

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### EVALUATION OF PLACER OPERATIONS IN MINING COMMUNITIES

Number 890

1987

Accurate historical account of placer mining in a variety of districts depends upon surface evidence surviving in areas where operations took place as well as upon mining reports and other documentary sources. Many old workings have been obliterated, at least partially by subsequent operations, but a great deal, including sequence of development can be learned from careful examination of tailings, hydraulic pits, and other traces of mining at various stages of gold and silver production. Histories of mining camps and of placer technology often have gone astray because of failure to assess site evidence that clarifies reasons for utilizing a variety of gold recovery procedures that had to be employed because of differing local conditions that affected mining in various parts of a productive district. Rockers, hydraulic giants, hydraulic elevators, various systems of sluicing, including ground sluicing were utilized to meet different conditions of terrain and availability of water. These choices can be understood in many areas only if a specialist who knows how to interpret surface evidence engages in a thorough site examination. Dredging and drag line operations have left identifiable evidence where they were employed. Chinese placers had characteristics that indicated work of Oriental miners who could recover gold in areas that others could not manage profitably. Mining promotions likewise had distinguishing features in some camps. All of this evidence can be interpreted and evaluated by a competent specialist. Experienced mining historians or mining engineers are necessary to undertake that kind of investigation. Elaborate systems of ditches and flumes also can be explained in such a context. A noticeably greater variety of operations is characteristic of mines, compared with farms, and surface evidence of placer mining reflects that disparity. Because local history in each district depends substantially upon information preserved in each camp, site evidence of mining generally is eligible for recognition in National Register listing. Even fairly dim traces can establish a sequence of mining development, so careful examination by qualified specialists is essential for assessment of National Register eligibility.

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