

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - STANLEY BASIN-SAWTOOTH WILDERNESS AND WHITECLOUDS

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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: Idaho's longest mountain basin extends over forty miles northwest from several Salmon River headwater streams into middle fork drainage past Cape Horn. Spectacular Sawtooth Wilderness peaks provide a western border, while still higher Whitecloud summits rise up opposite them. Recreational facilities take advantage of a large number of lakes and streams in this partially forested area. A number of mines, with rather limited production, have been developed, but ranching has assumed far greater economic importance. Forest products also are of interest, but have not supported large sawmills. Practically all of this area exceeds 6,000 feet in elevation, while Thompson Peak reaches 10 .

2. Prehistory and significant archaeological sites: People have inhabited southern Idaho for fourteen thousand years or more. Until about eight thousand years ago they were noted primarily as big game hunters. Since then, they specialized more in camas, bitterroot, and other natural crops and seeds, as well as in smaller game. But they continued to hunt large game that remained after earlier elephants, camels, giant sloths, and other ice age creatures left as climatic conditions changed. Snake River Plains big game hunters came into the Salmon River Mountains to fish and to hunt mountain sheep and other local

game. Evidence of their activity there goes back for eight thousand years or so. A Little Redfish Lake overhang and some Obsidian hunting blinds are significant archaeological sites in this area.

3. Cultural resource surveys and archaeological literature:

4. Historical summary: Major episodes include

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Fur hunters discovered the Sawtooth range on September 18, 1824. Directly to the south, Donald Mackenzie had led his North West Company trapping brigade across Camas prairie in 1820, and Michel Bourdon had explored the Salmon up as far as Challis in 1822. (By then, these trappers were hunting beaver for the Hudson's Bay Company, with which the North West Company of Montreal had been merged.) When Alexander Ross took out the same Snake brigade in 1824, he decided to search the mountainous country between the upper Salmon and the upper Boise. Finally he ascended Wood River and crossed into Stanley Basin. Some of his men examined Stanley Basin as far as Cape Horn and the upper middle fork of the Salmon, while Ross and the main party camped near Stanley. Before he got on down the Salmon to Challis, he wished he hadn't discovered the Sawtooth range and, particularly, the canyon of the Salmon below Stanley. He had seen enough mountain scenery to last a lifetime, and retired to run a Red River school for Indians at later Winnipeg.

Indications of fur trapping in the vicinity of the Sawtooth range immediately after 1824 are few indeed. Peter Skene Ogden's six Snake country expeditions, warned by Ross' findings, avoided that area. Ogden concentrated upon over trapping the Snake country in order to keep mountain men who might compete with the Hudson's Bay Company from working farther into the Pacific Northwest. With the help of many of the mountain men who had no incentive to conserve fur resources anyway, Ogden and his Hudson's Bay Company Snake expeditions did a thorough job. So after 1830, even the relatively untouched Sawtooth range country attracted fur hunters who had trouble finding any other good place to go. A large party of mountain men spent a long time on the upper Salmon in 1831, and some of them trapped with indifferent success in Stanley Basin.

A group including W. A. Ferris camped in Stanley Basin, July 13, after "a tedious and toilsome march" up the Salmon: on

meeting a band of Sheepeaters "clad with robes and moccasins made of dressed beaver skins" they concluded that reports of an "abundance of those animals in this vicinity" were accurate. While one of the Indians guided the main group of fur hunters about fifty miles on farther west in search of beaver, the others who remained in Stanley Basin "were employed in taking salmon, which was easily affected by driving them up or down the river, over shoals and rapids where we killed them with clubs and stones, and frequently even caught them with our hands."

