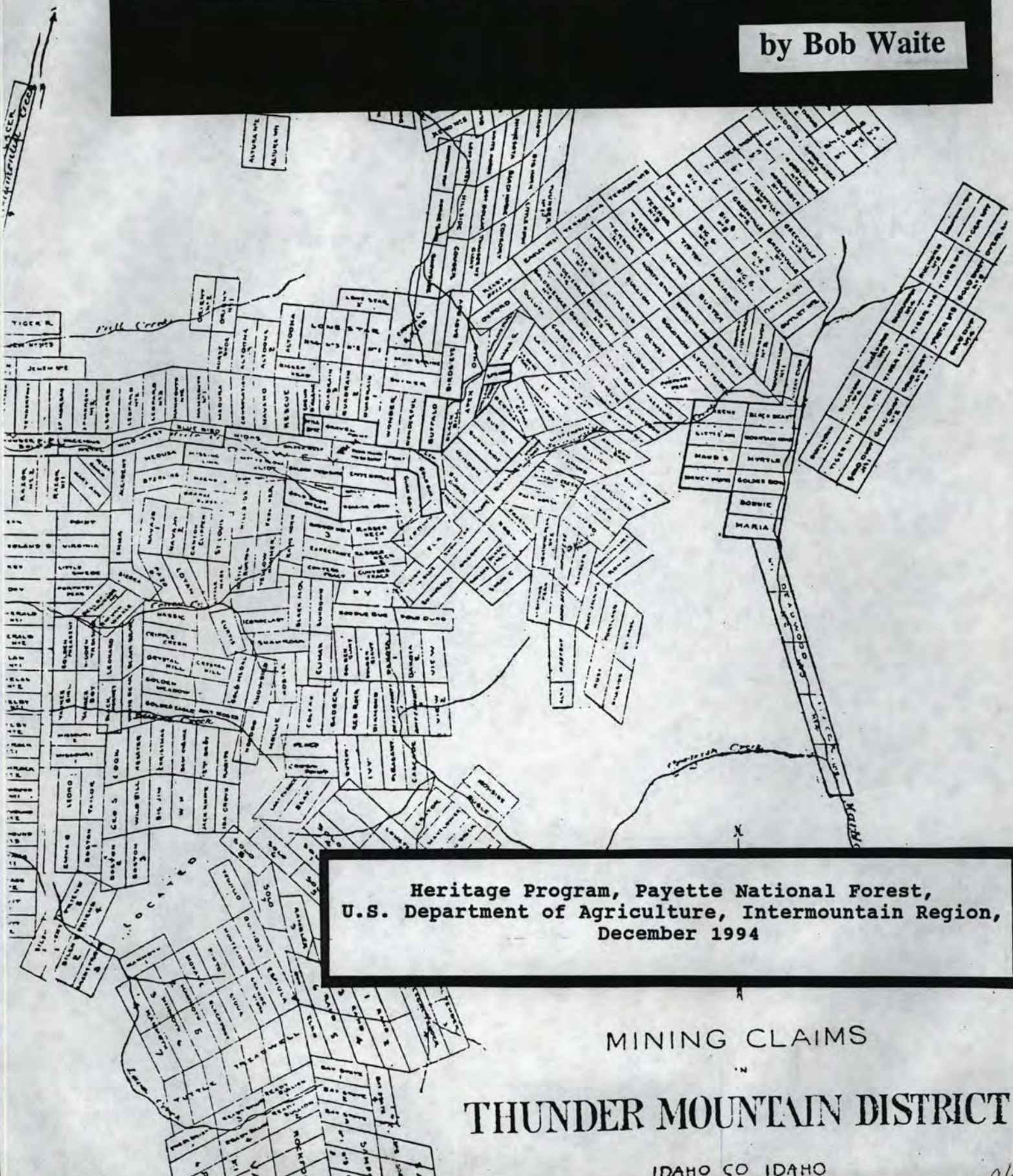


TO IDAHO'S KLONDIKE

THE THUNDER MOUNTAIN GOLD RUSH, 1901 - 1909

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MINING CLAIMS IN THUNDER MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

IDAHO CO IDAHO

As soon as the snows in the rugged mountains of central Idaho had melted enough in the spring of 1902 to permit passage, the rush to the gold fields of Thunder Mountain started. Prospectors had been reading the accounts in Idaho's newspapers and had eagerly listened to the stories told by those who had seen "Idaho's Klondike." Throughout the winter, newspapers published frequent stories about mountains of ore laden with gold. Prospectors, fortune hunters, investors, and businessmen, having read these accounts, traveled to Boise, Idaho City, Salmon, or other communities promoting themselves as the best jumping off point to the Thunder Mountain gold fields. Thunder Mountain was to be the last great gold rush of the American West, the final opportunity for countless prospectors to make the big strike, to find the riches that had eluded them for so long.

