



IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - WOOD RIVER

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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: Wood River descends from high mountain sources (forested aside from bare rock exposures characteristic of steep slopes) to a fairly broad valley prior to emerging into a central Snake plains segment. This mining, logging, ranching, and resort area has highways up Wood River and Trail Creek connecting with Stanley Basin and Lost River farther north. Rail service reaches Hailey and Ketchum. Noted particularly for superlative ski slopes and Silver Creek's fishing resources, this area has become a diversified resort development of national significance. Elevations rise from at Magic Reservoir to 12,078 at Mount Hyndman.
2. Prehistory and significant archaeological sites:
3. Cultural resource surveys and archaeological literature:
4. Historical summary: Mineral discoveries on Wood River go back to the gold rush years following the Boise Basin mining excitement of 1862. A premature stampede to Wood River was reported early the next spring, and serious prospecting continued there in 1864. Nothing of great interest turned up then, except for Warren P. Callahan's discovery of a galena lode which he noticed right along Goodale's Cutoff south of later Bellevue, when he was passing through the valley on his way to Montana. Prospectors set out for Wood River from Rocky Bar again in 1865: most finished their search entirely disappointed, but some of them found some claims worth locating near the divide between Camas Creek and Wood River in a district later known as the Hailey Gold Belt. Indian opposition helped to hold back any development there for fourteen years. Eventually two of the original discoverers returned during the Wood River rush and saw their mines flourish. Meanwhile, Warren P. Callahan came back to examine his galena lode near Goodale's Cutoff. He and his brother located a claim there September 3, 1873, and followed up

with another in 1874. They did their annual assessment work regularly for the next four years. Then the Bannock War of 1878 kept them out. During that time, they displayed galena samples from their lode in Rocky Bar with little effect. Miners in Rocky Bar got excited about gold and silver but could care less about lead. By the end of the Bannock War, though, times were changing. Profitable methods of smelting lead and silver ores had been worked out in Eureka, Nevada, and improved still more (for areas where the ore could not be worked as advantageously as in Eureka) in Leadville, Colorado. Better transportation also was on the way with railway construction extending through Idaho not too far from Wood River. Lead prospects that amounted to little before the Bannock War now seemed worth developing. So Warren P. Callahan came back to relocate his galena lode, April 26, 1879, and other prospectors began to look over the entire Wood River area. David Ketchum came across some promising lead silver mines at the head of Wood River in May. Frank W. Jacobs found the Queen of the Hills--one of the major producers of the region--near later Bellevue (five or six miles north of Callahan's property) on July 15, and by August another belt of lead silver ledges at the head of Little Smoky (where limited gold discoveries in 1864 had led to a modest amount of mining from 1873 on) brought mining to the Wood River divide northwest of the Callahan and Jacobs lodes. Still other mines were found near later Ketchum and Hailey that summer. By this time W. H. Broadhead had a lot of uniformly good assays (100 to 140 ounces of silver per ton) from the upper Wood River mines, where the town of Galena was organized early in September. Jacobs City (renamed Broadford in 1880) followed almost immediately on lower Wood River where Frank Jacobs had turned up the Queen of the Hills, and forty hardy settlers prepared to spend the winter in scattered parts of the extensive new mining region. W. P. Callahan shipped out a batch of ore to test that fall in Salt Lake: with an average recovery of \$431.46 in gold and silver a ton, he proved that the new mines would pay well.

Thousands of fortune hunters joined the rush to Wood River in 1880. New towns, destined to overshadow Galena and Broadford, sprang up in the valley. A post office called Ketchum was established April 19, and the townsite for the new community was laid out May 2. (The townsite locators still were calling the place Leadville, unaware that a postal clerk in Washington had refused to allow any more Leadvilles and had decided to call the place Ketchum, which he named for David Ketchum who had discovered the upper Wood River mines the year before.) Bullion City followed discovery of the Bullion Mine May 28 and got a big boost with the addition of the Mayflower and Jay Gould, July 4. Bellevue got a post office June 12, and settlement followed quickly. With discovery of the Minnie Moore--the most important of the early Wood River mines--at nearby Broadford, September 22, Bellevue had genuine promise of becoming the major city of the region. A winter population of three to four hundred stayed there after the rush. Then John Hailey (whose Utah, Idaho, and Oregon State Company served Wood River until the railroad came) took up land between Bellevue and Ketchum, December 6, 1880, and that month another trading center was started on Hailey's site. Rivalry between Hailey and Bellevue entertained the inhabitants of Wood River for the next several years. Hailey had the advantage of organized promotion by the Idaho-Oregon Land Improvement Company that also established Caldwell, Mountain Home, and tried to take over Weiser) with an energetic developer backed by lots of capitol resources. Robert E. Strahorn managed the promotion, and Andrew W. Mellon (later Secretary of the Treasury) got some useful business experience as secretary of the townsite company while a young man.