One aspect of life in Stanley Basin at that time tormented the ones who had remained there. Ferris noted that "Our horses were daily so much annoyed by flies, that they were forced to assemble in crowds for their mutual defense, and were seen switching and brushing one another continually with their tails in the most affectionate and friendly manner." Those who stayed in the basin, though, did little worse than the trappers who had gone out on the ten day beaver hunt. Aside from one small beaver colony, their Indian guide found them nothing of importance before reaching a high point from which the trappers could see the vast expanse of the Snake River plains somewhere in the Boise region. Their guide, "imagining they hunted merely for food, had prepared them what he thought would be a most agreeable surprise. . . ." When asked if he could find them any more beaver, he replied that he could not. But he had taken them to a region where they could find an "abundance of elk." So the trappers had to return to Stanley Basin, where the entire party was satisfied that their "visit to this now interesting country was a complete failure. . . ." So on July 24, the trappers left for the plains to the southeast to start another hunt.

Then in 1832, John Work brought the Hudson's Bay Company Snake Brigade from the upper South Fork of the Boise into the head of Stanley Basin. Noting the lack of success experienced by the trappers in Stanley Basin the year before, he swung on to Cape Horn and across Bear Valley on his way through the Payette and Weiser country to Snake River. By 1832, these ventures had pretty well eliminated any possibility for an extensive fur trade in the Sawtooth range-Stanley Basin country.

Even though fur hunting in Stanley Basin may have shown little promise, the area proved useful to the trappers. Captain B. L. E. Bonneville came to Salmon River, September 24, 1832, to camp for the winter a short distance below the mouth of the Lemhi. Some Nez Perce and Flathead Indians joined him. Lack of supplies and repeated trouble with the Blackfeet, however, led the Indians to suggest a move to Stanley Basin, "which [in the words of Washington Irving] they represented as a perfect hunter's elysium. It was the right branch or head stream of the river, locked up among cliffs and precipices where there was no danger from roving bands, and where the Blackfeet dare not enter.

Here they said, the elk abounded, and the mountain sheep were to be seen trooping upon the rocks and hills." So on December 9,

Bonneville set out with his men and the friendly Nez Perce to seek refuge in "the secluded regions so much vaunted by the Indians." Moving leisurely, he did not push into the Salmon River canyon below Stanley until December 19. Proceeding up it, he entered the long promised secluded basin--

a natural fastness of the mountains, the ingress and egress of which was by a deep gorge, so narrow, rugged, and difficult as to prevent secret approach or rapid retreat, and to admit of easy defense. The Blackfeet, therefore, refrained from venturing in after the Nez Percés, awaiting a better chance, when they should once more emerge into the open country.

Captain Bonneville soon found that the Indians had not exaggerated the advantages of this region. Besides the numerous gangs of elk, large flocks of the ahsahta or bighorn, the mountain sheep, were to be seen bounding among the precipices. These simple animals were easily circumvented and destroyed. A few hunters may surround a flock and kill as many as they please. Numbers were daily brought into camp, and the flesh of those which were young and fat was extolled as superior to the finest mutton.

Here, then, there was a cessation from toil, from hunger, and alarm. Past ills and dangers were forgotten. The hunt, the game, the song, the story, the rough though good-humored joke, made time pass joyously away, and plenty and security reigned throughout the camp.

Finally after an elaborate Christmas celebration with the Nez Perce, who joined enthusiastically in the festivities, the little band of fourteen trappers left Stanley Basin, December 26, in search of a detachment of Bonneville's men who had gotten lost in the Bear River country on their way to the main party's winter camp on the Salmon River.

Thirty years after Captain Bonneville sought refuge in Stanley Basin, mining possibilities brought an invasion of prospectors in the general region. Gold discoveries in Boise Basin in 1862 led to the opening of the South Boise mines around Rocky Bar toward the Wood River country. Directly south of the Sawtooth range, mines were found on the Little Smokey. Other prospectors went in the spring of 1864 to work on a limited scale on the Middle Fork of the Boise near Pfeiffer Creek northwest of Rocky Bar. Gold hunters were out almost everywhere in southwestern Idaho hoping to find new bonanzas. Some of them were even making preliminary discoveries on Loon Creek, remote in the Salmon River mountains not far to the northeast of Stanley Basin.

