

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### SITE REPORT - MIDDLE FORK SALMON-BEAR VALLEY

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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: Salmon River's middle fork drains a large mountainous area with some important basins--primarily Bear Valley and a portion of Stanley Basin north of Valley Creek. Largely a wilderness area with deep canyons, this rugged terrain offers limited ranching opportunity, but contains a number of mining districts and extensive national forest lands. Peripheral roads, along with grades through Stanley Basin and Bear Valley, and with connections on into mining camps, offer limited transportation opportunity. River boats and rafts, as well as small landing strips, provide recreational opportunities in an otherwise difficult area for access. Elevations range from barely over 3,000' to 10,082' at Mount McGuire--creating a maximum middle fork canyon depth of 6,800 feet. Arid at lower elevations and timbered on higher slopes and valleys, this area has considerable diversity of climate.

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 sloth, 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.

3. Cultural resource surveys and archaeological literature:

4. Historical summary: Major historical episodes include

1. Exploration and fur trade, 1824-1868
2. Loon Creek mines, 1869-1879
3. Sheepeater campaign, 1879
4. Mining expansion, 1880-1900
5. Thunder Mountain, 1900-1906
6. Forest Service administration, 1906-1930
7. Primitive area, 1931-1964
8. Wilderness administration, 1964-

Discovered September 26, 1824 by a detached party of Hudson's Bay Company beaver hunters from Alexander Ross' Snake brigade, this area attracted very little notice from fur traders.

An expedition of mountain men based from Saint Louis followed in 1831. Like Ross, they came through Stanley Basin. Crossing Bear Valley, they finally reached Long Valley before finding out that their Indian guide (who saw no point in pursuing beaver) had taken them on a magnificent elk hunt. John Work returned with another Hudson's Bay Company Snake expedition in search of beaver in 1832, but his tour of Bear Valley and Stanley Basin brought middle fork trapping to a conclusion. Four of his canoemen exploring Salmon River canyon examined lower middle fork beaver possibilities, but lacked any serious desire to return to explore more of that difficult terrain. Sharp competition between Hudson's Bay Company and mountain men served by Saint Louis suppliers accounted for efforts to develop a middle fork fur trade, but beaver resources were too limited to attract serious attention when other streams in that area were depleted.

After more than two decades of white inactivity, prospectors from nearby mining camps--Boise Basin and Leesburg--finally

introduced a disquieting element to Idaho's Salmon River mountain wilderness core. Shoshoni Indian domination of that area continued for another decade, with refugees driven out from other mining areas reinforcing a modest-sized indigenous Sheepeater population. Prospectors going to and from Florence checked out lower middle fork possibilities without success in 1862. After a major gold rush (1862-1864) brought thousands of miners to Idaho City and Placerville, a large force of prospectors searched for upper middle fork mines. Then an express trail from Idaho City to Leesburg brought increased attention after 1866. Finally Nathan Smith, who already had several Idaho gold discoveries to his credit, found important placers on Loon Creek in 1869. He followed up with another, less promising Yellow Jacket location later that season. Loon Creek offered good opportunities for white gold seekers for a season or two, after which Chinese miners dominated that camp. Orogrande had enough permanent buildings that Chinese occupants did not have to construct too many of their own. Within a decade, only a few Orientals constituted Orogrande's entire population, and in February 1879, they were wiped out in one of Idaho's excessively numerous Chinese massacres. Yellow Jacket--unlike Loon Creek, primarily a lode-mining camp--was destined to last longer, because remote quartz properties rarely can be exploited quickly. But about two decades were required to get much production going at Yellow Jacket. (An appendix to this report includes detailed information concerning Loon Creek and Yellow Jacket.) Meanwhile, Indian hostilities in nearby areas gave Idaho's Salmon River mountains a dangerous reputation.

Although they originally were regarded as inoffensive and quiet, some of Idaho's Sheepeaters gained an undeserved notoriety for ferocity. Wyoming's Sheepeaters were insulated enough from Idaho's troubles to avoid involvement in military action that afflicted Salmon River's original inhabitants. After an 1878 Long Valley ambush of some leading ranchers was attributed to Andy Johnson (a prominent Sheepeater who had gained experience as a cowboy) and four associates, they were blamed for wiping out Orogrande's Chinese community. Sheepeater tradition, no doubt accurately, holds that they had nothing to do with that misadventure. But white fears of Sheepeater power were sufficient that General Oliver Otis Howard authorized a difficult 1879 military expedition to round up what remained of Salmon River's middle fork population, so that everyone there could be resettled at Fort Hall. Like most Northern Shoshoni, Idaho's Sheepeaters were a decidedly elusive people. Lieutenant Henry Catley brought an army force from Grangeville in June, when deep snow delayed his advance to Big Creek. After he finally was blocked by an impregnable Indian position commanding Big Creek gorge below Cabin Creek, he retired to Vinegar Hill where his army was trapped from early afternoon until midnight by a single vigilant Sheepeater. Abandoning his equipment and pack train

following that singularly un auspicious defeat, Catley fled back to Grangeville with a reluctant army force that had preferred to try to capture their numerically inferior opponents.

