

THE INDIANS AND THE MINERS

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Quote
By the early 1860's, the first rush of miners surged into Idaho. They pushed past the Indians in a hurry to pan for gold in streams, the same streams and rivers where Indian tribes had fished and trapped for thousands of years. Mining claims sprung up on winter village sites. Miners burned lodge poles for fire wood and pitched tents over ancestral burial grounds.

After the discovery of gold north of the Salmon River in 1860, the rush was unstoppable. In 1862, gold was discovered in Warren and the Boise Basin (Idaho City).

Sven Liljeblad (1957) describes the impact on the Tukudika, or Sheepeater band of Northern Shoshone living in Idaho's central mountain country during the period that followed.

"Shortly thereafter, gold was also found on the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River, the principal spawning ground of the Columbia River salmon and a center of Tukudeka winter camps. In 1866, prospectors from Montana found coarse gold on panther Creek, west of Salmon City, at a place called Leesburg. A few months later, Leesburg had a population of three thousand. Unfortunately for the Tukudeka, this place was situated in proximity to several of their largest winter villages...Within a year, there were 7,000 miners in Leesburg basin...In 1870, Leesburg had more than one hundred stores, saloons, hotels and work shops.

Area newspapers published a continual series of angry and indignant articles as bands of Indians traveling through the country attempted to travel to summer trading grounds near Council, Boise, Camas Prairie and Bear Valley in southern Idaho. On these grassy meadows the tribes tried to meet as they had each summer for centuries for trading fairs. Newly settled farmers and ranchers fumed and threatened, not understanding when thousands of Indians collected in "their" pastures, eating "their" grass.

Throughout the 1860's, the Idaho Statesman had little good to say about Idaho's Indians, other than a few grudging comments they published about the Sheepeaters.

"It is doubtful if there are a dozen peaceable Indians except the tribe of Sheepeaters who occupy a not very large scope of country on the headwaters of the Salmon. They stay at home and make their own living by fishing and hunting. They have thus far treated whites passing through their country with kindness and cordiality and are as thoroughly hostile as the whites are towards the small thieving renegade bands that occasionally go up that way from this vicinity" (March 21, 1866 issue).

Liljeblad continues the story of the Tukudika:

"Salmon City and Challis were established as trading centers to supply miners. Business in both places was soon controlled by ... Colonel George L. Shoup, the first Governor of the state of Idaho. He won his military honors in the Sand Creek Massacre, Colorado in 1864..."

"...The Indians, terrified by all this noise and at the destruction of their fishing waters, could do nothing but move farther away into their forests, trailed closely by hardy white men who searched for gold in every creek."

Southern Idaho's Indians, however, would no longer be allowed to roam freely through the country they had lived in for centuries. On June 14, 1867, President Andrew Johnson, issued an executive order setting apart the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, ordering the bands of Northern Shoshone and Bannock to be removed there. The Sheepeater band, however, remained in the quiet shadows of the Wilderness until 1879, when, during Idaho's last Indian war, the Sheepeater Campaign, the military forced them from their mountain home.

YOUR ROLE IN PROTECTING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Wilderness Archaeologists are currently working to preserve, protect and understand the prehistory of the ancient peoples who lived in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. As this prehistory is discovered and understood, they will share it with the public through educational monographs and other publications. You can help in this effort by leaving artifacts where they lie, and informing Forest Service Wilderness managers of your discovery.

Take pride in our American heritage.

Take nothing but photographs.