Serious prospecting of the Sawtooth range got underway at

least as early as the summer of 1864. J. Marion More, of Idaho City, searched the Sawtooth range for precious metals. In the process, he discovered a large number of the high mountain lakes, which provided excellent fishing, if not gold possibilities. (Recreational possibilities of the Sawtooth range did not go unnoticed in those gold rush years: More, for example, took an Idaho City fishing party back to the lakes of the Sawtooths, August 12, 1867.) During that same summer of 1864, John Stanley led a party southeast from Warrens, July 4, and approached Stanley Basin (named on that occasion) by way of Bear Valley and Cape Horn. Several placer discoveries made on that trip seemed to be too remote to justify development. So the group continued by crossing the Sawtooth range to the upper Middle Fork of the Boise. There on Yuba River they had better luck. Organizing a mining district, July 20, they opened placer claims which, in turn, led to a far more significant discovery that fall: the important Atlanta lode. Located not far to the west of the Sawtooth range, the Atlanta mines brought another important community into the Sawtooth region. Limited quartz production began to supplement the Yuba placers in 1866, and stamp milling at Atlanta began in 1867. Remoteness from good transportation facilities--even the nearest wagon road came only to Rocky Bar, some fourteen miles over a high ridge--held Atlanta back for many years.

Following the South Boise and Atlanta excitements to the southwest, mining operations or possibilities, at least, began to encircle the Sawtooth range. A Rocky Bar party set out in 1865 toward Wood river; two properties were located September 11, south of the Sawtooth range, in an area later known as the Hailey gold belt. Development here was delayed until 1879, but in the meantime, the rush to Leesburg brought miners through the country to the north of the Sawtooths from 1866 on. Before another gold rush in 1869 attracted still another gold rush to Loon Creek, a limited amount of mining had commenced around Stanley. That community already had a store. Less than twenty miles down the Salmon River from Stanley, a hydraulic giant already was in production at Robinson's Bar. Soon the Loon Creek excitement led to the beginnings of a still more important operation on Yankee Fork. Discovery of the General Custer mine in 1876 greatly enlarged the quartz possibilities of Yankee Fork, and two new mining camps of Bonanza and Custer grew up in that area in 1869.

And by 1879, mining spread southwest to the head of the Salmon with activity at Vienna and Sawtooth City bringing settlement to the southern end of the Sawtooth range. From 1880 on, the Sawtooth range--while uninhabited itself--no longer was so remote from Idaho's expanding mining frontier.

Just before the Bannock War of 1878, Levi Smiley left Challis late in May to prospect the upper Salmon above Stanley Basin. Just before his party crossed a high divide onto the south fork of the Boise, they noticed a rich quartz outcrop.

Before they could record any claims, news that the Bannock War had broken out on nearby Camas Prairie induced them to retire to Challis. After Indian hostilities were concluded, Smiley returned that October with T. B. Mulkey to locate a number of lode claims. An experienced Montana prospector and Utah mill superintendent, Smiley had no trouble raising another party as early in 1879 as they could get back into that high country. E. M. Wilson had greater success than any of the others, discovering the Vienna lode, June 4. A gold rush that summer led to additional discoveries on Beaver and Lake creeks. A mining district was organized and Sawtooth City was established on Beaver Creek. Rich silver ore, augmented by some gold, was packed from the Pilgrim mine at Sawtooth to Atlanta that fall. San Francisco investors purchased the Pilgrim for \$30,000 in the fall of 1879 and soon spent \$45,000 more developing their property. Capitalists from LaCrosse and Winona, Wisconsin, took over the Vienna mine, so that during an enterprising initial season, Vienna and Sawtooth City moved rapidly toward production.

