

***Victoria Mining Company Boardinghouse
Site 5ST1229***

Site 5ST1229 encompasses a mostly intact log boardinghouse most likely built by the Fuller Placer Company during the 1870s and last used by the Victoria Mining Company. The site lies at 10,420 feet elevation on Georgia Gulch's north rim, which features an abrupt cut-bank created by placer mining. Georgia Gulch (5ST1228) was recorded as a placer mining landscape, and the workings are concurrent in timeframe with the boardinghouse ruin. A steep slope ascends northwest, and it features a thick forest of young lodgepole pines. The site retains a high degree of archaeological integrity.

Victoria Mining Company Boardinghouse Site Description

The boardinghouse is the most distinct feature on the site, and it stands at the head of a small, open meadow. The boardinghouse is a front-gabled, story-and-a-half log structure whose roof collapsed within the last six months. The building is 18 by 21 feet in area, 7 feet high to the second floor, 10 feet high at the roof eaves, and 14 feet high overall. The walls consist of hewn logs with flat faces, and workers assembled them with square-notch joints. Gaps were chinked with mud retained by log strips, which workers carefully trimmed to fit tightly to maintain the neatly smooth appearance of the walls. Both the bottom and top stories featured plank floors nailed to hewn log joists spaced 24 inches on-center. Prior to collapse, the roof consisted of planks nailed to eleven log beams that spanned the building's length. The number of log beams is unusually high probably to support the roof against the weight of heavy snows. The boardinghouse's foundation consists of heavy logs laid on the surface of a cut-and-fill platform. Workers used cut nails to fasten all primary woodwork and affected repairs with wire nails.

Workers graded the platform (F2) specifically for the cabin. They excavated a rectangular niche in the mountainside for the boardinghouse and used the backdirt to create a crescent-shaped flat area for outdoor activities. According to material evidence, one of these activities was blacksmithing in a simple open-air shop. Overall, the platform is around 20 by 50 feet in area.

The ground surrounding the boardinghouse is largely blanketed by sod, which conceals artifacts. The platform's rocky surface is exposed on the building's southwest side and appears to lack buried archaeological deposits. The northeast and southeast sides, however, hold the potential for shallow deposits that include small artifacts. The potential for additional items and perhaps slightly thicker deposits increases downslope and east.

The residents disposed of their refuse in the manner common to western mining camps. They relied on a privy for their personal use, and the pit (F4) manifests as a terrace of backdirt 5 by 10 feet in area. A square of boulders 4 by 4 feet in area embedded in the ground supported the privy building, and several pieces of lumber lie on the flat area. Sod obscured most surface artifacts, and important buried deposits are possible.

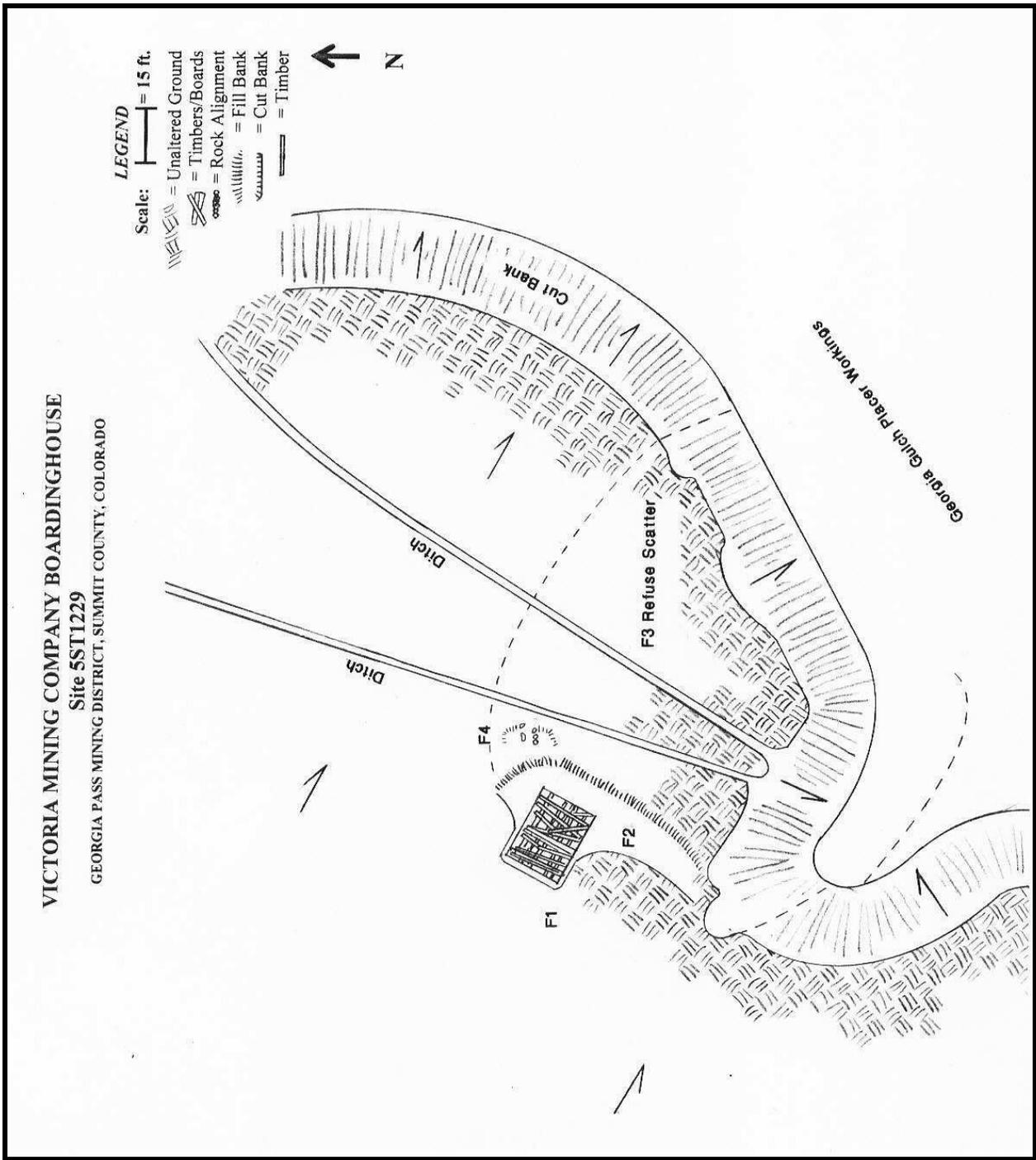


Figure 2.71: Plan view of the Victoria Mining Company Boardinghouse site.

The residents threw their solid refuse downslope and southeast. Over time, the material became scattered (F3) over a 100 by 130 foot area, which is currently blanketed by sod. Some of the refuse also accumulated in a minor gully south of the cabin, and this area features thick vegetation and humus. While the environment is excellent for the accumulation of buried materials, bottle collectors have already perused the gully and excavated a pit at its head.

Currently, only a small sampling of what is probably a richer artifact assemblage is visible through the coverage. Substantial buried deposits are, however, probably absent.

The site possesses a fairly intact artifact assemblage with small items concentrated around the boardinghouse and most everything else amid the refuse scatter. Residents threw most of their refuse down into the placer workings, where it became destroyed over time. Cut nails and various types of cans assembled with lapped side seams date to the 1880s. Wire nails, several hole-in-cap cans assembled with inner-rolled and soldered side-seams, and a hand-finished bottle base reflect brief occupation during the 1890s. Based on sanitary cans, an ovoid fish can, and a machine-made jar finish, someone occupied the boardinghouse for a brief time between the 1930s and 1950s.

Victoria Mining Company Boardinghouse Site Interpretation

It seems likely that the Fuller Placer Company built the boardinghouse during the 1870s. This conclusion is based on how the materials and workmanship differed from other log buildings in the area. Buildings attributed to the Victoria Mining Company consisted of raw logs that workers fitted together as best they could. By contrast, when workers erected the boardinghouse, they hewed the logs flat, carefully fitted them together, and nailed down thin strips for chinking. Overall, the workers attempted to maintain neat, flat sides to the building.

The Victoria Mining Company assumed the boardinghouse in 1887 when it purchased the Fuller assets and used the building to house a crew of workers. In 1894, the Wapiti Mining Company succeeded the Victoria company but did not heavily use the boardinghouse. A few Wapiti workers repaired the building and inhabited it for a brief period of time. The reason why the building remained largely vacant after the early 1890s was that mining shifted to the gulch's head, and the workers lived elsewhere in response.

The domestic refuse allows us to draw a few conclusions regarding the workers. The artifact assemblage was simple and lacked items reflecting fine and costly goods. This combined with work boots indicates that the residents were male laborers who belonged to a limited socioeconomic status.

The workers consumed a diet that was typical of industrialized mining camps. Specifically, they relied mostly on preserved foods, evident by cans. Such foods included soups, stews, vegetables, fruit, meat, and fish. When available, the workers probably supplemented their meals with fresh meat and baked goods.

The workers drank relatively little alcohol on site, which may have been company policy. The artifact assemblage includes only two liquor bottles, which is a very low number.

Victoria Mining Company Boardinghouse Site Significance

The site encompasses the ruins of a log boardinghouse, its privy pit, and associated artifacts. The Fuller Placer Company erected the building during the 1870s or 1880s, and when the Victoria Mining Company was organized in 1887, it housed workers in the boardinghouse. The Wapiti Mining Company assumed the mining operation in 1894 and used the boardinghouse for a brief period of time. The site retains archaeological integrity and ambiance relative to placer mining, largely because its setting is that of a placer mine. The site is associated with significant historical trends, represents an important site type, belongs to a greater whole, and is likely to yield meaningful information. For these reasons, the site is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criteria A, C, and D and for the SRHP under Criteria A, C, and E.

In terms of NRHP and SRHP Criterion A, the site is associated with several important historical trends. The site was a component of the Fuller Placer Company from around 1875 until 1886, and of the Victoria Mining Company from 1887 until 1894. Both companies sequentially operated one of the largest, most advanced placer mines in the West. The mine was of local importance because it was a major employer and contributed heavily to Breckenridge's economy. The operation was of statewide significance because it contributed to Colorado's economy and reputation as a mining center. In addition, the operation contributed to the development of Colorado's water law because it was center to a complex web of appropriations, distribution systems, and consumption points. The mine was of national importance as an example of a massive and complex operation with an infrastructure that served thousands of acres.

Second, the site served several important functions as workers' housing. Specifically, the building provided housing for some of the miners that Fuller and Victoria relied on for their operations. Without miners living at the placer and hardrock workings, both companies would not have been able to maintain their infrastructures and voluminous production. The boardinghouse also was very important to the miners. It served as home, place of recreation, and center of communication and commerce.



Figure 2.72: The boardinghouse is a sound example of workers' housing erected at large placer mines in Colorado. The walls were carefully constructed with hewn logs and nested chinking to present smooth surfaces. Source: Author.

In terms of NRHP and SRHP Criterion C, the site is a sound example of the type of housing that large placer companies provided for their workers during the 1870s and 1880s. The

associated artifact assemblage reflects aspects of the workers' demography including socioeconomic status, gender, diet, health, and the consumption of substances of pleasure.

In terms of NRHP Criterion D and SRHP Criterion E, the site is likely to offer important information. Specifically, the area around the boardinghouse and the associated privy pit probably possess buried deposits that may differ from the materials currently lying on the surface. Testing and/or excavation may enhance the current knowledge of the workers' socioeconomic status, ethnicity, diet, health, and substance abuse. The findings could be extrapolated to other large placer mines elsewhere in Colorado and the West.

Victoria Mining Company Boardinghouse Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest several actions. First, the boardinghouse should be stabilized against total collapse, which will happen within several years. Currently, the roof fell in but the walls remain standing. The northwest wall, however, has decayed and is slumping in. The walls should be reinforced with posts and a roof installed.

Second, the site should be developed as a heritage resource. The site provides an excellent opportunity to educate the public regarding the history of the Fuller and the Victoria companies, the nature of workers' housing, and lifestyles of miners during the 1870s and 1880s. The site lies near other resources recommended for similar treatment such as the Wapiti company office (Site 5ST372), the Fountain Tunnel (Site 5ST1163), and American Gulch (Site 5ST1170). These resources, historically tied together as components of the Victoria and Wapiti companies, can be linked by an interpretive trail.