THE DISCOVERY

The miners who made the first strike at Thunder Mountain were Ben and Lou Caswell, two brothers from Michigan who had prospected for gold in Colorado before pushing into Idaho. Their luck in the Seven Devils area was not good, and as Ben Caswell later recalled, "cash was a scarce article with us and we weren't any too long on grub."¹ The Caswell brothers went into the Salmon River basin in 1894, where they trapped and hunted the abundant game. They hoped their luck might change as they moved on and prospected in the Thunder Mountain district of central Idaho.

Over the next several years the Caswells focused most heavily on surface levels, areas easy to mine. Once they found a promising location, they built sluice boxes and tried to extract as much gold as possible. By 1896 they operated four sluice boxes at Monumental Creek in the Thunder Mountain district, and during the short mining season they took out \$900 in gold. At the first hints of winter, which came early in the high mountains, the Caswell brothers prepared to pack out, discouraged because the find at Monumental Creek appeared to be exhausted.²

As they prepared to break camp in the fall of 1896, they realized that one of their mules was missing, and Ben Caswell followed its tracks up a stream that flowed into Monument Creek. While crossing a small outcrop, he leaned over and scooped up some material, much as he had done countless times before at innumerable locations. Ben soon found the mule and returned to camp. He panned the material that he had picked up, thinking he might find a trace of gold, or even a nugget. As water moved across the pan, separating out the sand and gravel, Ben, much to his surprise, found his pan laced with gold. This was the largest find the Caswell brothers had made to date. But the season was at its end and they were forced to leave their discovery behind. Full of optimism, they returned to Mule Creek in the spring of 1897. Once back at the digs, they were joined by another brother, Dan, and his partner Wesley Ritchie. They figured to have more success finding gold with more prospectors working.

Each season the Caswells returned to this area, and each year they added more sluice boxes, expecting to find more gold. They worked hard, and had 1,200 feet of sluice boxes in operation by

1901. The mining season in the northern Rockies is short, because of the severe winters and because some of the claims were located above streams. That meant that the Caswells had to use the run-off from melting snows to wash gold from the rocks, and some operations were restricted to only a couple of weeks each year. The rewards were, however, worth it--Ben Caswell later boasted that in one two-hour period he found more than \$135 worth of gold. As their operations expanded, the returns increased rapidly, from only \$245 in 1895 to \$11,000 in 1901, and that led the state mining inspector to write in his report for 1901: "Although their efforts were of the crudest and they were only able to work two weeks a season, a total of 14 weeks, utilizing the water from melting snow, within that period, they secured an enormous amount of gold, as evidenced in the records of the assay office." Receipts from Boise's assay office list the returns at an impressive \$20,358.99.³

The Caswell brothers knew that they had hit it big when an investor, Colonel William H. Dewey, came forward in late 1900 and secured an option on their claims for \$100,000. Colonel Dewey, a well-known figure in Idaho, had his son meet with the Caswells in September 1900 to discuss investment possibilities. The young E.H. Dewey was clearly impressed with the reports and the ore specimens he had received. After meeting with the Caswells he sent a glowing report to his father, then in Pittsburgh. Colonel Dewey wired his response: "Go ahead, take the option." An agreement was drawn up, and once signed, it gave Colonel Dewey the purchase rights for eleven of the Caswell brothers' claims. The sale, however, depended upon the outcome of further exploration at the claims.⁴

Colonel Dewey sent a prospecting crew into the Thunder Mountain district, even though some remained skeptical about the finds. By October 1900, with the mining season rapidly coming to an end, a great deal of exploratory work had been completed. The samples taken from the claims proved to be far more valuable than Colonel Dewey or the Caswell brothers had expected. According to one newspaper article, "the prospect hole revealed ore worth \$5,000 to the ton." The reporter wrote: "it would have been possible to have packed out on the burros and broncos that belonged to the camp outfit enough ore to pay for the mine according to the terms of the bond." This initial enthusiasm was confirmed in the 1901 report from the Idaho inspector of mines.⁵