Shipment of ore from then Wood River mines still was fairly limited in 1880. Some Boise owners of the Idaho Mine at Bullion sent out \$17,000 in the fall, but that amounted to only a modest beginning of what they had in sight. The other mines, even at Bullion, were not even that far along. Smelters were needed close to the mines, and another Boise company, headed by David Falk and Alonzo Wolters, put up the Wood River Smelting Company plant at Hailey the next season. Hailey profited substantially from the early development of the mines at Hailey the next season. Hailey profited substantially from the early development of the mines at Bullion which used the new smelter, and production rose greatly in 1881. With \$80,000 to its credit, the Hailey smelter accounted for not much more than 10% of the total. Another Wood River promoter, with interests around Ketchum in 1880, went east that winter to Philadelphia where major capital investment for the region was obtained. During the summer a large smelter was built at Ketchum, and other smaller ones were started for other mines. By this time lead miners at Eureka, Nevada, had learned that small smelters did not work very well, and the Philadelphia smelter profited from that lesson. It always had more capacity than it needed, and used the most advanced methods and equipment. Opening October 8, 1881, for a ten-day test, the Philadelphia smelter prepared for major production in 1882. The Wood River mines exceeded a million dollars that year, with close to a fifth of the total handled by the Philadelphia smelter.

Most of the ore still was being shipped out to Omaha, Salt Lake, Kansas City, or Denver, but at this point the Philadelphia Mining and Smelting Company decided to offer prices competitive with the outside smelters. The plant was doubled in size the next spring, and an electric light plant (the earliest in Idaho) was installed then. The Philadelphia Company acquired a lot of new mines in 1882 to help utilize the larger capacity, and other investors put considerable capital into similar mine purchases. Altogether, over one and a half million dollars was put into the Wood River mines in 1882. Philadelphia and Salt Lake City were important sources for funds. Fourteen major sales took place in 1882, the largest being the Mayflower at Bullion which was purchased for \$375,000. E. A. Wall, who already had important properties at Bullion, added the Bullion mine to his holdings, spending \$200,000 for this acquisition. Sparring the \$200,000 when he bought it, this production amounted to little more than development work. The same could be said for most of the Wood River mines up to 1882.

Transportation improvements--particularly construction of the Oregon Short Line to Hailey, May 7, 1883, and on to Ketchum, August 19, 1884, allowed the early Wood River mines to reach their maximum production. Up through 1882 for the mines around Hailey, and until most of 1884 for those at Ketchum and beyond, miners preferred to hold back until they could profit by shipping at reduced railroad rates. They expected to save \$20 a ton over wagon freighting. Rail transportation also provided faster, more comfortable passenger service. Until the Oregon Short Line entered the area, daily stage lines from the Utah Northern at Blackfoot and the Central Pacific at Kelton served Hailey and Ketchum. Even after the railroad arrived, stages and freight wagons still had to take care of places like Bullion and Galena that were too high in the mountains to be reached by rail. And by the beginning of 1884, a new toll road up Trail Creek from Ketchum to Lost River and Bayhorse provided a route that served as a worthy test for H. C. Lewis' huge ore wagons that are still preserved in Ketchum. With the railroad boom, Bellevue, Hailey, and Ketchum reached their peak. For a time, Bellevue had two daily newspapers (until the railroad went on to Hailey), and Hailey had three. (These were not the earliest daily newspapers in Idaho by any means, but at that time they were the only ones.) With

Idaho's earliest phone service, as well as Idaho's original electric light plants, Wood River rates as the most progressive region in the territory.

