

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

SITE REPORT - CARIBOO MOUNTAIN-TINCUP CREEK

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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: Rising 9,803 feet above Grey's Lake, Cariboo Mountain is a conspicuous feature in that locality. With timber in protected and higher elevations, and more open range land otherwise, Cariboo mountain is noted for gold resources as well as lumbering and livestock possibilities. A Tincup Creek highway and some Forest Service roads serve that area.

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: Major historical episodes include:

1. Exploration and fur trade, 1819-1969

2. Mining, 1879-1906
3. Forest Service administration, 1906-

Some placer mining camps were worked out rather quickly, while others lasted for many seasons. Richness of the mines did not determine how long they lasted; length of the normal mining season (usually the length of the season water was available to operate sluices and other gold recovery equipment) and difficulty of handling the gold-bearing gravel, along with amount of gravel to be processed, generally had more impact on the duration of a mining camp. Most placer miners preferred to get rich quickly and to finish working their claims as soon as possible. But mining districts which could not be exhausted in a season or two enjoyed greater stability and performance. Cariboo Mountain, with a short annual water season and with deeply buried placers, lasted a long time as a mining center.

Discovered in the summer of 1870, these mines were named for Jesse Fairchilds, generally known as Cariboo Fairchilds because he had worked earlier in the Cariboo mines in British Columbia. While contrasting greatly in richness with the fabulous buried placers characteristic of Cariboo, B.C., some of the deep placers on Cariboo Mountain were slightly reminiscent of Cariboo Fairchilds' earlier experience. Some of the Cariboo Mountain deposits showed enough early promise to set off a modest gold rush from Malad and Corinne--the latter a new anti-Mormon freighters' community on the Central Pacific in Utah. Accounts of the excitement in Corinne and of the beginnings of the new mining district (mistakenly identified at first as in Wyoming) came out of Utah early in September:

Reports reach us of the discovery of very rich gold mines in the district known as Cariboo, in Wyoming. The precious metal is said to be in the form called "free gold," and the richest location about seventy miles east of Soda Springs and near the headwaters of Green River. Of course, the reports give it as richer than anything yet struck in the mountains. A party is going from this neighborhood, and as the distance is not great, we shall probably have authentic intelligence before many days.

A more accurate report was available two days later:

At last we have some reliable news from this new Eldorado, and from gentlemen not liable to be mistaken. Messrs. Fisher and Lavey reached Corinne yesterday, direct from the mines. Their party of twelve had located and gone to work but a few days before, when a sudden fire destroyed all their provisions but fifty

pounds of flour. Three men were at once sent out, making the distance to Ross' Fork, ninety miles, with no provisions but one sagehen. One of the number returned at once with supplies obtained there, while the two mentioned came on to this city. Their entire company and all they had seen were making from ten to fifteen dollars per day to the man. The area of pay-ground is quite extensive. Quite a number of companies are already on the way there, two of which got lost in the mountains by attempting to find a shorter route, and suffered considerably. The only direct and safe route is to go up the regular Montana road to Ross Fork, from which place a trail leads off a little north of east for ninety miles to the center of the district.

A large map, posted up at Ross Fork, shows the exact route. Fisher and Lavey rode horseback from the last point here, over a hundred miles, in a day and night, about the quickest time on record in these parts. They have purchased 10,000 pounds of supplies and several hundred picks and shovels, with which they purpose to make good freighting time back to their locations. The supplies were obtained of Barratt, who worked all of last night to get them shipped, and the scenes around his store this morning remind one powerfully of the old times of "gold stampedes." Now that the mines are an established and ascertained fact, whether rich or not, quite a number of Corinnethians are preparing for a start, of whom more anon.

By September 12, the rush to Cariboo provided an excellent vacation opportunity for almost anyone in the vicinity who wanted to see the new mines:

It is not yet a week since the discovery of the rich gold diggings in Eastern Idaho became known through the towns and settlements along the roads between here and Montana. Thomas Winsett informs us that he was at Malad City when the account reached that place, and in an hour afterward there were parties of from two to ten on their way to the gold fields, and all the way down to Corinne he met people going up to try their fortunes. In addition to the party that left here yesterday, we notice now some more, including many of the business men of the city who are to start tomorrow.

Among these are Harry Creighton, Mr. Burgess, Mr. Short, J. W. Wallace, Geo. Wright, and a number of others. The distance being only a four or five days' journey, and the road a good one, the trip, outside of the nature of the expedition, will be pleasant to the participants. Later accounts all indicate that the

district is a basin of great extent and richness. The only practicable route of travel in there is that described in our last issue, namely, the stage road to Ross' Fork, 120 miles from Corinne, and thence 90 miles northeast to the district. We are informed by persons long acquainted with that part of the country that these mines are in Idaho, and not in Wyoming as we inadvertently stated on Saturday. This city is the nearest starting point on the railroad, as well as the most convenient supply depot for the new diggings, and all present appearances promise that we are destined to have an immense trade this Fall with the miners of Idaho.

Because of the high elevation and lateness of the season, those who joined the Cariboo gold rush in 1870 could not do very much except prospect when they go there. They could go out panning gold to find the best claims; but with acres of gravel to be worked, panning was too slow and difficult a process to use for gold production. Sluice boxes (in which a strong current of water carried placer gravel over slats that trapped and separated out the gold) worked best. But they could be used only when a lot of water could be brought through ditches to the better claims. Some water still was available for operating a sluice box (which did not function so well as it should,) and the miners gained confidence that they would have a lively camp the next summer.

Reports from Cariboo the next spring continued to show optimism. J. H. Stump, who had a salt mine between Soda Springs and Cariboo, passed on some reliable information concerning the new gold camp, April 24:

The first news of the season from the new diggings reached us through Hon. J. H. Stump, of Malad City, who has just returned from Soda Springs. He says that some of the men who remained all winter in the basin, came out a few days ago after supplies, and they had sums of three or four hundred dollars each in good dust, panned during their sojourn. The road in will be passable in a few days, and the placers in McCoy's basin will afford six dollar diggings to several hundred men, with good prospects for still richer product than this. Many mines are now getting ready up the road to go in to New Cariboo, and all are satisfied that a good season is ahead for the summer.

Cariboo Mountain rises to an elevation of 9,803 feet, and most of the mines there were found at high elevation. Few other Idaho camps were anywhere near that high. Heavy winter snow prevented much in the way of mining for half the year; and when

the deep snow finally melted, water ran off so that little could be done much of the rest of the time. This kind of situation was typical of mining in the high country. When spring finally came to Cariboo in May, those who had spent the winter there had a chance to give their sluices a better test. Keenan, Allen, and Davis--the pioneer company who started operating in the spring--recovered \$60 in a day and a half. Their return ran high enough to encourage construction of a saw mill to turn out lumber for more sluice boxes. This kind of success helped to overcome some of the discouragement arising from difficult mining conditions in the new camp:

Since the discovery of gold in California up to the present time every new mining camp has had its rush and stampede of eager fortune seekers, and likewise a reaction. Rushing to the new El Dorados without aim or purpose, except to find gold in lumps on the surface, the excited stamper is disappointed and soon disgusted if shining nuggets as large as boulders are not as thickly scattered before his view as leaves on the strand. Cariboo has not been an exception to this characteristic custom, and although the mines had hardly been prospected, the most discouraging reports were circulated concerning them, until all confidence had been destroyed in the new region. But a shrewd miner's proverb runs that "gold is where you find it, and not where lazy men say it is not." Reliable advices from Cariboo were received here yesterday, which convince us that extensive gold fields exist, and that the yield of dust will be large. A letter received last evening by Mr. Kupfer from a Mr. Meyer, a reliable gentleman mining at Cariboo, states that active mining had but just commenced, and that the most encouraging results had been obtained from several "clean ups." Two men working the claim immediately above the writer had made their first "clean up" the evening before the date of the letter from a ten hours' run and realized \$23 and some cents in good dust. Three claims further above the claim of the writer three men had cleaned up \$43.60 in one day's sluicing. The yield of some other claims is given, but we have quoted sufficient items to demonstrate that Corinne has valuable gold fields in her immediate neighborhood, which will cause a stir before the dog days are over. Mr. Meyer pronounces the dust of Cariboo as worth more than the average stuff, being fine and pure. The credit of claim owners is said to be good, and a poor man who wants to work his mine can get all his tools and "grub" on "tick." An express will shortly be put on between this city and Cariboo, when information will

be received more regularly from the new El Dorado.

Confirmation of the problems of mining at Cariboo--as well as of potential wealth of the district--came with a report that the miners there wanted to import Chinese labor:

A gentleman now here from the gold diggings of Cariboo, reports to us that claim owners are steadily making \$20 a day to the man. Ground on McCoy and Iowa creeks, is growing richer, but there is great scarcity of hands. Three hundred men could find work by the day, now, at \$4, but those going in generally stake out claims and work them in preference to taking wages, and hence the drawback in securing labor by those who own the best paying placers. Water is abundant in all the streams, the roads into the mines good, and many miners from Idaho and Montana are gathering there. An effort is being made to obtain Chinamen to work the diggings, as white men are not to be found in sufficient numbers to supply the demand for laborers. It is somewhat astonishing that gold placers of such extraordinary richness, only two days' journey from the railroad, should thus go a begging for men to come and gather up their wealth, but this is the actual fact. If any one would see the evidence of Cariboo's richness, let him drop in at any of our banks during the day and see the sacks of dust which miners are exchanging for coin and currency.

As was the case in most mining camps that got over some of the hard feelings engendered by the Civil War, Cariboo miners had grand, old-fashioned Fourth of July celebrations even though they had to hold their parade in deep snow. In 1873,

The true spirit of patriotism was unmistakably and forcibly evinced by the miners and citizens of Cariboo and Soda Springs, on the Fourth. In Cariboo the usual exercises were gone through with, such as cannonading, bell-ringing, fire cracker shooting, cocktailing, etc., a grand oration, a procession on snow shoes, a huge feast of bear meat, trout, mountain sheep, grouse, and other luxuries of that district, a war dance in the afternoon by a few of the noble red men residing in those parts, and a grand ball in the evening, which wound up with a roaring serenading party that browsed round on the rim of the basin to the tune of "Hail Columbia." Thus ended the Fourth at Cariboo, but quite a number of the miners and merchants living there went over the Soda Springs to celebrate, and there, in the shade of the veteran pine forest which covers those

medicinal founts with its umbrageous foliage, they lavished multiplied encomiums on the heads of the sires of '76, while a stream of pure sparkling soda water gently disappeared between their patriotic lips. A glorious soiree also wound up the day's programme at Soda, and a day never to be forgotten by the participants of these two places wore pleasantly away, and slipped, reluctantly, away into the never-ending eternity.

Aside from turning to Chinese workers for help, miners from Cariboo resorted to labor savings equipment standard in many western camps. Hydraulic giants were installed to obtain placer gravel to feed the sluices. Giant streams of water (shot out of nozzles fed by metal pipe leading from ditches at higher elevation) cut away surface gravel and swept the gold-bearing placer gravel into sluice boxes. Within a year or two a number of giants were at work in the region, and by the fourth season, eight of them had gone into production.

As the years went on, gold recovery at Cariboo proved erratic. A few spots yielded well, but most of the ground turned out to be marginal. One or two claims gave satisfactory results--an ounce a day (about \$20) for each miner at work. Most of the others provided from \$2 to \$5, with the leaner ones of interest mainly to Chinese. They never seemed to get enough white miners to come to work the ground available, so driving out the Asiatics seemed pointless. Chinese companies owned claims and operated giants along with everyone else--apparently without discrimination. That way, unlike other camps that kept out Chinese competition during the more productive early years, Cariboo had whites and Chinese at work on adjacent claims most of the time and did not become strictly an Oriental camp after a few seasons of early excitement.

In the early days of placer operations, Cariboo Mountain had two mining districts, one on the east side at Iowa Bar and the other on the west with Keenan City as its center. Keenan City, with a dozen or so log cabins on McCoy Creek, had become the major (and only recognizable) mining center; Iowa City on the other side of the mountain was pretty hard to find, even for the people fortunate enough to go through it. In the Iowa district (named for an Iowa discoverer), William Clemens--a cousin of Mark Twain who mined in various parts of Idaho for more than thirty years--spent many seasons placering and promoting the country. He had three hydraulic giants in operations there, the most in the district. Cariboo Fairchilds spent fourteen years in McCoy district not far from Keenan City and had quite a time there: in 1872 he "broke his leg while 'skylarking' with a friend one day," and in 1884 he had a disastrous misadventure with one of Cariboo Mountain's numerous bears, an encounter which he unfortunately failed to survive.

With the discovery of lode claims in 1874, Cariboo Mountain offered an additional attraction to early miners. Over the next decade, a number of these new lodes were developed to enough depth to prove that thousands of tons of ore were available if anyone would manage to operate a hard-rock mine in such a remote and difficult location. Simple arastras--rock crushers made of local materials, with drag stones used to grind up ore in a circular rocklined surface--provided a modest production. But not enough thousands of tons of ore were available in one place to justify a major stamp-milling enterprise in the early years, although such a possibility attracted attention to the district season after season.