Colonel Reuben F. Bernard invaded Big Creek from Fort Boise. He lost one soldier in his difficult Sheepeater campaign upon reaching their summer camp at later Taylor's ranch, just below Catley's battle sites. But he failed to injure or capture any Sheepeaters, although he managed to destroy their camp and supplies. That fall, after Bernard's force withdrew, some of his officers managed to find some Sheepeaters and other Indian refugees with whom they negotiated a settlement. Altogether, fifty-one Indians agreed to relocate at Fort Hall--a move that had some merit after their supplies and camp had been ruined. Eagle Eye and his Sheepeater band remained in their traditional homeland unmolested for two more decades. But after 1879, middle fork miners felt less apprehensive about an Indian menace.

Packers supplying Bernard's Sheepeater expedition prospected along his campaign route, where they discovered promising lode outcrops on Sheep Mountain. Additional nearby Greyhound Ridge and Seafoam lodes expanded that silver mining region westward, these camps became quite active by 1886, although they had more promise than profits. Farther northwest, upper Big Creek lode mines came into production. (An appendix to this report includes additional information relating to these camps.) Transportation improvements, including rail facilities to Blackfoot and Ketchum, associated lode mining development and production, so that Yellow Jacket also began to yield a limited amount of gold after 1890. A few trappers and ranchers got established in scattered flats and small middle ford basins. After 1892, national silver mining and general economic depression encouraged more pioneers to get by with a combination of subsistence gardening and trapping while they prospected a remote country that still might offer possibilities for making a fortune.

Among those scattered middle fork settlers, Ben and Lou Caswell fared better than anyone else. From their base on Cabin Creek, they learned to search for gold. After several seasons of work at Thunder Mountain above Monumental Creek, they recovered enough gold to set off a wild excitement that reached a climax in 1902. This focussed national attention upon Thunder Mountain. Thousands of enthusiastic fortune seekers set out for Idaho's Salmon River mountain wilderness, although only two thousand or so actually got to Thunder Mountain in 1902. Pittsburgh and other outside investment contributed most middle fork mining wealth, with early day Thunder Mountain gold production limited to a modest \$350,000. (An appendix to this report provides detailed information concerning this affair.) By 1909, a mud slide turned Roosevelt--Thunder Mountain's commercial and residential center--from an almost deserted mining camp into a natural lake. By that time most potential middle fork mining country had been prospected rather thoroughly. Other new

properties--particularly a Loon Creek copper mine (Lost Packer) and some other upper Loon Creek lodes on Parker Mountain--gained considerable attention. But until after 1980, none of them were developed systematically on a large scale than many early mines were expected to match.

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: Sites related to the area's development as resort, mining and ranching area and Forest Service land during the period 1870 to 1930 have only a limited number of structures.

Twenty-one sites of architectural interest have been recorded at Cabin Creek. The following towns and centers have received no attention and should be inspected for architectural remains:

Big Creek            Cape Horn            Castro            Yellow Jacket

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

## 9. United States Geological Survey Maps:

Acorn Butte 1973	Hoodoo Meadows 1962
Aggipah Mtn. 1972	Knapp Lakes 1964
Aparejo Point 1963	Langer Peak 1972
Banner Summit 1972	Lodgepole Creek 1974
Bear Creek Point 1962	Long Tom Mtn. 1972
Bear Valley Mtn. 1972	Meyers Cove 1963
Big Baldy 1973	Meyers Cove Point 1963
Big Creek 1969	Monument 1973
Big Chief Creek 1973	Mormon Mtn. 1972
Bismarck Mtn. 1972	Mosquito Peak 1974
Black Mountain 1963	Mt. Jordan 1964
Bluebird Mtn. (15') 1950	Mt. McGuire 1962
Blue Bunch Mtn. 1972	Norton Ridge 1962
Bull Trout Point 1972	Opal Lake 1963
Buttes Creek Point 1962	Papoose Peak 1962
Cache Creek 1972	Pinyon Peak 1963
Cape Horn Lakes 1972	Profile Gap 1969
Casto 1963	Puddin Mtn. 1962
Center Mtn. 1973	Pungo Mtn. 1973
Challis Creek Lakes 1963	Rainbow Pk. 1973
Chicken Peak 1974	Rock Creek 1963
Chilcoot Peak 1972	Safety Creek 1973
Chinook Mtn. (15') 1961	Sheldon Peak 1963
Cold Meadows	Shellrock Peak 1962
Cottonwood Butte 1974	Sherman Peak 1962
Custer 1963	Sleeping Deer Mtn. 1962
Dave Lewis Peak 1962	Sliderock Ridge 1962
Deadwood Reservoir (15') 1953	Stibnite 1973
Duck Creek Point 1963	Twin Peaks (15') 1963
Edwardsburg 1969	Vinegar Hill 1962
Elevenmile Creek 1963	Wapiti Creek 1956
Elk Meadow 1972	Warm Lake (15') 1954
Falconberry Peak 1963	Wolf Fang Peak 1969
Greyhound Ridge (15') 1961	Yellow Jacket 1963

## 10. Cultural resource management recommendations: