

Cliff Mine  
Centennial Ridge  
Medicine Bow National Forest  
Centennial vicinity  
Albany County  
Wyoming

HAER No. WY-18

HAER  
WYO  
1-CENT.V,  
2-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
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Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Cliff Mine

HAER No. WY-18

Location: On the west slope of Centennial Ridge in Medicine Bow National Forest, approximately 2.8 miles (in a direct line) southwest of Centennial, Albany County, Wyoming

UTM: 13.400790E.4569930N

Quad: Centennial, Wyoming

Date of Construction: c. 1926

Present Owner: United States Forest Service, Medicine Bow National Forest

Present Use: Abandoned; attracts recreational visitors

Significance: The Cliff Mine appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. The site is associated with events that have made significant contributions to the broad patterns of our history, i.e., early 20th century mining for precious metals in Wyoming and the western United States. It retains significant physical features such as the millsite and standing log bunkhouse, in addition to foundations, building sites, adits and ore dumps which define the original mining layout and level of mining technology. This mining operation had to adapt to and utilize materials and techniques suited to a remote, high country environment. It retains excellent integrity of setting due to its isolated location. It also retains good physical integrity and, therefore, conveys feeling and association with its period of historical significance. All significant cultural dumping areas have been thoroughly potted and disturbed. Soil deposition is poor on the remainder of the site and, therefore, significant buried materials and deposits are not expected.

Historian: Robert G. Rosenberg  
Historical Consultant  
55 Service Road East  
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82007

## I. HISTORY

A. F. Lindsley et. al. located this 40 acre (3,000 feet x 600 feet) placer claim on May 29, 1911 (Albany County Courthouse, Book D, p. 393). The Cliff Gold Mining Company was formed to develop this claim and ten others adjacent to the property. A drift was sunk into the base of the sheer cliff on the west slope of Centennial Ridge for a distance of 775 feet. A crosscut was run north-northwest at the 700-foot mark for a distance of 325 feet, which cut at least four small veins or fracture zones. The first carried about \$12 to the ton in gold. A short drift was run eastward on vein No. 3 about 140 feet from the main drift. "Strong traces" of platinum were found in this area but could not be relocated by the U. S. Geological Survey in 1924. In 1926, the Cliff Gold Mining Company installed a 50-ton or a 100-ton amalgamation mill on the property (Bartlett 1926:20 states that it was a 100-ton mill; Knight 1942:13 states that it was a 50-ton mill). By 1930, the Cliff Mine had a 90-foot vertical shaft, an 800-foot adit, and 500 feet of drifts and was still being developed by the Cliff Gold Mining Company (Knight 1942:13). It is not known when active work ceased on the property, but there is no record of actual production from the Cliff Mine and, judging from the physical remains, it was probably only worked intermittently, if at all, after the 1930s. Remnants of the amalgamation mill still exist onsite in a partially collapsed log mill.

### Historical Significance of the Centennial Ridge Mining District

Louis Coughlin, a former ranger and amateur historian for the Medicine Bow National Forest, tersely summed up the history of mining on the forest by stating, "Thus far, the mining industry on the Medicine Bow has just been a nuisance" (Coughlin 1936:3). Certainly from an economic point of view, the mines in the Centennial Ridge District were far from commercial successes. With the possible exception of the Centennial Mine, which produced from \$50,000 to \$90,000 in gold during its first year of operation, none of the mines in the district had any significant or sustained production. Placed in a regional context, the Centennial Ridge District is a mere footnote in the mining history of the western United States, which included the great Colorado and Montana gold and silver camps such as Central City, Leadville, Cripple Creek, and Virginia City. The so-called mining rushes experienced on Centennial Ridge in 1876, 1902, and in 1923-1924 were largely based "... on wishful thinking, irresponsible distortion of the facts by the media, and promotional schemes" (Thybonny, Rosenberg and Rosenberg 1982:247). It is perhaps more difficult to gauge the historical significance of a mining district that failed.

Nevertheless, the search for precious metals and base metals opened the region to intensive exploitation and development. It aided in the creation of a system of roads and was the chief impetus for the building of the Laramie, Hahns Peak, and Pacific Railroad. Mining camps were established, support settlements such as Centennial grew up on the nearby plains, out-of-state investors injected new capital into the local economy, and jobs were created. Many people who were initially drawn to the area by mining later settled there permanently, engaging in other pursuits such as ranching and business.

The short-lived platinum boom, while proving unsuccessful in the long run, was a unique facet of the mining history of Wyoming. As a rare metal, it was "the first known discovery of the world of rich platinum in vein form." Previously, all commercial platinum sources had been obtained from placer operations (Bartlett 1924:9). It is also interesting from the standpoint that non-miners such as students and college professors became interested in the platinum rush and staked their own claims in the area.

Another historical sidelight seldom mentioned in mining histories is that large numbers of unemployed citizens came to the abandoned mining districts during the Great Depression years, in an attempt to earn a living by panning and mining precious metals. This is a phenomenon that was unique to this period of time and has not been repeated. Thus, many of the old lode mines and placer claims on Centennial Ridge and along the Middle Fork of the Little Laramie River were reworked during this time.

Although the Centennial Mining District was not successful from a commercial standpoint, the district retains fine integrity of setting because of its isolated location and primitive road system. Many of the component mines still retain significant architectural features, such as log shafthouses, bunkhouses, offices, power houses, millsites, and adits, shafts, prospect pits and ore dumps. Therefore, the Centennial Mining District retains a higher degree of feeling and association with its colorful mining past than other districts which were much more economically successful. The Queen Mine retains one of the most interesting and best preserved shafthouses and headframes in the Medicine Bow National Forest. The Platinum City Mine still retains a large platinum processing mill with a flotation machine intact. These are rare resources that represent early 20th century mining technology.

## II. SITE DESCRIPTION

This historic gold and platinum mine and millsite is located at the western base of a prominent cliff on the west slope of Centennial Ridge

and to the east of the Middle Fork of the Little Laramie River. The site is at an elevation of 8,960 feet and measures approximately 66 meters east-west by 156 meters north-south.

Feature A (see site map on page 9) is a concrete foundation or pad (10.7 feet north-south by 6.6 feet east-west) with two associated concrete piers. One pier was located 11 feet north of the foundation and measures 5 feet north-south by 2.1 feet east-west and had four mounting bolts. The other pier was located just off the southeast corner of the foundation and measured 5 feet north-south by 3 feet east-west. The mineral plat (dated 1937) depicts a powerhouse at this location.

Feature B is a roofless log mill structure (see HAER No. WY-18-B), which has been pushed or has collapsed downslope a short distance from its original location on the large ore dump.

Feature C is a collapsed adit whose entry way is lined with logs

Feature D is a collapsed woodframe outhouse measuring 8 feet square and fastened with round nails.

Feature E is a small trash dump measuring 15 feet east-west by 12 feet north-south and consisting of metal powder kegs, charred logs and sheet metal fragments. The mineral plat depicts a blacksmith shop at this approximate location.

Feature F is a building site measuring approximately 25 feet north-south by 12 feet east-west with a concrete pier at the south end. Its function is unknown.

Feature G is a building site measuring approximately 15 feet north-south by 13 feet east-west with a concrete pier on the south end. The mineral plat of the property depicts an assay office at this location.

Feature H consists of two log cabins built face to face and connected by a 7-foot wide breezeway (see HAER No. WY-18-A).

Feature I is a building site measuring 25 feet north-south by 20 feet east-west with an addition on the northwest corner measuring 21 feet north-south by 12 feet east-west. There was an associated scatter of artifacts. The mineral plat depicts the feature as a "house."

Feature J is a building site measuring 27 feet north-south by 20 feet east-west which appears, by the remains of charred logs, to have been burned, a burned metal sink, three sets of bedsprings, and melted

bottle glass. This cabin appears to have been burned down within the last five years and was probably used for informal camping/recreational purposes long after mining operations had ceased. The mineral plat depicts this location as an office.

Feature K consists of two trash dumps which have been potted. The larger concentration had cans, modern beer cans, aluminum soda cans, and clear glass.

Artifacts consisted of window glass sherds, clear, amber, cobalt, bright green, and a small amount of smethyst-colored bottle glass sherds, round and wire nails, porcelain electrical insulators, a sink and bedsprings, tin cans (evaporated milk, opentop, and coffee), aluminum and metal soda and beer cans, and metal powder kegs. Diagnostic artifacts appear to be of 20th century origin, and post-World War II trash, such as metal beer cans, are intermixed with older artifacts.

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CLIFF MINE (48AB 511)

- a. CONCRETE FOUNDATION & 2 CONCRETE PIERS
- b. LOG MILL STRUCTURE
- c. COLLAPSED ADIT LINED WITH LOGS
- d. COLLAPSED OUTHOUSE
- e. TRASH DUMP
- f. BUILDING SITE W/ CONCRETE PIER
- g. BUILDING SITE
- h. 2 CONNECTED LOG CABINS
- i. BUILDING SITE
- j. BUILDING SITE (BURNED)
- k. TRASH DUMPS (OLDER DUMP ON NORTH)

 TAILING PILES

0 25' 50'