Producing over two million a year for the next three seasons after the railroad brought added prosperity in 1884, mining on Wood River offered wonderful returns to those fortunate enough to own the right properties. In a single year, Isaac I. Lewis' Elkhorn Mine near Ketchum yielded ore sold to the smelter for \$161,841.72 for a cost of only \$35,372.33: while this did not amount to a really big producer, a net profit of over \$126,000 a year gave its owner capital to invest in organizing the First National Bank of Ketchum in February, 1884, and amounted to a profit of almost 80% of the yield. The largest of the early producers--the Minnie Moore--was sold to a director of the Bank of England, February 25, 1884, for \$450,000 with ore reserves of \$675,000 on hand. With a declining price for silver, operating expenses exceeded profits somewhat, but before the British operation shut down, the mine had produced well over a million more than had been blocked out at the time of purchase, and profits far more than repaid the initial investment. An even bigger sale (unaccompanied by such spectacular returns) of the Bullion Mine for \$1,050,000 at the same time--with \$685,000 in cash, and the rest in shares-- also held great promise with around one to two million dollars worth of ore still in sight. This investment, also of British capital, marked the height of the early Wood River mines. When the Triumph was discovered on the east fork early in June, the owners declined a \$40,000 offer for an underdeveloped, but fabulous looking, prospect. Eventually the Triumph turned out more value than the \$20 million or so from all the early Wood River properties combined--but it took until 1927 to get major production going there. Some of the Triumph metal sold at higher prices, and altogether \$28 to \$29 million was realized there between 1936 and 1957. Long before that, the early Wood River mines had gone into decline.

Labor difficulties, generally brought about by attempts to reduce miners' wages in face of expected rising costs and declining prices, foreshadowed the end of Wood River's early prosperity. On July 20, 1884, the miners at the Minnie Moore struck in protest of failure to receive their pay, and ten days later they won a settlement that warded off wage reductions which had been promised. But early in 1885 the miners' union emerged less successfully from a similar dispute. Under threat of military intervention if it were necessary, the mine union lost their fight to maintain their wage levels, and after a lot of protest and excitement around Bellevue, the mines went on to attain their peak production during the early years. Cost reductions through 10% wage cuts helped the various Wood River districts to maintain high production for two more years. An abrupt drop in 1888 (in which the total fell almost in half, but still exceeded a million dollars), followed by a much more severe collapse after 1892, reflected an abruptly falling price of silver. What had been low grade ores were ruined, and what production there was had to be shipped out for smelting. The Philadelphia smelter had to shut down with the 1888 decline: with capacity to handle everything that Wood River produced, the Ketchum smelter suffered from a remote location in which technically trained specialists were hard to find and where repairs to equipment were hard to make. Large smelters in places like Omaha got ore from many different places, and could mix various ores in the combinations needed to satisfy the complex chemical requirements for processing refractory lead ores. In the early years of high grade production the central Idaho smelters could afford to ship ore back and forth by wagon to each other to meet such needs. And the Ketchum smelter could afford to import iron ore from Wyoming, coke from Utah, and to make large amounts of expensive--and

not too satisfactory--charcoal in twenty-one charcoal kilns. After the Philadelphia smelter in Ketchum shut down, costs of sending ore by rail to distant smelters (\$10 or more a ton) exceeded the actual smelting cost of \$6.50 to \$7.50 a ton. Reopened from 1902 to 1906, the Minnie Moore put out more than another million dollars in spite of such costs. But by then, the early years of mining prosperity on Wood River were over.

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:

Amber Lakes 1967
 Baker Peak 1970
 Baugh Creek SW 1967
 Bellevue (15') 1957
 Blaine (15') 1957
 Boyle Mtn. 1970
 Buttercup Mtn. 1970
 Dollarhide Mtn. 1970
 Easley Hot Springs 1970
 Galena 1970
 Galena Peak 1970
 Gannett
 Grays Peak 1967
 Griffin Butte 1967
 Hailey 1967

Hyndman Peak 1967
Little Wood Reservoir
Mahoney Butte 1967
Meridian Peak 1967
Phi Kappa Mtn.
Picabo
Rock Roll Canyon 1967
Ryan Peak 1967
Seamans Creek
Shoshone Ice Cave
Sun Valley 1967
Tapper Lake
Tikura

10. Cultural resource management recommendations: