Prospect Complex
Site 5ST1153

Site 5ST1153 includes three portions. The first and most prominent is a cluster of prospect adits in a drainage. The second portion is hand-excavated placer workings, and the third is a residential complex featuring two cabin ruins. The prospects and complex date to the 1880s, and the placer workings were excavated at an earlier time. The site, at around 9,720 feet elevation, occupies two minor drainages on the east side of Gold Run Gulch. The steep wall of Gold Run Gulch surrounds the site and is vegetated with a young lodgepole pine forest. The residential complex, however, lies in an open meadow. A gravel road used by recreationists passes through the meadow and provides access to the cabin ruins. The site has been reduced to archaeological features and possesses mixed integrity. The prospects and placer workings are poorly preserved due to natural decay and heavy revegetation. The residential complex, however, has a high degree of archaeological integrity.

Prospect Complex Site History

Almost no archival information could be found regarding the site. A map printed in 1911 depicts the prospects and indicates that they were developed on unpatented, public land.[1] Because the land was not patented, claim records no longer exist. Given this, the material evidence is the principal source of information for the site's history.

Prospect Complex Site Description

The prospect workings represent a poorly organized effort to find a mineralized vein in a minor drainage. Prospectors sank one shaft and drove three adits into the drainage's south side and drove a fourth adit into the drainage's north side. All the workings collapsed into linear areas of subsidence. The waste rock dumps are relatively small, thin, and possess little form.

Artifacts are few, and evidence of structures such as blacksmith shops is absent. The artifacts are limited to structural debris and a few cans concentrated mostly on the largest waste rock dump (F9). Dateable artifacts indicate that the last activity occurred during the 1910s. The items include several sanitary and vent-hole cans, and one hole-in-cap can assembled with an inner-rolled and soldered side seam.

The placer workings represent a small operation in which miners processed gravel by hand. The workings (F20) were relatively shallow, confined to the gulch floor, and have become overgrown and flattened. Currently, small piles of placer tailings, minor excavations, and hummocky ground remain. The miners obtained water from a reservoir (F18) at the workings' head. An earthen dam 11 feet wide, 40 feet long, and 4 feet high impounded water tapped from a ditch (F14). A spillway stopped by a gate, now gone, breached the center, and miners lined the sides with dry-laid rocks to prevent erosion. The gate allowed miners to release high volumes of water, which carried auriferous gravel through a sluice located downstream. Refuse associated with the residential complex lies scattered over the workings, indicating that the workings predate the 1880s, when the complex was occupied.

[1] Ransome, 1911.

Prospectors probed the area around the workings for hardrock gold deposits and met with failure. They left a pit (F15) on the north side, and a second pit and a short adit (F16, F17) on the south side.