This official report praised the discovery at Thunder Mountain. The inspector wrote that "nature did wonders for this property," and reckoned that the vein he examined at the Caswell claims contained "one million five hundred thousand tons at a conservative estimate of ten million dollars."⁶ Such conclusions attracted further attention. The respected publication Mines and Minerals sent a special correspondent to Thunder Mountain who was excited about what he found there. "The fact that a pan of gravel can scarcely be picked up along this stream without getting the 'color' suggests to the intelligent prospector that somewhere above must be extensive belts of auriferous material awaiting the hand of enterprise," he concluded. Furthermore, Thunder Mountain is "a veritable mountain of ore, whose estimated wealth throws the

treasures of the Incas into the shade."⁷

The enthusiastic reports coming out of Thunder Mountain led Colonel Dewey to meet the terms of the contract with the Caswell brothers ahead of schedule. Dewey obtained the financial backing from investors in Pittsburgh, and they organized the Thunder Mountain Gold and Silver Mining and Milling Company with capital of \$5 million. In a highly publicized meeting, held in the lobby of a Boise hotel on November 16, 1901, Colonel Dewey presented the Caswell brothers with a check for \$100,000. It appeared to be the deal of the century.

THE RUSH TO THUNDER MOUNTAIN

The newspaper accounts that ran throughout these months on the developments at Thunder Mountain and Colonel Dewey's purchase of the Caswell claims sparked the rush to these "mountains of gold," to "Idaho's Klondike." Even before newspapers from across the region began carrying articles about an area rich with gold, stories obtained from packers and outfitters who had carried supplies into and out of the Thunder Mountain district sparked further interest.⁸ A handful of prospectors soon moved into the district, eager to find out for themselves that the stories were true. During the winter of 1901-1902, when travel to and from the Thunder Mountain district was perilous at best, some miners hiked out from the gold fields. Reporters eagerly sought them, because they were the only source of information on what was being called "the new Klondike."⁹

Those coming out from Thunder Mountain brought accounts of vast riches waiting to be tapped. Idaho newspapers featured these stories, and Boise's Idaho Daily Statesman, for example, published reports of new finds almost daily throughout early 1902. Articles from these newspapers were then picked up by other regional newspapers which spread the news well beyond Idaho. Newspapers from as far away as Pittsburgh and professional mining journals sent reporters and correspondents to cover the fast breaking news, each publication eager to provide its readers with up-to-date and reliable information. Mining Reporter, one of the most influential and widely read journals, offered news of Thunder Mountain almost weekly. "Everyone expects a rush into the district next spring," it wrote in the January 16, 1902, issue. And "there seems every probability of the rush materializing into a permanent district." Within a month, reader interest had risen so much that Mining Reporter sent a special correspondent to the district who provided a detailed account of the finds, the assay values of the ore, and most important, the best routes into the district.¹⁰

Newspaper accounts continued to fuel the excitement. According to a story in the Idaho Daily Statesman, a "new discovery [was] said to have been made in the Dewey," where "two feet of very rich ore," worth "\$5,600 a ton," was uncovered. Another story in the Lewiston Tribune newspaper insisted that the area was "lousy with gold." A new strike, it was claimed, "will assay from \$10,000 to \$25,000 a ton."¹¹ The available riches seemed to be matched

only by the luck of the prospectors at Thunder Mountain. A headline in the Standard Grangeville announced: "Fast Man Stakes Out Claims While Scooting Down an Avalanche." As a prospector explained to a newspaper reporter, "Why a fellow got caught in a snowslide the other day, and slid for half a mile, along with rocks, trees and a hundred feet of snow. What did he do but pull out his pencil and location blanks, figure out the distances by computing the rate of speed and counting the seconds on his watch, and he located three claims before he reached the bottom." And the prospector added, "Fact, for I saw the slide."¹²

The mountain snows did not stop prospectors from staking claims. An article in the Idaho Daily Statesman stated that "a group of 17 claims were located in deep snow." As the reporter described the situation, "there was nothing whatever to guide the locators; they did not know whether they were within a half a mile of a ledge or whether there was any ledge on that part of the mountain; their only object was to take up and hold the ground until it could be examined after the snow melted off." The same story confirmed that blind luck did exist at Thunder Mountain. Noting that Idaho law required for the validation of a claim "a hole ten feet deep and not less than sixteen square feet area must be sunk within sixty days after the date of making the location," the article stated that the results of "sinking the holes on these seventeen claims" was nothing short of astonishing. "The men came upon material in sixteen that returned value when assayed and two of the holes went down into solid bodies of rich ore."¹³

