

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### BLACKBIRD

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Discovered in the summer of 1892 by Indian Tom--a local Lemhi prospector who brought rich float copper samples of his find to Robert N. Bell in Salmon--Blackbird began to attract attention several years later. Bell and Indian Tom set out October 17, 1893, to examine Blackbird's lode possibilities, which Bell confirmed as a rare instance in which an Indian mineral report could be verified. During further work in the summer of 1895, a free-milling gold lode at Blackbird soon was traced for two to three and a half miles along the surface. J. O. Swift found this lode attractive enough to invest \$12,000 in a half-interest and to promote his new property that fall. Development work undertaken by twenty miners that winter showed a change in ore at a depth of fifty feet all along the lode. Gold values ranged from about twelve dollars a ton on the surface to twenty-four dollars farther down. (These rates compared favorably with nearby Yellow Jacket.) Then at fifty feet down, their lode changed to copper which retained gold values as well. By 1896, Blackbird had been established as a promising mine with ten to 30% copper that had to be smelted. A Rothschild investment firm in London agreed late in 1896 to undertake development and to purchase J. O. Swift's Blackbird property for \$250,000 if their exploration justified such an investment. After a year's investigation, gold, copper, nickel, and cobalt valued at \$2,000,000 was identified there. Isolation of Blackbird from rail transportation, lack of a sampling works, and difficulty in processing ore there all contributed to long delays in serious production.

After some additional claims consolidation in 1899, a modest production of \$35,000 in copper finally was realized in 1913 to 1915 and 1921. Then cobalt became more prominent after modern production got underway in 1939. Active until 1960, Blackbird accounted for fourteen million pounds of cobalt (mainly 1952 to 1959) under a government contract price of \$2.30 a pound. In a ten-year span (1949 to 1959), Blackbird became a major Idaho mining area, credited with \$47,500,000 in cobalt, copper, gold, and minor amounts of nickel. Rising prices allowed Blackbird to resume production in 1967 with \$1,186,000 primarily in copper turned out that year.

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