

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

BOULDER BASIN MINES

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After serving as an Army Bannock War scout in 1878, William Schultz returned to Upper Wood River in search of new mineral wealth. He had noticed some interesting possibilities there, particularly in Boulder Basin. Before winter snow drove him out in 1878, he had located several important lode claims with high values in lead-silver and cooper. That kind of mining barely was commencing in Idaho, but he spent his entire career after 1878 developing and expanding his Boulder Basin prospects. Returning there after a winter in Nevada, he expanded his initial prospects a year prior to a major mining rush to Wood River in 1880. Fortunately for his enterprise, his ore could be processed without any need for a smelter. Within two more years, forty-two claims had been located in Boulder Basin, and major development of those properties was underway. Yields as high as forty to sixty ounces of silver per ton of ore made those mines attractive, while some lead-silver values (70% lead) ran as high as 100 ounces of silver as well. By 1882, Boulder had a hotel, store, corral, and saloon, along with a post office that ran from August 1, 1881 to August 28, 1885. Fifteen people worked there that winter, and operations continued to expand.

Significant new discoveries in June and July of 1884, supplying three tons of high value ore each day for pack mules to haul out from that isolated camp, greatly increased Boulder Basin's operations. Because of their steep rocky slopes, cliffs with valuable mineral outcrops above Boulder Basin could be developed into mines with relatively modest expense and effort. Veins a thousand feet deep could be reached through an access tunnel only a thousand feet long-- a remarkable opportunity rarely available in mining country. This situation occurred in a camp at an exceptionally high altitude for mining in Idaho. Difficulties of access restricted production there to exceptionally valuable deposits. But enough unusually high grade resources were available to maintain activity there during summer seasons when access was possible.

Finally in 1888, when an average of 1 ½ carloads of ore were still being shipped out for processing, an international collapse in silver prices led to a suspension of Boulder Basin production early in July. By that time, only about 1 ½ carloads of ore per week were coming from lodes there, because of marginal possibilities for profit.

(Information provided by Larry Jones)

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