**Mining in the West Notes for French Henry and Cyphers Mine**

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Feel free to email or message on Twitter any questions you may have over the summer, or any insights into the camps and roles that you play.

Mining was an explosive frontier that really changed everything in the West. Up until the California gold rush, the enterprises that brought white Americans and foreigners to the West involved relatively few people: fur trapping, exploring, trading. Mining changes all of that: miners came to mine and relied on ancillary industries to support them, such as freighting, railroads, farming, ranching, and logging. Mining was an urban frontier.

Gold exists in two forms: Placer, or the gold that has been loosened from the earth and surrounding rock, and the gold still in the rock (hard rock, or lode). Placer mining takes place along creeks and usually involves water. Hard rock or lode mining involves drilling into the earth.

The gold pan was simply a tool of discovery, and quickly ditched for larger scale methods of working placer lodes. But it symbolizes mining exploration.

Mining is highly destructive, involving the stripping of the hillsides and the moving of huge volumes of soil and rock. It leaves behind massive slag heaps on which little can grow. To extract higher amounts of gold, mercury was used as it has an affinity for gold; gold sticks to it but nothing else will. Later, diluted cyanide was used for the same purpose starting around the 1880s.

Because of the capital-intensive nature of mining, larger companies and corporations came to quickly dominate most mining areas. There was a constant need for capital on the mining frontier, so stock was sold in the east and Europe and the search for investors was never ending.

The mining frontier was very diverse and cosmopolitan; in some cases foreign-born workers were in the majority, and sometimes the large majority.

Mining also produced some of the most significant labor union movements in the U.S.. This was fueled by several factors. Miners were paid high wages for the time, and sought to organize to protect those wages (the first unions came on the Comstock Lode when owners threatened to use Chinese labor). Some of the unions, such as the Western Federation of Miners, tended toward more radical solutions in part because the quick transformation of miners from expectant capitalists to permanent wage workers mirrored Marxian prophesies of capitalistic development.

The mining on Baldy and in the Cimarroncito district were small and isolated by comparison with other mining areas. On the whole, they were poor produces but could be profitable when either gold was high in price, or labor was cheap. In the Baldy mining area, the use of Latino labor during the down times (such as the 1880s and after 1900) was common and somewhat unique. In most mining areas, peoples of color were kept from mining (the dual labor system of the West: one for whites, one for everyone else).