Additional newspaper accounts, all citing miners recently returned from the gold fields, fueled the excitement about Thunder Mountain. Already in early 1902, the Idaho Daily Statesman announced the "coming rush to Idaho Eldorado," and claimed that "200,000 will reach Thunder Mountain this season."¹⁴ A northern Idaho newspaper described an "army of gold seekers coming this way," and yet another claimed that the discoveries at Thunder Mountain "will rival [the] Klondike." A reporter from as far away as Salt Lake City saw around him "indications of the forthcoming invasion of Thunder Mountain." He observed the presence of what he described as a "couple of sheep wagons," carrying a sign that read "we leave for Thunder Mountain January 12, for further particulars, enquire at the office."¹⁵

PROMOTERS

News of the riches at Thunder Mountain spread rapidly, and in early 1902 local businessmen, outfitters, railway companies serving the Rocky Mountain West, and the print media all prepared for the onslaught of prospectors. Suppliers, store-owners and others expecting to gain from the rush to Thunder Mountain eagerly promoted their local communities, whether Boise, Idaho City, or another town, as the best starting point for the journey to the nearby gold fields. Competition was intense, and this was reflected in newspaper accounts, with each locality citing prospectors just coming out as saying that this town or the other was clearly the best to begin the trek to Thunder Mountain.¹⁶

Quick to see the potential for profit in the Thunder Mountain rush were the railway companies serving the northern Rockies. Already in January 1902, the Union Pacific Railroad began the distribution of 50,000 maps of the Thunder Mountain district, complete with rail and stage lines. The maps were also sponsored by the Boise Chamber of Commerce and they identified Boise as the major outfitting center for the journey. For prospectors and others thinking the rush to Thunder Mountain, the maps provided much useful information. For example, in addition to the rail lines into Idaho, the pack routes to the district, and the closest railroad junctions, the maps identified the claims already staked there. Clearly, a lot of land was still available, and the gold fields were easy to reach! The maps added to the excitement about the gold fields at Thunder Mountain.¹⁷

A few entrepreneurs joined the fray publishing their own guides to the district. In January 1902, Ignatius T. Murphy, the publisher of Western Progress and other publications, arrived in Boise to "gather data for the Thunder Mountain edition of his publication." As he told Boise's Evening Capital News, "I have written up practically all the great mining camps of the west and have participated in several 'rushes' myself but I firmly believe that the coming stampede to Thunder Mountain will exceed them all." In fact, he concluded, "no other camp has received the publicity that this has and the winter months have given time for the gold seekers to make adequate preparations, therefore I look for a big mining community to spring up in a night almost."¹⁸

Mining Reporter, an influential journal, published an extensive account in its April 10, 1902, issue, and this included extensive information on each of the five major routes. The Boise Trail began in Idaho's capital, went north to Idaho City, then to Banner, reaching the mouth of Clear Creek at the Payette River. This route followed Clear Creek to its head, down Bar Valley to the Forks of Valley Creek and Elk Creek. Mining Reporter noted that a stage line would soon be using this route, and that at Elk Creek the Thunder Mountain prospector had to transfer to a pack train for the last and toughest part of the 170 mile journey.¹⁹

A second route began at Ketchum in the Wood River Valley. Prospectors taking this route went by stage north over the Galena Summit, through the Stanley Basin to Wagon Town. Here, the passengers switched to a pack train, and continued north along Marble Creek to Thunder Mountain, a journey of 142 miles. A third route began at Mackay, then headed north to Challis. At Singiser, the last station on the stage line, a pack train took over. This route then led prospectors to Loon Creek and Marble Creek before reaching Thunder Mountain, a total distance of 180 miles. The fourth way into the gold fields, the Red Rock route, started in that town, proceeded to Salmon, then on to Singiser, Loon Creek, Marble Creek, before reaching Thunder Mountain, a 190 miles later. The last of the major routes began in Weiser. The stage line ran to Council and eventually to Warren, where the prospectors joined a pack team. It traveled to Curly Brewer's for a rest, then to Smokehouse Cabin and Copper Camp before reaching Thunder Mountain,

a distance of 161 miles.

