Wapiti Mining Company Office
Site 5ST372

The Wapiti Mining Company Office was built by the Victoria Mining Company then occupied by the Wapiti Mining Company from 1894 until the close of operations around 1903. The site served as the headquarters for both companies and as the residence and office for company managers such as Alfred J. Ware, Ben Stanley Revett, and Frank and Maurice Griffin.

The Victoria company strategically sited the complex on a natural, flat area between Georgia and American gulches. The company's hardrock mines were located upslope and southwest, and the Victoria Mill and workers' housing were south in American Gulch. Historically, the area's main artery road ascended through the site en route to the summit of Farncomb Hill, where aspects of the water infrastructure were located. Much of the surrounding slopes were denuded by logging and mining, but the company carefully maintained a stand of old-growth lodgepole pines around the complex for both appearance and protection against weather.

Figure 2.60: The 1890s view depicts the interior of the Wapiti Mining Company office. The interior is within an addition built against the main two-story office, visible through the doorway at right. Note the gold scale against the rear wall and the safe at left. Source: Denver Public Library, CHS-5441.

Figure 2.61: View east of the Wapiti Mining Company office today. A two-story building stood on the floor at left, a frame addition currently stands at right, and a log cabin is at far right. The interior photo above was taken within the addition, with a perspective from right to left into the two-story office. The log cabin at far right was probably built by the Fuller Placer Company during the 1870s. Source: Author.

Wapiti Mining Company Office Site Description

When intact, the complex featured four buildings including an office, quarters for management, and a residence for other staff. The office was the largest and most distinct building, and it has been reduced to a ruin.

Originally, the office (F1) was a side-gabled, two-story structure 13 by 22 feet in area and 17 feet high at the roof eaves. The top story was 7 feet high, the bottom story was 8 feet high, and a subframe elevated the building approximately 1½ feet above an underlying cut-and-fill platform. Workers excavated a root cellar 5 by 8 feet in area and 5 feet deep underneath the floor's east portion. The floor originally consisted of 1x7 planks nailed to 3x6 joists spaced 2 feet apart, and someone later nailed another layer of tongue-and-groove planks at a 90 degree angle. The walls consisted of two layers of planks nailed to a 2x4 balloon frame, and they stood on 2x4 footers nailed to 4x6 joists. Workers used cut nails for all primary woodwork and affected repairs afterward with wire nails. The ruin currently consists of a plank floor, subframe, and partial walls. The floor is intact, the north wall fell outward, and the roof and east and west walls are completely missing. A few historic artifacts lie scattered around, and shallow, buried deposits are possible on the north and east sides.

The office featured an addition, which currently stands on the south side. The addition (F2) is a story-and-one-half, front-gabled structure 17½ by 18 feet in area, 9 feet high at the roof eaves, and 19 feet high at the gable peak. The walls differ depending on the building side. The east and west walls consist of plank siding nailed to a 2x4 balloon frame on a foundation of 4x6s. The north wall has no frame and is shared by the adjacent office, and the south wall consisted of planks nailed to an adjoining log cabin (F3). The roof features 2x8 common rafters sided with planks clad by corrugated sheet iron. The second story is defined by plank flooring nailed to the roof's 2x9 tie beams. Workers used cut nails for the building's primary construction and affected repairs with wire nails.

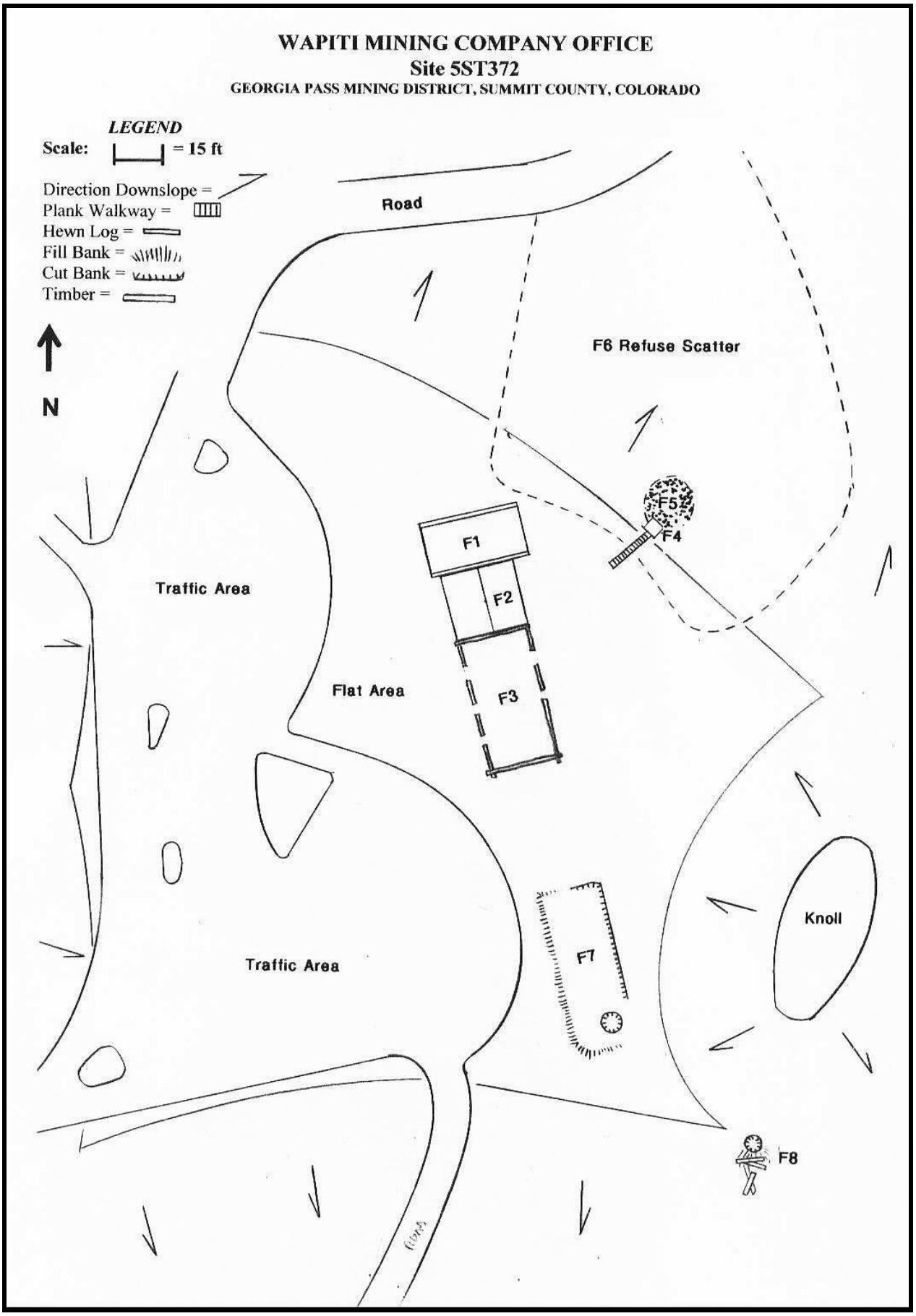
A log cabin, one of the earliest buildings in the complex, abutted the addition's south side. The cabin (F3), partially collapsed, was a front-gabled log structure 17½ by 31 feet in area and 8½ feet high at the roof eaves. Workers assembled the walls with saddle-notch joints and chinked gaps with mud retained by lumber strips. The roof, now gone, was probably similar in pitch to the adjoining addition, and the floor consisted of planks nailed to log joists. The log foundation and the joists were laid on a gently graded platform augmented with fill removed from a shallow trench underneath that was used for storage. Workers used cut nails for all primary woodwork. While the surrounding ground is dense, shallow, buried deposits are possible along the south and west sides.

The office residents disposed of their refuse in the manner common to western mining camps. Specifically, the residents relied on a privy for their personal use, dumped stove ash behind the privy, and threw solid waste downslope. The privy (F4) remains standing and is a side-gabled building 4 by 4½ feet in area, 6½ feet high at the roof eaves, and 9 feet high at the peak. The walls are little more than planks nailed to 2x4 cross-members, and the roof consists of planks and corrugated sheet iron cladding nailed to common 2x4 rafters. The building stands on a pedestal of 3x6 corner posts and plank siding that workers built into the underlying pit. A ventilation stack at the top of the roof evacuated foul odors. In recent years, someone built a plank walkway from the hillslope to the privy door. Workers used cut nails for all primary woodwork except in the walkway. The underlying pit, currently filled with modern garbage, was 2½ by 4½ feet in area and 5 feet deep. The pit was not much deeper, and hence, meaningful buried deposits are probably absent.

The dump (F5) behind the privy manifests as a mound of mostly stove ash and broken bottles approximately 20 feet in diameter. Buried deposits are present and shallow, and they probably mirror the surface artifact assemblage. When the residents threw their solid waste downslope, they formed a deposit (F6) of mostly food cans and broken bottles 105 by 126 feet in area. The scatter is largely surfacial.

The complex featured a second log building, which stood independently south of the office. The building burned, leaving a cut-and-fill platform (F7) 18 by 48 feet in area. Workers excavated a cellar pit into the platform's south end and created a berm along the east edge to deflect snowmelt. The cellar collapsed and now manifests as a depression 10 feet in diameter and 4 feet deep. Sod along the south and west sides conceals small artifacts.

The log building possessed its own privy, which collapsed. The pit (F8) now manifests as a depression 3 feet in diameter and 2 feet deep excavated into slate bedrock. A small pile of backdirt indicates that the pit is shallow, in which case meaningful buried deposits are unlikely. Remnants of the privy building and some domestic refuse extend downslope.


WAPITI MINING COMPANY OFFICE
Site 5ST372
GEORGIA PASS MINING DISTRICT, SUMMIT COUNTY, COLORADO
LEGEND
Scale: = 15 ft
Direction Downslope =
Plank Walkway =
Hewn Log =
Fill Bank =
Cut Bank =
Timber =
N
Road
F6 Refuse Scatter
F5
F4
F1
F2
F3
Traffic Area
Flat Area
Traffic Area
F7
Knoll
F8

The complex possesses a full and rich artifact assemblage. However, recreationists have removed numerous important items during the last several decades. As can be inferred, most of the artifacts are concentrated in the refuse dump and scatter, while a few items are scattered around the building ruins. While the Fuller Placer Company may have erected the log cabins during the 1870s, dateable artifacts indicate that the principal period of occupation spanned the 1880s and 1890s. A high proportion of hole-in-cap cans assembled with lapped side seams, other cans with like side seams, and applied bottle finishes reflect the 1880s. An almost equal number of hole-in-cap cans assembled with inner-rolled and soldered side seams, hand-finished bottles, and a plate base with maker's mark date to the 1890s. In addition, many bottle bases featured makers' marks used during both decades. The complex was occupied one last time during the 1950s, according to sanitary, vent-hole, and one-piece fish cans. Tobacco tins, several bottle bases with makers' marks, and machine-made bottles confirm this timeframe.

Wapiti Mining Company Office Site Interpretation

Material evidence suggests a few broad conclusions regarding the site as an administrative center. Due to the removal of important artifacts, the conclusions are limited. It appears that the complex began as two log cabins (F3, F7) similar in shape and size. The cabins were aligned with each other and represent an attempt at regulation and order. The two-story office and attached addition were built afterward, and their frame construction contrasts with the log cabins. Further, it seems likely that the Victoria company built the office in 1887 as part of its construction campaign. After the office was built, the log cabins probably served as quarters for the mine manager, family if any, and other company officials.

Artifacts reflect a few details regarding the site's role as an administrative center. First, battery cores and an insulator indicate that the office featured a telephone to improve communications with distant portions of the operation. Second, according to assay crucibles, a rock hammer point, and a sink, the detached cabin housed an assay shop. While the main assay shop was probably located at the mill, which was common practice, the one on site may have been reserved to test important ore samples.

The assemblage of domestic artifacts is particularly significant because it allows us to understand the lifestyle of management when on site. While we know that the company staff belonged to an upper socioeconomic status, the individuals apparently lived an austere lifestyle when at the mine. Accordingly, the artifact assemblage includes relatively few items that reflect fine and costly goods. A few artifacts do, however, distinguish the residents from common workers. One is a fish hook, which indicates that management had leisure time for activities such as fishing. Several more are broken Dutch gin bottles, and gin was an acquired European taste not shared by most mine workers. Last was an extraordinarily high volume of liquor and beer bottles that represent disposable income.

While we know that the mine's management was male, they were not the only gender to live amid the complex. Women's clothing hardware in the refuse scatter and at the southern privy pit indicates that women lived in the complex's buildings. They could have been the wives of management or hostlers hired as domestic help.

The artifact assemblage reflects aspects of the management's diet, substance abuse, and health. In terms of substance abuse, the artifact assemblage included approximately 480 liquor bottles, 600 beer bottles, and 70 wine bottles. These extremely high numbers reflect two possible trends. One is that management suffered from chronic alcoholism, and second is that the office included a drinking establishment for local workers.

Management apparently consumed the same type of diet shared by mine workers throughout the region. Specifically, a high number of cans reflects an emphasis on preserved

foods such as soups, stews, vegetables, fruit, meat, and fish. Baking powder cans indicate that the residents also prepared baked goods. Meals featured fresh food when available, and this included meat. As was common, beef was a favorite, and butchered bones represent roasts, stews, and steak. A canning jar lid indicates that fresh fruit and vegetables were also offered, and some were preserved.

Wapiti Mining Company Office Site Significance

The site encompasses the archaeological and architectural remnants of an administrative center. The Fuller Placer Company probably built the site's two log cabins during the 1870s, the Victoria Mining Company erected the frame office and addition in 1887, and the Wapiti Mining Company used the complex from 1894 until around 1904. The center housed the management and staff, the central office, and an assay shop that served extensive placer and hardrock mining operations. The site currently retains a high degree of archaeological integrity relative to the Victoria and Wapiti companies. Because of the site's type, function, and historical associations, the site is recommended eligible for the NRHP under Criteria A, B, and C and for the SRHP under Criteria A, B, C, and D.

In terms of NRHP and SRHP Criterion A, the site was the administrative center for the successive Victoria and Wapiti companies, which were important on local, state, and national levels. On a local level, the Victoria and Wapiti companies may have been the Breckenridge area's most important gold producers, employers, and consumers of goods and services. In this capacity, the companies were cornerstones of the local economy. In exchange for their consumption of goods and services, the companies produced a substantial amount of the lumber used for construction throughout the region. As major gold producers, the companies stimulated confidence in the mining industry, contributed to its overall production figures, and interested investors in the area.

The Victoria and Wapiti companies participated in several statewide trends. First, the companies made significant contributions to Colorado's economy through their voluminous gold production and consumption of goods and services. Because most of the mine owners lived in Colorado, nearly all the profits remained in the state. Second, the companies purchased much of their equipment from manufacturers in Denver, which hosted one of the most important mine supply industries in the United States. In so doing, the operators helped Denver's mine supply industry maintain its status.

The Victoria and Wapiti companies participated in several national trends. First, because of their productivity, the companies were tied to national commercial and banking systems. In terms of commercial systems, the companies consumed goods and services from outside of Colorado and hence contributed to distant economies. In so doing, the companies also helped to support distant industries. In terms of banking, the companies contributed to the development of interstate systems because some of the investors were located outside of Colorado. These individuals provided financing, accepted profits, and distributed company stocks to buyers.

Second, the operation, recognized as the Fuller, Victoria, or Wapiti placer depending on source and timeframe, featured 6,000 acres of ground, tens of miles of ditches and flumes, numerous hydraulic monitors, several sawmills, infrastructure, and as many as 300 workers. The greater mining industry claimed that these aspects made the operation one of the largest placer mines east of California.[1] This enhanced both Colorado's and Breckenridge's national reputations as important centers of mining and engineering. Further, the operation served as a

[1] Fossett, 1880:485.

model for engineers elsewhere in terms of managing, developing, designing, and operating massive placer mines.

In terms of NRHP and SRHP Criterion B, several important individuals lived on site and had direct impacts on the mining operation. One of the individuals was Alfred J. Ware, who founded the Victoria Mining Company with Mason B. Carpenter in 1887. Ware was a company director, managed operations at times, and helped organize the mine. Ware was born in Ohio in 1838, studied law, and went into practice as an attorney for several railroads. He came to Colorado in 1870 and directly entered the mining industry as manager of the Comstock Mine, which was the first operation of substance at Montezuma, Summit County. In 1872, Ware joined the small excitement in California Gulch and, finding the reports of gold exaggerated, continued southwest to the San Juan Mountains. When Leadville boomed during the late 1870s, Ware returned to the central Rockies, speculated on claims in Lake County, and drove a stage between Leadville and Breckenridge. He settled in the Breckenridge area by 1880, leased various placer claims, and heavily developed the Iowa Hill Placer Mine. Through this last venture, Ware was recognized as one of the first in Summit County to operate a hydraulic placer mine on a large scale. This established a precedent that other operators followed. Ware's involvement with the Victoria company lasted until his death in 1891.[2]

