Georgia Gulch Placer Workings
Site 5ST1228

Georgia Gulch was the scene of intense placer mining from 1860 through 1903. The entire gulch has been recorded as a historic resource because it constitutes a placer mining landscape created by three successive companies. Given the gulch's massive size and paucity of intact feature complexes, the gulch was recorded in a cursory manner.

The gulch descends northeast from Farncomb Hill's flank, and its head is approximately 10,800 feet elevation while its mouth is 10,000 feet elevation. The gulch is narrow and steep, the walls abrupt, and the flanks forested with second-growth lodgepole pines. Several historic resources were recorded within the gulch, including a Victoria Mining Company boardinghouse (5ST1229) on the north rim, and the Boss and Key West mines (5ST544 and 5ST1164) on the south side of the head. For site boundaries, see the Wapiti Mining Company Sites index map (Figure 2.59).

Georgia Gulch Placer Workings History

Georgia Gulch holds a place of great importance in Colorado's history. A brief summary is provided here and the history is discussed in greater depth under both the Wapiti Mining Company, above, and Chapter 7 (History of the Upper Blue River Drainage).

In 1860, neighboring American, Georgia, and Dry gulches hosted the first major gold rush on the west side of the Continental Divide. The event, known as the Parkville rush, drew thousands of miners who established the cosmopolitan town of Parkville at the confluence of the gulches. The rush became a foundation for additional gold discoveries in Summit County.

Georgia Gulch continued to yield placer gold for decades after the Parkville rush ended. During the early 1870s, several outfits sluiced the gravel deposits by hand, and in 1876, the Fuller Placer Mining Company acquired American, Georgia, and Dry gulches and engaged in a massive and systematic operation. For five years, the company employed a combination of hand-sluicing, booming, and hydraulic monitors to literally scour the gulches from bottom to top. In 1887, the Victoria Mining Company purchased the Fuller assets and resumed production. Six years later, the Wapiti Mining Company assumed operations and maintained activity until around 1903.

Georgia Gulch Placer Workings Description

As a historic resource, Georgia Gulch can be divided into three large segments, each with its own character. The segments are described below in ascending order.

Lower Segment

The lower segment ascends approximately 1,600 feet southwest from the gulch's mouth to a point where the heavily used Farncomb Hill road passes through the drainage. In this segment, the gulch is relatively narrow and features two general aspects of placer mining. The most prominent occupies the gulch floor and consists of decayed, partially collapsed piles of placer tailings amid gravel outwash generated by hydraulic mining up the gulch. The second aspect of placer mining manifests as bowls, incisions, and piles of cobbles on the gulch sides left from high-bank pocket mining. Much of this type mining was conducted by hand with pick, shovel, and sluice. Most of the bowls, incisions, and

excavations have blended together to form continuous, irregular, and scalloped cut-banks approximately 18 to 25 feet high. Overall, the high-bank workings and gulch floor are around 200 to 250 feet wide.

Several types of important historic features lie scattered along the gulch's northwest side above the placer workings. The historic features have been noted here but were not recorded because they were functionally different from the actual mining. One is a historic road abandoned in favor of the existing two-track on the gulch floor, mentioned below. The Fuller Placer Mining Company probably graded the road, approximately nine feet wide, in conjunction with its 1870s hydraulic operations. The second type of historic feature is a ditch originally excavated to supply high-bank workings with water. Cut-banks from subsequent mining fragmented the ditch into segments. The third and most important type of historic feature is isolated cabin platforms scattered at irregular intervals above the placer workings. The platforms are eroded, range from 12 by 15 feet to 15 by 30 feet in area, and feature collapsed stone chimneys. The artifact assemblages associated with the platforms are sparse due to hydraulic mining and recreational collection during the last forty years. The platforms probably represent residences from the 1860 Parkville rush.

As a historic entity, the gulch's lower segment retains little integrity due to several factors. First and most significant, the gulch floor carried a high volume of effluent from hydraulic mining during the 1880s and 1890s. This and flashfloods destroyed evidence of early mining and buried much of the gulch floor with gravel and braided channels. Second, the lower segment was mined during the last fifty years with heavy equipment. During the activity, a road was graded up the floor and areas were bulldozed. Third, erosion and revegetation damaged and obscured historic features.

Middle Segment

The middle segment of Georgia Gulch ascends approximately 1,000 feet from Farncomb Hill road past a confluence with a northern tributary. The middle segment is similar to the lower one, except that it ranges from around 250 feet to 500 feet wide at the confluence. In terms of content, the middle gulch is also similar but has seen considerable disturbance from recent mining. Most of the floor and the entire area around the confluence have been bulldozed, which, combined with flash floods, have destroyed most historic features. Unlike the lower segment, the middle segment features several rows of distinct tailings piles on the floor but no other features such as building platforms or ditches. In profile, the segment features cut-banks approximately twenty feet high, a mix of gravel outwash and tailings at their bases, a road on the southeast side, and a drainage channel along the northwest side. As noted, berms and mounds of tailings lie in various and irregular areas. The mounds near the cut-banks were created when workers raked through gravel to remove cobbles in advance of sluicing, and the mounds at center were created when workers shoveled tailings out of the sluices during operations. In general, the middle segment retains poor integrity due to recent mining, flashfloods, and revegetation.

Upper Segment

The gulch's upper segment begins at a constriction above the middle segment and ascends approximately 1,400 feet to a broad area stripped of vegetation at the gulch's head. The narrow constriction is approximately 150 to 200 feet wide and 500 feet long,

and as it ascends, it widens to as much as 450 feet. This area saw the last hydraulic mining, which sent effluent down through the narrows into the lower segments. The upper segment's narrow portion offers few distinct features except tailings piles and cut-banks scalloped from pocket and hydraulic mining.

The segment's broad floor is blanketed by gravel outwash fans, hummocks, and braided stream channels left from high-energy water flows. The head of the segment features distinct hydraulic workings consisting of gullies, furrows, and crenellations in decayed and friable bedrock.

It can be argued that the upper segment retains integrity as the type of landscape created by hydraulic mining. Recent mining impacted a corridor through the upper portion, but from afar, the disturbance is minor. The visual impact, however, is limited. The workings merely appear as a highly eroded area stripped of old-growth vegetation, and they offer few individual features clearly identifiable to people with little knowledge of hydraulic mining.

Artifact Assemblage

As is typical of hydraulic mines, the artifact assemblage is relatively limited. Many items were buried or destroyed both by the effluent of continued hydraulic operations and the recent mining. The artifact assemblage increases in variety and density from the gulch's head down to its mouth, although nowhere was there a significant concentration of items. The potential for buried materials is low except for around the residence platforms, which were not inventoried as part of the placer workings. Artifacts include structural debris, pipes and lengths of cable, and domestic refuse such hole-in-cap cans and hand-finished bottle fragments. All the dateable artifacts fall within the Victoria and Wapiti company timeframes.

Georgia Gulch Placer Workings Significance and Management Recommendations

Due to erosion, revegetation, and recent mining, the site fails to convey a clear sense of placer mining on a broad scale. Instead, the site resembles an eroded drainage that experienced earthmoving and excavation. The site is also unlikely to offer important information. For these reasons, the site is no longer significant and is recommended ineligible for the NRHP. Management recommendations suggest no further consideration as a historic resource.