All of the five trails went through rugged mountain country. The fact that each trail was roughly the same distance from start to finish led community businessmen and local promoters to campaign vigorously for the expected rush of prospectors into Thunder Mountain. Newspapers in each community carried advertisements announcing that their town had proven to be the starting point of the best route, and the claims were supported by testimonials from prospectors just returning from the gold fields. Towns in northern Idaho, not included in the Mining Reporter account, launched their own publicity campaigns in the spring of 1902 as they attempted to benefit from the growing interest in Thunder Mountain.

The news of the Caswell brothers' discovery and Colonel Dewey's hefty check for these claims prompted some towns to go even farther in their preparations for the coming boom. In Salmon, for example, public meetings addressed the issue of how the town could best attract travelers going to the gold fields. Excitement in Salmon mounted and plans were drawn up for a large new hotel. New lots were plotted, and the newspaper purchased new equipment to handle the expected interest in "Idaho's Klondike." Already in December 1901, Salmon's Idaho Recorder described how easy the trip was from Salmon to Thunder Mountain. The Salmon City & Gibbonsville Stage Line planned to extend its service to Thunder Mountain, enabling it to handle "the great crowd of people which, it is expected, will rush to the wonderful quartz discoveries recently made in the Thunder Mountain district."²⁰

In early January 1902, the Lewiston Tribune reported that "the citizens of Grangeville are alive to the importance of the new Thunder Mountain district and have taken active steps to bring to the attention of the country the shortest and best routes to that district from Grangeville and other northern points." The town even produced and distributed a large map showing the various northern routes to the gold fields. This effort was an attempt to convince the public that the northern routes were in fact the quickest and easiest, "despite the claims of several southern communities who have misrepresented the conditions existing in the north in order to sustain their claims regarding the shortest and best routes to the new eldorado."²¹

Businessmen in the Wood River Valley, eager to promote the route beginning in Ketchum, met in January 1902 to "further consider a Thunder mountain route." Ketchum businessman H.C. Lewis organized the Ketchum and Thunder Mountain Stage Line, and according to a March 22, 1902, account in the Idaho Daily Statesman, he had "just received two carloads of stage horses and a \$2,000 shipment of harness." Lewis had already secured an order to ship more than 100,000 pounds of goods to the Lewis Brothers store at Thunder Mountain.²²

Claims of being the best, the shortest, the most convenient, or the most used route to the Thunder Mountain gold fields were heard throughout Idaho often in early 1902. But it was not until

a few months later, after the snows in the high Rockies had begun to melt, that regular passage to "Idaho's Klondike" became possible. In April, the Mining Reporter published stories on travel routes, and it reported that 800 men were already there while "many are waiting at Dixie and Chamberlain's basin for the trails to be open for pack animals."²³ The next issue, published a week later, contained additional reports on the opening of the route to Thunder Mountain. That issue reported that "most of the travel is by the Warren route," and "we heard of only one man in from Salmon City, though he reported a number along the road. No one has yet come in from Ketchum and Hailey."²⁴

In spite of these early reports, the opening of the trails into the Thunder Mountain district proceeded only slowly as the snows began to melt. In May 1902, the Lewiston Tribune cautioned its readers that the "trail is not yet open," and "horses cannot yet reach Thunder mountain." Mining Reporter, in its May 22nd issue, stated that "All reports that roads are open for horse traffic to Thunder mountain are misleading. The snow is deeper on all the higher mountains than at any time during the past winter."²⁵

The hardships of winter travel in the northern Rockies had halted the trip to Thunder Mountain for all but the hardest, or perhaps the most fool hardy gold seekers. But in the early spring of 1902 the rush was on, as numerous prospectors hoped to be among the first to stake claims and hit the big strike. Already in March 1902, the Standard Grangeville newspaper reported that, "The country is located almost solid for a radius of seven miles every direction from the original camp. For a distance of thirty miles down Monumental and Big Creeks, there is a forest of location stakes." In fact, it was "almost impossible to hire men to do the kind of work, as everybody is busy locating claims for himself."²⁶

CLAIMS AND MINES

Many prospectors had made the arduous trip along snow-covered trails to Thunder Mountain in the spring of 1902, but the bulk of the ore extraction was done at one of a handful of large mining operations funded by big investors, and not at the claims of hopeful individuals. Prospectors with only a few claims continued to work them, and they often, as the big strike eluded them, took jobs at one of the larger mines--the Dewey, Sunnyside, the H-Y, Venable, and later the 20th Century Mine.

