

Florida Mountain Mining Sites,
Historic Roadway #2
Silver City Vicinity
Owyhee County
Idaho

HAER No. ID-31-B

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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, HISTORIC ROADWAY #2

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Location: Historic Roadway #2 lies east of the Rich Gulch Mine and Mill Site on the western flank of Florida Mountain in Owyhee County, Idaho. It runs eastward across the current road, and up the south side of Jacobs Gulch for approximately 1500 feet. The roadway crosses over the ridge that separates Rich Gulch and Jacobs Gulch, with several switchbacks on the steep, west-facing slope.

Quad: USGS DeLamar Quadrangle, 7.5'
UTM coordinates: Zone 11, 517920 E,
4762000 N

Date of Construction: ca. 1880s

Present Owner: Kinross DeLamar Mine Company

Present Use: To be demolished 1996

Significance: The roadway is associated with early mining activity (1860s to 1880s) in southwestern Idaho and is part of a transportation network throughout the Florida Mountain mining region.

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Historic Context:

Historic road systems of Florida Mountain changed constantly with the development and decline of various claims on its flanks. Little documentation has been found that would definitively pinpoint Historic Roadway #2's origins and construction date.

Owyhee County historical records mention numerous toll roads that crisscrossed the base of the mountain during the early settlement years. An 1877 Idaho Avalanche article describes a road leading three miles from Silver City to the Black Jack mines as "splendid." Castings and supplies for the Elmore Mill came from Winnemucca to Silver City, then over this road to the Black Jack millsite in 1878. Connecting roads were quickly built from Florida Mountain millsites to new, cross-cut tunnels and adits. However, the roads described in these reports probably covered the east face of Florida Mountain, since more activity took place there in the early years.¹

By April of 1882, Owyhee County Commissioners laid out formal road districts. District #1 was described as "commencing at the mouth of Jacobs Gulch and running up gulch to summit of mountain." The road went on to "Sands old arrastra at the headwaters of Sinker Creek's north fork." It followed the "old Lincoln Road" to the divide between Jordan and Sinker Creeks, then followed it to the Reynolds Creek road, and went on southwest to the mouth of Jacob's Gulch. Many of these "county" roads remained toll roads, leased by the commissioners to whomever submitted the lowest bid.²

A 1903 map of the Trade Dollar Consolidated Mining Company properties shows a road running north across Florida Mountain's west side. It then went northwest along Long Gulch, to just below the Pluto and Crown Point mines. Next the road ran through the Cliff and Ida Harley claims. From there it went through the Miller and Walters claims to the Baltic, Humboldt, and Comstock. A circa 1920 surveyor's map shows a road leading from Dewey to DeLamar. Another road branched off the main one, following the north side of Rich Gulch. It ran east, then crossed Jacob's Gulch. There the road branched into two forks: one ran south back towards Rich Gulch and the Guffey claim; the other ran north of Jacob's Gulch to Sullivan and Noble's Shannon and Blain claims, then to the Summit and Eureka claims. The road then branched off into many parts running south across the eastern side of the mountain, including to the Phillips, Sullivan and Belfast mines initially located by John F. Sullivan and Isaac Phillips.³

John F. Sullivan arrived in the Silver City area around 1864. In 1868 he located the Dardanelles placer claim (later called the Shannon) in Jacobs Gulch, on the west side of Florida Mountain. He built a ditch from Blue Gulch to run the Jacobs Gulch placers, which eventually was extended to Rocky Gulch. Blue Gulch, Jacobs Gulch, and Rich Gulch were heavily mined in the 1860s through the 1870s, and were all part of the Carson Mining District. Roads were probably built to the Rich Gulch area during this time. After 1875 most Florida Mountain mining efforts stalled, due to California bank failures. John Sullivan kept on prospecting. In 1877 he located the Black Republican claim on Jacobs Gulch (with Boise lawyer Frank Martin), and the Shamrock (later called the Steuben), which was located near the summit on the mountain's east side. He then located the "Seventy-Six" in 1879 and the "Republic" in 1880. Both were located near the Black Jack mine and Coffee Gulch.⁴

In 1887 John F. Sullivan joined in partnership with Isaac Phillips. Phillips and he claimed the Sullivan and Phillips Lode in 1887. In 1889 John Sullivan located the Blain claim on the west side of Florida Mountain, just above the head of Jacobs Gulch. By 1895 Phillips had sued Sullivan over some business dealings and their partnership ended. Both had incurred large litigation debts during that time, so they sold the Phillips, Sullivan, and Belfast mines. Sullivan alone located the Molly Pitcher on Jacobs Gulch in 1896. He also located the Ben Harrison mine and its millsite in 1900.⁵

In 1900 John Sullivan became partners with Robert Noble, a local sheep rancher and Boise real estate developer. Together they greatly expanded operations the full length of Jacobs Gulch, almost to the summit of Florida Mountain. Their claims included the Harrison and Tonawanda Placer. The portion of the road running past Rich Gulch up to the head of Jacob's gulch may have been built sometime after Noble and Sullivan started their partnership in 1900, and before Sullivan's death in 1912. Robert Noble died in 1915, and his heirs leased the properties to local miners. One of his heirs was his daughter Rozella Nottingham; hence the "Searchlight" and others became known as the "Nottingham" group of mines. These claims were leased by various groups into the late 1920s. In the early 1930s, Noble's heirs lost several of the mines to back taxes, and area mining became stagnant.⁶

New Deal gold mining policies renewed interest in Rich Gulch and Jacobs Gulch, and historical photos show an active mining community with a few small trucks for transportation. Declining mine prices and changing international markets again shut down most Florida Mountain mines during World War II. After World War II a few companies ran small-scale operations at Rich and Jacobs gulches, and probably built new access roads to the mines. These operations never reached the prosperity level of earlier years, and most operations ceased until major mining companies bought most Florida Mountain claims in the 1970s. Roads had reverted to cleared, grassy areas requiring a four-wheel-drive vehicle. As large-scale efforts started again in the 1970s, new roads changed the face of Florida Mountain once more.⁷

END NOTES

1. The Idaho Avalanche (Silver City), 8 December 1877; 30 March 1878; 10 May 1879. See also Owyhee County, Idaho Territory, Commissioner's Minutes (Unindexed and unnumbered), 1871-1890, Owyhee County Courthouse, Murphy, Idaho.
2. Idaho Avalanche, 1 July 1882; 12 May 1883.
3. Undated, unnamed map, circa 1903, Owyhee County Museum, Murphy, Idaho (hereafter OCM); 1903 map the Trade Dollar Collection of Claims (MS 96), Idaho State Archives, Boise (hereafter ISA).
4. Owyhee County Mining Claims Book 6, 345, 548, 608, Owyhee County Courthouse, Murphy, Idaho (hereafter OCC).
5. OCC Mining Claims Book 7, 287, 600; Book 8, 57, 227; Book 11, 7; Owyhee County District Court records (1895), ISA; The Idaho Avalanche, 23 August 1895.
6. See OCC Mining Claim Book 11, 455; Book 13, 290, 294; Book F of Placer Claims, 65; Book 3, 775. See also The Idaho Nugget (Silver City, later Homedale), 1904-1939.
7. Photograph Collections, "Rich Gulch," OCM. For general information on international gold markets and its effect on the Florida Mountain mines, see Idaho's Mineral Industry...The First Hundred Years (Moscow, Idaho: Bureau of Mines and Geology, Bulletin No. 18, 1961); see also Merle Wells, Gold Camps and Silver Cities (Moscow: Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, Bulletin No. 22, reprinted 1983).

