Reading log 6

Leah Wheele

Mica Jorgenson analyzes Indigenous people’s history during the gold rush at Barkerville in her article, “Into That Country to Work”. In her writing she argues that there was little to no mention of the Indigenous people in and around that area. This is because at the time it was documented that disease had wiped all Indigenous people out in BC, which was not the case.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jorgenson focuses on providing evidence to prove Indigenous people were located near Barkerville, what they provided to the community and Indigenous women involved in the sex trade. In the book “Primary Documents: BC Gold Rushes by Thomas Thorner and Thor Frohn-Nielson there is a passage by a man named Charles Major who wrote a letter *“News From British Columbia”* referring to what life was like during the gold rush in1860.[[2]](#footnote-2) Together, these two passages give insight to the Indigenous people and white men during the time of the Barkerville gold rush in British Columbia.

Because there aren’t many documents from the Gold Rush time period stating which Indigenous people were where, Jorgenson picks certain information out of articles that can give us an educated guess. The different environmental aspects of Barkerville brought many groups in different seasons. For instance, the St’at’imc camped at Barkerville to pick huckleberries, and the Sentinel (a newspaper) noted, “the Indians along [Bowron River] are having a joyful time catching and drying salmon ... [T]he run for good, well-conditioned fish is enormous”[[3]](#footnote-3) These statements prove that there were many groups of Indigenous people coming to Barkerville as it supplied them with community and lots of food.

As mentioned above the Indigenous people used their knowledge of the land to hunt, fish, and gather. They then took it one step further and began to sell to the growing population of Barkerville. Not only did they sell their food, but some ended up being “packers” (mailmen) in the winter to early spring period when the high snow couldn’t be cleared off the roads.[[4]](#footnote-4) The gold rush created jobs and businesses for the Indigenous groups who would migrate to Barkerville in the seasons that was most prosperous to them.

Another job that Jorgenson spends time analysing is the Indigenous woman being sex trade workers in Barkerville. Jorgenson picks through a lot of evidence, and a lot of it was an assumption. For example, a case in which in a woman named Lucy Bones’ suggests a man came into her cabin and before she offered herself up, it is recorded that she asked for a payment first and she was later found dead in her cabin.[[5]](#footnote-5) This story strongly suggests Lucy was involved in the sex trade, but the accuracy of the story remains to be in question, as well with many of the examples used in this article. Some could be taken out of context or because Jorgenson was looking for evidence of a sex trade, she drew a more bias conclusion.

Mining was a hard life, and many expected it to be much easier. For instance, Charles major writes in the Primary Documents: "BC Gold Rushes", “I have lived in a tent since I came up the river and I have to lie on the ground before the fire and write”[[6]](#footnote-6) From this passage, you can tell it was not what Charles expected. I would assume that all found the gold rush to be difficult for every culture that traveled to Canada for it. The Indigenous in particular (after the major decrease in population from disease) found a way to work with the gold rush and lived around it, created jobs for it. It is a shame that Jorgenson had to search so hard and draw conclusions from little information to the best guess she possibly could. Do the Indigenous groups have shared some oral stories about the Barkerville gold rush?

1. Mica Jorgenson, *“’Into That Country Work’, Aboriginal Economic Activities*

*During the Barkerville Gold Rush,”* BC Studies, 185 (Spring, 2015): 109-136 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Primary Documents: *"BC Gold Rushes*" from Thomas Thorner and Thor Frohn-Nielsen (Eds.), A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Pre-Confederation Canadian History (3rd Edition), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009: 232-253. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mica Jorgenson, “*’Into That Country Work’, Aboriginal Economic Activities*

*During the Barkerville Gold Rush,”* 123 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Ibid* 127-128 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibid 133-134* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Primary Documents: *"BC Gold Rushes*" 239 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)