In early 1902, Colonel Dewey and his Pittsburgh investors established the Thunder Mountain Gold and Silver Mining and Milling Company and it held a number of important claims. One report maintained that Dewey's company had capital of \$5,000,000. Dewey was full of optimism, and told reporters from the Chicago Record Herald that "he is the richest man in the world or that he soon will be. There will be trumpet tidings from Idaho within two or three months, he says, tidings that will proclaim Idaho an American Transvaal or a United States Klondike, that will pale the fame of Cripple Creek or any other old digging."²⁷

While a number of big investors came from out of state, some mining companies sought local support and funding. The Thunder Mountain Consolidated Gold and Mining and Milling Co. Limited ran an ad in the Boise newspaper the Evening Capital News in January 31, 1902. According to the advertisement, the company "Offers you a chance to invest your money safely and profitably. Shares bought in our company when we need money to start development work and open up our ore bodies, will net you thousands." It also reminded readers: "You all remember Cripple Creek, how many took advantage of those opportunities; this is another opportunity for you all. Think again and do not hesitate or elect to purchase stock when a good management offers its treasury shares to develop its property."²⁸

The brisk trading in Thunder Mountain stocks raised huge funds for the mines in the early months of 1902, much of which came from out of state investors. A group of claims located west of Monumental Creek and known as the Fairview Group, was sold to investors based in Pittsburgh for \$150,000. The claims belonging to the Apex and Burr Oak Group went to other Pittsburgh investors for "a handsome figure." The intense buying and selling of claims led Boise's Idaho Daily Statesman to report the "remarkable records of sales," which totaled "nearly a million and a half" dollars. The newspaper added, "it is not believed there ever before was a mining district in which so many properties were sold before development work got fairly under way. Ever since the disclosures of the wealth of the district there has been a very active business in property, a very large number of claims having been sold."²⁹

The feverish sale of Thunder Mountain claims and stock shares was outdone only by the speed with which new claims were staked and recorded. Much of this activity took place south of the Dewey Mine because many believed that the gold dikes ran north-south, and these claims were on the same gold bearing vein, or at least close to it. Other promising veins were located in the heavily prospected area between the Dewey Mine and Monumental Creek. Another promising area was near the Sunnyside, and in fact throughout the district there were a number of gold veins. As news of the high returns of assayed ore spread, prospectors hurried to nearby areas, staking claims at a furious pace.³⁰

By early 1902, several mines at Thunder Mountain had begun serious operations, providing they could find enough men willing to forego work on their own claims. Of course, one of the first to begin operations was the Dewey Mine. Already by December 1901, underground work had begun there, and a 10 stamp mill was operating, though only sporadically because of the lack of supplies. The Dewey Mine was an especially promising location, with 1,392 tons of ore valued at \$5.00 per ton crushed in 1902.³¹ Mechanical problems slowed the production considerably, and the Idaho inspector of mines, Robert Bell, found that not to be surprising. He wrote that the mill was built on an "insecure foundation", and therefore it "gives a great deal of trouble and causes loss of time." Bell wrote in his 1904 report, "it is common experience for a patchwork of this kind to give lots of trouble and

prove hard to hold up in repair."³²

From September 1903 to April 1904, the stamp mill at the Dewey Mine ran continuously, stopping only because of lack of fuel. During these months, 7,233 tons of ore were crushed, with an average assay value of \$8.81 a ton. The bullion recovered was worth \$52,253.08. The following year \$67,166.63 worth of gold was extracted. The high yields shown by the Dewey Mine were in large measure the result of sound management by the superintendent who kept the costs of mining and milling to a minimum.³³

Productivity at the Dewey Mine remained high. During 1904, for example, an estimated \$67,000 in bullion was produced, some from surface quarries. Most of the ore came from the underground tunnels, the more than 2,000 feet of underground workings on two main levels, several intermediate levels, and short tunnels. In 1906, the Dewey Mine was "the largest producer of gold for the year in Idaho county," and an estimated \$55,910 of bullion was produced by the 35-40 men working at the mine.³⁴

