

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - CAMAS PRAIRIE, SOLDIER MOUNTAIN, AND BENNETT MOUNTAIN

Number 624

December 1981

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: Located in a valley between Bennett Mountain (7,465') and Soldier Mountain (10,085'), Camas Prairie contains wet meadows and camas grounds as well as extensive farm land, some requiring irrigation. Lower portions turn into a sagebrush plain. Little Camas Prairie, north of Bennett Mountain, occupies a similar high valley edge above Boise River's south fork. Long Tom reservoir is located farther west on similar high ground. Bennett mountain has some timber, and Soldier Mountain is forested on protected slopes. Mineral resources have received very limited development, but recreational opportunities are utilized on an increased scale.

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.

3. Cultural resource surveys and archaeological literature:

4. Historical summary: Explored in 1820 by Donald Mackenzie and his North West Company Snake brigade, Camas Prairie provided early trappers a superior access route to important beaver resources. An emigrant wagon route opened across Camas Prairie in 1852, became popular in 1862. Because of its importance as a Shoshoni and Bannock camas ground, farming and ranching was delayed until after 1878, when Bannock war hostilities came to an end. Settlements grew gradually until 1912, when rail service helped speed development of Camas Prairie. Highway improvement of U.S. 20 in 196_ brought increased tourist traffic, and a Soldier Mountain ski resort helped increase recreational use of that area.

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:

Anderson Ranch Dam 1973
Bellevue (15') 1957
Bennett Mtn. (15') 1958
Blaine (15') 1957

Boardman Creek 1970
Buttercup Mtn. 1970
Cat Creek Summit 1973
Danskin Peak (15') 1957
Davis Mtn. (15') 1957
Deer Mtn. 1963
Dollarhide Mtn. 1970
Fairfield (15') 1957
Grouse Butte 1964
High Prairie 1963
Hill City 1963
House Mountain 1973
Jumbo Mtn. 1964
King Hill (15') 1958
Mammoth Cave
Mountain Home (15') 1956
Mountain Home North 1956
Pine 1973
Sprout Mtn. 1963
Summit Reservoir
Sydney Butte 1970
Thorn Creek (15') 1957
Thorn Creek SE 1957
Thorn Creek SW 1957

10. Cultural resource management recommendations: