

***Victoria Mining Company Workers' Housing
Site 5ST1242***

The site encompasses the archaeological remnants of four cabins and associated features last used by Wapiti Mining Company workers. The Victoria Mining Company almost certainly erected the cabins during the late 1880s. The site lies at 10,600 feet elevation on the south side of American Gulch (5ST1170), which was recorded as a placer mining landscape. The Fair Tunnel and Victoria Mill (5ST1162 and 5ST1169) lie immediately below the site on the gulch floor, and the Wapiti Mining Company Office (5ST372) is on the gulch's north side. The surrounding ground is steep and features a thick forest of young lodgepole pines. Most of the site retains archaeological integrity, although two of the cabin ruins were bulldozed.

Victoria Mining Company Workers' Housing Site Description

As a complex, the workers' housing featured four cabins arranged according to a grid oriented roughly north-south. The southeastern cabin (F1) was a front-gabled log structure whose roof collapsed. The building, now missing its roof, was 14 by 14 feet in area and 7 feet high at the roof eaves. Workers assembled the walls with V-notch joints and chinked gaps with mud retained by log and lumber strips. The cabin stood on a foundation of logs laid on a cut-and-fill platform just large enough the building. The north wall had twin fixed-pane windows and an adjoining sash window, and the east wall featured the door. In the interior, a vernacular table stood under the windows, lumber strips tacked down newspaper to the walls, and a plank floor was nailed to hewn log joists.

The workers who lived in the cabin disposed of their refuse in the manner common to western mining camps. They threw their solid waste downslope, leaving a rich artifact assemblage that extends up to sixty feet away. The area surrounding the cabin is largely blanketed by duff and moss, which conceals additional surface artifacts. The steep mountainside, however, appears to lack buried archaeological deposits of depth.

The residents relied on a privy for their personal use, and two pits currently remain. One pit (F2) is downslope and manifests as an ovoid depression 4 by 6 feet in area and 2 feet deep. Remnants of the privy building lie downslope and were originally assembled with wire nails. The other pit (F3) lies on the cabin's west side and is an ovoid depression 3 by 7 feet in area and 1 foot deep. Backdirt extends downslope from both pits, and they may not have been much deeper than three feet. Regardless, buried deposits are possible, and duff and moss conceal associated artifacts.

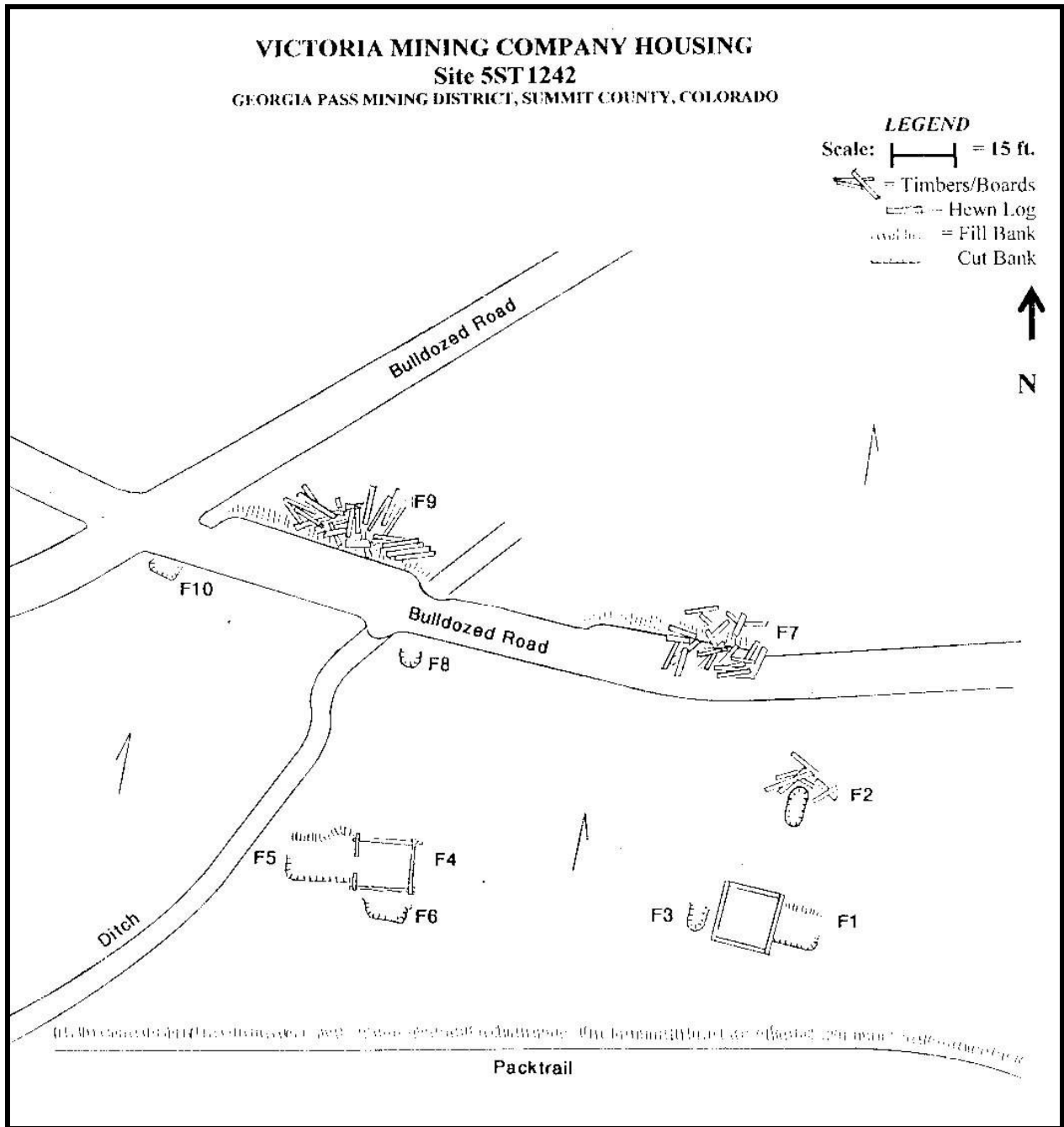


Figure 2.70: Plan view of workers housing erected by the Victoria Mining Company.

The southwestern cabin (F4) was a log structure 12 by 13 feet in area, and it stood on a cut-and-fill platform just large enough for the building. Workers assembled the walls, of which several courses remain, with V-notch joints and chinked gaps with mud retained by log strips. The cabin's west wall featured a doorway that opened onto a second building. The cabin had a plank floor, which overlay a root cellar that collapsed and now manifests as a semicircular depression 6 feet across and 1 foot deep.

A frame building adjoined the cabin's west side, and the structure collapsed. Workers graded a platform (F6) for the building, which was around 10 by 12 feet in area. The residents of

both the cabin and the frame building threw their solid waste downslope, and it scattered as much as sixty feet away. Duff and moss obscure additional surface artifacts, and important buried deposits are possible on the cabin ruin's east side.

The residents relied on a privy for their personal use, and an associated terrace is located above and adjacent to the cabin ruin. The terrace (F6) is 5 by 7 feet in area and probably represents two backfilled pits. Soft soil and duff conceal artifacts, and buried deposits are possible.

One of the last mining outfits to work American Gulch bulldozed a road through the area where the site's two lower cabins stood. The cabin platforms became part of the roadbed and now manifest as wide areas (F7, F9). The structural debris was bulldozed downslope, and notches in the logs indicate that the cabins were approximately 13 by 14 feet in area. Domestic refuse extends as much as sixty feet downslope, and buried deposits are unlikely.

Two privy pits remain intact on the upslope side of the road, and the eastern pit (F8) is 5 feet in diameter and 1 foot deep, and the western pit (F10) appears as a terrace approximately 3 by 7 feet in area. Both pits may possess buried deposits.

The site offers a full and rich artifact assemblage, most of which is domestic refuse that extends downslope from each cabin ruin. According to dateable artifacts, the cabins were built during the 1880s and inhabited during the 1890s. A combination of cut nails and numerous types of cans assembled with lapped side-seams reflects the former decade. Wire nails, hole-in-cap cans assembled with inner-rolled and soldered side seams, cans with sanitary ends and lapped side seams, and early vent-hole cans date to the latter timeframe.

Victoria Mining Company Workers' Housing Site Interpretation

The site possesses several characteristics typical of company housing. First, the four cabins were arranged according to a north-south grid. The cabins were almost evenly spaced apart and formed a rectangle. Second, the cabins were similar in shape, size, and construction. These qualities reflect an attempt at uniformity, organization, and housing like numbers of workers.

The numbers of workers can be estimated from the sizes of the cabins. In general, unmarried mine workers usually required 60 square feet of space for bedding and personal possessions. In communal households, an additional area was needed for domestic activities and recreation. Each cabin offered approximately 180 square feet, which could have housed two workers for a total of eight. This number was a fraction of the workforce employed by either the Victoria or Wapiti companies.

The domestic refuse allows us to draw a number of conclusions regarding the workers. The artifact assemblages were 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. Further, according to a candlestick, one of the residents in the southwest cabin was a hardrock miner.

The workers consumed a diet that was typical of industrialized mining camps. Specifically, they relied mostly on preserved foods, evident by the high number of cans. Such foods included soups, stews, vegetables, fruit, meat, and fish. When available, the workers supplemented their meals with fresh meat such as beef and wild game. Baking powder cans indicate that the workers also prepared baked goods, and numerous cocoa tins indicate that they consumed a few luxury items.

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

the workers suffered temporary ailments and attempted to treat their illnesses with patent medicine, according to a few medicine bottles.

Victoria Mining Company Workers' Housing Site Significance

The site encompasses the four log cabin ruins, five privy pits, and associated artifact scatters. The Victoria Mining Company most likely erected the buildings during the late 1880s. When the Wapiti Mining Company assumed the mining operation in 1894, its workers continued to use the complex. Currently, one cabin is partially standing, another has been reduced to a foundation, and two more were bulldozed. Except for the bulldozed cabins, which are noncontributing elements, the site retains archaeological integrity relative to both the Victoria and Wapiti companies. The site possesses 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 Victoria Mining Company from 1887 until 1894, and of the Wapiti Mining Company from 1894 into the late 1890s. 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 a workers' housing complex. Specifically, the complex provided housing for some of the miners that Victoria and Wapiti relied on for their operations. Without miners living near the placer and hardrock workings, both companies would not have been able to maintain their infrastructures and voluminous production. The complex also was very important to the miners. It served as home, place of recreation, and center of communication and commerce.

In terms of NRHP and SRHP Criterion C, the site is a sound archaeological example of the type of housing that large placer companies provided for their workers. Two cabins are clearly represented while two more are approximated by bulldozed debris. The intact cabin ruins illustrate the types of housing provided during the 1880s and 1890s. The associated artifact assemblages reflect 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 five privy pits 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 Workers' Housing Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest several actions. First, the site should be preserved. Currently, the area is open to motorized vehicle use, which has a record of accelerating the decline of historic resources around Breckenridge. Further, a heavily used motorcycle trail passes through the site. The area must be closed to motorized use and barricades erected to prevent traffic from accessing the site. The southeast cabin ruin should be stabilized against total collapse, which will happen within several years. Currently, the roof is gone but the walls remain standing. The south 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 Victoria and Wapiti companies, the nature of workers' housing, and lifestyles of miners during the 1880s and 1890s. The site lies near other resources recommended for similar treatment such as the Wapiti Mining 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.