During 1907, mining operations at Thunder Mountain began to slow, but the Dewey Mine continued extracting and processing ore. Its 10 stamp mill operated continuously from April to late October, with only a single 10 day stoppage in July. During these months of activity, more than 8,900 tons were crushed, with an average assay value of \$5.03 a ton. The actual value of the bullion extracted amounted to \$37,170. In October, the mill was shut down, and only a watchman left in charge. The state inspector of mines wrote: "it is likely to remain [in this condition] for some time, as the ore now available in the mines are of much lower grade than the values given."³⁵

In addition to the Dewey Mine, other claims sold by the Caswell brothers were heavily mined. In May 1902, the Belle of Thunder Mountain Company purchased the Sunnyside Group claims. The Idaho inspector of mines described the site, located on the northeast slope of Thunder Mountain, as "only a hole in the ground ten feet in depth." The site was developed rapidly, with preparatory work continuing through 1903. More than 7,000 feet of underground development work and some churn drilling had been completed. The results were promising. The Belle of Thunder Mountain Company increased its work force to more than 200 men, installed a 40 stamp mill in the fall of 1902, and constructed an aerial tramway to carry ore to the mill.³⁶

Material for the Sunnyside Mine's stamp mill, set up at Belleco near Marble Creek, and construction of the 8,000 feet tramway were brought on pack trains at considerable expense. Unfortunately, the tramway had to be shut down already on December 20th because the grips proved too weak and had to be replaced. The stamp mill started its operations even before the repairs were made. As reported in the district's newspaper, the Prospector and Thunder Mountain News, "the operators were so well pleased with the result of the mill run made prior to the breakdown of the tramway, that it spared no pains or expenses to repair the break in order to

go ahead with work." Supplies for the stamp mill and the replacement grips for the tramway arrived on February 14, 1905, part of a shipment of 5,000 pounds of freight. The local newspaper described its arrival, writing that the "16 fat horses wearing snowshoes walking on top of the snow pulling their heavy load with all ease, exhibiting as much intelligence as any 16 men could, was the cynosure of all eyes."³⁷

The investors in the Belle of Thunder Mountain Company expected much from the Sunnyside Mine. As the Idaho inspector of mines wrote in his report for 1905, the stamp mill, which was "to make such a great record in bullion production, demonstrated, after a brief run, that the ore values disclosed in the extensive development of the mine had been shockingly overestimated and the results produced not have been sufficient to pay operating costs." Operations did continue for another two years, and the stamp mill was replaced with a series of eight electro-cyanide machines with a capacity of 100 tons a day. Earnings from the ore processed continued to decline and the site remained idle for much of 1907. The owners finally closed the mine in 1908.³⁸

Trailing only the Dewey and Sunnyside mines in production was the 20th Century Mine whose holdings, mostly along Monumental Creek, surpassed those of the other Thunder Mountain companies. The Prospector and Thunder Mountain News reported that "its property covers an area of more than two square miles, or about 1500 acres, and is about three times as large as the territory controlled by any other company in the district." The site of the mill, the company's buildings, and other structures of the 20th Century Mine constituted "a small town of themselves."³⁹

The site of the 20th Century Mine's operations along Monumental Creek had not been heavily mined during the early days of the Thunder Mountain boom. During 1901 and 1902, most of the prospectors focused their efforts on the area in the vicinity of the Dewey Mine. Only a few placered along Monumental Creek. Intensive work at the 20th Century first began only in late 1904. The mine's general manager was an old hand, having arrived in the district in 1899. The local newspaper identified him as "one of the first to recognize the richness and extent of the mines of the district and [he] has made Thunder Mountain the field of his operations every since and has been instrumental in the organization and promotion of the 20th Century Mining & Power Co. and other equally good enterprises in the mining line in the district."⁴⁰

The 20th Century's holdings included 18 quartz claims, six placer claims, and four tunnel sites. Having begun operations later than most of the other mines at Thunder Mountain, the 20th Century continued operating well after the other mines began to slow down. In August 1905, for example, machinery, including three dynamos, electric fixtures, and stamp mill machinery, was unloaded at the site almost daily. New buildings were constructed, and plans were drawn up for a town to be built on 40 acres of land at the junction of Botha and Monumental Creeks. The company expanded its holdings

at Thunder Mountain, and in September 1905 it ran a trust deed for \$100,000 with the Cleveland Trust Company. This deed was paid in full four years later. In 1910, the 20th Century finally shut down its operations, and the actual value of the ore extracted there remains unknown.⁴¹

