

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - BOISE MOUNTAINS

Number 662

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: Smith's Prairie and a few small mountain basins (Atlanta, Deer Park, Barber flat, Alexander flat, primarily) are scattered throughout an extensive mountainous expanse west of Soldier mountain and its neighboring Sawtooth Wilderness. Elevations vary from at to at . A number of major mining districts have been developed, and forest products also have great importance. Three large reservoirs and many natural lakes contribute to recreational resources here. Limited farming (mostly on Smith's Prairie) and ranching, supplemented by vast federal range lands, also contribute to Idaho's economy.

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 1824 by Alexander Ross and his party of Hudson's Bay Company fur hunters, this area did not attract too many trappers. But after gold discoveries in 1863 at Rocky Bar, Atlanta, and Banner, important lode mining camps flourished even though many years went by before adequate transportation and recovery technology made efficient production possible. Twentieth-century logging and recreational activities brought increased development of this area, which also includes major irrigation reservoirs. A limited amount of ranch land and vast sheep and cattle ranges also have been utilized. Major episodes in this area's history include

1. Exploration, 1824-1862
2. Early gold and silver mining, 1863-1886
3. Major lode development, 1886-1906
4. Early Forest Service administration, 1906-1932
5. Large scale mining, 1932-1952
6. Logging and recreation

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.

Alexander Ross brought a Hudson's Bay Company brigade of fur hunters to explore these mountains and rivers in 1824, but their search for beaver proved to be generally unrewarding. By that time, enough Snake country beaver streams were being trapped so vigorously that Hudson's Bay Company officials had become willing to search almost anywhere, but serious fur production could not be developed in this area; although signs of old, but uninhabited beaver colonies still could be seen.

After 1862, however, miners got interested in gold and silver prospects. They met with much greater success. As soon as they could cross from Idaho City to Rocky Bar early in 1863, prospectors found good placer claims that attracted a gold rush to their South Boise mining district. Excellent lode outcrops followed on May 7. Early in August, Atlanta basin showed similar possibilities, although a gold rush to that area, August 8, from Idaho City disclosed nothing of interest. But in 1864, more careful examination of Atlanta's possibilities showed something of that area's future attraction. By that time, Rocky Bar had important placers and lode properties in their initial production, although use of locally available materials allowed for successful mining of nothing but really rich outcrops and deposits.

Mining around Rocky Bar (see RS 199) showed great promise in 1863-1864: placer deposits were somewhat limited, but a large number of arastras were doing well in 1864. But after stamp mills were imported at great effort and expense a year later, lode mining began to collapse by 1866. Distant from railroad service, mining areas like Rocky Bar had to wait until Oregon Short Line construction made them somewhat more accessible by 1884. Atlanta, even more remote from easy freight service, had to wait until 1878 for a good road. A number of early major lode operations started there (see RS 202), but in addition to isolation, Atlanta suffered from having gold and silver ore that could not be processed efficiently by metal recovery methods available to nineteenth century miners. Rocky Bar flourished from 1886-1892 because gold could be milled easily, and Atlanta produced several million dollars even though a large portion of lode values were lost there before 1932 when an efficient recovery system was installed.

Several other remote mining enterprises proved productive. Twin Springs had some elaborate ditch systems for placer operations, and another promising middle fork district at Black Warrior had some success. Large British investments at Graham, however, brought in heavy milling equipment to an extremely remote district that remained promising but unproductive because of failure to engage in essential development work. A major lode at Pine, however, flourished when Graham faltered.

8. Architectural resources:

9. United States Geological Survey Maps:

Arrowrock Dam 1969
 Arrowrock Reservoir NE 1969
 Atlanta East 1972
 Atlanta West 1972
 Baker Peak 1970
 Barber Flat 1972

Bear River 1972
 Big Owl Creek 1972
 Boardman Creek 1970
 Boise North 1954
 Cayuse Point 1964
 Danskin Peak (15') 1960
 Dollarhide Mtn. 1970
 Dunnigan Creek 1969
 Featherville 1964
 Frenchman Creek 1964
 Galena 1970
 Grand Mtn. 1972
 Grape Mtn. 1969
 Grouse Butte 1964
 House Mountain 1973
 Idaho City 1957
 Jackson Peak 1972
 Jumbo Mtn. 1964
 Little Trinity Lake 1964
 Long Gulch 1964
 Lowman 1972
 Lucky Peak 1972
 Marshall Peak 1964
 Mayfield (15') 1960
 Nahneke Mtn. 1972
 Newman Peak 1970
 Paradise Peak 1970
 Pfeiffer Creek 1972
 Pine 1972
 Pine Flat 1972
 Prarie 1964
 Rabbit Creek Summit 1972
 Robie Creek 1972
 Rocky Bar 1964
 Ross Peak 1964
 Sheep Creek 1964
 Sprout Mtn. 1963
 Sunset Mtn. 1972
 Swanholm Peak 1972
 Sydney Butte 1970
 Trinity Mtn. 1964
 Twin Springs 1964
 Tyhee Mtn. 1972

10. Cultural resource management recommendations:

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428