Book Reviews

Erich Obermayr and Robert W. McQueen. ***Historical Archaeology in the Cortez Mining District: Under the Nevada Giant.*** Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2016; 184 pp., 61 b&w illus., 3 maps, notes, bib., ind., cloth, $39.95. ISBN: 9781943859221

The Nevada Giant is a large quartzite formation in north-central Nevada, located between Reno and Salt Lake City. The presence of quartzite signified potential mineral wealth to hardrock miners during the nineteenth century, and the Nevada Giant happened to contain a remarkable deposit of lode gold and silver. The miners, their families, and the communities that these ores spawned are the focus of Erich Obermayr and Robert McQueen's new book, *Historical Archaeology of the Cortez Mining District: Under the Nevada Giant*.

Historical Archaeology of the Cortez Mining District is situated at the intersection of mining history and historical archaeology, and is a welcome addition to the field. Using artifacts to tell the landscape's story, the authors present a skilled interpretation of what life in the mining camps of Cortez might have been like at the turn of the twentieth century. The authors utilize the more than one hundred and seventy thousand artifacts uncovered within the Cortez district during an archaeological excavation that took place from 2008 to 2009—such as Chinese stoneware jars, suspender clasps, and pocket watches—to tell a story of the people who lived, worked, and died in the area.

This archaeological analysis is coupled with a detailed overview of the region's geology, prehistoric settlements, and land use, and a chronological narrative of its mineral extraction. However, in segments of the book the authors romanticize both the history of the area and the interpretation of material culture by personifying artifacts and features, such as the prospector's camp. This is a trivial criticism, but it does make the book read, at times, more like popular nonfiction than an important scholarly contribution. And I am not certain this is a bad thing, because *Historical Archaeology of the Cortez Mining District* is certainly a pleasure to read.

Although, the majority of artifacts detailed in the book are domestic in nature, owing to the historical archaeology framework of the book, Obermayr and McQueen provide a terrific overview of the broader technological system employed at Cortez—including the charcoaling and lime-making process—pointing to McQueen's training in industrial archaeology. Readers familiar with Donald Hardesty's section on mining technology in *Historical Archaeology of the American West* will find this book equally informative.

The authors provide an accessible and concise description of the various beneficiation processes employed in the Cortez district, ranging from cyanide leaching and flotation to the more obscure Reese River and Russel processes used to liberate value from waste. However, because the authors' primary focus is on material culture, rather than on the broader landscape features associated with mining and milling, there are some notable omissions from the book's analysis, such as an examination of mine tailings and mine waste on the landscape.

Historical Archaeology of the Cortez Mining District is nicely illustrated, with sixty-three black-and-white figures, including an assortment of maps, mining plans, landscape photographs, and a breadth of artifacts. The artifacts depicted

in these illustrations reflect the abundance of well-preserved material culture in the Cortez Mining District, and the authors' interpretation of these artifacts illuminates many of the social questions surrounding a mining camp, such as class, gender, and ethnicity.

With nearly half of its pages consisting of images, however, the book is both easily digestible, and, unfortunately, remarkably short. For example, the concluding chapter is just over one page in length. More detail regarding the modern Cortez Hills Expansion Project—the mining operation that spurred the archaeological investigation—and how it might affect the landscape and the remaining cultural resources would have been a nice addition. This could have provided readers unfamiliar with mining archaeology understanding of both the volatile nature of mining landscapes and the importance of archaeological investigations to uncover the stories embedded in these artifacts before they are lost. Nevertheless, *Historical Archaeology of the Cortez Mining District* should resonate with a wide audience and influence those budding archaeologists who hope to uncover another remarkable story from an historic mining site.

John Baeten
Michigan Technological University

Clark C. Spence. ***A History of Gold Dredging in Idaho.*** Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016; 341 pp., 24 b&w photos, notes, bib. essay, ind., cloth, $57. ISBN: 9781607324744

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, Idaho produced over nine million ounces of gold in more than a century of mining. Probably two-thirds of it was from placers, and much of that was from dredging. Auriferous gravels and black sands from surface to bedrock can be found to some degree in many of Idaho's streambeds and alluvial valleys. But finding placer deposits rich enough to work profitably—or even productively—was an elusive quest for most miners after the first flush years of the rush to the Clearwater and Boise Basin goldfields in the 1860s. This book takes up the story twenty years later, as a new technology entered the mining landscape to dredge through and under the remains left by surface miners with their picks, pans, sluices and rockers.

Among active mining historians today, no one is better positioned to trace Idaho's long and complex dredging history than Clark Spence. He knows his native state intimately but avoids personalizing what is essentially an economic and industrial history of Idaho dredging, from its beginnings in the experimental suction dredges on the Snake River to the last muddy scrapings of a dragline dredge on a tributary of the Clearwater nearly a century later. This is a work of careful, painstaking scholarship, the sort of deep dive into primary and secondary sources that characterizes all of his previous works.

Machines get more attention than people in this book, a fact attributable in part to the author's no-nonsense focus on technology and economics. The paucity of company archives and personal correspondence doubtless left him with few opportunities to evaluate the characters who ran the machines. Other than some smart managers and a few scoundrels who made newspaper headlines, personalities get only cursory treatment. The narrative describes individual and company operations, analyzes their financial successes and failures, discusses their technical problems, and summarizes their production results—or lack thereof. Descriptive chapters cover all sections of the state, but the lack of any maps reduces the book's value as a guide to Idaho's remote dredging fields.

In contrasting the efforts of many little operations with a few big ones, the author confirms the truism that money matters when it comes to field testing, land acquisition, applied technology, management expertise, operational stability, and ultimate productivity. In the teens and twenties the Guggenheim-backed Yukon Gold Compa-