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Mining History A New Dialogue

While researching the Georgetown mining district of Colorado, I recently discovered information about the Red, White, and Blue Mining Company, an entrepreneurial enterprise made up of a group of ex-slaves from the Missouri lead regions. They had organized their own company, opened mines, and operated one of the first smelters in Colorado. A member of this mining company, metallurgist Lorenzo Bowman, became a locally recognized expert before his death in 1870. Archeological evidence of his operations on the headwaters of South Clear Creek is an important reminder of the African Americans who participated in the Pikes Peak rush.

When cultural resource management studies are conducted, we often forget that the story of mining is the story of people. Mining history is more than the physical presence of mines or mills. It is about new arrivals in a region, the creation of new towns, and the characteristic mining culture of boom and bust. It is about the mix of industrial workers of a region, the great cultural diversity, and the resulting social and political fabric. And, it is about the tale of innovators and entrepreneurs, opportunities and disappointments.

In this, the centennial celebratory year of the Klondike Gold Rush and the 150th year after the California gold discovery, we continue to study and re-interpret mining history and places. New parks, such as Virginia City State Park in Montana, provide further opportunities to explore additional themes; in this case, Chinese sojourners and the society that evolved in the isolated northern Rocky Mountains. Interpretation of mining sites, like many other historic places, has been influenced by the "New History," which looks at the broader story of our diverse culture. In my corner of the West, the prehistoric and Spanish-era turquoise mines near Cerrillos, New Mexico, are just as important as the more celebrated gold rush sites elsewhere.

However, the conservation, preservation, and management of mining sites are particularly problematic. In general, mining sites lasted only as long as profitable ore or coal was extracted; then they disappeared. Integrity of the resource will always complicate the search for historic mining sites. Over the past decade, the National Park Service has offered guidance for the survey, evaluation, and sub-

sequent nomination of historic mining sites to the National Register of Historic Places. An increased awareness, partially because of the loss of mining-related properties in the West, has also facilitated the recognition of mines and mining-related sites for National Register designation and/or the initiation of serious preservation efforts.

Rare is the extant industrial plant or mill that once processed ores, either east or west. Preservation efforts have often been piecemeal—with some notable successes, such as the preservation of the Mayflower Mill near Silverton, Colorado. Preservation through documentation studies is too frequently the relied-upon method for recording at least some level of information about a historic mining site before the resource is lost. The Historic American Engineering Record has provided technical guidance and direction as well as conducted specific projects to record the mills and engineering works at idle mining sites.

Mitigation efforts for federal clean-up projects or new federally-permitted mining operations have resulted in many studies, especially archeological, of former mining camps and mine sites. As part of the mitigation for the loss of physical evidence of historic properties, mining companies or agencies have funded the archeological study or historical recordation of mining regions. Occasionally, the need to provide habitat for rare species, such as bats, has facilitated the preservation of mine works. This fortuitous overlap of natural resource management mandates with an identified cultural resource benefits both.

Nearly 10 years ago, the National Park Service co-sponsored a week-long conference at Death Valley National Park on the preservation of historic mining sites in response to a need for guidance on issues and policies, management and interpretation, National Register and inventory projects, and mitigation approaches for new mining operations or environmental clean-ups within historic areas.

Today, many of the issues raised at the conference have been addressed. However, mining history now needs new direction. There is a need for new points of view and historical methodologies. In particular, there exists a continued need for innovative guidance on preserving and protecting these fragile remains; a need for additional awareness about miners, prospectors, and countless other mining-related individuals; and a better understanding of the diversity of mining-related technologies and surviving historic resources within the national story. We hope this edition of CRM begins this new dialogue.

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