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The Stampede to Thunder Mountain: The New Idaho Gold Camp

Not since Klondike has there been such a stampede as that now underway to Thunder Mountain. Despite the warning that it is no poor man's country, at least one hundred "sooners" are going in daily on snowshoes, packing their outfits on their backs or dragging them on toboggan-sleds. Further, all the towns adjacent to the gold field--such as Boise, Ketchum, Council, Red Rock, Lewiston, Weiser and Salmon--are jammed with an army of cooler-headed gold-seekers, waiting the opening of the trails. And each train swells these towns to overflowing, with more men hastening eagerly from the north, south, east and west.

Boom times are on and stampede prices are up. Railroad transportation for seventy-five thousand people has been already bespoken; and as regards the finish, the rush will outrival Klondike; for every man who starts will get there, and there will be more men on the ground than were on the Yukon five years ago.

Thunder Mountain is one of the blank spaces on the map which will no longer be blank. The Thunder Mountain country is as large as the states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut combined, and has long been known as a very rich, though largely unprospected, mining country. Thunder Mountain, in particular, is in the southern portion of Idaho County, Idaho, and is situated not far south of Vinegar Hill of the maps. To the south lie the Sawtooth Mountains, which extend from the Seven Devils region, along the Snake, to the main Salmon River. It is a rough and jagged country, of volcanic formation, with a general elevation of from 7,000 to 9,000 feet, and promises to become one of the world's greatest treasure houses.

The Caswell brothers are responsible for this rush. In 1804, Ben and Dan Caswell made their way into Thunder Mountain and located several claims. Notwithstanding it was entirely a quartz formation, they panned the decomposed porphyry, which had become air-slacked, and washed out ^{s260} in gold. They were joined by another brother, Luman Caswell, and by W. T. Ritchey and Mr. Huntley, and each year for seven years they returned to the spot. Their efforts were crude; water from the melting snow permitted but two weeks' worth; yet in the fourteen weeks all told they secured \$20,358.00 in gold, as shown by the receipts of the United States Assay Office at Boise.

But Thunder Mountain was a quartz proposition, absurd to work as a placer and too big to work without capital. In 1901 Colonel W. H. Dewey, the well-known Idaho millionaire mining and railroad man, bonded the claims for \$100,000 and incorporated the Thunder Mountain Gold Mining and Milling Company with a capital stock of \$5,000,000, Pittsburg, Pa., capitalists being chiefly interested. Then began the proper development of the deposit. Last fall a ten-stamp mill was freighted in on mule-back and set up. Tunnels and cross-cuts were run and the astonishing value of the deposit discovered. Not only as the mountain itself determined to be a huge ore body of free milling gold running from seven dollars to the ton upward, but rich chutes were found, as wide as seven feet, carrying \$2,000 to the ton and penetrating the

mountain an unascertainable distance. Recent reports go to show that the value of these chutes has been underestimated.

Thus Thunder Mountain becomes another Treadwell. It is not a fissure vein, but simply a mountain of ore, a first-class quarry scheme, capable of busying two hundred stamps for an interminable period. But, whereas Treadwell is low-grade ore, Thunder Mountain is not only much higher but very much higher grade ore. In addition (and this is the secret of the rush) prospects go to show that the contiguous ground is likewise rich, and that the possibilities are large for a second Cripple Creek, while the very sanguine are not at all backward in proclaiming a second Transvaal. Incidentally, the real Cripple Creek men have achieved a great faith in Thunder Mountain, and every third man is either on the way or talking of going.

And so, because of the Caswells, miners from all the Americas are gathering up their outfits and stampeding to Idaho. The "sooners" are taking the chances of snow and famine in order that they may miss no chances on the spot. Since the ground is covered with many feet of snow, perforce they stake the snow. Later on, when the snow melts, they will find other sets of stakes beneath. Then there will be trouble. But a gold rush without trouble is like a pneumatic tire without punctures.

It never happens.

There are two main reasons for the magnitude of this stampede. Thunder Mountain is the only excitement of the year, and money is easy. Which is to say that the chronic stampeders and adventurers have no where else to go and work off their unrest, and that the good times of the last several years have put the money in their pockets wherewith they may go. That there are all the possibilities for a new Eldorado goes without saying. Idaho has already added \$250,000,000 to the world's gold supply, while thousand of square miles of mineral territory remain practically unexplored. As Thunder Mountain is to-day likened to Cripple Creek, who knows but in some future day new bonanzas may be likened to Thunder Mountain? Anyway, 75,000 men are hitting the high places to find out.