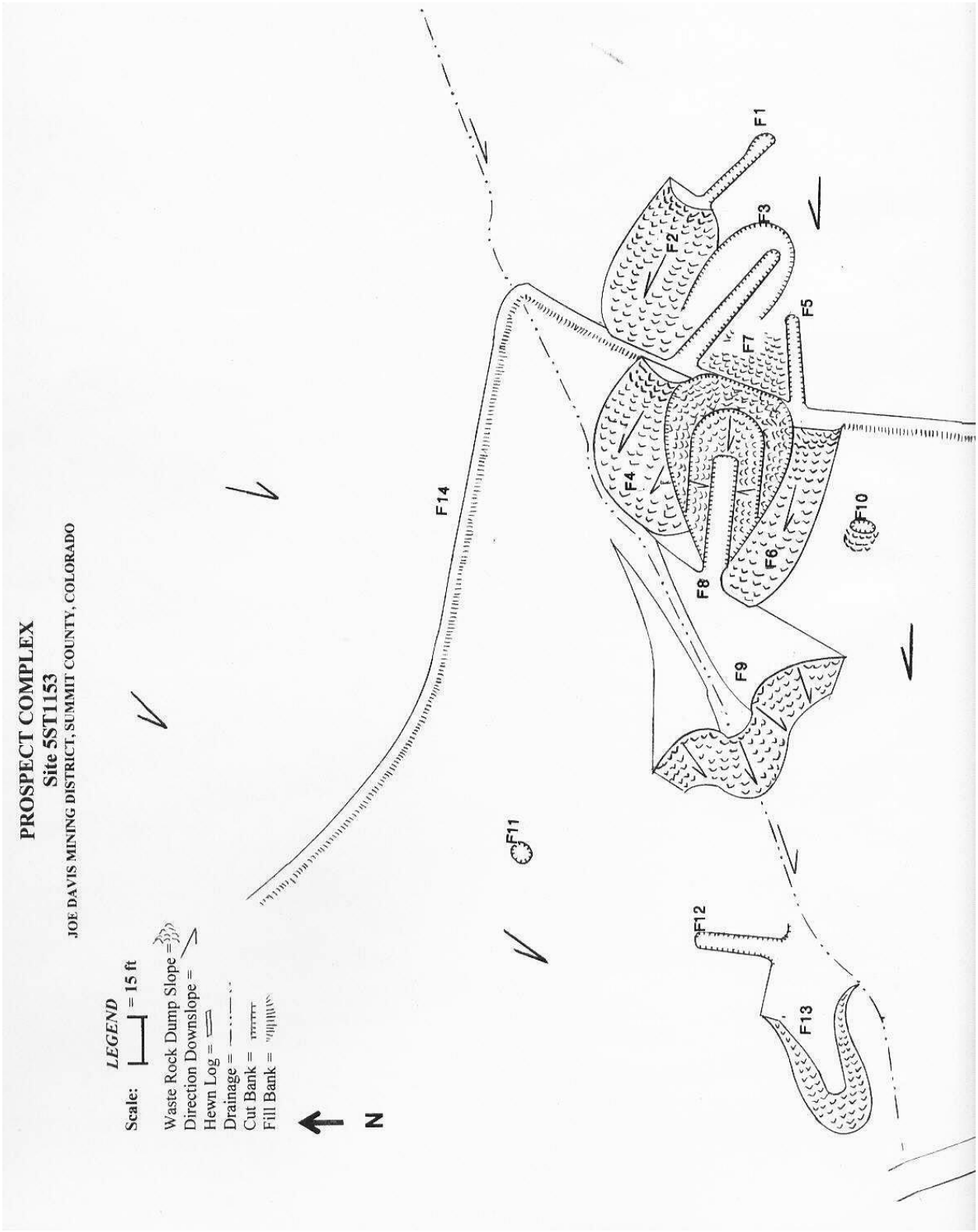
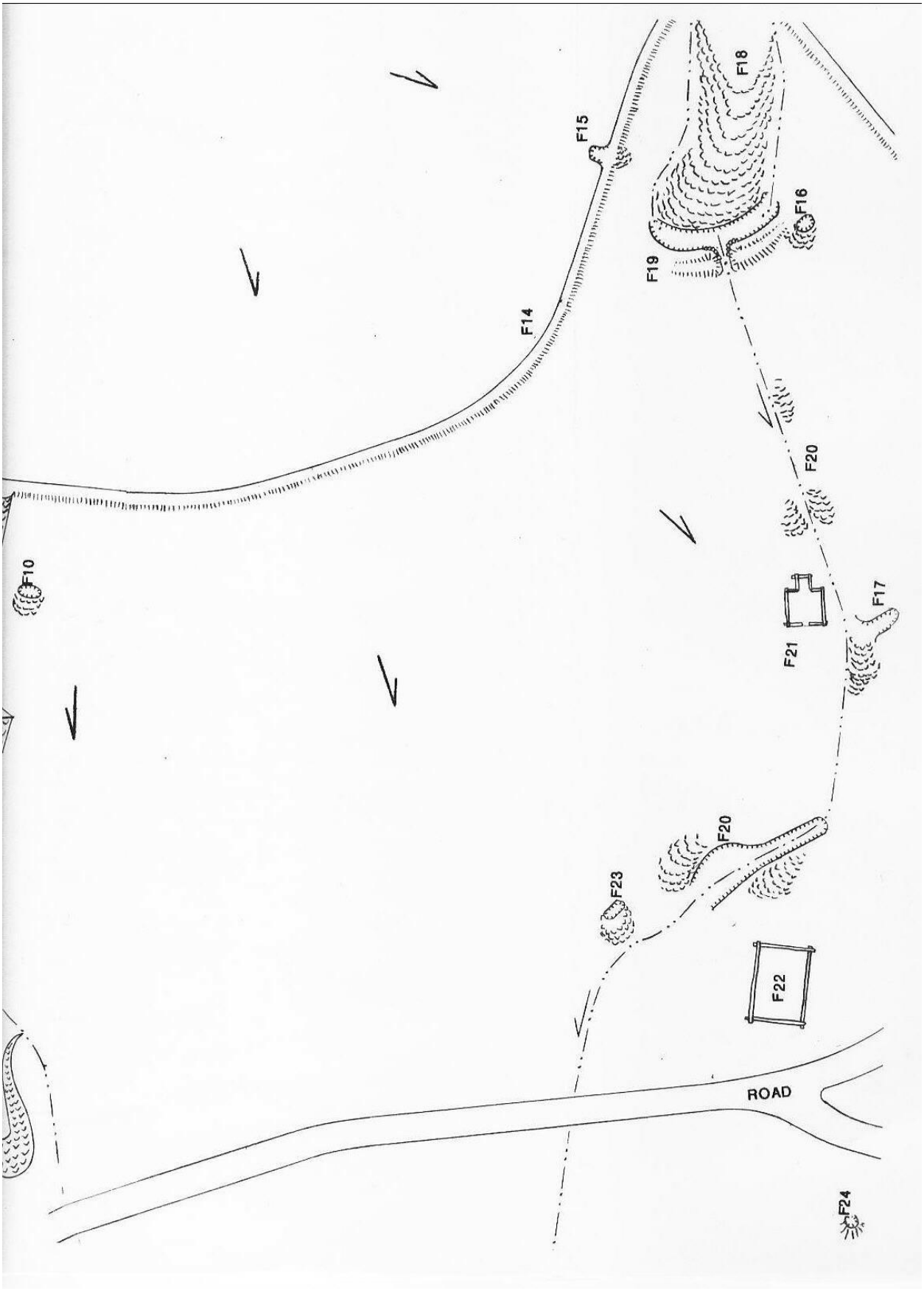


Figure 2.39: Plan view of the Prospect Complex site's north portion. The south portion is continued below.


F18
F15
F16
F19
F14
F20
F10
F17
F21
F20
F23
F22
ROAD
F24

The prospectors erected two log cabins in the placer workings after the workings had been abandoned. The eastern cabin (F21) was a west-facing, front-gabled log structure that consisted of two portions. The original was a single room 14 by 14 feet in area and 6 feet high, and workers built it on a cut-and-fill platform just large enough for the cabin. The workers assembled the log walls with saddle-notch joints, and they chinked gaps with mud retained by log strips. Three log beams supported a roof of planks, which featured a low pitch. The cabin's west side featured a doorway and a window, and the south wall featured another window. Workers used cut nails for the original construction and effected later repairs with wire nails.

The cabin's second portion is a small alcove 5 by 6 feet in area and 5½ feet high that extends east. Workers cut an area out of the hillslope for the structure, and sawed a section out of the cabin's wall to provide free access to the alcove's interior. The structure's east wall consists of lumber, while the north and south walls consist of planks hewn from logs.

A full assemblage of artifacts extends south and west of the ruin, and disbursed artifacts are probably buried at shallow depths in these areas. In addition, a deposit of substance probably lies in the drainage farther south. It should be noted that the buried deposits are likely repetitive with the surface materials.

The western cabin (F22) was a story-and-a-half, front-gabled, log boardinghouse 16 by 25 feet in area and 10 feet high at the roof eaves. Workers assembled the walls with square-notch joints and erected them on a foundation of logs laid on a cut-and-fill platform large enough for the structure. To render the walls weathertight, the workers chinked gaps with mud retained by log strips and shoveled earth around the walls' bases. Workers passed an iron tie rod through the interior to prevent the north and south walls from bowing outward. They bored holes in the walls, inserted the tie rod, and anchored the ends to the logs with washers. It remains uncertain whether the boardinghouse’s lower story had a plank floor, and if so, the remnants are currently blanketed with earth. The boardinghouse featured a second floor made of planks 6 feet above the lower floor. The planks have been removed, leaving log joists spaced 3 feet on-center. Workers incorporated the joists into the boardinghouse’s log walls.

The boardinghouse features most of its original windows and doorways. An opening 10 feet wide and 6 feet high breaches the east wall, and it originally included a doorway and at least one window. The south wall featured a 20- by 30-inch window, and the north wall featured a 26- by 35-inch window. The west wall, which was the front, featured a double-hung 30- by 54-inch window and a 30- by 70-inch doorway.

The occupants threw their solid refuse downslope and west, where it became disbursed over a 45 by 100 foot area. Shallow, buried deposits almost certainly exist on all sides of the boardinghouse, and deeper deposits probably lie in the drainage to the north. The deposits are most likely disbursed in rocky soil.

The residents relied on privies for their personal use, and two pits currently remain. The northern pit (F23) is 3 by 4 feet in area and 1 foot deep, and the substantial pile of backdirt suggests that the pit was originally a prospect. Meaningful buried deposits are likely, and duff coverage conceals surface artifacts. The western pit (F24) is 4 feet in diameter and 1 foot deep, and remnants of the privy structure lie scattered around.

Dateable artifacts suggest that prospectors occupied the residences during two separate periods of time. The first occurred during the 1880s as indicated by cut nails, applied bottle finishes, a bottle base with maker’s mark, hand-finished bottle fragments, and numerous hole-in-cap cans assembled with lapped side seams. The second period was the 1910s, according to a combination of sanitary, vent-hole, and hole-in-cap cans assembled with inner-rolled and soldered side seams. A Ford Model T hood, a carbide drum, and machine-made bottle fragments also date to this timeframe.