Developed between a gold rush to Yankee Fork in 1878 and 1879 and a silver rush to Wood River in 1880, Vienna and Sawtooth City enjoyed a considerable boom of their own. Attracting experienced miners from Rocky Bar, Atlanta, and Bonanza, the area underwent extensive early exploration. With a 1,200-foot tunnel, a 100-foot shaft, and some raises which reached the surface, the Pilgrim lode (with a width from ten to twenty-five feet) contained a lot of high grade ore with assays ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 ounces of silver per ton. An average of sixty ounces a ton for ten thousand tons developed by 1882, and two thousand more already for milling, justified considerable effort to provide a recovery process suitable for sulphide ores there. Two adjacent mines, developed by tunnels 250 and 360 feet long, had paid their own development costs, with several tons of high grade ore running from five hundred to two thousand dollars a ton sacked and ready for export. Yet another property--the Silver King--had fifteen tons of \$500 ore on hand by 1882, sorted into high grade (4,400 ounces a ton), second grade (770 ounces), and standard grade (93 ounces)--mostly the latter. A New York company had purchased two other prospects (Columbia and Beaver) in 1880 for \$12,000 and engaged in substantial additional development. With construction of a Sawtooth City-Ketchum toll road, two mills were brought in and that isolated camp flourished during an expensive development phase. Expenditure of \$100,000 on development preceded any effort at milling. This wise precaution would have paid off better if a short freighting season had not delayed completion of milling facilities until 1882. After being caught at Galena summit by an unexpectedly early winter snow, freighters could not get their mill on to Sawtooth until mid-summer. After all that delay, only a test run--capable of demonstrating an efficient leaching recovery process--was managed in August of 1882. Sawtooth City had grown

into a substantial community to accommodate all that activity: three saloons, a general store, a meat market, two restaurants, a Chinese laundry, a blacksmith shop, and an assay office served most needs of some eighty or ninety construction workers who had a sawmill to provide lumber necessary for erecting milling facilities. With a strong force of miners as well, Sawtooth City had considerable importance as a mineral center that had lots of activity, but almost no production, to its credit. Even though short seasons and exceptionally difficult transportation problems interposed severe barriers to mining at such a remote location, proper development prior to mill installation showed that Sawtooth City was avoiding some errors which had disrupted early mining at nearby Atlanta and Rocky Bar.

While miners at Sawtooth City struggled to get from development into production, adjacent Vienna had undergone substantial growth as well. Three general stores, six restaurants, two meat markets, a bank, a hotel, two livery stables, and fourteen saloons provided a good index of Vienna's prosperity. Like Sawtooth, Vienna had a sawmill. From July 4, 1882, until a consolidation with the Ketchum Keystone in November, the Vienna Reporter provided news coverage of that interesting camp.

Development of the Vienna mine, while less extensive than all of Sawtooth's properties, had justified construction of a major mill. A seven-foot vein of \$200 ore (but with assays as high as 19,000 ounces of silver a ton running far above this average) was exposed by two upper tunnels each of which ran 275 feet to reach the Vienna lode. Then a tunnel was driven to provide access at a depth of 500 feet below the Vienna outcrop. While all this exploration was underway between 1880 and 1882, a twenty-stamp mill was completed in 1882. Built to precisely the same specifications as the highly productive Custer mill on Yankee Fork, and installed by the same contractor, the plant exceeded \$200,000 in cost. Production had to be delayed until the next season for lack of mill supplies when winter snow isolated Vienna and Sawtooth for another season.

A number of other mines near Vienna had good promise as well. Two tunnels--one a hundred feet above the other--had produced 1,700 tons of 75 to 100 ounce ore by 1882 in the Mountain King, while another property had a blind tunnel that happened on to thirty tons of high grade ore which sold for \$10,000 prior to processing. Another three to four foot vein, parallel to the Vienna lode, was crosscut by a 160-foot tunnel from which a 75-foot drift developed high-grade ore ranging from \$150 to \$450 a ton. Another group of six claims, purchased for \$50,000 in 1881, had 60 to 200 ounces of ore per ton revealed by two tunnels of 250 and 450 feet with a connecting 215-foot winze.

Somehow many of these mines which had such great promise in 1882 could not get into major production. But the Vienna lode began to average \$750 a day the next season, returning a profit of

\$17.50 a ton on ore processed at \$20. Activity there reached a peak in 1884, with a cumulative production of a half-million dollars.

