Kathryn Morse. ***The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush***. (Weyerhaeusser Environmental Book Series; foreword by William Cronin.) Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003; 304 pp., 52 ill., 7 maps, notes, bib., ind., cloth, $29.95.

In *The Nature of Gold*, Kathryn Morse uses the Klondike as a case example of the environmental impacts of a placer gold rush. This is not a survey of the Klondike's history; it is limited to the years between 1897 and 1902, and does not include basic names, dates, and incidents of the rush to the Yukon. Instead, Morse divides her essay, by chapter and theme, into discussions of nature and culture.

She opens by examining "the culture of gold" through the "Battle of the Standards" that began after the Civil War and concluded with the election of 1896. This chapter focuses on the nineteenth-century debate over monetary policy and over the values and interests that each standard represented, but is not really integrated into those that follow. While this introduction gives the reader some context, the issues it raises are not explicitly returned to, even in the book's conclusion. Further, by the time of the Klondike rush, the "Battle of the Standards" had been largely decided, and the economy had begun to recover from the Panic of 1893. Morse's reasoning that people rushed to the Klondike in part to uphold their political values or to escape the poverty of that depression thus loses some of its force.

Morse examines a placer gold rush in its earliest and most individualistic phase, a time when she holds that it, and the people involved, were least alienated from nature. This may explain the omission in her ruminations about the culture of gold of any mention of the Klondike's contemporary, the gold strike at Cripple Creek. That Colorado district drew about as many people and produced significantly more gold than the Klondike, but perhaps the Cripple Creek District was not "natural" enough, being too close to Denver and being a hardrock rather than a placer district.

Following her introduction, Morse describes the "nature" and "culture" of the journey to the Klondike, the nature and culture of gold mining, the nature and culture of obtaining and consuming food, and the nature and culture of Seattle, the principal entrepot of the Klondike rush. Her thesis is that the Victorian culture that stormed north into the Yukon rendered all things into commodities and then sought to maximize the perceived economic value of those commodities to the exclusion of all other potential values. Thus (in the first photo caption): "Packtrain operators commodified the energy in animals' bodies, trading on the market value of the animals' ability to travel the short distance from tidewater up the [Chilkoot] trail."

This thesis supports Morse's correct assessment that the Klondike rush did not signify liberation or a return to nature for those involved, contemporary rhetoric notwithstanding. Rather, stampeders dragged their industrial revolution and their culture north with them and fused it into the pre-existing natural and cultural environments of the Klondike. With its emphasis on the extraction of gold to the exclusion of everything else, this fusion produced consequences, mostly bad, for those who joined the rush, for native peoples of the Yukon, and for the region's environment.

Morse capably describes how whole forests were consumed to fire the boilers of the Yukon's steamboats or build miners' cabins and sluices. She recounts how horses and mules were used up and left for dead, and how game animals lost their habitats and were over-hunted. She explains how native peoples of the Yukon saw their subsistence economies disrupted by market forces, and their cultures injured by displacement and disease. Miners' environmental depredations even beset themselves. The soil erosion they created by removing vegetation accelerated summer runoffs, hampering their sluicing operations.

The author is less sure footed when discussing "the culture of gold mining," meaning the motivations of those who rushed north. Focused on the adventures of the tenderfeet, she casts Klondikers either as workers trying to escape the bonds of oppressive and demeaning industrial capitalism by making fortunes of their own or as middle- and upper-class persons seeking renewal of place and virtue through a strenuous return to nature. Of course these people were quickly disillusioned by the hard work of placer mining and the rigors of the Yukon's harsh environment, and concluded that mining was but hard labor and rough chance.

But the Klondike boom marked the end of a fifty-year era that began with the California gold rush. By the time Nellie Cashman arrived in Dawson, Yukon Territory, she had spent decades running stores, restaurants, and boarding houses in places like the Comstock, Tombstone, and Kimberly. Discussed in but two paragraphs—and even then only as working-class miners, not as middle-class merchants and professionals—people like Cashman gave the Klondike rush a corps (and a core) of long experience. By overlooking this cadre, Morse conveys the culture of gold mining less effectively. Nellie Cashman was not escaping her life when she moved to Dawson; she was living it.

Another important issue in this work involves language. Morse uses the word "nature" in two senses in her chapter titles. In one sense she means the composition of a thing, its fundamental qualities; in another sense she means its naturalness or its relation to the natural world. It seems that this equivocation is intended, and it is sometimes clever and thought-provoking, but it also leads the author into some nebulous thinking.

For example, in her chapter on "the nature and culture of Seattle," Morse writes that its boosters' claims that Seattle was "the natural gateway to the northern goldfields" actually

> masked the real connections to nature and labor, and to the nation's industrial economy, that underlay the city's success. . . . [Seattle's economy] was the creation of an industrial, capitalist culture, of an industrial people prone to creating powerful naturalizations. Those naturalizations distanced them from the cultural assumptions and economic connections that defined their relationship to the natural world (170-71).

Morse maintains that "advertising, rather than nature, explained the success" (176) of Seattle over San Francisco, Portland, and Vancouver in the competition for the Yukon's trade. But not everything is a cultural construct. Seattle actually is the closest significant American seaport to Alaska. Other things being equal (e.g., access to railroads), Seattle was and remains the "natural" American gateway to Alaska and the Klondike.

These criticisms aside, Morse has written an interesting and thoughtful book. She writes dispassionately and avoids the recrimination often found in environmental essays on mining. Many of her discoveries about the environmental effects of mining will be familiar to experts—having been covered by previous writers—but they will educate the lay public. And the story she tells through the Klondike's case example is both an important and a sobering one. She raises very real questions about the costs—environmental, cultural, and economic—of the Klondike rush, and by implication, of the entire rush era of North American mineral development.

But Morse concludes her work without considering an essential issue in our debate about mining and the environment: the costs of not mining. She closes by contrasting the Klondike's headlong rush for riches with the thus-far successful efforts of wilderness groups to kill development of a surface gold mine along the Blackfoot River in Montana. She posits that American values are moving away from the nineteenth century's culture of gold, and suggests that we can simply choose to adopt new cultural values that will hold pristine environment in higher esteem than gold. A ticklish problem, that, if we intend to continue to write our book manuscripts and reviews using computers made of petrochemicals, copper, silver, silica, lead—and of gold.

Eric L. Clements
Southeast Missouri State University

Liston E. Leyendecker. ***The Griffith Family and the Founding of Georgetown***. Boulder: The University Press of Colorado, 2001; 106 pp., ill., app., gloss., bib., ind., cloth, $45.00.

Liston Leyendecker tells the fascinating story of the Griffith family and their three and a half year struggle to develop the Griffith Mining District and establish the camp of Georgetown, Colorado. Jefferson and Sidney Griffith, along with their children, were land speculators and pioneer farmers who moved from Kentucky to Indiana, Missouri, and then to Nebraska. In 1858, George, the second eldest son and a veteran of the California gold rush, and his brothers, John and David, decided to participate in the Colorado gold rush. A year later, George discovered gold along South Clear Creek near the future location of Georgetown.

After leaving for the winter, George and his brothers returned with several other members of their family. By May 1861, the Griffiths had used their expertise gained in other frontier areas to establish a small but functioning mining camp. They built a toll road from Central City with their own money to bring in supplies, and surveyed the district's boundaries. With this done, they were able to preempt a large number of claims, operate several mines, and bring one of the first stamp mills to the district. Leyendecker thinks it was striking how the Griffiths attempted to set up a small family empire along South Clear Creek.

However, one of the Griffiths' most important accomplishments was to formulate up-to-date laws that stated how their community and mining district should function. The Griffiths used their expertise in mining, farming, surveying, and law (at least two of the sons were lawyers) to write and revise the early laws of the Griffith Mining District. Samuel Cushman, an early historian of Colorado, believed that these laws were probably the most complete set of laws adopted in any district in the territory. According to Leyendecker, the major legacy of the Griffith family may have been their very complete set of mining laws for the Griffith district.

Leyendecker has done us a great service by painstakingly transcribing the handwritten laws of the Griffith Mining District from the two original manuscripts held at the Clear Creek County, Colorado, archives. This transcription takes up about half of this small publication, and, along with the background history of the family, makes this work truly important. The only criticism is that this book is only available in hardcover and is relatively expensive for its size.

The Griffiths' family legacy lives on in Georgetown's name (after George F. Griffith), in the early mining laws they established, and in this new book.

Mark Vendl
LaGrange Park, Illinois

Robert A. Trennert. ***Riding the High Wire: Aerial Mine Tramways in the West***. Boulder: The University Press of Colorado, 2001; 140 pp., ill., notes, gloss., bib., ind., paper, $19.95.

Robert Trennert's latest book fills a large gap in the history of mining engineering. It not only explains the science behind aerial mine tram-