Even though the slowly worked placers proved spotty, with an occasional rich streak at bedrock, by 1886 production may have amounted to a million dollars or so. Reports of \$200,000 in 1879 alone suggest that large a total--or perhaps twice that much if enough of the other seasons provided as much as a hundred thousand dollars. Considering the relatively small number of miners at work most of the time, and the shortage of water high on Cariboo Mountain, even a million-dollar total is difficult to substantiate. (All kinds of exaggerated reports of mineral wealth came out of most western mining camps, but with enough short seasons with a fair number of giants at work, Cariboo did provide a substantial return to a modest number of miners.) Remote from other mining districts and distant from sources of supply, Cariboo Mountain provided a definite economic stimulus to early development of the upper Snake country. At least one enterprising miner found that he could grow some kind of premium Idaho potatoes next to a snowbank high on Cariboo Mountain at a time when few farmers were at work in the valley below. But generally the mines at Cariboo had to depend upon distant sources of supply, and their needs offered an inducement to settlers to develop the surrounding country at a time when not too many other economic attractions were available to encourage settlement of that part of Idaho.

Rail service to the broad valley of the Snake to the west eventually helped in the development of Cariboo Mountain lode properties; and about the time that Idaho became a state in 1890, a long awaited stamp mill served the Robinson lode. A pretty good test of the only developed property was made. From a 246-foot cross-cut tunnel, ore was removed from a 275-foot stope on a 25-foot vein opened to a depth of 264 feet. But the mill burned up in a fire not long after that initial ore body was processed, and the company did not bother with a replacement. Edmund B. Kirby reported in Denver on August 6, 1894, that "a great number of quartzite strata near the top of the mountain have been prospected by surface pits, and are found to be gold bearing. The surface soil and gravel down the entire slope of the mountain on this side is said to pan well in gold. These strata range from three feet to sixty feet in thickness"

Geologically, these Cariboo Mountain gold deposits had the same corrosive alkaline origin and structure that characterized quartzite gold deposits in Ouray and Battle Mountain, Colorado.

After years of sporadic effort, several companies gradually made some headway in trying to develop lode properties on Cariboo Mountain. An Idaho Falls corporation, established October 8, 1903, invested \$60,000 in an 800-foot tunnel and a 100-foot shaft on the Monte Cristo. Copper discoveries in 1904 encouraged the Monte Cristo investors for a time, but they could not be mined successfully. Eventually, though, a Salt Lake enterprise was incorporated, April 19, 1917, to spend another \$13,002.60 on the Robinson, which attained 1,200 feet on tunnels--compared with only 246 feet during the era of production. In a still more ambitious project, undertaken by a Boise company incorporated March 17, 1920, four men drove 1,600 feet of tunnel for the Searchlight. But that concern soon shut down too. After many years of idleness, activity resumed at the Robinson in 1938, when leasers put five men to work there. Eventually another 100 feet of tunnel was driven in 1952, and more prospecting followed on the Robinson in 1955. Work at the Evergreen also helped maintain interest in the district during those recent years. Although a ball mill was utilized there after 1940, large lode mining simply could not be managed on Cariboo Mountain.

Twentieth-century placer mining did a little better. With ten men at work in 1907, the American Placer Company handled about 50,000 yards of gravel that season. Then an experiment in dredging came with the efforts of the Wolverine Placer Company, incorporated May 10, 1917. With eight men and capital outlay of \$70,000 to install a 150-horsepower hydroelectric plant, eighteen miles of transmission lines, and a McCoy Creek dredge, this operation showed promise before work was suspended in 1922. At that time, an ambitious Barnes Creek placer operation was started up with Pittsburgh capital. A four-mile ditch fed water into a 2,500-foot pipe that finally supplied two four-inch giants and a 300-foot sluice line. A substantial permanent camp accommodated twenty miners. A 30-horsepower hydroelectric generator with a mile transmission line provided power for a modern amalgamation plant and a warehouse, blacksmith shop, assay office, boarding house, and bunk house, along with a company office building, made this the district's most ambitious placer operation. When the Wolverine dredge resumed operation in 1924-1925, Cariboo looked still better.

As was the case with most old camps, Cariboo profited by revival of interest in gold mining during the depression. A Minneapolis company, incorporated May 3, 1936, employed four men to move 16,000 yards of gravel in 1938. Small operators, able to engage in subsistence mining in old placers, recovered modest amounts of gold--enough so that they could stay off relief--throughout most of the depression. But total production from all of this enterprise amounted only to four or five thousand dollars

a year in 1938 and 1939, so the addition to the district's total production still was pretty limited. From the time that George Hearst had anticipated that "the next year of our history will show a record of population and mineral wealth unparalleled in the records of our Territory." But somehow Cariboo's golden age never quite materialized.

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:

Alpine 1966
Bear Island 1966
Big Elk Mtn. 1966
Caribou Mtn. 1966
Etna 1966
Poker Peak 1966
Stump Peak
Thayne West
Tincup Mtn. 1966
Wayan East

10. Cultural resource management recommendations:

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