

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

VOLCANO

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Widespread prospecting ranged over much of southern Idaho in 1864. New finds turned up in several scattered places, although the earliest, while promising in the beginning, did not really amount to anything in the long run.

Volcano was the name bestowed upon a new lode district found March 12, 1864, on the eastern extension of Bennett Mountain between the Camas Prairie and the Snake River Plain. At the close of the 1864 season, twenty-five to thirty veins were known there. Some assayed at \$180 a ton, and one reported by T. A. Patterson ran as high as \$2,100. Much effort went into prospecting, but practically nothing into development. The miners preferred at that time to wait for a stamp mill to test their properties. The 1865 season, therefore, was a very quiet one. At its end, W. R. DeFrees' ten-stamp mill finally arrived.

Arrangements were made to run the mill all winter, even to the extent of bringing in enough hay to supply horses required to haul ore to the mill. A tunnel was started to strike the five-foot vein of ore for the operation. With surface assays of \$600, DeFrees expected a handsome profit. Not until September 1866 did DeFrees' company finally manage to assemble 100 tons of rock for a test run. DeFrees was greatly disappointed to find his recovery process returned only about \$10 to the ton. Operations naturally had to shut down altogether when the rich outcrops turned out not to be ore at all, at least for that mill.

Copper mining at Volcano began to attract interest when William Clemens went to work in 1900. After 1924, a 1,453-foot tunnel was driven before work shut down in 1931. Now, after 118 years of sporadic attempts to develop major mineral production at Volcano, an open-pit silver-copper mine began operating in 1982.

With eight miners at Volcano and thirty more employees at a \$500,000 360-ton concentrator in Mountain Home, the mining venture began processing a 3,000-ton ore reserve at an initial rate of 80 tons a day. Over \$1 million has been invested in this latest development at Volcano. At \$10 an ounce for silver and 70¢ a pound for copper, ore averaging \$260 a ton is expected to return a \$3 million annual profit. So Volcano, like some other early discoveries in Idaho, has eventually begun to justify the long-held optimism for its potential--but only after transportation and technology far different from anything envisioned in 1864 finally became available.

(This information has not been edited.)

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