Ben Stanley Revett was the second important individual to live on site. Revett was born in Calcutta, India, in 1858, studied ship building and engineering in Scotland during the late 1860s and early 1870s, and apparently worked in England's maritime industry until 1884. At that time, the British-backed Twin Lakes Hydraulic Mining Syndicate hired him as engineer for its massive Twin Lakes placer mine near Granite, Chaffee County. He ascended to the position of manager in 1889, introduced the practice of hydraulic mining, and personally engineered portions of the mine's infrastructure. The investors mismanaged the company, and sensing an impending collapse, Revett quit in 1892 and returned to England. While there, John F. Campion tracked Revett down and enticed him to return to Colorado as manager of the Wapiti Mining Company. Under Revett's personal involvement, the Wapiti operation grew in size and complexity. Revett's most important contribution, however, was pioneering gold dredging in Colorado. In 1897, Revett and Samuel S. Harper, another placer mining engineer, personally designed the first of many dredges to operate in Summit County. The initial dredges were failures, but Revett revised the design and produced a working unit that operated for years. Other dredge companies imitated Revett's design, and their success established a precedent for outfits elsewhere in the West. Revett left the site, and the Wapiti company altogether, in 1897 to focus on his dredging project.[3]

The site currently retains archaeological integrity relative to both individuals. The structural ruins, the intact building, and the stand of old-growth lodgepole pines around the office would be readily recognizable to Revett and Ware were they alive today.

In terms of NRHP and SRHP Criterion C, the site is an excellent archaeological example of the type of administrative center that served massive placer mining operations. The ruins clearly represent the offices and living quarters for company management. In addition, the site's artifact assemblage reflects the diet, levels of substance abuse, and health of management. In general, such sites with intact artifact assemblages are extremely rare, rendering the Wapiti office important as a surviving example.

[2] *Colorado Mining Directory*, 1883:805; Henderson, 1926:227; Fossett, 1880:491; "Obituary" *EMJ* 5/2/91 p524; Ransome, 1911:18.

[3] Dougherty, 1980:41, 44; Ellis, 1967:28; Turnbull, 1962:243; Wolle, 1993:74.

In terms of SRHP Criterion D, the site was of great geographic importance because it was the administrative center for the Victoria and Wapiti companies. In the site's buildings, management set policies, designed aspects of infrastructure, attended to operations, and dealt with complex finances. Further, the site hosted the area's post office between 1894 and 1903.

Wapiti Mining Company Office Site Management Recommendations

Management recommendations suggest several actions for the site. First, the site should be preserved from immediate destruction. Currently, the site lies on a heavily traveled off-road vehicle corridor. Recreationists park on the site, drive around the buildings, camp in the area, use structural materials for firewood, climb through the ruins, remove artifacts, and leave trash. This is, needless to state, causing a rapid disintegration of the site. To prevent this, barricades should be erected around the site to prevent vehicle access. Signs should also be posted informing the public of the site's significance and vulnerability.

Second, because the site lies on a heavily used corridor, the site is ideally suited for development as a heritage resource and inclusion in a self-guided tour. Signage and pamphlets can explain the history of the Victoria and Wapiti operations, the site's role as an administrative center, and biographies of the important people who managed operations. Signage will have the added benefit of encouraging the public to participate in the site's stewardship.

Third, the building ruins should be stabilized against further collapse. The site's standing building lacks siding and windows, which admits moisture. The missing siding and windows should be replaced. The adjoining log cabin ruin has already partially collapsed, and the remnants of the existing walls will topple in the near future. The walls should be supported with interior posts or buttresses.

Last, the office and the partially intact cabin can be rebuilt. One of the office's walls remains standing and the floor is intact, but the other walls and the roof are gone. New walls and a roof can be erected with little effort. To maintain the site's historical integrity, the new walls must match the original ones in terms of materials and workmanship. Fortunately, the office's north wall currently lies on the ground, and it can serve as a template for the new walls. The new roof can be modeled after the intact one that currently covers the adjacent frame addition.

The log cabin can be rebuilt with a combination of intact logs lying around the ruin and imported logs. The cabin's remaining walls are currently intact enough to allow for easy reconstruction. The new roof can be modeled after that covering the adjacent frame addition.