Lake Canyon, west of Sawtooth City, also had some rich lodes which did not have their own mill but which provided high-grade ore worth shipping to Atlanta for processing in the Buffalo mill.

A \$50,000 New York investment in 1881 led to considerable activity by 1883. Nine tons of ore that year returned more than \$15,000 in Atlanta. Until the Vienna mine was shut down after 1886, so that milling of Lake Canyon ore could be managed there, that isolated district had little chance to recover much of its initial capital investment.

After establishing a mill that could operate successfully at Sawtooth City in 1882, investors there could not match Vienna's success in mineral production. Unable to resume milling the next season until September 1, on account of "gross mismanagement of an ignorant and inexperienced man," they realized an encouraging return of \$60,000 in custom milling of ores from other local mines. They needed to process their own ore as well, but faced a two-year delay trying to solve technological problems. While a satisfactory recovery process was being sought, Sawtooth City miners had to ship their high-grade ore to Ketchum's Philadelphia smelter in 1884. This necessity encouraged them to install a concentrator to process their stockpile of ore--which had accumulated over several years by then--to ship out with their high grade. With concentrates running at \$500 to \$800 a ton, they finally managed to smelt much of their refractory ore which had resisted local milling. At least in 1886, they had solved their technological problems so that their mill could run all season. Two hundred miners finally were able to work at Sawtooth City, which belatedly joined Vienna as a successful mining camp.

But neither Sawtooth nor Vienna managed to continue their new-found prosperity after 1886. William Hyndman managed to keep his Sawtooth City property going with eight to ten miners at work on \$800 ore, but Vienna had only a watchman employed. Even Hyndman's operation had to shut down early in 1888 because his mine was accidentally flooded. Hyndman took over another Sawtooth property in 1888, but his success there was limited to a twelve-ton shipment to Portland which provided a profit of \$2,738.88 that July. A \$60,000 development tunnel at Vienna, driven clear through to the South Boise face of the ridge there, failed to produce any ore in 1888, so neither camp had more than limited operations until 1892. Lake Canyon ores gave the Vienna mill some custom business after 1886, but only a modest amount of high grade could be shipped that far with any profit.

By the summer of 1892, William Hyndman had developed enough ore in his Sawtooth City property to keep his ten-man crew busy for a year. An expenditure of \$25,000 for a new pumping system allowed him to resume full scale operations. Then a disastrous shaft fire, August 9, wiped out his hoisting, pumping, and

compressed air equipment. Unable to persuade his company to start all over with another set of new equipment, he had to shut down altogether. Neither Sawtooth nor Vienna produced much after that.

Later efforts to revive Vienna accomplished little. After Vienna's mines were sold at a sheriff's sale in 1906, leaseholders did a little work there in 1912. When they failed to engage in serious production, Vienna literally collapsed. Nothing but piles of lumber remained in 1914 from more than two hundred buildings that represented Vienna's early promise for success. Some ore was shipped out the next year, and a new camp and mill were erected at Vienna in 1917. All that effort went to waste because of failure to process any ore. Vienna wound up with an unused mill, although occasional leasers tried to resume production. As a result of extreme isolation and technological recovery problems, Vienna never got much beyond some half-million dollars recovered by 1888, while Sawtooth City accounted for only about half that much.

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:

9. United States Geological Survey Maps:

Alturas Lake	1963	Horton Peak	1970
Atlanta East	1972	Knapp Lakes	1964
Atlanta West	1972	Langer Peak	1972

Banner Summit 1972	Marshall Peak 1964
Basin Butte 1963	Mt. Cramer 1963
Boulder Chain Lakes 1964	Mount Everly 1972
Casino Lakes 1963	Nahneke Mountain 1972
East Basin Creek 1964	Obsidian 1963
Edaho Mountain 1972	Snowyside Peak 1964
Elk Meadow	Stanley 1963
Frenchman Creek 1964	Stanley Lake 1972
Galena 1970	Warbonnet Peak 1972
Galena Peak 1970	Washington Peak 1964
Grandjean 1972	

10. Cultural resource management recommendations: