

From start to finish it shows what men will go through when catapulted by greed and the lure of wealth. As was said about miners, they would go through heaven to reach a gold strike in hell. The author tells the story so well that the reader will pick favorites and choose villains (the De Beers corporation fits the latter title nicely) before too long and wait to see how their favorites all come out and if the "bad guys" get their just rewards.

This is one history book that is truly hard to put down. Krajick is a fine writer with the skill of making his subjects come alive and building excitement and tension as the story unfolds. His sense of pace in telling the story is outstanding. The author also has a fine touch when describing the environment and discussing what happened to it as the miners advanced. The reader should not overlook the page references either; they contain fascinating information that expands on the text.

This reviewer might quibble a little about including conversations that the author could not possibly have heard or have been privy to from some written source. Some photographs would have been a welcome addition also, to help visualize the people and the land. It is possible that Krajick may have "gilded the lily" on a few stories but never enough to detract from his pursuit of discovering what happened, why, and to whom.

One may wonder what will happen to the native peoples and their land now that diamonds have been found, but that is the story of another book. *Barren Lands* is recommended for fascinating hours of reading.

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Holly Skinner. *Eye of the Blackbird: A Story of Gold in the American West* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 2001.) 298 pp., notes, bib., index, paperback, \$17.50.

One opens this book with great anticipation because it is billed as a prospector's story of her own experience interwoven with an account of the Western gold rushes. As a rule, prospectors are a taciturn breed, disinclined to discuss what they do and, above all, where they go (or to write about it in diaries or memoirs). Regrettably, author Holly Skinner proves to be no exception to this rule. Specifics on her own prospecting are disposed of by page thirteen and not returned to until almost the end of the book. "Gold is the excuse," she candidly admits, but it appears that her actual prospecting has been rather brief.

The bulk of this volume is concerned with vignettes of the mining rushes—and not only excitements over gold. The Comstock and Tombstone (both silver rushes) are duly recounted, as are the familiar sagas of the Earps, along with Mark Twain and the Spanish conquest. All this is interspersed with the author's wilderness experiences living alone in a deserted sheep camp in the farther reaches of Wyoming's South Pass and taking pride in her survival skills. Evidently she is unaware that Panamint Annie and Fannie Quigley, among other women prospectors before her, have taken similar pleasure in the wilderness and their ability to survive there.

The author's vignettes are well told, technical matters are clearly explained, and her descriptive powers are sometimes keen, as when she writes of the coyote's "banshee language" or a man with "Lincoln's cavernous features." Reflecting on the darkness in her isolated situation, she observes: "We are creatures of light. Light is safety. Light is comfort. When you learn to walk in darkness alone and unafraid, you have learned to be not quite human." Readers new to the mining world may find this book an enjoyable introduction; mining historians are unlikely to see much in these pages that is new to them.

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