

Florida Mountain Mining Sites,  
Stone Cabin 1  
Silver City Vicinity  
Owyhee County  
Idaho

HAER No. ID-31-G

HAER  
ID  
37-SILCIV  
18-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Columbia Cascades System Support Office  
909 First Avenue  
Seattle, Washington 98104-1060

**HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD**  
**FLORIDA MOUNTAIN MINING SITES, STONE CABIN I**

HAER  
ID  
37-SILC1.1  
1G-

**HAER NO. ID-31-G**

**Location:** Ruins of the structure are located northeast of the Empire Mine on the western slope of Florida Mountain, just below the summit. Florida Mountain is located one mile southwest of Silver City, Owyhee County, Idaho.

**Quad:** USGS DeLamar 7.5'  
UTM Coordinates: Zone 11, 520212 E,  
762968 N

**Date of Construction:** 1860s-1880s; ruins.

**Present Owners:** Kinross DeLamar Mine Company

**Present Use:** To be demolished 1996

**Significance:** The ruins are associated with early methods of vernacular stone construction, and with early mining activity (1860s to 1880s) in southwestern Idaho. It may be associated with either William Knott or William Dewey, two early developers of mining sites on Florida Mountain.

**Report Prepared by:** Madeline Buckendorf, Barbara Perry Bauer, Elizabeth Jacox.

**Date:** June 1995

### Site Layout and Description:

The ruined structure is located on a talus slope on Florida Mountain's north side. It sits on a small ledge dug into the slope, on the east side of a recently constructed road. Loose slabs of native rhyolite stone surround the ruins. Little vegetation is located around the site, except for a small tree and some scrub brush. No nearby water source was discernible in June 1995. The entire area has been greatly disturbed due to bulldozer cuts and road construction. Physical contextual evidence of the structure's ties to other mining sites is missing.

The stone structure is mostly in ruins. Its approximate dimensions are 9' x 10'12" long. The roof is missing and most of the walls have deteriorated or crumbled. The existing wall sections are approximately 2 feet wide. They are constructed of uncut or rough-cut rhyolite chunks, irregularly coursed, mortared together with mud and small rock infill. The corners braced with small boards forming a triangle with walls. Some rotted wood door sills are located at foundation level. The floor consists of packed dirt and rhyolite slabs. An interior chimney is built into the wall on the east facade; it may have been used for small fire. On another site visit of 6/20/1995, some charcoal and burnt rocks were found in chimney site. These artifacts may indicate some type of early, makeshift smelting or assaying.

### Historic Context:

Mining engineer Kinton Stevens, who worked for Trade Dollar mines between 1908 and 1911, left a manuscript and photographs which state that William E. Dewey and Michael Jordan built the cabin for part-time habitation around 1865, to protect a gold outcropping Dewey discovered on Florida Mountain. Stevens later (circa 1955) documented the old stone cabin with photographs. In 1863 William Dewey arrived at Happy Camp, where Michael Jordan was located, at Florida Mountain's base. He invested in several early mining claims with Michael Jordan, and some later claims on the lower gulches surrounding Florida Mountain. By 1877 Dewey and others bought the Black Jack mine on the eastern side of Florida Mountain from William Knott.<sup>1</sup>

Wilma Lewis Statham, the daughter of a miner born in Silver City in 1876, said her father identified this stone cabin as built by William B. Knott. Statham's father also believed that Knott was the "true discoverer" of Florida Mountain gold, which conforms to other indications that Knott was one of the earliest of Florida Mountain prospectors. Owyhee County mineral claim records indicate that Knott was working claims on or near Florida Mountain as early as 1871, including the famous "Black Jack" ledge. Knott continued to work various claims until the 1880s, then eventually disappeared from Silver City records.<sup>2</sup>

Though both accounts contain kernels of truth, there are inconsistencies that make it difficult to determine their complete veracity. Michael Jordan died in 1864, so he could not have helped Dewey build the cabin in 1865. Dewey did not locate (it is not known when he discovered it) the Empire State Claim on its eastern flank until 1880. No extant written records indicated where William Knott lived during his time working Florida Mountain claims. Statham's account states that a second stone cabin [Stone Cabin II] was built by William Dewey and

Michael Donnelly in 1885, but no extant record mentions such an event. Donnelly was an early partner of Dewey's; they both helped establish Silver City in 1865. The 1880 Idaho Avalanche mentions Dewey building a "house for the winter" near his Empire State claim, but no further information is given. Preliminary SAIC archeological results recorded in July 1995 indicated that the second stone structure [Stone Cabin #2] was used for blacksmithing.<sup>3</sup>

The building probably had a variety of uses over the years. Whether William Knott or William Dewey built it, he probably used the built-in vent or chimney for makeshift assaying purposes. The archeologists found indications of charcoal and burnt, cracked rocks in the chimney area. Such findings match primitive assaying procedures.

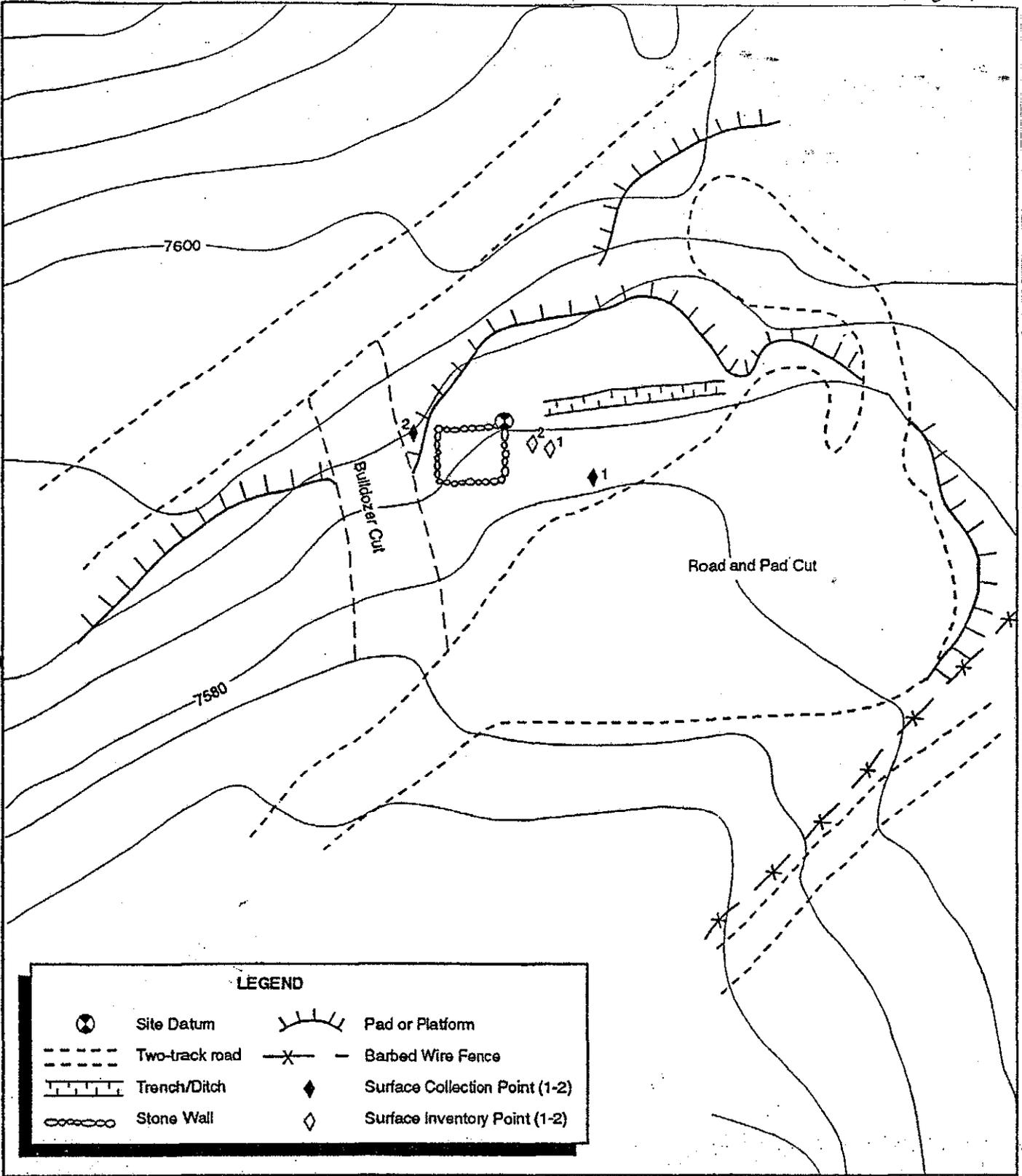
A mining handbook from the 1890's explains that early prospectors needed little to test various ores: "When gold is suspected in quartz, but there is visible to the naked eye more or less, iron, copper, and other base metals, it is well to crush the quartz into coarse fragments. Toast on a shovel or other convenient tool over a hot fire, and finally pulverize in the mortar." The pulverized quartz was passed through cheesecloth, then mixed with mercury. If swished around a pan, the amalgam will reveal gold. Often charcoal was used to make a hotter fire.<sup>4</sup>

Another description of the process was found in the same book. It described the basic outfitting for a prospector: a pan, flask of quicksilver, cheesecloth. The ore was placed on a shovel and held over a brisk fire; it then showed the color of gold. It then was poured into a clay mold. With the use of borax, a tiny ingot was made. Other tools needed were an iron mortar and pestle, scale, 40-mesh sieve, burro furnace and muffle, one cupel mold, scorifiers, tongs, annealing cups, spirit lamp, test tubes, pouring mold, borax and soda, bone ash, granulated lead, nitric acid, hydrochloric acid, sulfonic acid, ammonia, alcohol, and granulated zinc.<sup>5</sup>

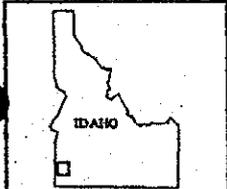
Only further in-depth archeology could help identify other uses of Stone Cabin I. The remaining written and oral records are too scanty to make a definitive historical conclusion.

END NOTES

1. Kinton B. Stevens, "Mining Recollections in the Owyhee Mountains," Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, undated, page 9. A copy of the manuscript without photographs is located at the Owyhee County Museum in Murphy and has been published as "Mining Recollections in the Owyhee Mountains 1908-1911," Owyhee Outpost 22 (1991). See also Byron W. Johnson, "Dewey Remembers the Colonel," Owyhee Outpost (May 1995), page 30;
2. For information on the Black Jack mine, see Deed Index, Owyhee County Clerk, Murphy, Idaho, Book P, page 592. The handwritten entry is difficult to decipher and has been interpreted to refer to the Black Jack. A date of 1871 is consistent with stories later published in the Idaho Avalanche and cited elsewhere in this report. See also pages 421 and 592 for references to Knott: the mines were William Knott Remunerative and Idaho Standard. See also Miscellaneous Records, Book 3, page 33. For an account of Knott building the first stone cabin, see Wilma Lewis Statham to Dan Hutchinson, Bureau of Land Management, August 16, 1989.
3. "Mining Notes," Idaho Avalanche, November 20, 1880, page 3.
4. Bramble, Charles A., The ABC of Mining: A Handbook for Prospectors (Chicago and New York: Rand McNally Co., 1898), page 21.
5. Ibid., pages 17-20.



LEGEND	
	Site Datum
	Two-track road
	Trench/Ditch
	Stone Wall
	Pad or Platform
	Barbed Wire Fence
	Surface Collection Point (1-2)
	Surface Inventory Point (1-2)



# STONE CABIN I