Several other smaller mines and a large number of individual operators continued to work at Thunder Mountain. The better known included the Venable Mine, located south of the Sunnyside, the Standard Mine, situated about 3,000 feet southeast of the Dewey Mine, and the H-Y Mine, placed on a divide between Cornish Creek and Coone Creek.⁴²

BOOM TOWNS AND THE BUST

Many of the prospectors who rushed to Thunder Mountain, the merchants and businessmen who followed, planned to remain until they struck it rich, or until they went broke as the gold veins were exhausted. As reports of the high value of the ore circulated, more people arrived at Thunder Mountain with the intention of staying for a long time, expecting to turn the mining camps into permanent settlements. Already in 1902, sites for five towns were platted in the district. The first of these towns was Roosevelt, a community organized by the Monumental Creek Mining Company west of Thunder Mountain. It also became the largest town, growing to more than 7,000 residents by 1903. Roosevelt would eventually have 14 saloons, two hotels, numerous restaurants, and a variety of professionals, including undertakers, doctors, dentists, lawyers, and assayers. In October 1904, the town's newspaper, the Prospector and Thunder Mountain News began publication.⁴³

Not long after the founding of Roosevelt, four other communities were organized, all close to the claims at Thunder Mountain. In March 1902, the town of Thunder Mountain was founded by a group of Weiser businessmen who had secured "five claims embracing 280 acres on Monumental Creek at the mouth of West Fork." A map of the town showed 30 blocks, each with 24 building lots.⁴⁴ Other towns included Belleco, erected below the Sunnyside Mine on Marble Creek, and Caswell, organized by the Thunder Mountain Townsite & Mining Company, and located four miles south of the junction of Monumental Creek and Mule Creek.⁴⁵

A sense of community emerged quickly in these boom towns. Efforts to raise funds for a school, needed "before Roosevelt can call itself a first class city," started in 1905. As the local newspaper wrote, a "nice school house with a bell on it" could serve a number of functions, including a place for public meetings. Interest in the campaign for a new school in Roosevelt was exceeded only by the discussion of the need for a public library.⁴⁶

Confidence in the future of Roosevelt and Thunder Mountain was widespread and genuine. An article in the local newspaper stated: "Times are good, and Roosevelt and Thunder Mountain need only to take advantage of such opportunities as they possess, and herald

them to the world to make her a center of wealth and industry greater than that of any other mining district in the West."⁴⁷ Early in 1905 a movement began to organize a new county, called Mineral County. Voters had already secured an electoral precinct at a meeting where members of the community also decided by unanimous vote "cast in favor of allowing no Chinese, Japanese or dagos to enter the district and a committee of determined, although responsible men was [sic] appointed to see that the resolution is carried into effect should it be necessary."⁴⁸

The survival of these towns and the district as a whole depended upon the mines, and when the yields finally dropped sharply in 1905 a number of them shut down. Some mining continued. The demise of the district's major town, Roosevelt, came on May 31, 1909. A rock slide, "a river of mud," as a miner described it, blocked Monumental Creek. Over the next several hours, its waters backed up, eventually flooding the town. Soon, most of the buildings had disappeared from sight, all submerged under water. In the face of the rising creek, residents had abandoned their homes and businesses, taking those few possessions they could carry. The boom at Thunder Mountain had ended.⁴⁹

Despite the large amount of ore extracted in the years between 1901 and 1909, most of the claims at Thunder Mountain never produced a great deal of ore of value. Even the large mines never lived up to the expectations of the investors. In fact, only the Dewey Mine turned out to be a reliable producer of ore, even though its value proved to be less than early estimates. Thunder Mountain was another of the West's booms that all too quickly went bust. Over the next several decades, some mining did take place at Thunder Mountain, as a handful of prospectors continued to extract enough ore to live on. The last of the big gold rushes, Thunder Mountain continued to attract attention. In 1931, Zane Grey, the renowned novelist, packed into the area while researching his novel Thunder Mountain, which was published in 1935. The fame of the district persisted, as did the interest in its potential wealth. In recent years, the area was once again mined and the last of its riches extracted.

NOTES

1. "Story of the Great Discovery," Evening Capital News (April 5, 1905). "Ben Caswell Tells of Discovery of Thunder Mountain," Idaho Daily Statesman (April 13, 1902).
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