's was so hard to reach, and offered less opportunity for those who preferred to get rich while avoiding too much hard work, the camp was spared much of the trouble that road gents and desperados brought to neighboring Florence.

Overshadowed in the fall of 1862 by two other new mining regions--Boise Basin to the south and Bannock on the upper Missouri to the east--that had been discovered only a week or two after Jim Warren's men had found gold, Warren's diggings did not attract anything like the thousands of miners who had rushed to Florence only the year before. Yet during the next summer, Warren's rose to become North Idaho's leading mining camp, with 660 men still on hand that fall. Florence already was mostly worked out, and Warren's still had only begun to produce. As was the case in Florence, each mining season was relatively short. Placering could begin late in May or early in June, and could continue only for two months or so before seasonal water shortages began to restrict mining operations. Short ditches made even the bench and gulch claims workable when water was available, and early Warren's offered serious miners a real opportunity to prosper.

Civil War passions divided Warren's camp into two rival towns, Washington and Richmond, during the gold rush years. Unlike Boise Basin and East Bannock, union sentiment predominated in Warren's. Washington, therefore, had a brighter future right from the beginning. Richmond's downfall came mostly from a fortunate--or perhaps, for a town, unfortunate--location on good placer ground. Claimholders could not be denied the site. By 1866 Richmond had disappeared. Mining of the townsite had led to removal of the buildings there, and reconstruction scarcely

seemed necessary after that. Washington gained as Richmond declined. Eventually, though, Washington became known as Warren's, since it was the only town left in Warren's camp.

Quartz discoveries from 1866 brought a new mania to Warren's at a time when the better placers were being worked out. As Norman B. Willey (a leading Warren's miner who later became governor of Idaho) described it, "the attention of prospectors was attracted to considerable moderately rich float quartz hereabouts, and many scores of ledges were discovered, and hundreds, probably thousands, of claims were located and recorded upon them." Of the multitude of locations recorded, only eighteen lodes actually had some mining possibilities, and two stamp mills (totaling fifteen stamps) and several arastras went into operation. Yet the excitement of discovery was intense. In one notable example, Willey reported that "Before 10 o'clock the next day [following an afternoon discovery], 45 claims of 200 feet each, were located one way from the discovery stake, and 50 in the opposite direction. Subsequently a few tons of rather rich croppings were taken out of the discovery claim, but 50 feet in any direction from where a pick was first struck in the ground, only the merest trace of a ledge has been visible." Moreover, he said, "out of all those ledges whose praises were so mysteriously whispered at first, or so triumphantly sounded when things were fixed, on the strength and lustre of whose fame . . . so many drinks were obtained from too confiding barkeeps, three only . . ." were being developed at all once the 1866 craze died down. These included the Charity and the Rescue, both discovered in 1868 and mined with great difficulty in the early years. Both of the stamp mills brought in during the quartz boom failed--as was usual at that time, especially in districts so extremely remote as Warren's. For the next several years, the sheriff "repeatedly had his eye upon them" during the litigation which accompanied the failures. As Willey explained, "their unfortunate creditors uniformly found them [the stamp mills] a heavy burden."

Placering continued to support Warren's camp during the years that quartz mining got off to a faltering start, and removal of the county seat from Florence to Washington in 1868 helped sustain the camp. A small jail was built in 1869, and an empty cabin was leased for a courthouse. Gradually the population became more and more Oriental: Chinese miners commenced to supplant the whites as placer claims ceased to pay high wages. By 1874, most claims that white miners would pay any attention to were worked out, and that season saw a considerable exodus of white prospectors in search of new regions to exploit.

A few whites stayed around, including a company running a hydraulic giant on some good ground at the lower end of Warren's meadows. Warren's was not as bad off as Florence, which by 1874 had "reached the last stage of decadence" with a Chinese flag flying in place of the stars and stripes on Main Street--

"sufficient proof in itself of decay and degeneracy." Yet when a major county boundary revision led to removal of the county seat from Washington to Mount Idaho in 1875, nothing much remained for white placer miners in Warren's except to sell out their claims to energetic Orientals. Willey reported in 1876 that "On the whole the season has been successful. A good deal of ground has been sold to Chinamen this year. Many claims too poor to be of any earthly value to any human being have been sold to these barbarians at good figures."

Lode mining--mainly at the Charity and the Rescue--helped keep Warren's alive after the Chinese took over most of the placers. The Charity generally ran only on a limited scale, with an arastra to grind up what ore it produced after a stamp mill brought in from Florence had run only a season or two after 1874.

The Rescue, which had been mined rather successfully by claim jumpers who had produced \$60,000 between 1870 and 1872, had reopened after a long and windy litigation before the supreme court had restored title to the original owners. Two years more had been required to bring in and install a simple hoist for a 70-foot shaft which could be used only with great difficulty in so remote an area. Several Boston capitalists were interested in the property through the energy of Alonzo Leland who promoted the Rescue for years. But they were handicapped greatly by the mine's near inaccessibility. An occasional rich pocket encouraged the lode miners, but the Rescue grossed only about \$100,000 to \$150,000 by 1900, and the Charity, \$45,000. Finally a more successful venture, the Little Giant, came into production in 1883 and paid dividends every year for the rest of the century. By 1904 the Little Giant's five-stamp mill had turned out about \$350,000. Later companies occasionally worked the Little Giant and the Rescue, with fairly extensive operations from 1921 until a shutdown by 1926, and again from 1928 to 1930.

Dredging of Warren's meadows--where a steamshovel and sluice operation had failed just before the turn of the century--finally became practical after 1930. A steam dredge was trucked into the area in 1931, and work continued until wartime restrictions suspended all gold mining in 1942. By 1934 two dredges--both powered by electricity--were active, and their yield finally reached about \$4,000,000.

A century and more after mining commenced, Warren's survives mainly as a forest service and recreational center. As one of Idaho's larger ghost towns--or near ghost towns--Warren's provides examples of most of the kinds of gold mining to be found in Idaho. In spite of extreme isolation from convenient transportation, Warren's has had an important part in Idaho's long mining story.

5. Historical documentation and literature:

6. Historic sites inventory:

7. Industrial archaeological and engineering sites summary:
Surface evidence of placer mining in this area offers opportunities for study of industrial procedures utilized in historic production. Hydraulic pits, patterns of dredging operations, or tailings that distinguish hill claims from stream claims--or that identify Chinese services--provide information of historic importance. Prospector's pits disclose gravels that were searched unsuccessfully for gold. Ditches, flumes, stream diversions, and similar evidence of water sources also are important.

Lode mining operations left a variety of indications, many of them relatively permanent in nature. Disturbance of surface outcrops includes trenches and exploratory shafts. In other places, tunnels and raises or stopes that reached surface outlets reveal important aspects of mining activity. If accessible, underground workings have still greater importance for industrial archaeology and engineering analysis. Abandoned tools and equipment, along with items like timbering in tunnels and stopes, add to this record.

8. Architectural resources: Survey of the Warrens study area is limited to a few isolated areas, and generalizations about the nature of the area's architecture would be premature. One would expect to encounter sites related to the area's development as a mining area during the 1860's and later in the 1930's.

No site of architectural interest has been recorded in the area. All parts of the study area deserve further survey.

The area has no sites of architectural significance listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

9. United States Geological Survey Maps.

Burgdorf (15') 1956
Loon Lake 1969
Pilot Peak 1969
Pony Meadows 1969
Warren 1956

10. Cultural resource management recommendations: