

History of the Thunder Mountain  
Mining District

by  
Robert G. Waite, Ph.D

1933 or later

A HISTORY OF THE THUNDER MOUNTAIN MINING DISTRICT

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The rush to Thunder Mountain, ~~to the~~ gold fields heralded as the "New Eldorado" and Idaho's "Klondike", began in the spring of 1902 as soon as the snows in the high mountain passes had melted enough to permit passage. ~~Already~~ in the previous winter tales of some spectacular finds of ore laden with gold circulated in the mining communities of northern Idaho and were printed in the Idaho Daily Statesman and the Idaho World. Excitement mounted quickly throughout Idaho and much of the region as prospectors, fortune hunters and businessmen made their way to Thunder Mountain. The rush to the gold fields was on.

The last of the great rushes in Idaho, the Thunder Mountain gold rush provided an enormous amount of excitement and expectation. For some who were able to get into the area early and stake a claim or set up a business, there was money to be earned. A few lucky ones made a fortune. But for most it proved to be several years of hard work, frustration and ultimate disappointment. The names of the claims and the mines, the Dewey, the Sunnyside, the 20th Century, the H-Y and the Fairview, became known throughout the nation.

By 1906 the claims had been worked, failing to produce as expected, the promoters had left, and a growing number of reports from the area, most prominently those from the Idaho inspector of mines, voiced discouragement and bitterness. Some claims continued to be worked but for most of the claims and most of the miners the years of glory were over. In May, 1909 Roosevelt, the one remaining community, flooded after a mudslide blocked Monumental Creek and caused it to inundate the town. The town was left in the hands of a caretaker as most of the remaining residents moved elsewhere. During the next two decades, until the mid-1930's, little mining activity took place at Thunder Mountain. In 1931 Zane Grey, aware of the excitement once generated by the gold rush, packed into Thunder Mountain and used some of his impressions as background details for his 1935 novel of the same name.

Some mining resumed in about 1935 and continued until the early years of the Second World War. Of the total estimated gold production for the

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district about one-quarter came from this latter period. In the 1950's a Canadian firm operated the Dewey and attempted to gain outside investors for the project. Other claims were worked but on an isolated and small basis. This past decade has witnessed a renewed interest in the Thunder Mountain claims and some exploratory work commenced.

This history of Thunder Mountain focuses on the early rush, the years of excitement and promise for this central Idaho mining district. During these years, roughly 1901 to 1906 thousands flocked to the area and newspapers across the country carried regular reports on new finds and discoveries. These were years in which claims were bought and sold for large sums of money and the new mines were worked intensively. There is another side to the Thunder Mountain gold rush which needs to be identified. For many the area became their home and they expected to stay there for many years. Roosevelt was a thriving young community with a considerable amount of local pride. This study also deals with the forgotten years, those decades of little activity when a few isolated claims were worked.

#### I. BEFORE THE BOOM: Thunder Mountain 1860 - 1890

The rush to Thunder Mountain had in part been prepared by the rich gold finds of the central and northern Idaho gold districts decades earlier. Miners from these areas, as their own vicinity ceased to provide the excitement and wealth they hoped for, combed the Idaho territory. They pushed into the more remote sections constantly seeking new and promising locations. Some important finds did result. In 1862 gold was discovered in the Boise Basin and miners swarmed to the area hoping to find the legendary Blue Bucket mines. A year later several groups went into the Deadwood Basin and by 1868 mining had begun there in earnest.

With these strikes, with miners and prospectors covering an ever larger area, and with the thought that a great new find might lie over the next ridge it is not surprising that some went into the Thunder Mountain district. In 1866 or 1867 James W. Poe discovered a promising outcrop of

free gold. He searched for the placer ground that would apparently go with the rich quartz load," but "troublesome" Sheepeater Indians, who spent the summers in the area, caused Poe and other prospectors to leave. According to a 1902 account in the Evening Capital News, "hundreds of mining men knew of the extensive mineral district long before the fame of the Dewey mine attracted the attention of the public. Both placer and quartz deposits were reported from the region of Thunder Mountain in the early 1860's." While Poe maintained that the Chamberlain Basin miners left in 1867 because the value from panning was worth less than twenty-five cents, Newton Hibbs, who provided much of the material for the newspaper article, insisted that "the placers which were accessible to water supply were worked in the early days and quartz locations were made and abandoned almost every season up to the time of the Nez Perce War in 1877."

Combined with the exceedingly rugged terrain which went far in slowing prospecting in the Thunder Mountain area came stories of what Hibbs called "Indian renegades with white outlaws [who] maintained a reign of brigandage in that region." In about 1875 more rumors circulated among the mining camps, and "quite an excitement was occasioned by a report that a party of placer miners had been murdered in the vicinity of the present site of the Dewey mine." This incident might have been confused with the murder of five Chinese by renegade Indians on Loon Creek in early 1879. In response to this attack a U.S. cavalry unit was dispatched and it pursued the Indians through the Salmon River country for eight months. The terrain, harsh weather, lack of supplies and ambushes hampered their efforts. Word of these problems no doubt curbed the miners and prospectors as well. And Sheepeater Indians continued to be seen in the region well after this military campaign.

There were other reasons why miners were reluctant to go into the Thunder Mountain district. According to one early report the area "was staked off by mysterious locators. The claims were located every year about the time the usual campaign of prospectors began." The miners were apparently startled by "the strange names signed to the location notes and

the fact that the well known trails were unused." Strange noises and suspicious shootings were allegedly heard in the area. "At the camp on Monumental Creek, it is said, the nights were always noisy with the sound of the pick in irregular strokes upon the rocks of the mountainside." Hibbs noted that these would be followed by "the sound of a Chinese fiddle and then of horses feet upon the trail. These ghostly sounds were usually followed by an early abandonment of the country by the invaders.<sup>3</sup>

Those who remained in the area despite the peculiar goings-on~~on~~ were often awakened at "unseemly hours" by "the more significant evidence of disturbed spirits, rifle shots." And if this did not drive them away, there<sup>4</sup> then would result the death of a pack horse from a bullet fired by an invisible sharpshooter. These demonstrations never failed to discourage the most persistent gold seekers."

In part the rumors might have resulted from some isolated incidents or the rumblings,~~rumblings~~ of the mountain which were very real. The loud and unpredictable noises which gave the area its name continued well through the gold rush days. Some attributed the rumblings to the frequent landslides which were common in the area, for geologically the land was highly unstable. But these formations contained much of the surface gold<sup>4</sup> and led many to believe that Thunder Mountain was a mountain of gold.

Regardless of the causes, whether it be the terrain or the lingering rumors of peculiar happenings or the strange noises, the riches of Thunder Mountain were only begun to be seriously tapped in the mid-1890's by the Caswell brothers. It was the finds of the Caswells that were to make the district world famous.

II. DISCOVERING THE NEW ELDORADO: Thunder Mountain, 1890-1901

Ben and Louis Caswell came upon the Thunder Mountain district while trapping and hunting in the Salmon River drainage. They turned to prospecting after noticing large amounts of free gold. This search brought them to Thunder Mountain where for several years they scraped

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away what was to amount to many thousands of dollars. As word of their finds and their claims became known it attracted the attention of many including Colonel <sup>W.</sup>H. Dewey who had already made a fortune in mining. After some consideration Dewey<sup>e</sup> purchased the claims for \$100,000. News of the claims had already begun to leak out with the stories quickly being picked up by the newspapers. It was now only a short time before the rush was on.

Originally from Michigan, Ben and Lou Caswell arrived in Idaho in 1890 fresh from some mining experiences in Colorado. The next four years were spent, as Ben Caswell later told a reporter from the Idaho Daily Statesman, "prospecting around in the Seven Devils country and when we got ready to pull out of there all we had was a bunch of scrawny <sup>Y</sup>causes." With few resources, for "cash was a scarce article with us and we weren't any too long on grub," the Caswells in 1894 headed into the Salmon River country. They trapped and hunted for a living but they also did some prospecting. The area around Thunder Mountain looked promising<sup>5</sup> and the two brothers took out their first claims in August 1894.

"The surface indications were very good," Ben Caswell was to later remark, "but we were poorly equipped and it was slow work to open up anything. We were satisfied though that there was something there; and we determined to stick to it and get it. You can rest assured that we were pretty well discouraged after we had spent a whole year there and had not made a red cent. We continued our work, however, and the following year we had preparations made before the water had run off to do some rocking. The two of us rocked for eight days and took out \$245. That was the first Thunder Mountain gold we had the privilege of putting into our pockets, and we felt better."<sup>6</sup>

According to the unpublished diaries of L.G. Caswell, now in the Idaho Historical Library, the Caswells pushed into the Monumental Creek area at the junction of Mule Creek in May, 1895. Most of the work done on the surface levels proved to be not terribly rewarding, and success for

them was still a couple of years away. When they did find gold and realized the ease of mining it, the Caswells began to build sluice boxes. They whipsawed the necessary lumber for the sluice boxes that would speed up their efforts. "In fact," Ben Caswell was to later tell reporters, "we spent so much time getting lumber and preparing for the bigger operations that we did not take out much gold with the rocker, only \$190, for the entire third year." The yield increased sharply the next year when "we had four sluice boxes 12 feet long, and during a very short season we took out \$900."

The Caswell brothers returned to the claims each spring but during the 1896 season the find on Monumental Creek was seemingly exhausted. Discouraged, they broke camp and planned to push on. While gathering up their pack animals a mule was missing and they followed it up a creek which flowed into Monumental from the eastern hills. Ben Caswell went after the mule and while crossing a small outcrop scooped up some material and later panned it for gold. To his amazement it was laced with gold and the outcrop was named the "Golden Reef." These efforts, and their considerable good fortune, led one observer to describe the Caswells as "the type that constitutes the pioneers of development and civilization. Untiring in their efforts, and willing to have the hardships of such a life, these men secluded themselves in the wilderness to be rewarded by the discovery of a deposit whose counterpart will be hard to find in the State." Not surprisingly, such praise dates from 1901, right as news of their discovery was becoming known.

The Caswells continued to work the area. In 1897 a third brother, Dan, and his partner, Wesley Ritchie, came to work the claims with Ben and Lou. With the proven success of harvesting the gold with sluice boxes, the Caswells, as they later told reporters, "simply increased our output by adding to the length of our sluice boxes." By 1901 they had 1200 feet of sluice boxes and had cut 20,000 feet of lumber for the construction. Occasionally, as Ben later boasted, the results were astonishing; in a two hour period more than \$135 in gold was found. And

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one pan, with twenty minutes of work involved, had \$150 in gold in it.

Once they discovered the gold on Mule Creek, the Caswells took out considerable quantities of gold each year. The first published notice of their success appeared in the August 11, 1897 issue of the Idaho Daily Statesman. As news spread other prospectors came into the area and by 1899 a small scale rush had begun. By the end of that year about 50 other prospectors had come into the area. Another article in the Standard Grangeville <sup>ANNOUNCED</sup> heralded in its headlines "Ledges 200 Feet Wide and Assaying from \$84 to \$36 in Copper, Gold and Silver." 10

With some of the Caswell brother claims located above the streams of the area, they used water from the melting snow to wash gold from the rock. The practice restricted their operations to about two weeks a year. Figures published in an April, 1902 article recorded their success with their earnings for each of the previous years being: 1895--\$245, 1896--\$190, 1897--\$900, 1898--\$3000, 1899--\$4000, 1900--\$5000, 1901--\$11000, for a total of \$24,335. Receipts from the assay office in Boise list the total returns as \$20,358.99, an impressive amount. 11

The fine showings of the claims led Martin H. Jacobs to write in the Report of the Mining Districts of Idaho for the Year 1901 that "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. 12

The Caswell brothers faced considerable difficulty when it came to persuading the outside world of their "mountain of gold ore." For "one expert after another," noted Ben Caswell in 1902, "reported unfavorably when the facts were made known either by personal observation or detailed statements of existing conditions." An experienced mining engineer who recognized the similarity of the geology of Thunder Mountain and Colorado's famed Cripple Creek was impressed. H.E. Taylor had spent the summer at Thunder Mountain and was "quite enthusiastic" about what he felt was "destined to become the leading gold camp in Idaho." With "even a

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fair wagon road" into Thunder Mountain, over which machinery could be shipped in and the gold shipped out, the wealth of the area would "astonish the world." Taylor demonstrated his excitement for the area by organizing the Thunder Mountain Consolidated Gold Mines Company with most of the funds coming from a group of Weiser<sup>Idaho,</sup> businessmen. But these plans, dating from 1901, proved to be too ambitious; his objective of bringing in a twenty-five<sup>stamp</sup> Huntington mill exceeded the investors' resources and the entire venture collapsed. Another miner, J.R. Delamar who had made a fortune in the Silver City mines, had engineers check out the area, but they advised him against investing. There was as yet no clear consensus on Thunder Mountain.

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The big break for the Caswells came in late 1900 when Colonel William H. Dewey, "one of the builders of Idaho's greatness", agreed to purchase the Caswell brother's claim for \$100,000. Payment would be made at a later date if initial investigations proved to merit it. A newspaper article in 1902 maintained that Dewey "accepted the option just because it was tendered to him, and he realized a chance to carry it for an indefinite period without cost."

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Colonel Dewey<sup>o</sup>, who had made his fortune in Owyhee county mining, moved quickly to obtain rights to the Caswell claims. In September, 1900 Colonel Dewey's son, E.H. Dewey, met the Caswell brothers in Boise and was very impressed with the results presented him. The younger Dewey then sent a large specimen and glowing reports to his father, then in Pittsburg. "Go ahead, take the option" was the Colonel's response from the east. The option gave Dewey the purchase right for eleven Caswell claims depending upon the outcome of further mining exploration. Payment of the \$100<sup>o</sup>,000 was to fall due on January 1, 1902 and until the option was fulfilled the Caswells could continue placer mining on the claims. At this time there was still no indication that Thunder Mountain was on the verge of a boom.

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Under the terms of the agreement, Dewey had to send in a ~~re~~prospecting crew. According to an early newspaper account, "when it was learned by

certain friends that he had taken hold of a big low-grade proposition away from the world they kindly determined to save him from spending any money on the venture. They did shame the old gentleman, and he promised to do no more than send in a crew of prospectors to meet a moral obligation which the escrow agreement of the bond implied rather than expressed." Those who wound up working on the claims were "friends of the Caswell boys" who had gained further employment. The prospecting and the geological examination was to be completed by October 30, 1900.<sup>16</sup>

The crew working for Colonel Dewey<sup>P</sup> at Thunder Mountain started digging on the porphyry dike which had been cleared of debris by the hydraulic work of the Caswells on their placer claims. Free gold had been found here and "the most conspicuous of these pay streaks was selected as the point on which to sink to earn the summer's stake that the Colonel had kindly provided. Of course the laborers themselves felt the usual routine would result in a commonplace report of indifferent values," noted one newspaper reporter. By early October a great deal of work had in fact been accomplished. According to Martin Curran writing in the Report of the Mining Districts of Idaho for the Year 1901, "The underground workings consist of about five hundred feet of cross cuts and drifts, every foot in pay ore. Main cross cut sixty feet, samples seven dollars and eighteen cents, pay ore still in face west drift cross cut fifty-five feet, six dollars and twenty-seven cents. Face of west drift, seven dollars and eighty-two cents dark ore. On south side of west drift one hundred and forty feet cross cut north to go through ore, such as the face of the west drift."<sup>17</sup>

The samples from the claims at Thunder Mountain proved to be far greater than Colonel Dewey had anticipated. As one newspaper article put it: ~~✂~~ "The prospect hole revealed ore worth \$5,000 to the ton. It would have been possible to have packed out on the burros and bronchos that belonged to the camp outfit enough ore to pay for the mine according to the terms of the bond." The initial analysis was confirmed in the 1901 report of the Idaho inspector of mines. "Nature did wonders for this

property," wrote Martin Curran in a letter to E.H. Dewey which was published in the annual report. The vein he had examined contained "one million five hundred thousand tons at a conservative estimate of ten million dollars." In the same report Martin H. Jacobs called the Thunder Mountain district one which "promises to become one of the world's most famous treasuries of gold."

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With such enthusiastic reports coming out of the area, a leading mining journal, Mines and Minerals, sent into the area Wm. E.L'Hame who wrote an article which appeared in the July, 1901 issue. Entitled simply "Thunder Mountain, Idaho. A Mining Region about Which Little is Known, but Which Promises Great Richness," the article describes the area, the difficulties of getting into it and the rewards to be found there. "The fact that a pan of gravel can scarcely be picked up along this stream [the Middle Fork] without getting the 'color' suggests to the intelligent prospector that somewhere above must be extensive belts of auriferous material awaiting the hand of enterprise." Thunder Mountain, "a veritable mountain of ore, whose estimated wealth throws the treasures of the Incas into shade," was one of the spots focused on.

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The geology of the area, according to L'Hame, was "both interesting and instructive and mineralogically and structurally it is strongly suggestive of the famous Cripple Creek region of Colorado." L'Hame was clearly impressed with what he had found at Thunder Mountain, and he wrote: "During the first season a point above the present workings was mined by the old fashioned rocking process and five hundred dollars were taken out in four days. Single pans produced as high as ten dollars, but such was not an average by any means." The entire area, including Big Creek, Deer Creek, Monumental Creek, Marble Creek, Johnson Creek, "and many others," looked very promising. "They show gold in the very top wash, but bed rock in any of these has never been touched by a miner's pick."

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Colonel Dewey, with such glowing reports in hand, and "more than \$1,000,000 in sight in a mere prospect hole," took steps to meet the

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the conditions of the bond. In addition to the payment of \$100,000, the bond called for a wagon road to be built to the mine by November 1, 1901 and for the establishment of a quartz mill at the mine. Hurriedly a saw mill was set up on the site of the claims and a ten stamp mill packed in over the Boise-Bear Valley route was to be in full operation by December 1. A road could not be constructed so quickly, and "the Caswell boys had then learned that their property was worth millions and they were selling for \$100,000." They next employed legal counsel in an attempt to declare a forfeiture of the Dewey bond. Ben Caswell later told a reporter that "Colonel Dewey got our Thunder Mountain claims for a song. After we gave the bond (\$100,000) we struck it richer than ever, and we would have been tickled to death if Colonel Dewey had forfeited the bond."<sup>21</sup>

According to the Idaho Evening Statesman, it was the late success of the Caswells that prompted Dewey to fulfill payment of the bond ahead of when it fell due. The article, printed under a headline reading "Ground Found Covered with Gold After 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches of Soil Had Been Washed Off--\$3,000 Panned Out in Two Days" on January 17, 1902, recounted a story told by Wesley Ritchey about "the discovery of the wonderfully rich streak of ore." "The ground at the claims had been too high for operations, sitting just beyond reach of the full impact of their hydraulic operations. But last spring they were able to hit the area with some force. Ben Caswell went up to where the water was running after a little time and immediately showed signs of excitement." "He motioned to the rest of them to come up. When they reached the spot a sight greeted their eyes as such as few men have ever seen." The bottom of the channel carved out by the water was "strewn with gold," and "gold dropped out in chunks when the specimens were knocked about in the pan." Ritchie concluded that "it was the disclosure of this wonderful streak of ore that induced Colonel Dewey to pay the entire \$100,000 to Caswell before any payments were due."<sup>23</sup>

While the Caswells hoped to get a default or legal judgement in their favor, the attorney advised them that a forfeiture could not occur until the date fixed by the bond for the performance of certain acts had passed.

Dewey found the reports from Thunder Mountain and the figures for the ore sent out for assay very persuasive. To pack out the ore it was soldered in tin cans and carefully packed out. The values of the ore proved the hard work to have been worth it; for one seven hundred foot tunnel the ore assayed an average of \$7.00 a ton, while one chute, according to the 1901 inspector of mines report, assayed at between \$266.20 to \$1,975.84 a ton. If this tunnel were to continue at the same value throughout it was estimated that with 200 stamps at work the property would pay \$150,000 a month. Dewey had three miners working the site in the spring and summer, and in June eight more went in by pack train.

On November 16, 1901 Colonel Dewey and his backers in Pittsburg paid in full the agreed purchase price. Together they organized the Thunder Mountain Gold and Silver Mining and Milling Company with capital of \$5,000,000. With great fanfare, Dewey presented the Caswell brothers with the check for \$100,000 in the lobby of a Boise hotel. The press coverage, the attention attracted by the largest check issued in Idaho, and the stories of the mountain of ore, began to attract considerable regional attention. Some believed a rush to Thunder Mountain would soon begin, and the 1901 report of the Idaho inspector of mines noted that there "will be an immense rush to this district with the opening of the traveling season." The report went on to estimate that "20,000 people would travel to Thunder Mountain in the spring." For "so far as known the district promises to become one of the world's most famous treasuries of gold."

### III. To The New Klondike: Thunder Mountain, 1901-1902

Once the publicity of the Dewey purchase hit the press new interest in Thunder Mountain and what must be mountains of gold located there grew. Before spring prospectors and hopefuls were trying to make their way into the area. For most, the going proved to be very slow and tough, far more difficult than they had expected. In order to facilitate this traffic, and to make a good business out of the rush, communities in northern Idaho, along with Boise and Idaho City, tried to persuade those in the rush

reports of untold riches. Almost every day of January, 1902 the Idaho Daily Statesman carried such accounts. Picked up by other regional papers, these stories combined with the purchase of the Caswell claims, ignited among many an uncontrollable need to get to Thunder Mountain and to stake a claim. Nearly everyone coming out was interviewed and quoted.

Already on January 3, 1902, the Statesman ran an article on C.J. Fry who had "made the journey to Council in eight days." The headlines read "Mountain of Gold," and it provided an overview of activities at Thunder Mountain as Fry remembered them. "Over 100 men are working in the district," and at the Dewey mine the new mill building had been completed. All the machinery was installed in a mill building constructed by Patrick Murphy, a millwright from Silver City. Actual operations at the mill would "not start until about February 1,"<sup>27</sup> "due to a shortage of water supply."

Most of these early reports, appearing in January, 1902, were very enthusiastic. Under a headline reading "Biggest Camp in the World," the Evening Capital News published an article by Capt. St. Cyr who had departed from Thunder Mountain early the previous November. Speaking in Boise, St. Cyr declared that "Thunder Mountain will make one of the biggest camps in the world," and "it is...practically unprospected." The same issue ran an article on A.J. McNab, who<sup>[was]</sup> "for many years identified with the material interests of Idaho." McNab said "it is foolish for those seeking an intelligent foothold on Thunder Mountain to undertake a trip into the region at this time as it holds out no refuge to the traveler and exposes him entirely to the chances of reaching a cabin." But McNab, who had only recently come out of the area, noted that it "has now been prospected over an area 2 miles in width by 18 in length." Even though a large part of the district had been claimed, McNab remained "quite<sup>28</sup> enthusiastic over the possibilities of the country."

Reports appearing later in January were equally excited about Thunder Mountain and they continued to feed the general excitement. On January

23. the Standard Grangeville ran an article under the headline "Just Out From the Mountain of Gold," and it quoted Jonas Lawrence as saying "one cannot exaggerate the wonders of Thunder Mountain." Competition among the various outfitting points had already begun for the article again quoted Lawrence as saying that the "best route yet discovered lies through Grangeville. Fix up state bridge, advertise a little, and the travel must come this way." Reports of new strikes continued to be published. According to the January 20 issue of the Statesman, a "new discovery [was] said to had been made in the Dewey." Rumor had it that the strike, "two feet of very rich ore," was worth "\$5,600 a ton."<sup>29</sup>

News of discoveries continued to be reported into the spring. An article in the Lewiston Morning Tribune on February 22, 1902 called the area "lousy with gold," and noted that a "new ledge [was] discovered at Thunder Mountain." Ore in this find "will assay from \$10,000 to \$25,000 a ton." Another report from April boasted that there was "sufficient ore to operate a 100 stamp mill for five years." Not only were the yields of these new finds enormous but the discoveries themselves involved an extraordinary amount of blind luck. One new find was "revealed to an ignorant German" by a snowslide, and another fellow staked his claims while sliding down the hill in a snowslide. The headlines in the Standard Grangeville ran "Fast Man Stakes Out Claims While Scooting Down an Avalanche." The article read in part "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." Tom Johnson who brought this report out with him added "fact, for I saw the slide."<sup>30</sup>

Staking claims blindly on the snow was not uncommon in the early days of the rush. An article in the Statesman from March 8 noted that "a group of 17 claims were located on deep snow." But the possibilities of doing such and finding anything of value on the ground in the spring were indeed

slight. "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 had melted off. Under the Idaho law 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. In sinking the holes on these seventeen claims 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." <sup>31</sup>

After reading such accounts excitement about Thunder Mountain and an intense desire to get there heightened. Reports from early 1902 frequently mentioned the anticipated rush. On February 13, the Standard Grangeville mentioned the "army of gold seekers coming this way." An earlier issue of the Statesman wrote of the "coming rush to Idaho Eldorado," and claimed that "20,000 will reach Thunder Mountain this season." Another newspaper claimed the finds at Thunder Mountain "will rival [the] Klondike." "Indications of the forthcoming invasion of Thunder Mountain" were common in Salt Lake City. Outside of a livery stable in that city a "coupe<sup>1</sup> of sheep wagons" stood with a sign announcing that "we leave for Thunder Mountain January 12, for further particulars, enquire at the office." Articles of a similar nature were published in newspapers throughout the east. This led the Lewiston Tribune to estimate that 50,000 would visit Thunder Mountain in 1902. <sup>32</sup>

News of the riches found at Thunder Mountain circulated widely outside of the region. In April a veteran prospector just back from that district told the St. Paul Commercial Club the "wonderful stories of the rich find." A North Carolina woman who had apparently read of the gold rush sent a letter addressed simply to "Thunder Mountain, Idaho," and asked the recipient "to locate a claim." Miners did in fact stake out a location "not far from the Dewey<sup>e</sup> and very promising." The Pittsburg Gazette sent a civil engineer as its correspondent, hoping to provide its readers with more accurate and believable reports. <sup>33</sup>

With such excitement reliable information and accurate maps were in considerable demand. "All the mining publications of the country" were giving the area "the greatest prominence," insisted the Lewiston Tribune. One of the most important of these journals, the Mining Reporter, provided information on a regular basis. Widely read and influential, it at first voiced some caution. An article from the January 16, 1902 issue noted that "everyone expects a rush into this district next spring," a statement which helped generate one. It warned though "owing to the high price of provisions, and the difficulty of getting in there at present, it is better to stay away until spring." The article concluded that "there seems every probability of the rush materializing into a permanent district."<sup>34</sup>

By February, 1902 the Mining Reporter had "received so many inquiries relating to Thunder mountain that we deemed it necessary to send a special correspondent into the new district." The report, a lengthy article outlining the initial discoveries, assay values and routes into the district, appeared in the February 27 edition. The editors concluded that "we have every reason to believe that the following account is substantially correct inasmuch it is endorsed by Mr. B.F. Olden, president of the Boise Chamber of Commerce."<sup>35</sup>

Throughout the spring considerable activity was taking place at Thunder Mountain and this was reported widely. According to a report in the Engineering and Mining Journal on April 12, the one trail that had remained open all winter was now carrying "nearly fifty men daily." New strikes made in the district were described in the newspapers, and the Evening Capital News wrote of "the most sensational discovery ever made in that wonderful district" in its July 8th edition. Another newspaper had reported that by <sup>lc</sup> JUNE "nearly 1400 people" lived "in the great gold camp."<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the reports of prospectors flocking to Thunder Mountain and the spectacular discoveries being made there, some expressed their doubt. The Engineering and Mining Journal, while noting that it was "too

past definite opinion," did comment that "the general impression among some very conservative mining men now in the district is that there is nothing whatever so far developed to justify the boom; that it is the most overestimated district that has ever been fostered on the public, and that there will be quite a string of disappointed investors, who paid fancy prices and forfeit money, when they have had a chance to examine their claims."<sup>37</sup>

The Boise newspapers, after learning of such doubts, became defensive. "One of the most prominent mining journals of the country," reported the Statesman on April 18, 1902, "gravely informed readers that no lodes are in the Thunder Mountain district." And the article continued to say that "the entire district will be tied up in lawsuits before summer ends," a conclusion which the paper called "one of the most absurd statements that has yet appeared concerning the district." Such assertions were, according to the Statesman, "likely to cause damage."<sup>38</sup>

Particularly severe criticism was reserved for the Salt Lake newspapers which in June, 1902 "engaged in what appears to be to them always a congenial occupation, that of knocking the interests and belittling the resources of a neighbor state." The Capital News quoted at length from an article which appeared in the Telegram and which began: "The impression abroad respecting the glorious chances in Thunder Mountain is that they are a barren idealty," and it continued by ridiculing those who had spoken so favorably of the new gold finds. "From a reasonable amount of information that has come out of Thunder Mountain he [the average westerner] suspects that the fool's paradise is located in that part of Idaho." The Telegram concluded that "there are better and richer prospects within fifth<sup>Y</sup> miles of Salt Lake than in Thunder Mountain."<sup>39</sup>

Boise's Evening Capital News did not respond by attacking the Telegram article directly. Rather, it asserted that "knocking is not in our special line of endeavor," and stated that "the defamation of the Thunder Mountain district by the Salt Lake papers has not a single basis of truth, and rests wholly upon the reports set afloat by a limited number

of callow tenderfeet, who rushed into the district with the first stampede, and because they failed to find chunks of solid gold protruding through five feet of snow, came out disgusted and disappointed. Not one of these fellows is a mining man of experience or prominence, and scarcely one of them is even known by name, but is referred to generally as a 'returning Thunder Mountain miner'." The Idaho newspapers refused to acknowledge that they were responsible for much of this disappointment, and they probably failed to realize what their exaggerated reports had done.  
40

To be sure, expectations of those rushing to Thunder Mountain were greater than could possibly be fulfilled for everyone. Many did leave the district during early 1902 discouraged and disgruntled. And even the Standard Grangeville, long an enthusiast of the new gold fields, noted in September that "the boom last winter was in some respects unjustifiable, for it is a camp where expensive machinery and large capital work must do the work. It isn't a poor man's camp, and they were mostly poor men who went in. It isn't a lazy man's camp either, and too many who rushed in were of that class."  
41

Even while voicing such cautions, most newspapers and professional journals concluded that Thunder Mountain offered enormous opportunities, that vast quantities of high grade ore were to be found there, and that fortunes were to be made. As the Capital News concluded, "The truth about the so-called Thunder Mountain district is that it is the biggest unexplored mineral region, and according to all reliable reports, the richest in North America." Since much of the talk of the area's reputation stemmed from the Dewey mine the newspapers stated flatly that "there is no doubt in the least that it is a veritable bonanza, the most promising mining property in the whole West." The district, which included considerable territory around Thunder Mountain, was "destined to be the great mining camp of the West, in the due course of time that is required for the proper development work and enlistment of capital." The 1901 report from the Idaho inspector of mines confirmed this sentiment,

and while noting that the fame of the area had made it known "in mining circles throughout the world," concluded that it "has reached that stage of progress in its development into a mining camp, where the tenderfoot has given away to the real miner, who knows a good thing when he sees it and has settled down to work."<sup>42</sup>

The rush to the gold fields of Thunder Mountain, generated by news of the sale of the Caswell claims to Colonel Dewey and the numerous accounts of extraordinarily rich finds carried by the local newspapers, was intensified by the efforts of a number of promoters. In particular, the railroads showed an immediate and a keen interest in developing routes for passengers and supplies that would run close to Thunder Mountain. Often these efforts involved considerable expense but the anticipated profits were considerable.

Already In December 1901 the Salt Lake Tribune reported that the Oregon Short Line was "doing everything possible to find out" which wagon roads went into the Thunder Mountain district. The railroad wanted to put together a promotional pamphlet with the best information available for "the country at large, for the benefit of the prospector and others who may wish to go into the country." According to the newspaper, the Oregon Short Line was "spending much time and money through the passenger department to find out all about Thunder Mountain." The railroad wanted to be sure that the "expected big rush of traffic" would travel on its<sup>43</sup> lines.

In January 1902 50,000 maps of the Thunder Mountain region, with Boise identified as the major outfitting point, were ready for distribution. The maps were issued by W.M. Wantland, the brother of the "well-known Union Pacific colonization agent," and sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and Mining Exchange. The maps showed in detail the claims staked at Thunder Mountain as well as the pack routes into the district and the nearest railroad junction. The maps were distributed by the Union Pacific, the Oregon Short Line and the Rocky Mountain Bell

In February businessmen in Idaho City who wanted to encourage prospectors to take the Boise route on through their community, contemplated printing and distributing "several thousand folders" with information on the new district. The folders would provide a description of the Boise and Idaho City route to Thunder Mountain and "every businessman in Idaho City knows this is the best route." A month later the Northern Pacific issued a circular on the region which was distributed throughout the nation. The Northern Pacific, "determined to handle the trade of Thunder Mountain, "advocated the northern route into the district. Competition for this traffic was mounting. 45

The promotional battle even attracted single entrepreneurs who recognized there was money to be made in supplying information on Thunder Mountain. ~~Already~~ In January <sup>1902</sup> Ignatius T. Murphy came to Boise to gather data <sup>FOR</sup> ~~on~~ the Thunder Mountain edition of his publication "Western Progress." Murphy was excited: "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. 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." 46

The most elaborate product of the promotional skirmish was prepared for D.E. Burley, General Passenger and Ticket Agent for the Oregon Short Line Railroad in Salt Lake City. The 32-page brochure came with photographs from location, with the Caswells panning gold, the spectacular terrain and Curly Brewer carrying the mail on a dog sled. Two maps of the railway connections provided by the Oregon Short Line and Union Pacific were included with Thunder Mountain sitting right in the heart of Idaho. Beyond this the brochure gave a surprisingly accurate narrative. Rather than focusing on the sensational dimensions, it coolly described the Salmon river region, "in which is located the great Thunder Mountain,"

as promising to be one of the richest gold districts on the North American  
47  
continent.

The brochure with its attractive layout, the sound background information on the region and its geological features was designed for a literate and sophisticated public. No wild claims or exaggerated boasts were made. Rather, the account of the history of the area and of the earlier gold rushes in Idaho was sober but it did help build excitement and interest. The early history of the region was provided along with a description of the Salmon River basin which, the brochure noted, contains "valuable resources of agriculture, stock-raising, timber and mining." But "the great undeveloped wealth of the region, however, is found in its vast and varied mineral deposits; greatest of which are its extensive gold quartz ledges, some of which are marvelously rich; while the sands of the Salmon and its tributaries, from source to mouth, are laden with placer gold."<sup>48</sup>

After devoting several pages to a history of mining in the region and noting that "it need be no surprise if Thunder Mountain, during 1902, should rival the gold production of the placer districts of the early sixties," the brochure describes in some detail "The Geological Features and Immense Gold Ledges of the New Camp." This discussion easily leads into the story of the Caswell brothers, "enterprising farmer boys," who stumbled upon Thunder Mountain, staked claims and sold these to Colonel Dewey. The booklet concluded by mentioning that "mining men familiar with Idaho are unanimous in declaring that it is destined to become the greatest producer of precious metals in the United States."<sup>49</sup>

With the wide distribution of the promotional material, with the news coming out of Thunder Mountain throughout early 1902, and with the frequent newspaper accounts of the wealth of the area, and with the rugged and sometimes inaccessible terrain, information on the best route into the district was at a premium and that information--distances, obstacles, ranches, mountain passes--needed to be accurate and reliable. Most of

those traveling these routes had little or no experience in the high mountains. The April 10, 1902 issue of the Mining Reporter, considering "the liveliest concern...being shown as to the best route to be taken to get to that district," "investigated the question pretty thoroughly." But the editors would not commit the publication to any one specific route as being the best, for "there is such a conflict of evidence." It was determined to offer the reader information on each of the routes and let them make the decision.

50

In its discussion of the various routes the Mining Reporter gave the mileage by wagon road and then pack trail from the end of the road. Most of the same routes were included and described in the promotional brochure prepared for the Oregon Short Line. There were five main routes. The Boise route passed Idaho City then on <sup>to</sup> the Banner, to the mouth of Clear Creek on the Payette, then up Clear Creek to the head and down Bear Valley to the Forks of Valley Creek and Elk Creek, then up to the head of Elk Creek. This part of the journey was by wagon road and it was expected that it would soon <sup>be</sup> traveled by a stage.

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The next segment of the Boise route was by pack trail and it began at Elk Creek then proceeded across the divide to Sulphur Creek, then to Pen Basin at the head of Johnson Creek, then across the tributaries of Johnson Creek to the head of Indian Creek, then down Indian Creek to the forks and another tributary of Indian Creek, then on to Monumental Creek which was followed down to its fork and from there to Thunder Mountain. The total distance of the Boise route was 170 miles.

The route from Ketchum went by wagon road to Galena, Stanley, to Cape Horn and to Wagon Town. This portion of the route was serviced by a stageline. From Wagon Town the journey continued by pack team to Sea Foam, then to the mouth of Marble Creek and from there to Thunder Mountain. The total distance of the Ketchum route was 142 miles.

The Mackay route proceeded to Challis, then on to Singiser by way of Morgan Creek. From Singiser, the end station for the stage, the traveler continued by pack train to the junction of Three Forks, then over the

mouth of Loon Creek, then to Marble Creek and from there to Thunder Mountain. The total distance of the Mackay route was 180 miles.

The Red Rock route proceeded from there by stage to Salmon City. From Salmon it continued to Singiser, the end of the stage line. At Singiser the trail continued by pack team to the junction of Three Forks, then to the mouth of Loon Creek, then to Marble Creek and from there to Thunder Mountain. The total distance of the Red Rock route was 190 miles.

The Weiser route had a stage line that ran from there to Council, then to Salmon Meadows, then to Little Lake and on to Warren. At Warren the pack trail began and continued to Curly Brewer's, then to Smokehouse Cabin, then over the summit to Copper Camp and from there to Thunder Mountain. The total distance of the Weiser route was 161 miles.

Competition among the communities at the various points of departure was intense, as each waged a campaign to be acknowledged as either the best route or the first clear route in the spring. Newspapers in Lewiston, Grangeville, Salmon, Idaho City and Boise heralded the route from their local as the best. Such claims were often backed with quotes from travelers who had just come out of Thunder Mountain. The Lewiston Tribune, for example, reported on January 17 what E.B. Simmons thought of this issue. "With all the fluster over the various Thunder mountain routes I am afraid the stamper will not find a 'hot air' line that will land him at that Mecca, but with a personal acquaintance with the country north and west from Thunder mountain, and after making thorough inquire from the prospectors and mountaineers of that section, I am convinced that either of the northern routes is feasible. Of course, in either event, Lewiston is the initial point."

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Throughout the early months of 1902 similar claims were made as the competition intensified for the business to be derived from those rushing to the gold fields of Thunder Mountain. The northern communities were especially active. On January 8 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." That town went so far as producing a "blue print map" which showed the various northern routes and the distances involved. The map was intended to convince those heading for Thunder Mountain that the northern route was indeed superior "despite the claims of several southern communities who have misrepresented the conditions existing<sup>in</sup> the north in order to sustain their claims regarding the shortest and best routes to the new Eldorado." While acknowledging the plans to construct a road from the south, the Grangeville booster maintained that it was "not a consideration." "The people who will rush into the district in the spring will be in too much of a hurry to wait for new roads to be built when a definite and long utilized road already affords the best travel that can be offered."

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Already In December, 1901 the Idaho Recorder, published in Salmon, discussed the easy journey it would be for gold seekers to leave from that community. An article on F.W. Vogler, general manager of the Redrock, Salmon City & Gibbonsville stage line, outlined the plans being made for "the handling of the great crowd of people which, it is expected, will rush to the wonderful quartz discoveries recently made in the Thunder Mountain district." Preparations for a stage line to Yellow Jacket, 50 miles from the mines, were being made as Vogler purchased grain and stacked hay at stations along the way. In order to handle the "25 or 50 passengers each day" the stage company had ten four-horse Concord coaches and four six-horse Concords. "It is said that a wagon road from Yellow Jacket to Thunder Mountain will soon be built and when this is done Mr. Vogler's stages will take the gold seekers direct to their journey's end." In January the Salt Lake manager of the Oregon Short Line railroad announced arrangements for three stage lines to reach Thunder Mountain.

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Salmon was determined to take advantage of the traffic to Thunder Mountain. As soon as the news of the discovery of gold hit that area public gatherings and meetings were held in order to discuss how Salmon could direct the expected travelers through there. Plans were made for a

large hotel and amusement hall, and new lots were platted in the town. Even the local newspaper bought new equipment. The major obstacle to travel along the route was the Middle Fork of the Salmon, but funds were collected and a pack bridge completed by the following spring. <sup>55</sup>

Traveling by stage must have been very appealing to those who wanted to get to Thunder Mountain. In April the Idaho Recorder published a glowing report on the joys of journeying by stage. "A daylight jaunt over the glorious 'Rockies' stopping at handsomely furnished eating houses for meals and enjoying the comforts of a Concord coach, the traveler to Thunder mountain reaches the end of the first day's journey early the following morning." Sounding more like a tourist guidebook the article continues: "The modern city of Salmon is left behind and the traveler passes through a country made famous by the early gold seekers, as the richest mineral country in the inter-mountain region." The journey continued along Napias Creek, "an Indian name for money," the article reminds us, "over one of the best mountain roads that has ever been built, crossing sparkling streams on substantial bridges and enjoying the magnificent views that present themselves at every turn of the road." To reassure the reader that the journey would be made with all due haste, the article stated that "there will be no delay" at Three Forks. For "Mr. Vogler has arranged for sufficient stock to take care of any rush that may present itself during the coming season." Now the stageline had become the Redrock, Salmon and Thunder Mountain Stage Company, and "stages will leave Redrock for Salmon City and Thunder mountain twice daily after the first of April, and once a day until then." Salmon City, the article concluded, "with its fine trading marts is the best and most convenient place to outfit for Thunder Mountain." <sup>56</sup>

Other stage lines and communities were quick to announce their intentions. A group of Hailey businessmen met late in January, 1902 to "further consider a Thunder Mountain route via Ketchum" and the meeting was "quite well attended." In Ketchum H.C. Lewis was setting up his Ketchum and Thunder Mountain Stage Line. According to a newspaper report

from March 22, Lewis had "just received two carloads of stage horses and a \$2,000 shipment of harness." A large order for ~~ship~~ shipping more than 100,000 pounds of goods for the Lewis Brothers store in the Thunder Mountain district <sup>had</sup> and already been placed. The W.E. Travis of Idaho, California and Nevada Stage Company, operating out of Emmett, announced in April that it was prepared to "meet any demands that the Thunder mountain rush might develop." But it would only begin as soon as the road was built and the company expected that to be completed by August. 57

Other communities, departure points for some of the other routes into Thunder Mountain, were also involved in the campaign to have their trail identified as the best. Most relied on testimonials from those familiar with mountain travel. In mid-January E.J. Cowley, "an old hand at the business of maintaining winter roads in the mountains," stated that he would "break a winter road in Bear Valley over which the gold camp would be reached on runners until the break-up comes." Cowley insisted that this road could be "opened very easily" and that there would be "no trouble to keep it open." 58

Although a number of claims that the trail was and could easily be opened were made in the winter of 1901-1902, it was not until the <sup>summer</sup> spring that free and open passage was feasible. Some communities became impatient to open a route from their area. In April farmers from Garden Valley started a program to open a trail into Thunder Mountain. This was, the Statesman reported, "one subject the whole community talks about." In order to get the trail opened a trail breaking crew of thirteen men at \$2.50 a day was hired. 59

In April, the Mining Reporter carried reports on the trails in and out of Thunder Mountain. The article quoted one man who had come out as saying there were 800 men at Thunder Mountain and "many are waiting at Dixie and Chamberlain's basin for the trails to be open for pack animals." The same issue, April 17, 1902, reported that the Schiesler pack train had reached the camp through the Elk City-Dixie route. The <sup>is</sup> meant that the trail was at last open to horse travel unless heavy snow were to fall

again. The pack train made good time and Thunder Mountain could be reached from Dixie in five days. The next issue contained a report 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." 60

The opening of the routes moved slowly. In mid-May the Lewiston Tribune cautioned that the "trail is not open" and "horses cannot yet reach Thunder mountain." "Other reports [are] misleading." Yet only a week later the Grangeville newspaper announced that the "snow is almost gone on the Warren Route," with bare ground for most of the way "Thunder mountain can be easily reached and hundreds of eager prospectors line the trail." 61

Conflicting reports continued to be published. "All reports that roads are open for horse traffic to Thunder mountain are misleading" stated an article in the May 22 issue of Mining Reporter. "The snow is deeper on all the higher mountains than at any time during the past winter. All supplies are packed in by men." The same issue did include notice that D.E. Burley, the Salt Lake General <sup>Manager</sup> ~~Passenger~~ for the Oregon Short Line, received word from the secretary of the Thunder Mountain committee that "the first party of prospectors and the vanguard of the rush reached Thunder mountain April 28th." 62

While individuals, packing in their own supplies, made the journey, pack trains were not yet able to cross the high mountain passes. According to the May 29th issue of the Mining Reporter "returning miners from Thunder mountain emphatically deny the published reports that pack trains or even horses are getting into camp over the Florence-Warren or any other road." The one pack train to get through, led by George Stonebraker, went over the Stites-Elk City-Dixie route. Those camped along the way were quickly recruited in an effort to open the trail for pack animals. For once it opened "There will be ample supplies in the camp for the present, as no less than 500 pack animals have been loaded at this point, which, conservatively estimated, will give the prospectors 60,000 pounds of food--a welcome relief to those who have been living on poor

venison almost straight." Any prospect of relief for the acute shortage of foodstuffs must have indeed been welcome. Most of those who had come out of the district had warned that ample supplies had to be carried in for there were few supplies available in camp. <sup>62</sup>

For those individuals journeying into Thunder Mountain before the pack trails opened late in the summer the trip proved to be difficult. Several individuals have left detailed accounts. Viola Lamb, the first woman into the district, made the trip with three others in late April, 1902. They started in Denver where she purchased an outfit for "roughing it" and they continued on to Salt Lake and then Boise. "At Boise we heard all kinds of discouraging reports, and people who came out of Thunder on snow shoes informed us that it would be folly to try to get in there before July 1st with pack trains." At Council the group purchased horses but the going was slow as it rained for several days straight. "The muck was above our horses knees, and very often I had to raise my feet to keep them out of the mud." "The melting snows and continuous snows combined made what would be at most seasons of the year rippling mountain streams, raging torrents, indeed the force of the water was so great that many dead horses were carried down stream as if they were as light as feathers." <sup>63</sup>

Upon moving higher into the mountains, the Lamb party encountered formidable snows in the Sesesh Pass. This group, as well as others, tried crossing the snow in the middle of the night, hoping to be able to walk on the icy crust. Another early arrival at Thunder Mountain, Charles Neff, wrote in his memoirs of horses with snow shoes. Some pushed the horses through without packs in an effort to compress a usable trail. Regardless of the method, travel across the deep snows proved to be exceedingly slow. Throughout the journey other groups of travelers were encountered as a great many people were determined to get to Thunder Mountain as soon as possible. Frequently the horses and pack animals did not survive the ordeal. Viola Lamb noted that "the first time I saw a dead horse beside the trail I felt like weeping but when I had counted two hundred it ceased to cause heart aches--two dead burros lay on Elk Summit

and old prospectors told me that it was the first time that they had ever  
seen these hardy beasts of burden give up and die." <sup>64</sup>

The various routes into Thunder Mountain gained prominence in early 1902. But well before then, in the previous summer, serious discussion commenced in regard to building a road into the district. The reasons were urgent and pressing--Colonel Dewey recognized the importance of a road for packing in the supplies for his planned mills and for transporting the gold ore out. ~~At last~~ On August 2, 1901 the Evening Capital News ran an article with headlines which read "Dewey Will Build the Road. Highway to Thunder Mountain Certain. But Boise Must Contribute to the Terminus." Interest in the road was widespread, and on September 4 a letter to the editor from E.W. Jones, the state auditor, expressed <sup>65</sup> strong support for the project.

Colonel Dewey, who hoped to have much of the road completed by the coming winter, advanced some of the required funds. But Boise subscribers to the project were slow in raising their share and Dewey pulled out. Interest in the road did not die, however. In January a series of fund raising meetings began as efforts were made among Boise businesses to keep the idea alive. The long-term commercial importance of a road into Thunder Mountain was apparent. As one promoter expressed it: "the road is a necessity and will be of incalculable benefit to Boise." Another booster added that "every day the matter is put off, Boise was losing <sup>66</sup> ground."

An important organizational meeting was held on January 20 at the home of Willard White, an early promoter of Thunder Mountain. White, who had only recently sold more than a dozen claims to a Pittsburg investor, maintained "that the Pittsburg people were anxious to have a road opened so that the development work on their claims could be carried on expeditiously." There were other reasons and White pointed out the value of such a road for Boise. Assurances were given that the Union Pacific "would do everything it could to promote the development of the district.

Advertising matter concerning the great district would be sent out in all their folders, and whatever could be done to enlighten the public " would be done. Several local businessmen attending the meeting expressed their confidence in the future of the Thunder Mountain district. <sup>67</sup>

A committee of five was established to make arrangements for additional meetings, but the success of the initial assembly was far-reaching. White offered to raise \$10,000 - \$20,000 if Boise would subscribe \$10,000. A local brewer, Emil Maxgut of the Idaho Brewing Company, pledged \$100 in a show of community support. "He believed in reaching out," wrote a reporter for the Statesman. "He believed it would be a benefit to Boise and to his company to build the Thunder Mountain road and extend every possible encouragement for people to travel this way." And these contributions were being made to an effort that had already begun. According to the Statesman, "one-hundred miles of the road is already constructed, and there remains to be built only the portion to make the connection with the gold camp from Bear River." <sup>68</sup>

Discussion of the road and the gathering of funds for it continued through the spring of 1902. By mid-April, according to one newspaper account, more than \$10,000 had been raised by the Boise committee. In May bids were taken for the road and plans were made to construct it from a point eight miles above De Chambeau's to a point in Pen Basin where the Caswell trail diverges from the Johnson Creek trail. There was, however, considerable disagreement over which route to take. Idaho City, which felt it was being bypassed by one proposed route, sent a delegation to the Boise committee to state their objections. Nat Howes who ran a saloon in Idaho City wrote a poem called "What Fools These Mortals Be" and dedicated it to the Boise Road Committee. The poem began: "Here's a proposition I can't understand, why suckers are so plenty in the land. It was most a year ago, just before the fall of snow, you let everybody know you were going to Thunder. You were going to build a road right into Thunder." Howe continued, poking fun at the proposed route bypassing Idaho City and following a path desired by Colonel Dewey. "Yes he played you all for

suckers, every one." Howe concluded: "you foot the bills and he gets the  
69  
mon."

Even the Boise committee and community lacked unanimity on the road. In May an effort was started to get those who subscribed to refuse to pay if the road was not built from Bear Valley. Confusion and differing suggestions led to little being done. Finally in the spring of 1903 the Idaho legislature, impatient to have a road completed, appropriated \$20,000. Local citizens and corporations were to raise the same amount. The 1903 report of the inspector of mines stated outright that "the development of this district has been seriously retarded by its remoteness and the excessive cost of transporting supplies. The feature should be materially improved upon by next fall by the completion of the Thunder mountain wagon road." In addition to the money put up by the state, the Dewey and Belle of Thunder Mountain Companies each gave \$10,000.  
70

The contract for the project was given to the Northwestern Bridge and Construction Company. The firm operated "under the supervision of a superintendent appointed by the State." The route taken left Long Valley road at Warner's ranch and continued by way of Scott Valley over Trail Creek summit to the south Fork of the Salmon River. From there it went up Cabin Creek over another summit and down Trout Creek, down Johnson Creek to Yellow Pine Basin. From the basin it continued up East Fork Creek, over the summit to the headwaters of a tributary of Monumental Creek and down that stream to Roosevelt.  
71

The road was to have been finished by September 15, 1903 but a shortage of labor prevented its completion. Still, about two-thirds of the total distance was built, with some work at the Roosevelt end and about forty miles up to Johnson Creek taken care of. The contractors used less than half the appropriation, and they believed "that they will be able to complete the work before the close of the next season so that supplies can be gotten in on wagons or sleighs at less than half the cost involved last fall." The completion of the road in 1904 helped the district and in its first three months of operation carried more "traffic

than any of our new State roads have done in a year after their completion." Some concern remained and in October the Idaho World insisted that you would find that "not a single freighter would take a contract to haul a pound of freight over the road farther than Randall's at any price." The road was considered to be "too tough for traffic." 72

#### IV. CLAIMS, MINES AND MINING: Thunder Mountain 1901 - 1920

The rush to Thunder Mountain launched a scramble for claims and a host of locations were filed. Most of the serious mining was done by one of the larger firms and they purchased many of the smaller groups of claims. While the initial results were impressive the enthusiasm quickly died. By 1904 many spoke bitterly of the district. But even after most had left, mining, ~~though~~ on a reduced scale continued.

Despite the hardships of traveling into Thunder Mountain, despite the difficulties of hauling in equipment, hundreds of prospectors rushed into the area, staking claims throughout it. By March, 1902, the Standard Grangeville 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." Everyone was putting down claim markers which made it "almost impossible to hire men to do any kind of work, as everybody is busy locating claims for himself." 73

While a great many claims were staked by early 1902, much of the solid work was done at one of the several large mines. The Dewey, the Sunnyside, the H-Y, the Venable and later the 20th Century became well known. In addition, much of the activity of the early days of the rush took place at financial institutions as hundreds of thousands of dollars exchanged hands. As was widely said in Thunder Mountain, the only road to keep open was the one to Pittsburg. The hope and promise of the area attracted big investors from the east.

The first to tap eastern money was Colonel Dewey who early in 1902

established the Thunder Mountain Gold and Silver Mining and Milling Company. Based in Pittsburg and backed by several financiers, the company was reported as having capital of \$5,000,000. It also held a number of claims including the Caswell Group which had been purchased from the Caswell brothers in November, 1901. Assays from \$7 to \$6,000 per ton were reported. The company added other claims including the Golden Reef, Golden Treasure, Gold Boy's Dream, Poor Man's Treasure and the Enterprise. A claim at the mouth of Mule Creek was being reserved as the site for a large mill.

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These claims generated a great deal of optimism for the entire district. The manager of the mine wrote to Colonel Dewey "We expect to pay the expenses to date and the cost of the mine at the end of thirty days run." Dewey himself told the Chicago Record Herald in mid-November that he believed "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."

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Agents from the east came into the area, looking for claims to purchase and with large amounts of money to invest. F.J. Conroy, "the Pittsburg mining expert," bonded the Brown and Whitaker claims at Thunder Mountain which had recently reported a valuable strike. The price was not made public, "but, which it is said, will compare favorably with the high prices existing on choice and well located claims." The bond was to last sixty days with a 10 per cent cash payment being made in thirty days. The property bonded by Conroy consisted of nineteen full claims, and "the expert believes the strike is all that the two prospectors claim for it and says they will not have to have much of the same kind indicated by the evident values in the specimen for his people to get the purchase price back." Conroy sent a miner into the district to check the property, and "if his report is satisfactory the prospectors can have cash for their claims."

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With such large amounts of money changing hands for claims as yet not fully developed it is not surprising that activity on the Mining Exchange was heavy. As reports of new strikes and sales came out of Thunder Mountain the exchange responded with a great deal of trading. On January 15, 1902, for example, more than 17,125 shares valued at \$7,520.12 were sold. The most heavily traded stocks included the Gold Eagle and Dewey Consolidated.  
77

In order to attract investors the Thunder Mountain Consolidated Gold Mining and Milling Co. Limited published a large advertisement for its stock in the Evening Capital News on January 31, 1902. The company, the ad read, "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." The ad reminded potential investors "you all remember Cripple Creek, how many took advantage of those opportunities; this is another opportunity for you all. Think, think again and do not hesitate or neglect to purchase stock when a good management offers its treasury shares to develop its property."  
78  
The stock was issued on February 10.

Some of the methods used by those selling stock in the mines were less than reputable. Upon occasion stocks were offered in mines at Thunder Mountain which did not exist. The Mining Reporter in its December 17, 1903 issue blasted what it called the "coarse methods of eastern stock brokers." The article began by stating that the methods employed by many eastern mining companies and eastern stock brokers in the disposal of mining stocks are so coarse at times that it is surprising that any man of average intelligence should invest in their schemes." A booklet entitled "The Truth About Thunder Mountain" was published in New York City and was being "circulated in the East by a house that is selling stocks in a number of companies operating in the district." Filled with distortions and exaggerations, the booklet was "not disseminated in the West nor is it intended for the man that knows the first thing about mining." The cover, for example, depicted a volcano erupting with molten gold pouring out of a

crater, somewhat of an oversimplification of how gold was deposited in the  
79  
district in the first place.

A considerable part of the booklet was given over to discussing the history, geology, first discoveries and access into the Thunder Mountain district, "which is set forth in strong fashion of a readable sort to the unsophisticated investor." By overwhelming the reader with seemingly accurate data and information the potential investor would be convinced all the more quickly of the possibilities of the area. In fact, the next section listed the mining properties and included an estimate of the amount of ore in sight which totaled \$69,000,000. "For anyone to make a statement of this sort it is rash indeed," wrote the Mining Reporter, "especially when only a few of the properties mentioned have more than  
80  
prospect holes on them."

The article goes on to blast the author's discussion of stamp mills and the technology of such a mill. The booklet probably did help sell a lot of stock, but the Mining Reporter protested the use of this kind of irresponsible promotional material. For "such exaggerations and misstatements only do a mining region harm and are a drawback to the proper development of that region's mineral resources." To control the dubious claims it was suggested that "perhaps to make the sending out of  
81  
such literature a misdemeanor or even a felony would be the best remedy."

In spite of warnings, a large number of properties had changed hands early in 1902 as big investors entered the market. The Mining Reporter in its February 27<sup>th</sup> issue included a list of the recent transactions. The Taylor and Eby Group, west of Monumental Creek and also known as the Fairview Group, was sold to the Jennings Bros. of Pittsburg for \$150,000. "The assays run very high and the surface indications are identically the same as that of the Caswell Group." In February twenty men were preparing the property for full scale mining and plans were made to have a 200 stamp  
82  
mill operating early in the spring.

The Longfellow Group, which according to the Mining Reporter "assays very high and will be a great producer," was purchased by Mr. Longfellow

In early 1902. Plans were made for rapid development work and the construction of a big mill. At about the same time the Belle of Thunder Mountain Mining Company purchased the Hidden Treasure Group located on Coney Creek by H.E. Taylor. The claims were "undoubtedly one of the best undeveloped properties there. It contains a vein resembling in every particular the Dewey vein and is traceable for a distance of 3,000 feet and is from 300 to 700 feet in width, surface assays running from \$5.86 to \$9.26." The same company, Belle of Thunder Mountain, bought the Rainbow Group on Rainbow Mountain. It contained a vein of ore over 300 feet wide, "undoubtedly a continuation of the Fairview Group vein." <sup>83</sup>

The Apex and Burr Oak Group of claims was sold by its locators to C.D. Greenlee of Pittsburg "for a handsome figure." Assays ran from \$5.00 to \$400 per ton, and the new owners expected to have twenty five men at work early in the spring. In another transaction, the Brown and Richardson Group was purchased by Cressy & White "for a good sum." The assays on this property ranged from \$16 to \$1,00. It was announced that a large force of men would soon start development work which would eventually include a large mill. The Hawley-Puckett Group was placed with <sup>THE</sup> buyers simply identified as "Pittsburgh capitalists" for the sum of \$100,000. The claims encompassed a "whole mountain of valuable ore" which assayed at an average of \$5.00. A large mill was to be built and a force of men put <sup>to</sup> work "as soon as conditions will permit." <sup>84</sup>

The Sunnyside Group of claims <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ originally located by several different parties, but it was the Caswells who made the first location. In February, 1902 they refused \$100,000 for this property which the Mining Reporter wrote "equals the Dewey property in assays and values and is considered a highly valuable piece of property." The Caswell brothers did sell, and in May, 1902 the Belle of Thunder Mountain Company acquired the claims at a cost of \$75,000. The financing was carried through the Boise National Bank. <sup>85</sup>

This wave of buying in the first two months of 1902 did not satiate the market as major investments and purchases continued to be made. In

April the Fanburg and Root Group of fifteen claims was bonded to a syndicate of buyers, most from Payette, for \$100,000. These claims adjoined the Dewey mine and this probably explains the high price. A member of the syndicate put together for the purchase, I.O. Roots of Warren, went into the district to do development work. Apparently some of the arrivals at Thunder Mountain included a number of buyers. As the Mining Reporter noted: "There is lots of money in Thunder Mountain. Agents representing all kinds of wealthy clients are there with the cash to buy promising properties. The camp is a fever heat of anticipation." In June the Belle of Thunder Mountain Company bought additional claims from F.W. Holcomb of Salmon City for \$65,000.

The wave of buying in the spring of 1902 led the Statesman to report on what it termed the "remarkable record of sales. Vast amount of property disposed of at Thunder Mountain. Total nearly a million and a half." Under these headlines the article continued to note that "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." These transactions took place in the winter, when it was impossible to make examination of properties as they were covered with deep snow. The willingness of investors to put up large sums of money for undeveloped claims is symptomatic of the rush to Thunder Mountain.

The furious pace of sales was only outdistanced by the speed with which claims were staked and recorded. Much of the original activity of late 1901 took place south of the Dewey Mine, for it was widely held that the dikes ran north-south. Claims south of the Dewey were assumed to be on or near a gold bearing dike and these sold the quickest. Other gold bearing dikes were believed to run between the Dewey lode and Monumental Creek, the site of a number of additional claims. Other dikes ran through the Sunnyside and were spread widely throughout the country. With the strong finds made in the Fairview Group, west of Monumental Creek.

prospectors spread out into these hills. By March, 1902 more than 7,000 claims were staked. <sup>83</sup> and the "country is located solid for a radius of seven miles every direction from the original camp. For a distance of thirty miles down Monumental and Big Creek, there is a forest of location stakes." <sup>88</sup>

#### A. The Dewey Mine

Throughout this space of activity several of the mines began serious work, providing they could find enough men willing to work and who were not staking claims for themselves. ~~Already~~ By December, 1901 the Dewey Mine had a 10 stamp mill operating and underground work had commenced. The Dewey, which was to be the largest producer in the district, got an early start because of Colonel Dewey's favorable reports. The equipment of the stamp mill had been packed in over the Boise-Bear Valley route during the late summer, but it operated only on test runs until late in 1902. According to B. Haug, the superintendent of the mine, the mill "started December 16, 1901 and closed down March 10, 1902 for want of supplies and etc." The manager of the Dewey during this time, T.D. Babbit, wrote that the "work has been confined principally to development work it being impossible to keep a force of men at work operating the mill." Development work had begun and by the spring 200 feet on the gold bearing <sup>89</sup> vein had been worked.

The records from the early days of operation available to superintendent Haug indicated that an estimated 1392 tons of ore were crushed with an average value of \$5.00 a ton. The report of the Idaho inspector of mines for 1902 cites the value of the ore as averaging \$7.00 a ton, and he spoke of "chutes of ore of astonishing value" being forty feet long and five to seven feet wide. Some of this ore assayed at \$1,975 <sup>90</sup> a ton.

The stamp mill at the Dewey resumed operations again on July 14, 1902, about two weeks after the superintendent arrived with supplies and men for the new season. The mill continued operating until December 24.

1902<sup>7</sup> when a cam shaft broke and it "could not be replaced on account of the roads being snowed in." During this run an estimated 3,156 tons were crushed yielding an average assay value of \$6.80 a ton for a total value of \$10,194.85.<sup>91</sup>

Through 1903 the Dewey stamp mill remained the only quartz mill in the district. A replacement cam<sup>1</sup>shaft arrived by pack team late in April, 1902 but the mill then operated for only 27 days before it too broke down. <sup>IT</sup> The closed while some alterations were being made and it reopened the following September. The difficulties with the mill at the Dewey were, according to Robert Bell, the Idaho inspector of mines, commonplace and not at all surprising. Bell noted that with the parts carried in by pack train and then set on an "insecure foundation" the mill "gives a great deal of trouble and causes loss of time." In his 1904 report Bell added that "it is common experience for a patchwork of this kind to give lots of trouble and prove hard to hold up in repair."<sup>92</sup>

From September, 1903 to April, 1904 the stamp mill ran continuously and stopped only because of a lack of fuel. During this run 7,223 tons of ore were crushed with an average assay of \$8.81 per ton. According to the figures cited by superintendent Haug, the value of the bullion recovered amounted to \$52,253.08. When fuel was obtained to start the mill operations again on July 25, 1904 it ran continuously through April, 1905, the date of Haug's letter and report. During these months the mill crushed 17,827 tons with an average assay value of \$9.34 a ton. The total value of recovered bullion during this run amounted to \$67,166.63. In large measure the high yields of the Dewey during these years <sup>WEAE</sup> was due to the effectiveness of superintendent Haug in keeping the costs of mining and milling low. Robert Bell in his 1904 report praised Haug's work. Bell looked upon 1904 as a "remarkably successful year of development and production." For the seven months of operation that year and with a crew of 35 men developing the mine, bullion valued at \$78,000 was produced.<sup>93</sup>

In 1905 productivity at most of the Thunder Mountain mines dropped, but the Dewey Mine, "the only gold producer in the district after four

years of steady development," produced approximately \$67,000 in bullion. Some of this came from surface quarries, but most came from the underground tunnels. More than 2,000 feet of underground workings on two main levels and several intermediate levels and short tunnels accounted for most of the ore. In 1906 the Dewey continued to supply large amounts of ore and Robert Bell called the site "probably the largest producer of gold for the year in Idaho County." With a crew of 35-40 men at work 1,500 feet of new development was shed. The ore mined and milled amounted to 11,784 tons at an average assay of \$5.25 a ton. According to figures sent to E.H. Dewey<sup>94</sup> the value of the bullion produced was \$55,910.

A miner who worked at the Dewey in 1906, Paul Swayne, later remembered working "the big slope which was exceptionally well timbered." This area was worked to about 400 feet deep, between 60 and 70 feet wide and about 250 feet long. Pressure from the shifting geological formations began to take a toll. "Some time during the spring of 1906 the timbers (square sets) began to crack and break with noises like gun shots by the enormous side pressure of the formation of this mountain." Intensive<sup>95</sup> mining operations were to continue only through the next year.

The report of the inspector of mines for 1907 written by Robert Bell who had long been a supporter of the district now commented that Thunder Mountain "experienced a very dull season that marks the dying struggles of a misplaced and unwarranted boom." The Dewey, however, continued to produce. Its 10 stamp mill was started up again on April 10 and it operated until October 28 with a single ten day loss in July. More than 8,900 tons were crushed at an average assay of \$5.03 a ton. The value of the bullion amounted to \$37,170. Even though mining and milling costs had been kept at around \$3.00 a ton, "a remarkable result considering the isolation of the district and a creditable example of the efficient management of Mr. Burt Haug," the property was shut down on October 28, 1907 and all was left in the hands of a watchman. "It is likely to remain [in this condition] for some time, as the ore now available in the mine are<sup>96</sup> of much lower grade than the values given."

The great days of the Dewey Mine were over, but the workings were not completely abandoned, and according to one report about 400 ounces of gold came out during 1916, 1918, and 1919. In 1911 some mining activity did produce 732 tons of crude ore which yielded over 200 ounces of gold. The site was leased during most of these years and a few high grade stakes placered from 1907 to 1914. But the returns were not high. In 1914 Dan McRae secured a lease and placered during the spring run-offs until 1921. The annual production averaged \$4,500. After 1921 only sporadic placer operations produced an estimated \$6,500 in gold. All total for the years 1907 to 1926 an estimated \$42,500 in gold and silver came out of the Dewey.

#### B. The Sunnyside Mine

The purchase of the Sunnyside Group by the Belle of Thunder Mountain Company in May, 1902 was a risky acquisition. At the time, the claims which had belonged to the Caswell brothers and were located on the northeast slope of Thunder Mountain, were ~~as~~ described in the 1902 Idaho mining inspectors report <sup>AS</sup> "only a hole in the ground ten feet in depth." The site was developed rapidly with the company cross cutting the hill with tunnels. The preparatory work continued through 1903 and more than 7,000 feet of underground development work and some churn drilling was completed. The results were promising and the Belle of Thunder Mountain Company increased its crew from about twenty men in June, 1902 to between two-hundred and three-hundred for most of 1904. The small stamp mill planned for installation in the Fall of 1902 was then replaced by a 40 stamp mill and an aerial tramway.

Most observers greeted this work, and they identified it as a further example of a long term commitment to the mine. The materials for the new 40 stamp mill at Belleco, near Marble Creek, and the 8,000 foot tramway were packed in over the mountains at considerable expense. Once the tram began hauling ore on December 20 it had to be stopped. The grips on the tramway buckets proved to be too weak. The mill had begun operation

before the tram as it was running ore from the mine and the dump through its breaker. Shortly after the operations started it was expected that "enough would be loaded into the buckets on the tramway to generate power to run the big Blake crusher which the Prospector and Thunder Mountain News reported on December 3, 1904 "is to be operated by gravity on the loadline of the tramway, which gives as indicated and developed strength of twenty  
99  
horsepower.

When the grips proved defective replacements were ordered immediately for "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." The supplies--automatic tramway grips and hangers--arrived on February 14, 1905 in a shipment of 5,000 <sup>1</sup>pounds of freight brought in by sixteen horses and three sleighs. According to the local paper the arrival created quite a sensation. The "16 big 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."  
100

The operations planned for the Sunnyside were indeed ambitious. The mill had been brought in at great expense and, according to the local paper, "the company has a mountain of ore in sight." As soon as possible the company would proceed to reduce it and this would give employment to about one hundred men. Two towns were established to accommodate the  
101  
crews, one at Sunnyside and one at Belleco.

The expectations of rich loads from the Sunnyside were quickly disappointed. The 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 are reported not have been sufficient to pay operating costs." The 1905 report of the inspector of mines continued its accounting of the Sunnyside and noted that the mill had been shut down early in the season and a new manager sent to the site. The new manager,

Captain Treweek, "a thorough-paced and practical mining man from Utah, under whose direction the real merits of the property will doubtless soon be disclosed," increased the crew to number about 40 men. Reports of their development work suggested that ore found in large quantity ran from \$3.00 to \$50.00 per ton. The report of the inspector of mines concluded: "It is sincerely hoped that this report is true and that the values may average between these extremes and an extensive body of that class of ore may be developed, as the Sunny Side Company have invested a vast amount of capital in the development and equipment of their property, in addition to paying a large part of the cost of constructing a wagon road into the district."  
102

Work at the Sunnyside continued over the next two years. By the end of 1906, 45 men were working on a new find which was reported as being twenty-five feet thick, five hundred feet wide, and six hundred feet long. The ore was said to average between \$5.00 and \$10.00 per ton in gold. "If these estimates are right the property ought to become a good payer, for the management of the Dewey makes handsome profits on less than \$6.00 average values under similar conditions." The stamp mill was being replaced with a series of eight electro cyanide machines with a total capacity of one hundred tons a day. The mechanical equipment was run by steam power, as were the other mills. Those working underground were paid at least \$3.50 per eight hour day while timbermen and blacksmiths earned \$4.00 per eight hour day.  
103

The Sunnyside was not able to recover ore with enough gold to keep the operations working through 1907. According to the inspector of mines report for that year the mine "remained idle throughout the year in the hands of an unpaid watchman and seems to be a complete failure, although there are men who still think that if it were worked on the same principle as the Dewey deposit and as efficiently handled, that it could be made to yield a margin of profit." While some held out hope, "the chances are that the millions of shares of stock issued, as a result of the boom year of 1902 in this district, will continue to be a dead asset to their

holders."

Because of the poor yields, the mine closed in 1908. It lay derelict for the next decade before being relocated in 1922 by D.C. and Robert McCrae and R.A. Davis. They constructed a 10 stamp mill on the site near the mine in 1926. The mill was operated by them for about four months each summer from 1927 to 1936. According to later reports, about 9,000 tons averaging .28 ounces gold per ton were milled. <sup>105</sup>

### C. The 20th Century Mine

The 20th Century Mine and Power Company, <sup>✓</sup> stood behind the Dewey and Sunnyside in its production. It began work in the district in 1902 and its holdings surpassed those of any other operation. The Prospector and Thunder Mountain Miner <sup>NEWS</sup> noted in its February 25, 1905 edition 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." Most of the holdings were located along Monumental Creek, south of the townsite of Roosevelt and "the millsite, main buildings, numerous cabins and saw-mill" constitute "a small town of themselves." <sup>106</sup>

The company owned an extensive web of claims which included 18 quartz claims, 6 placer claims, and 4 tunnel sites. Intensive work on the site had begun by late 1904. In December of that year Hugh G. Fulton, general manager of the mine, visited the site and hurriedly returned to Boise "to forward the new ten stamp improved Allis-Chalmer's mill his company <sup>HAS</sup> have bought to handle the output of the mine next year." The mill was to be placed at the mill site "within the next sixty days." The Thunder Mountain newspaper applauded his determination writing "He is to be commended for not listening to the gloomy reports of the difficulty in getting in to camp now, but with a determination and courage of conviction went ahead and bought 25000 pounds of provisions for his mine and brought in with him." Fulton had been one of the first into the area, arriving in 1899. The local newspaper identified Fulton as "one of the first to

recognize the richness and extent of the mines of the district and has made Thunder Mountain the field of his operations ever 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." 107

At a time when the other major mines were reducing their work the 20th Century was moving ahead. The August 12, 1905 issue of the Prospector and Thunder Mountain News described the activity and noted that "work was progressing daily." At that time preparations had been made for continuous development through the fall and winter. Machinery, including three dynamos, electric fixtures, stamp mill machinery, was being unloaded daily. Cable for an aerial tramway that was to extend from the main working tunnel at Toltac No. 3 to the mill had also arrived. The buildings on the site included a boarding house, bunk houses and a "commodious" store house. The company was making money on the mine, for it obtained a trust deed ~~deed~~ for \$100,000 in September, 1905 and paid the loan in full in February, 1909. Beyond these figures and descriptions 108 there is little information on the amount of ore produced and its value.

#### D. The Venable Mine

One of the smaller mines in the Thunder Mountain district, the Venable location dates from the turn of the century when J.M. Venable staked the Fairview Group of claims. Venable continued to work as the superintendent of the Gold Ridge Mining Company through early 1902. The claims, situated to the north of the Sunnyside property, <sup>were</sup> was developed by the Venable Bonding and Leasing Co. The site was developed to include a Chili ball mill, two tunnels, a shaft and numerous other test holes. Some ore was mined and treated there but the value or amount is unknown, other than a few tons from 1909. 109

#### E. The Standard Mine

The group of claims was located in 1903 by J.E. Cawley and Joseph

Chatham, and during that year a small amount of production occurred. The workings consisted of four adits and about ten prospect pits and trenches. The mine was sold to the Standard Mining Co.

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#### F. The H-Y Mine

The H-Y Mine, located southwest of the Standard, was established by Jonas Fuller, John Lawrence, and John Ferrington in 1901. A year later the property sold to the H-Y Mining Company. Development work consisted of a shaft 260 feet deep and two crosscuts reaching out from it. A camp with more than half a dozen buildings was nearby. There is no recorded production for this mine.

111

There were other mines at Thunder Mountain, and large amounts of money were offered for the Golden Eagle group and the Holy Terror. Most of the claims never produced much and even the large mines, with the sizable investments in capital made in them, never lived up to expectation. Only the Dewey turned out to be a producer of ore, but again the values of the ore taken out of the ground there were not close to early estimates. The rush to Thunder Mountain had proven to have been misguided.

#### V. LIFE IN THE BOOM TOWNS, Thunder Mountain 1902 - 1909

Many of the prospectors and the merchants who followed them into this district planned to remain here for as long as the boom lasted. In the early days of <sup>THE RUSH</sup> ~~it~~ this appeared to be a number of years, at the least. Fairly rapidly several communities were established, though some were purely speculative ventures. Still, a degree of normalcy characterized life at Thunder Mountain, a fact which is often overlooked. Social customs evolved, a political consciousness emerged and a strong sense of community resulted.

To outside investors who expected up to 20,000 people to flock to the

new Eldorado in 1902 establishing communities there, platting the land and selling the lots must have looked like a good deal. In 1902 five towns were platted. Roosevelt, the first of the towns, was organized by the Monumental Creek Mining Company and a Roosevelt Townsite Company set up. The townsite company had already in December, 1901 put up for sale about 250 lots. Business lots in Roosevelt sold the following spring for \$100 and up. An advertisement in the Statesman on March 22, 1902 advised potential buyers that the price would jump to between \$500 and \$5000 in ninety days. The Idaho Land & Loan Co. Ltd. in Boise was handling the sales.

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The town of Roosevelt was set up along Monumental Creek, west of Thunder Mountain. It grew rapidly as prospectors hurried into the area. By 1903 it boasted more than 7,000 people and its buildings included 14 saloons, 2 or 3 hotels, numerous eating places, 7 or 8 stores, undertakers, doctors, dentists, lawyers, carpenters, assayers and a host of other businesses. A newspaper, the Prospector and Thunder Mountain News was founded in October, 1904. Judging from the advertisements in the newspaper the town quickly had a thriving commercial center. Most of the stores and saloons were first housed in tents, but as confidence in the area grew these were replaced with more permanent wooden structures. By August, 1905 sidewalks were found in parts of the town.

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The confidence in Roosevelt's future continued through the slow down in mining in 1903 and <sup>1904</sup> ~~1905~~. Early in 1905 the local newspaper listed much of the new construction that was going on. "A good log house" was being built on the east side of Main Street; a "very neat Cottage has just been built;" and one resident was "hauling logs to put up a building 16 X 24 feet in the clear, south of the Pioneer Meat Market." Several residents were constructing substantial houses. Some of the commercial enterprises were doing quite nicely. In an ad for the Big Amusement Hall, where "fine wines, liquors, and cigars" were sold, ran a jingle "Tis here the lusty hosts of life, May find a respite from the strife, With song and music, mirth and wine, And all the fun of '49, It really is the roaring wonder.

Of all the far, wide land of Thunder."

Soon after the establishment of Roosevelt four other communities were organized. The town of Thunder Mountain created in March, 1902 by a group of Weiser businessmen who had secured "five claims embracing 280 acres on Monumental Creek at the mouth of West Fork." The town was "to be laid out at once." By June more than thirty tents had been set up there. The site showed a town with thirty blocks, seven cross streets and six other streets with names such as Rainbow, Dewey, Caswell, Colorado, Pittsburg and Monumental. A large advertisement appeared in the April 18, 1902 edition of the Evening Capital News showing the lots and promoting the new site. It stated in part: "Fortunes will be made out of town lots. Not every one who goes there will prospect or mine. Thousands will go for business. For investment. For speculation. The value of town lots will double in a night. A month will make you wealthy. Now is the time to invest. Get in with the first rush. Buy lots while you can get them at the lowest prices. During the month of April lots are offered you at a discount of 50 per cent for cash. Lots have already been secured for a drug store, two saloons, two hotels, one real estate office, three general stores, two restaurant<sup>s</sup>, barber shop, blacksmith, transfer stable, brewery, saw mill and other lines of business. Lots have been reserved for church, school and park purposes."

115

Several other communities were planned and advertised but none grew as large as Roosevelt. The Belle of Thunder Mountain Company set up Belleco below the Sunnyside mine on Marble Creek. Caswell was organized by the Thunder Mountain Townsite & Mining Company on Monumental Creek, four miles south of its junction with Mule Creek. Lots were being sold for \$100 and up by the W.E. Pierce & Co. of Boise. Another townsite, Golden, was located on Big Creek <sup>at the</sup> ~~with it~~ junctioned with Logan Creek <sup>where</sup>. Golden Placer Mining Co. obtained a tract of 320 acres. Promoters from Hailey and Ketchum set up a town called Marblehead on 160 acres of land on Marble Creek at the junction of Big Cottonwood Creek.

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Clearly more than a half dozen townsites and the enthusiastic boasts of the promoters was required for any of these to be considered a community. There needed to be a sense of community, a commitment to its development and well being. This sentiment existed in Roosevelt. For example, in February, 1905 the Prospector and Thunder Mountain News called upon "some of our hustling businessmen" to "put their shoulders to the wheel" in order to raise the funds needed for a school. The article began: "Before Roosevelt can call itself a first class city it must have a school house. Already \$1,000 <sup>is</sup> ~~is~~ school money to our credit in the treasury and by the middle of August twice that amount." The paper was hopeful, "with \$2,000 in cash and four sawmills to furnish lumber it looks like it would be an easy matter to build a little school this year." A "nice school house with a bell on it" would serve a number of functions, including a place for public meetings.

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Interest in a public school for the children of the town was exceeded only by the discussion of the need for a public library. The Prospector and Thunder Mountain News called for a committee and "strong, concerted action" to secure a public library. The issue "concerns every prospector and miner." For "the present outlook of the district gives positive assurance that this is a permanent, growing community and in the near future will teem with the busy life of a great mining camp." Books were available and necessary for the healthy community Roosevelt was expected to develop into.

118

The confidence in the future of Roosevelt was voiced in another newspaper article. Entitled "What Will 1905 Bring Us?", the article announced that "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." "We have here, stored away in the rocky recesses of central Idaho gold enough to pay and make prosperous all who come to help us reclaim it. Why not advertise? Why

There is money to be made by us and those who may come. The NEWS is in favor of a policy of growth and improvement; wants to help upbuild this great intermountain country of gold."<sup>119</sup>

The local optimism felt toward the community was also expressed in the political life. Early in 1905 a movement was afoot to organize a new county, ~~a county~~ with what an early supporter called "a county with a community of interest, with geographical conditions such that with a centrally located county seat, the people would at all times be in touch with public affairs and with one another." The name suggested was Mineral County and it was intended to be more responsive to the needs of the Thunder Mountain District. As it turned out, these hopes proved to be overly ambitious. Still, sentiments of this kind demonstrate the strong commitment that was growing in the district."<sup>120</sup>

Well before the drive for a new county, voters in Roosevelt tried to obtain their own voting precinct. At the same meeting they also decided by a 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 appointed to see that the resolution is carried into effect should it be necessary." The sense of community as it was developing allowed no ethnic variations or cultural differences."<sup>121</sup>

Some community wide social events had been planned. Election day in 1904 was "a real letter event in local society." A dance, organized by the women of the town, was held in Jones Hall. On the 4th of July a wider range of activities were planned for. One newspaper article which called the festivities "a grand success" recorded the events: a packing contest, a 100 yard foot race, rifle shooting, double hand drilling, single hand drilling, wrestling, tug of war and a baseball game."<sup>122</sup>

For a boom town there was surprisingly little crime in Roosevelt and in the Thunder Mountain district. Most of the reports deal with some isolated acts of theft, especially in early 1902 when food was so scarce.

The headlines in the Standard Grangeville on April 10, 1902 read "Hang Food Thieves Short Shift If Culprits Are Captured At Thunder Mountain."

Some scattered reports of claim jumping were also in the newspapers. The Evening Capital News in July, 1902 stated that there<sup>was</sup> a "claim jumping mania" at Thunder Mountain, and "very few properties of a promising nature have escaped." That same month miners organized the "Miners' Protective Association of Thunder Mountain" and its objectives were to "discourage claim jumpers and to assist in the preservation of order." All in all though, crime was a minor problem at Thunder Mountain. 123

Of the towns in the Thunder Mountain district Roosevelt developed the farthest. But its survival depended upon the mines which began to shut down in 1905. The growth of Roosevelt was halted but people continued to live there well after the rush was over. The end to Roosevelt came on May 31, 1909. Earlier in the evening a miner had left the town to return to the mines at the base of Thunder Mountain. He was turned back though by a "river of mud" a short distance above the town. The slide was moving toward Monumental Creek. Several inhabitants went out to see the slide and they hurriedly returned to warn the other inhabitants. 124

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2AM Monumental Creek was already swollen by the melting snows and around the town began to flood. By early the next morning the water had reached the second stories of the cabins. Later the same day most had disappeared from sight under the water. A few structures at the southern edge of town were spared. Most citizens then left the town, and the few remaining buildings were left in the hands of a watchman who, when he died in 1915, it was reported, "was an exiled member of a Royal German family, dubbed 'Bismarck.'" The school building left standing at the upper edge of town was torn down in 1920 and moved to the McCoy Ranch where a house was constructed out of it. Those parts of the buildings that protruded above the water were for a time the home of a beaver colony. The last of the buildings were burnt in 1934. Though a few have dived down into<sup>the</sup> ruins the town of Roosevelt was gone. 125

VI. THE FORGOTTEN YEARS: Thunder Mountain 1920 - 1980

With the demise <sup>of</sup> Roosevelt only a few miners remained in the Thunder Mountain district. Over the course of the next decades sporadic mining did take place there but most of it was <sup>on</sup> a seasonal basis. Occasionally, such as in the mid-1930's and early 1940's, mining there would intensify. Again in the mid-1970's renewed activity took place.

Throughout these years the memory of Thunder Mountain persisted. In 1931 Zane Grey packed into the district and later used it as a background for a novel. But in Grey's novel the town <sup>was</sup> transformed and <sup>became</sup> a caricature of western mining communities.

Of the mines in the Thunder Mountain District it was the Dewey that continued to produce during the forgotten years. Dan McRae placered and worked a few high grade stokes until 1914 and then placered during the spring runoffs until 1921. From 1921 until the mid-1930's there were only sporadic placer operations and a later estimate puts the value of the gold mined during these years at about \$6,500. Robert J. McRae who prepared an abstract on the Dewey wrote that "there is undeniable a large tonnage of gold bearing material above ground on the west side of Dewey Hill that will lend itself to open-cut and power shovel mining." McRae concluded that "there is the possibility that the entire Dewey Hill might carry sufficient value to return a profit on a large scale open-cut operation." 126

Open pit methods were used at the Dewey by the Gold Reef Mining Co. In 1941 and 1942 approximately 20,000 tons of ore was extracted and then trucked to the Sunnyside mill for processing. From this ore 2,083 ounces of gold and 1,613 ounces of silver with a value of \$73,852 was recovered. The mine closed down as a result of War Production Board Order L-208 in October, 1942. Before this shut-down the recovery of bullion from the ore was estimated at 73%, due primarily to the lack of proper equipment. 127

The Gateway Gold Ltd. controlled the mine during part of the 1940's and

attempted to resume mining. In 1947 the Dewey was purchased by C.F. Phippen, E.M. Phippen and Charles C. Chaffee Jr. Some placering of the old dump site and surface materials took place until 1962. In the mid-1970's renewed interest and activity in the Dewey was reported. According to the December 21, 1975 issue of the Idaho Statesman "at present extensive drilling is going on at the old Dewey and Sunnyside mines." A part owner in the mine insisted that the Dewey "has "quite a future in the next few years." A number of improvements were being made as some large companies showed interest.

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Outside of some isolated placering at other mine sites only the Sunnyside, along with the Dewey, recorded production during these years. The property was relocated in 1924 by D.C. and R.J. McRae and R.A. Davis, and two years later a 10 stamp mill was erected. From 1927 to 1936 the mill operated about four months each season and processed about 9,000 tons averaging .28 ounces per ton of gold. Until 1938 when the mine was again closed a further 8,000 tons were milled which averaged .22 ounce gold per ton.. R.J. McRae estimated the total production from 1926 to 1938 at around \$115,000. About 20,000 tons of ore from the Dewey mine was processed here in 1941-1942. In the 1950's a great deal of near surface exploration was carried out by the Bradley Mining Co., Yuba Mining Co., and the J.R. Simplot Co. Later, in 1962 R. and Grace C. McRae and Warren Brown patented eight lode claims which covered 185 acres in the Sunnyside mine area.

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While some mining continued in the district the fame of Thunder Mountain had long faded away. In 1931 Zane Grey, with an idea for another western novel, assembled a pack train in Salmon and headed into the area. Because of the dry season, Grey and his party had to wait for rain. A local guide and outfitter, Elmer Keith, had made the arrangements. The pack train made its way over the mountains into <sup>the</sup> Thunder Mountain district. At the time some of the buildings at Roosevelt could be seen above the water.

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Although the pack trip was quick, Grey apparently obtained enough material for his planned novel. In 1935 his novel Thunder Mountain appeared. Grey rearranged the story of the Caswell brothers; his characters were the Emerson brothers who were cheated out of their early claims. The novel deals with one of the brother's struggle to have justice done, to find out who killed his brother and stole their claims. Grey's description of the community, of the life there, was more a composite of stereotypes of early western mining towns, ~~it~~<sup>it</sup> bore little resemblance to Roosevelt. Grey also readopted the 1909 mud slide which had dammed Monumental Creek and he used it at the climax of his story. While all-in-all the novel resembled the true story of Thunder Mountain only occasionally it did keep some of the excitement of the last of Idaho's gold rushes alive.

#### CONCLUSIONS

While the rush to Thunder Mountain generated far-reaching excitement and interest the returns from the mines never lived up to expectations. In part the newspapers of the region were responsible; the articles carried on almost a daily basis in the winter of 1901-1902 did much to popularize the alleged wealth of the area. The promoters, Colonel Dewey and those who bought and sold claims for enormous sums of money, created much of the interest and commitment to the area.

There were, in addition, thousands of individuals who hiked into the area hoping to strike it rich. The dream of instant riches remained very much alive. Many of these people, those who did not hit it big, stayed in the area creating a small community. The town of Roosevelt especially had a considerable amount of community feeling. Those who did not abandon the area, filled with disappointment, became its residents.

But the district started as a mining site and once the mines started closing there was little future for it. Although Thunder Mountain did much to bring money and national attention to central Idaho it was forgotten after a few short years.

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