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3. Synopsis
This compilation consists of three items. The first, "Treasures of Cariboo," is based on Captain Bonneville's County. This account tells of the discovery of gold at the site in 1870 and the subsequent activity. The second item is "Caribou History," a historical paper. The third item, "Cariboo Mountain" published by Idaho Historical Society 1975, provides additional information.

4. Other
*Map - Freedom Ranger District D-3
*hand drawn sketches
*material compiled in three-ring soft cover folder
A History of the
CARIBOU MOUNTAIN MINING AREA

Compiled for the
Star Valley Historical Society
Afton, Wyoming

by Forrest W. Kennington
and
Kathaleen K. Hamblin
"Cariboo is legendary- so legendary that the facts become more elusive with each new bit of information. Who discovered the gold? How much was taken out? Fifty million? Sixty-two million? Or a paltry two million five hundred thousand? Who got rich from Cariboo? Were there two towns or three? Or was there just one, called at various times Cariboo, Keenan, Iowa Bar? On-the-spot notes on Cariboo are scarce, and even those do not agree...

"Gold was discovered on the slopes of the highest mountain east of Gray's lake on what is now southern Bonneville county in 1870. That much historians agree on. It was discovered by one of the following claimants: George Chapin, a trapper; an unnamed Negro cook from the Oneida Salt Works on Stump Creek; F.M. McCoy and F.S. Babcock; Jesse Fairchilds, late of Canada, and full of hair-raising tales from the fabulous gold diggings at Cariboo, British Columbia; or perhaps some obscure prospector who was drygulched either literally or legally and thus eluded historical note.

"'In 1870 reports of new gold diggings travelled fast, and within a year there were approximately five hundred white miners and four hundred Chinese at the mines,' according to a history of Caribou County. (1) Commerce to and from the diggings went chiefly through Soda Springs, fifty miles southward, to the railroad at Corinne, Utah.

"'The placer mines of Cariboo were discovered by Babcock and McCoy in September, 1870, and since have yielded as high as $250,000 a year,' according to J.L. Onderdonk, writing in 1884. (2)
Placer mining and amalgamation were the processes used in obtaining the precious mineral. The ore was crushed in crude devices operated by horse power. It was combined with quicksilver or washed in pans. At some claims one and one half foot canvas hose was used to wash the gold. Mountain streams, fed by the heavy snows which occurred at that high altitude were the only available source of water. This necessitated hard and rapid work during the summer runoff.

"Most accounts place Caribou City on the eastern slope of the mountain; ruins there indicate this to be true. The elusive Keenan City, if a separate entity, is placed on Keenan Creek or Barnes Creek; a definite location has yet to be established. Captain John Codman in 1873 thought Caribou City and Keenan City the same. He was told that scattered claims
on the western slope constituted Iowa City. Lt. G. C. Doane in 1876 wrote in his journal that he was at Keenan City, but datelined a billet from that point 'Iowa Bar!'

"Caribou City developed into the largest camp in the district, reaching a population of about fifteen hundred. As a center of Idaho population in the middle '80's it ran a close race with Eagle Rock, later Idaho Falls. It was a typical mining town of that day. Besides the gambling halls, bars, saloons, dancing girls and the usual aggregation of men of all kinds and nationalities seeking a fortune in gold dust, there were several supply stores, a postoffice and boarding houses. Caribou City also boasted a three-storied hotel known as the 'Green House' which was considered quite an elaborate lodging place to be situated in a mining camp. Robert Campbell operated a butcher shop in the town, and his wife opened and maintained a boarding house.
Captain John Codman visited Cariboo in August, 1873, making the trip from Soda Springs.

"...We came to a log-house which we were told was Cariboo. The real name of the town is Keenan City. It contains about a dozen log-houses, including a saloon, lodging house, and restaurant, entertainment being furnished on the 'European plan.'

"It was after 2 a.m. when we were shown to our apartment. This was a log house of one room, in which two gentlemen were already sleeping on a shelf under a blanket. Two other double shelves were provided for us. Neither of them had a mattress upon it, but they were furnished with horse blankets, and pillows were not. I selected the least inebriated of my fellow passengers for a bed fellow, and turned in after placing my coat and pantaloons on an empty box, using my monkey-jacket for a pillow and walking to my shelf over the bare ground, for the apartment had no floor. But we were all tired enough to sleep until seven o'clock, when I awoke first and got out of doors.