Prospect Complex Site Interpretation

The site features the remnants of a large-scale prospect operation superimposed over earlier placer workings. Miners worked the site's southern drainage for placer gold most likely during the initial gold rush of the early 1860s. They processed shallow gravel deposits with traditional sluicing methods and constructed a reservoir to store water. The reservoir was a substantial endeavor and reflects either a miners' cooperative arrangement or a company operation.

Material evidence suggests that prospectors then intensively examined the area during the 1880s for hardrock ore. They probed the placer workings and found little of worth, then focused on the minor drainage to the north. On the south side, the prospectors identified a promising lead and sank a shallow shaft to sample it at depth. Most likely, the shaft confirmed mineralization, which encouraged the prospectors to drive three adits toward the discovery. The highest adit trended southeast while the lower two extended easterly. Based on the size of the waste rock dump, the lowest adit was the longest, although all the workings were relatively shallow. Despite the work, the prospectors failed to encounter ore in substantial volumes and abandoned efforts. According to dateable artifacts, another party reoccupied the workings during the 1910s probably for speculation purposes.

Driving the adits required the support of a blacksmith shop, evidence of which is conspicuously absent from the site. This indicates that the prospectors maintained their tools and fabricated hardware at a shop located elsewhere. The adits lacked other aspects of a surface plant, which can be expected of shallow prospects. The shapes of the waste rock dumps and the presence of a wheelbarrow bed at the residential complex indicate that the prospectors used wheelbarrows as the principal means of transportation amid the workings.

A prospect complex such as the one on site was well within the capabilities of two or three individuals. Yet, the site's two residential buildings were intended to accommodate many more workers. This disparity in crew size suggests two trends. First, the residential complex was a base camp from which at least several parties of prospectors worked other properties. Second, the numbers of workers and the capital required to build the complex were functions of an organized, company operation.

The rich artifact assemblage associated with the residential complex allows us to draw a number of conclusions regarding the workforce. For example, the residents were men who belonged to a working-class socioeconomic status. In support of this, the artifact assemblage lacks items representing fine and costly goods.

The crew consumed a high-quality Victorian diet rich with fresh food. Numerous cans reflect an emphasis on preserved foods including soups, stews, vegetables, fruit, meat, and preserves. Baking powder cans indicate that the crew also ate baked goods. The crew consumed a wide variety of fresh meat according to a high number of butchered bones. As was common, beef was favored but some pork was eaten, and cuts included ribs and roasts.

The workers drank alcohol, but very modest quantities. The site's artifact assemblage includes only seven fragmented liquor bottles. A similar case can be made regarding the use of patent medicine, as suggested by five bottles. The medicine suggests that several of the workers suffered from temporary illnesses.

Prospect Complex Site Significance

The site consists of three complexes that were functionally different. The first is a cluster of prospect workings located in the site's northern portion, the second is a group of placer workings in the site's southern portion, and the third is a set of residential features located amid the placer workings.

The placer workings and the prospect complex are recommended ineligible as noncontributing elements of the site for several reasons. First, both groups of features retain little integrity due to erosion, revegetation, the collapse of topographical alterations, and other forces of natural decay. Second, the complexes are very simple and lack features and artifacts that clearly convey their historic timeframes and content. In sum, the prospect workings do not clearly represent a prospect complex, and the placer workings are a poor example of placer mining.

The residential complex is the site's most intact and important component and is recommended eligible for the NRHP and the SRHP as the only contributing element. While the complex's two log buildings have partially collapsed, the complex retains sound archaeological integrity in the form of features and artifacts. The complex is recommended eligible under Criterion C as an example of company workers' housing occupied during 1880s and 1910s. The complex includes the remnants of a large, log boardinghouse built as a communal residence for a crew, and the complex includes a separate residence probably for a superintendent or manager. The residences were crude log buildings typical of the Rocky Mountain mining frontier. The complex's artifact assemblage contains enough content to reflect aspects of diet, substance abuse, demography, and socioeconomic status of the residents.

One of the residential complex's important contributions is its role as a prominent aspect of Gold Run Gulch's historic landscape. The boardinghouse remnant stands in a highly visible location and imparts a sense of the mining activity and development that were important at one time in the gulch.

The residential complex can serve as a contributing element of a historic district that could include Gold Run Gulch and the townsite of Preston to the southwest. These areas offer a rich and intact historic fabric, and aspects of a historic landscape, that were important at one time to Colorado's mining industry.

Prospect Complex Site Management Recommendations

Because the site's residential complex is the only element recommended eligible, management recommendations apply only to the complex. Recommendations suggest stabilizing the cabin and boardinghouse remnants from further collapse. These two features retain a high value as pieces of a historic landscape, and their walls should be bolstered against falling over. Management recommendations also suggest developing the site for public interpretation with signage or some other form of recognition. So doing would educate the public about history, enhance their appreciation of historic resources, and promote preservation and stewardship.