

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

PROSPECTING IN IDAHO, 1870-1878

Number 667

1984

By 1870, Idaho had more Chinese miners than any other state or territory, and a majority of Idaho's miners were Chinese. Oriental miners had enough energy and industry to work lower paying claims that remained after major gold rushes had cleaned out those highly rewarding richer placers responsible for attracting settlers to Idaho. Most of Idaho's newly discovered mining areas for a decade after 1869 got off to a slower start. By that time extensive prospecting had disclosed many--but by no means all--of Idaho's potential gold camps. Some of those which followed offered more opportunities for Chinese miners than for whites. They fitted in well with Idaho's newer mining trends. Snake River fine gold properties, located in a number of places in 1869, characterized a new era in Idaho mining. Early Yankee Fork operations also started slowly before building up to a substantial gold rush toward the end of a decade of modest development. Cariboo Mountain, Black Pine, Bay Horse, and Gibbonsville went through similar slow developmental phases representative of hard times accompanying the Panic of 1873. With national economic recovery after 1878, Idaho mining developed along more prosperous lines. A surge of interest in lead-silver properties, largely dormant prior to 1880, helped stimulate mining along new lines that developed new districts quite different from most of Idaho's earlier operations.

During a second decade of Idaho mining, old established camps went through a similar era of recession. Aside from a conspicuous exception at Silver City until 1875, placer and lode properties generally showed less opportunity for fabulous profit that had resulted in gold rushes of an earlier decade. Lack of transportation facilities, combined with problems in management, promotion, and technology, held back lode mining in existing camps as well as in new ones. On that account, a number of mining areas discovered after 1869 illustrate problems applicable to most of Idaho's mineral development of that era.

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