"It was a lovely morning after the storm, and the air was delightfully cool and invigorating. But the wretched, woebegone look of Keenan City! The street was nearly knee-deep with mud and the miners were already wading through it to their work, with their picks, shovels and pans on their backs.

"I went to a restaurant and found it was kept by a Scotsman and his wife, and Englishman...it was neatly arranged, and my breakfast of toast and fresh butter, and a tender beefsteak with potatoes was well cooked.

"I met Jeff Davis at the table—not Jeff the rebel, but Jeff the teamster, who is well known all over this country. After breakfast Jeff proposed a walk to the placer diggings, a mile or two outside the city limits.

"The men were busily employed in the gulch when we arrived. This gulch is away back in the pine forest, and the sight is very romantic. The men were at their work, and near by among the trees several log-cabins, tastily decorated with spruce boughs, and some very spruce young women too, the wives and daughters of the miners, around them.
"The process of placer-mining is hydraulic, a strong stream of water being turned on to wash away the banks of dirt and then running through wooden flumes, in the bottom of which the gold settles and is afterwards removed.

"Besides these works there are some owned by poor men and Chinamen who pan out gold in the primitive way. I borrowed a pan and was not very successful, getting only a few specks of dust for my trouble. Indeed, little is done by this method now, those who simply pan are rarely getting more than two or three dollars per day.

"In the afternoon Mr. Brown, my landlord, invited me to go with him to the top of the mountain and see the place where he had been successfully prospecting for quartz-gold. Brown and I... ascended towards the mountain through what would have been a magnificent forest if a recent fire had not sadly marred its beauty. There was no trail, and we were obliged to pick our way through thick underbrush, and over hundreds of fallen trees. Cariboo is about two thousand feet higher than Soda, so it is some ten thousand feet above the level of the sea. The mountain is 1500 feet above the level of the town.

"After ascending five hundred feet we came to patches of snow. Above them it was beautifully green with pines and grass, and just where gold was struck, halfway to the summit, there was a great, wide, grassy lawn, looking as if it had been laid out by a landscape gardener. On the edge of this, among the pines, were the huts of the prospectors, made of bark and pineboughs.

"It was only three weeks since these quartz-mines were discovered and the ore had not been thoroughly assayed. But they are probably very rich, and are likely to be the original source of the deposits found in the gulches. Very little work has been done in them yet."
"After looking at the specks of gold in the broken quartz, and wishing that I owned the mountain, I determined to get upon the top of it and tread all its gold under my feet... It was tedious climbing over the loose rocks, and through the deep snow, but we accomplished it at last, we were on the highest peak of the range, and looked down upon the lesser mountains of snowy summits, and over them all beyond the valleys near us, into valleys in the far distance, tracing the Snake and Blackfoot River for at least a hundred miles... as far as the eye could reach in the clear atmosphere on this brilliant afternoon."

The following day, August 6, 1873, Captian Codman accepted an invitation to go "Over beyond the mountain and see some of the other quartz-leads."

"There were almost perpendicular descents into ravines, and away up more than a thousand feet above the valley, we crawled along the side-hill like flies on the edge of a teacup... Below us was an immense basin shaped valley, carpeted with the greenest grass, and figured with patches of giant pines, looking like shrub shrubs, beneath us. Over beyond, range upon range, were clearly defined mountains of different shades of dark granite to the faintest blue in the far distance.

"In the early part of our ride we had come through flocks of mountain grouse. They were so tame that we shot them with our pistols from the saddles, and brought along a lot of young chicks with us. We camped with Thompson and Graham and another man, the prospectors who had just discovered a new quartz-lead, and from which they expect to make their fortunes.

"Introductions and drinks were in order... it is only by falling back on total abstinence that I have escaped being drunk half the time and being poisoned for life, since I have been in Cariboo."
"If I was asked what miners lived upon I should answer, 'Whiskey and hope.' As to the former, I would prefer having the value of what is drunk, to having all the gold that is panned in Cariboo, for the miners spend all their gold dust for whiskey, and are still in debt for it. As to hope, they are always living, and that joyfully, on 'Great Expectations.'

"On the morning of August 9,...we started for Iowa City. This 'important town' is situated in a valley on the other side of the mountain, distant from Cariboo about seven or eight miles.

"I really could not find Iowa City, although I was assured that we had been there. Here and there within the distance of half a mile, there were some log-cabins, in all perhaps half a dozen. The last place to which we came was the residence of Wm Clemens, Esq. the head man of the place; there we alighted, tied our horses to trees, and then went with Mr. Clemens to see his claim. To arrive at it one must go on foot, by a wild shaded path through the pine woods. On the way we gathered a great many whortle berries...a dark purple color, slightly acid and very pleasing to the taste.

"Returning to the cabin of Mr. Clemens and resting a while, we came back to Cariboo."

(1) "Tosiba," by Daughters of the Utah Pioneers.
(2) History of Idaho Territory.
"After lunch, our miner friend brought out a small glass jar, with the yellow evidence of his labor, consisting mostly of flakes and kernels—nothing very large—probably several ounces. At this date, gold had not escalated in price, and was valued at some 30 dollars per ounce. As far as we were able to see, this was the only consistent mining operation in progress on the mountain."

"There was Gold On Caribou!"
by Reed Olsen
Snake River Echoes, Vol 13, #4.

"...The Trail led up Herman Canyon, east through Della's Basin and over the next pass to the headwaters of City creek, then downstream to Barnes Creek that has its headwaters on the northwest base of Caribou Mountain. (is called Keenan City.)

"Below in the creek bed lay long rows of washed rock, piled high as the eaves on a house and wide as a barn across the bottom. Rocks small as baseballs or large as watermelons piled neatly in windrows. Each rock looked as if it had been carefully placed rather than being carelessly tossed away to rest where it fell.

"On the last trip as the afternoon shadows lengthened across the canyon, I let my horse pick his way through the rocks and fallen trees to the dusty road that led northward into Caribou Basin. The trail led upward passing Keenan City, past the Hayden cabins, up to the foot of Houtz Basin (named after Johnny Houtz), around and beneath the high cliffs where the cables came down from the Pittsburg Mine, high above on the north face of the mountain, then out and around a steep rocky point to the
Robinson mine with its stamp mill, boilers, air compressors and all fascinating machinery for underground mining."

"Keenan City. Gold!!!!"
By Robert A. Collins

"CARIBOU HISTORY" HISTORICAL PAPER THOUGH TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN BY D.U.P. AT UNKNOWN TIME ACCORDING TO ANTHONY A. VARILONE, DISTRICT RANGER, CARIBOU NATIONAL FOREST, JAN. 1986.

"9. Mining
The first mining activity, the discovery of placer gold, was made on McCoy Creek, September 1870, by F.S. Babcock, F. McCoy and Jesse Fairchild. This discovery started a gold rush in 1870 and placer gold was found in Iowa Creek, Anderson Creek, City Creek, Barns Creek and Bilk Creek. Before the end of 1870 the mining town of Keenan (now a ghost town) named for
John Keenan, who discovered gold on upper McCoy Creek, had more than 500 population and a 'Chinatown' was located a short distance below with a population of about 400 Chinese. The first placer claims along City and Barnes Creeks were, by agreement, only 200 feet in length along both banks of the Creek and the average 'Haul' was one ounce of gold per man.

Iowa Bar, later known as 'Caribou City,' was opened in 1870 and is credited with a population of 1500 people during the 1870's.

The town of Herman along the Gray's Lake meadow came into existence about 1875 to serve as a supply center for the gold camps. There are three old buildings, two saloons and an old residence still standing on the old Herman townsite.

The 'Caribou' gold dust was normally very fine. Some called it flour gold of +$21.00 fineness. Many mining men consider that it is the source of the flour gold along Snake River.

Quartz mining developed on the ledges on Caribou Mountain about 1875 and flourished for many years with sporadic activity continuing up to the present time.

The ores found in the Caribou country reached a low ebb by 1900 but placer mining has continued on a small scale up to the present time. (date of writing uncertain) Barzillia Clark reports that the production of gold was reported to exceed 50 million dollars.

Two dredges were operated in Upper McCoy Creek after 1900 but both proved unsuccessful because of the shallow ground and roughhbed rock."

(10)
Some placer mining camps were worked out rather quickly, while others lasted for many seasons. Richness of the mines did not determine how long they lasted: length of the normal mining season (usually the length of the season water was available to operate sluices and other gold recovery equipment) and difficulty of handling the gold-bearing gravel, along with the amount of gravel to be processed, generally had more impact on the duration of a mining camp. Most placer miners preferred to get rich quickly and to finish working their claims as soon as possible. But mining districts which could not be exhausted in a season or two enjoyed greater stability and permanence. Cariboo mountain, with a short annual water season and with deeply buried placers, lasted a long time as a mining center.

Discovered in the summer of 1870, these mines were named for Jesse Fairchilds, generally known as Cariboo Fairchilds because he had worked earlier in the Cariboo mines in British Columbia. While contrasting greatly in richness with the fabulous buried placers characteristic of Cariboo, B. C., some of the deep placers on Cariboo mountain were highly reminiscent of Cariboo Fairchilds' earlier experience. Some of the Cariboo mountain deposits showed enough early promise to set off a modest gold rush from Malad and Corinne—the latter a new anti-Mormon freighters community on the Central Pacific in Utah. Accounts of the excitement in Corinne and of the beginnings of the new mining district (mistakenly identified at first as in Wyoming) appeared in the Daily Utah Reporter, September 8-12. September 8: "Reports reach us of the discovery of very rich gold mines in the district known as Cariboo, in Wyoming. The precious metal is said to be in the form called 'free gold,' and the richest location about seventy miles east of Soda Springs and near the headwaters of Green River. Of course, the reports give it as richer than anything yet struck in the mountains. A party is going from this neighborhood, and as the distance is not great, we shall probably have authentic intelligence before many days." September 10: "At last we have some reliable news from this new Eldorado, and from gentlemen not liable to be mistaken. Messrs. Fisher and Lavey reached Corinne yesterday, direct from the mines. Their party of twelve had located and gone to work but a few days before, when a sudden fire destroyed all their provisions but fifty pounds of flour. Three men were at once sent out, making the distance to Ross' Fork, ninety miles, with no provisions but one sagehen. One of the number returned at once with supplies obtained there, while the two mentioned came on to this city. Their entire company and all they had seen were making from ten to fifteen dollars per day to the man. The area of pay-ground is quite extensive. Quite a number of companies are already on the way there, two of which got lost in the mountains by attempting to find a shorter route, and suffered considerably. The only direct and safe route is to go up the regular Montana road to Ross Fork, from which place a trail leads off a little north of east for ninety miles the center of the district. A large map, posted up at Ross Fork, shows the exact route. Fisher and Lavey rode horseback from the last point here, over a hundred miles, in a day and night, about the quickest time on record in these parts. They have purchase
10,000 pounds of supplies and several hundred picks and shovels, with which they purpose to make good freighting time back to their locations. The supplies were obtained of Mr. Arratt, who worked all of last night to get them shipped, and the scenes around his store this morning remind one powerfully of the old times of 'gold stampedes.' Now that the mines are an established and ascertained fact, whether rich or not, quite a number of Corinnethians are preparing for a start, of whom more anon." September 12: "It is not yet a week since the discovery of the rich gold diggings in Eastern Idaho became known through the towns and settlements along the roads between here and Montana. Thomas Winsett informs us that he was at Malad City when the account reached that place, and in an hour afterward there were parties of from two to ten on their way to the gold fields, and all the way down to Corinne he met people going up to try their fortunes. In addition to the party that left here yesterday, we notice now some more, including many of the business men of the city, who are to start to-morrow. Among these are Harry Creighton, Mr. Burgess, Mr. Short, J. W. Wallace, Geo. Wright, and a number of others. The distance being only a four or five days' journey, and the road a good one, the trip, outside of the nature of the expedition, will be pleasant to the participants. Later accounts all indicate that the district is a basin of great extent and richness. The only practicable route of travel in there is that described in our last issue, namely, the stage road to Ross Fork, 120 miles from Corinne, and thence 90 miles northeast to the district. We are informed by persons long acquainted with that part of the country that these mines are in Idaho, and not in Wyoming as we inadvertently stated on Saturday. This city is the nearest starting point on the railroad, as well as the most convenient supply depot for the new diggings, and all present appearances promise that we are destined to have an immense trade this Fall with the miners of Idaho." As the rail terminus for Montana road, which ran north through Idaho west of Cariboo mountain, Corinne served as supply center for this new placer district as well.

Because of high elevation and lateness of the season, those who joined the Cariboo gold rush in 1870 could not do very much except prospect when they got there. They could go out panning gold to find the best claims. But with acres of gravel to be worked, panning was too slow and difficult a process to use for gold production. Sluice boxes (in which a strong current of water carried placer gravel over slats that trapped and separated out the gold) worked best. But they could be used only when a lot of water could be brought through ditches to the better claims. Some water still was available for operating a sluice box (which did not function as well as it should), and the miners gained confidence that they would have a lively camp the next summer.

Cariboo mountain rises to an elevation of 9803 feet, and most of the mines there were found at high elevation. Few other Idaho camps were anywhere near that high. Heavy winter snow prevented much in the way of mining for half the year, and when the deep snow finally melted, water ran off so that little could be done much of the rest of the time. This kind of situation was typical of mining in the higher country. When spring finally came to Cariboo in May, those who had spent the winter there had a chance to give their sluices a better test. Keenan, Allen, and Davis—the pioneer company who started operating in the spring—recovered $60 in a day and a half. Their return ran high enough to encourage construction of a saw mill to turn out lumber for more sluice boxes. Then hydraulic giants were installed to obtain placer gravel to feed the sluices. Giant streams of water (shot out of nozzles fed by metal pipe leading from ditches at higher elevation) cut away surface gravel and swept the gold bearing placer gravel into sluice boxes. Within a year or two a number of giants were at work in the region, and by the fourth season,
As the years went on, gold recovery at Cariboo proved erratic. A few spots yielded well, but most of the ground turned out to be marginal. One or two claims gave satisfactory results—an ounce a day (about $20) for each miner at work. Most of the others provided from $2 to $5, with the leaner ones of interest mainly to Chinese. Unlike most Idaho districts, miners at Cariboo made no effort to exclude the Chinese. They never seemed to get enough white miners to come to work the ground available, so driving out the Asians seemed pointless. Chinese companies owned claims and operated giants along with everyone else—apparently without discrimination. That way—unlike other camps that kept out Chinese competition during the more productive early years, Cariboo had whites and Chinese at work on adjacent claims most of the time, and did not become strictly an Oriental camp after the seasons of early excitement.

In the early days of placer operations, Cariboo mountain had two mining districts, one on the east side at Iowa bar and the other on the west with Keenan City as its center. Keenan City, with a dozen or so log cabins on McCoy creek, had become the major (and only recognizable) mining center; Iowa City on the other side of the mountain was pretty hard to find, even for the people fortunate enough to go through it. In the Iowa district (named for an Iowa discoverer), William Clemens (a cousin of Mark Twain who mined in various parts of Idaho for more than thirty years) spent many seasons placer mining and promoting the country. He had three hydraulic giants in operation there: the most in the district. Cariboo Fairchilds spent fourteen years in McCoy district not far from Keenan City and had quite a time there: in 1872 he "broke his leg while 'skylarking' with a friend one day," and in 1884 he had a disastrous misadventure with one of Cariboo mountain's numerous bears, an encounter which he unfortunately failed to survive.

With the discovery of lode claims in 1874, Cariboo mountain offered an additional attraction to early miners. Over the next decade, a number of these new lodes were developed to enough depth to prove that thousands of tons of ore were available if anyone could manage to operate a hard rock mine in such a remote and difficult location. Simple arastras (rock crushers made of local materials, with drag stones used to grind up ore in a circular rock lined surface) provided a modest production. But not enough thousands of tons of ore were available in one place to justify a major stamp milling enterprise, although for years such a possibility attracted attention to the district.

Even though the slowly worked placers proved spotty, with occasional rich streak at bedrock, by 1886 production may have amounted to a million dollars or so. Reports of $200,000 in 1879 alone suggest that large a total—or perhaps twice that much if enough of the other seasons provided as much as a hundred thousand dollars. Considering the relatively small number of miners at work most of the time, and the shortage of water high on Cariboo mountain, even a million dollar total is difficult to substantiate. (All kinds of exaggerated reports of mineral wealth came out of most western mining camps, but with enough short seasons with a fair number of giants at work, Cariboo did provide a substantial return to a modest number of miners.) Considering its location remote from other mining districts and distant from sources of supply, Cariboo mountain provided a definite economic stimulus to early development of the upper Snake country. At least one enterprising miner found that he could grow some kind of premium Idaho potatoes next to a snowbank high on Cariboo mountain at a time when few farmers were at work in the valley below. But generally the miners at Cariboo had to depend upon distant sources of supply, and their needs offered an inducement to settlers to develop the surrounding country at a time when not too many other economic attractions were available to encourage settlement of that part of Idaho.