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BLACK PINE MINES

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Silver lode discoveries not far from the Kelton Road brought a modest array of prospectors to Black Pine at a time when the Snake River fine gold excitement of 1869 accounted for mining interest along other parts of that important stage and freight route. Unlike many of Idaho's gold and silver lodes, Black Pine (an isolated high butte above Raft River) did not suffer as a location remote from rail or wagon transportation. Technological capability to handle complex silver ores still had to be developed at that time, so Black Pine could not profit greatly from availability of superior transportation. Promotion of an 1870 property there, assisted by additional discoveries the next year, finally brought Black Pine more attention than that area deserved. A Kelton correspondent informed the Dailey Corinne Reporter, September 26, 1871 of local Black Pine excitement then current:

"All is excitement here about the Black Pine Mines, every speculative and unoccupied man has gone there. We have news that an old location, more than a year ago, has just been bonded for a large amount, and as I write, a citizen of our town has arrived with specimens from a new ledge just discovered some three miles away from the old locations, which he avers is the biggest thing yet, in fact the country is not prospected at all; some time ago, during the Snake River excitement, Doc. Rice, Mr. Majors of your place, and a few others, made locations but all left them, none worked to develop or explore further, except Rice, who has clung with a tenacity which is now being rewarded; the old locators are hurrying back to save their claims from being jumped. I may take a deck passage on a cayuse, the coming week, and visit the mines, when I can speak more by the card."

Upon returning to Kelton, he described the wonders of Black Pine in a facetious style often employed in mining accounts of that time:

In my last I told you that I should probably inspect the Black Pine Mines before writing again, and so, one fine morning I started for the hills, distant thirty

miles. It would be needless to tell you of the charming alkali plains we traversed, dotted with the picturesque sage, behind every shrub of which peeped a rabbit or skulked a chicken. Suffice it that we arrived before dark at the camp, which is situated at the highest point where water can be obtained. Here we hammocked for the night, putting up at the Hotel de Shively, kept by "Jim" and his estimable lady. Up at daylight for a climb to the mines which are found a mile above us on top of the ridge, but so steep is the ascent it takes the workmen one hour and a quarter to get up to their labors, which are being prosecuted on the Black Pine and Aerial lodes, owned by Lewis Johnson & Co., said to be an association of English capitalists. After reaching the top of the mountains, which was as near the zenith as I ever expect to be again, we inspected the mines. Work on the Aerial being done sufficient to answer their contract with the original locators, they have concentrated the forces on the Black Pine, which is a real fissure lode, with a shaft down forty feet; and at fifty feet it is the intention to drift both ways and ship ore steadily, which will be about Christmas. At that time the wagon road will be completed to the mines. That, like all other immensely rich deposits, such as White Pine, Pioche, etc., are only found on the tops of mountains where nothing but silver can grow. Veni, vidi, viei: I came, saw, I got. You see, Judge, I have not forgotten all the Latin that was flog'd into me. Well, after prospecting around a little while we found the biggest thing out--a monster ledge composed of chlorides, bromides, sulphides and all the other ides, which is richer than pure silver itself; and now, instead of having two good feet (which I have been praying for so long) I have two hundred, and am a millionaire!

After a decade of relative inactivity, Black Pine revived somewhat in 1881. Two or three years of exploration resulted in four small shafts (of ten, thirty, fifty, and sixty feet) along with some other prospect holes and cuts. Assays ranged from \$28 to \$800 in silver carbonate, and Alexander Toponce--who had a notable record in Idaho and Montana mineral development--had interests there. When he published his autobiography, though, Toponce did not regard his enterprise here as worthy of mention.

A fair amount of evidence of mining still remains to be seen at Black Pine, but this district never attained any great importance in Idaho's mineral history.

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