

H-Net Reviews

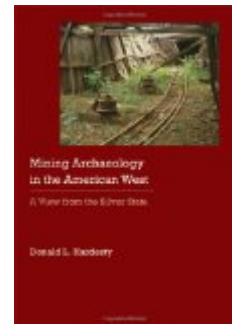
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Donald L. Hardesty. *Mining Archaeology in the American West: A View from the Silver State*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and the Society for Historical Archaeology, 2010. xvii + 220 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-2440-7.

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Chambers on Hardesty

Donald L. Hardesty's wide-ranging archaeological history of Nevada's mining frontier investigates the past arrangement, uniqueness, and progression of mining communities and mining occupations by examining the linkages between material vestiges of technical systems, environments and social patterns. Hardesty begins this work stating "Mining and miners left an enduring legacy in this history and landscape of the American West" (p. xiii). *Mining Archaeology in the American West* centers on Nevada to present a "microcosm" of nineteenth-century western mining. Hardesty visits the remains of archaeological buildings and their technological artifacts, and mines through technical and scientific journals and circulars from the U.S. Bureau of Mines and papers of the U.S. Geological Survey to produce a picture of mining community ethnicities, cultures, and technologies. The introductory chapter describes the foundation of the theoretical position Hardesty embraces to analyze Nevada's mining frontier. To that end, Hardesty successfully highlights several native groups, who mined salt and turquoise while living in the region prior to the arrival of the Europeans in the 1500s. Hardesty then quickly moves the reader through three-and-a-half centuries of European and American exploration and settlement as miners transferred their technologies from Europe to New Spain or from the United States to western territories, before the discovery of the Comstock Lode in 1859.

Chapter 1 is devoted to relating to archaeologists

and historians alike how to use various documents to explore Nevada's mining frontier. Hardesty combines the archaeological remains with written and pictorial documents to recreate a number of mining landscapes. The archaeological records that Hardesty examines reveal hoisting sheds, trash dumps, and the remains of miner's residences. Written documents include personal diaries and letters which contain a number of personal reminiscences of Simeon Wenban, a mine operator, and the adventures of John Ross Brown, who traveled through Arizona and Sonora in the Apache Country. One significant set of documentary images Hardesty scrutinizes are Townsite Surveys from mining camps established in Esmeralda, Aurora, and Mineral City. By using these plats, Hardesty successfully paints a picture of a town's layout and the location of various residences and mining-related buildings. Other government documents which are an important source are federal and state census records. Hardesty extracts from the census the composition of mining populations' ethnicities, numbers in a family household, lifestyles, social organization, and miners' occupations.

Chapter 2 offers a view into how mining was done in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and analyzes the patterns of mining technology. Hardesty carefully documents in detail the technological systems that miners and engineers constructed to prospect, extract, process, and transport ores, metals, and people. In this section, Hardesty moves beyond recently published

historical accounts as well as textbooks on mining, and conjoins the archaeological record with technical and scientific journals published by the United States Bureau of Mines, and numerous professional papers of the United States Geological Survey to detail the technologies associated with mining. In addition, after reading this chapter, historians of mining and mining landscapes will be challenged to look beyond the written archive to the archaeological remains of mining architecture in order to understand how tools, systems, skills, and knowledge help to introduce the social coordination of work.

In chapter 3, Hardesty combines archaeological records with additional documents to further recast Nevada's mining infrastructure and the social archaeology of mining. By utilizing archaeological and archival remains discussed in the previous two chapters, Hardesty successfully amalgamates the remains of buildings, plat surveys, census records, and trash heaps to recast a mining landscape and the cultures of miners. Hardesty recovers gender, ethnicity, and class in a number of what he terms "settlement-systems," and explain how individuals and groups created networks of power, and learned to negotiate "access to resources" (p. 109). He describes four mining settlements and their associated structures, such as a wood mill, a blacksmith shop, a machine shop, an ore house, and various types of houses including stone, adobe, and wood-frame buildings and dugouts, to highlight the social and technological nature of each local mining settlement. One of the strengths of this chapter is Hardesty's ability to use archaeological and documentary evidence to show the presence of Anglo-European, Anglo-American, and Chinese households at the Shoshone Wells settlement between 1870 and 1880. To examine these settlements, Hardesty not only

relies on the archaeological record to recover the size and shape of each community, but again he conjoins the archival sources and oral testimonies together with archaeological sources to describe each settlement "neighborhood" where mining societies organized themselves around households and production activities.

Finally, chapter 4 condenses the earlier chapters to consider how miners constructed settlements that resembled "networks of islands" and often were forced to adjust to the cyclical nature of mining. In essence miners learned how to discover expansion opportunities, locate new markets, and trim costs, which Hardesty suggests is another theoretical framework to further comprehend Nevada's mining past. Hardesty invokes the principals of Immanuel Wallerstein's "modern world system" theory to link miners and their mining communities to the growing presence of transportation, communication, and economic networks of power (p. 171). In conclusion, Hardesty provides a perspective on a mining frontier that successfully unites archaeological remains and archival documents to provide an alternative historical account which ties together a number of theoretical themes. I cannot find much to criticize in *Mining Archaeology in the American West*. Overall, this volume not only presents a thoughtful and scholarly discussion of the development of one of the nation's most vibrant mining regions, but also a model for digging deeper into archaeological remains and archival documents to recreate a history of mining cultural landscapes where technology converged with ethnic environments. Overall, *Mining Archaeology in the American West* is excellent for the professional or amateur archaeologist and historian interested in how to use a diverse set of documents to understand the development of a mining frontier.

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