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JULY 2011

Daytrip Destination: **SILVER CITY**

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4 Summer Drinks
Seasonal Recipes
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PLEASE SET YOUR CLOCKS BACK 100 YEARS!

Welcome to
**SILVER
CITY**

by Mary Defayette

Visiting Silver City is truly a walk in the past. It was established in 1863. Rich mineral strikes were discovered and people flocked from all over the country to stake their claim. There were around 75 businesses and 400 buildings at its peak in the 1870's. Now, there are about 60 buildings left. Hiking around town there are pieces of history strewn about the land. Chunks of machinery like dead soldiers litter the hillside. A creek runs through the town and fresh water trickles down from the mountain. A cemetery at the edge of town reveals sorrows mothers and fathers for the numerous graves of babies and children. Unknown graves tend to outnumber the known.

The town has only a handful of businesses now. The commercial buildings of the past are now private residents. Many of the owners are direct descendents of the pioneers that built the town. Rarely does a building go up for sale. From the Chinese Laundry to the Meat Market, locals have transformed the businesses to summer getaways. There are lots of renovations going on and the pride of ownership of a slice of Idaho history shows in the locals.

The huge white schoolhouse on the hill is the only building to be fully restored. Thanks to a grant of \$400,000.00 the school is the jewel of the town. To date the school is empty but there are efforts to recreate the interior with period furniture and school supplies.

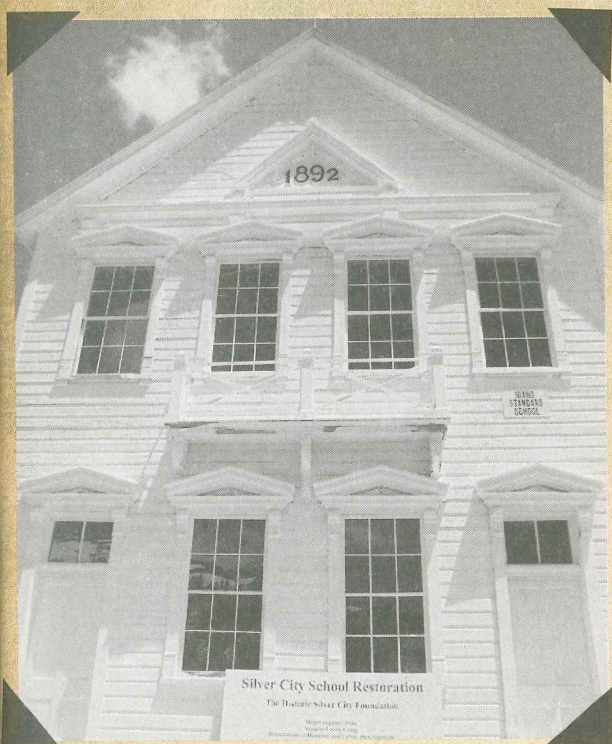
The only church is the Catholic Church, Our Lady of Tears. It's open for mass one Sunday per month in June-September. If you happen by when it's closed just peek in the peephole in the door. You'll be amazed at how beautiful it is.

2011 Mass Schedule:

July 17th 12:00, August 7th 12:00, September 4th 1:00 PM



Photo courtesy of Dave McCall



Left (circa 2011): the remodeled school house & above, the Idaho Hotel.

THE IDAHO HOTEL

One of the few remaining businesses is the historic and some say, haunted, Idaho Hotel. Roger and Jerri Neilson are the current owners. They purchased the Hotel from their long time friend Ed Jaegels, in 2000. Ed owned the hotel from 1972 – 2000. The hotel had been closed from 1942 to 1972.

The Idaho Hotel was originally established in Ruby City in 1863, just a few miles from Silver City. When Ruby City lost the county seat to Silver City many buildings were moved to the new county seat.

Walking in the front door of the hotel is a large room filled with period antiques. Part lobby, part museum. There are old slot machines, assaying displays and pictures of the past on the walls. Moving on, through the creek doors is the family style dining room that seats around 70 and features a long, ornate bar. There are no bar stools, instead, is the traditional foot rail. In the 1800's men would 'belly up to the bar' and stand to have a drink.



Left (circa 2011)-Silver City graveyard



There is talk of the haunted room #25, known for screaming Alice, although Jerri says she's more of a 'moaning' Alice. I am not sure that that gives me much comfort.

Roger and Jerri have been restoring the hotel one room at a time over the past decade. There are 13 rooms, mostly with one queen bed. Our room had a beautiful antique carved bed, matching dresser and a stunning view of the Owyhee Mountains.

Overnight guests have access to more of the hotel and are welcome to check out the other rooms and the magnificent parlor. There is a piano in the parlor that is one of only five in the world and three in the US. Can you imagine the work it took to get a piano up that mountain? According to Jerri, the parlor was a waiting room for women meeting a guest or waiting for

the stagecoach. Respectable women would not linger on the streets in those days. Also, there was a considerable red light district with women offering 'false affection.'

Although the hotel is well over 100 years old, the kitchen is sparkling clean and efficient. Jerri gave me a few of her secrets to a perfect pie- crust, mountain air being foremost. The food is wonderful! For dinner, we enjoyed salmon with lime sauce and wild rice, followed by Jerri's renowned peach pie. Most weekends there are dozens of pies to choose from and a good size menu with breakfast, lunch and dinner available.

Don't expect an in room coffee maker or turndown service. The Neilsons have strived to keep the place as authentic as possible. There are shared bathrooms and three showers. The beds are comfy and rooms and bathrooms tidy and clean. There is a second level porch out front, perfect for a morning cup of coffee or a cold beer in the afternoon and a great view of folks coming and going about town.

*At&t is the only cell phone coverage available.

AROUND TOWN

Wild flowers abound, daffodils are in full bloom in June and iris peak in July. Even in mid June there was still snow on the ground and the 'creek' was raging.

We stopped into Pat's What Not Shop and I purchased a beautiful pair of black onyx earrings. She also carries souvenirs, local mineral samples, history books and postcards.

There is free camping within a few yards of town. If you have a four-wheeler, this is a paradise of hundreds of miles of trails. Even on foot, there is great hiking and the views are stunning.

If you are camping bring everything you'll need, as there are few supplies available. You can of course get three squares from the Hotel.

HISTORY

In the late 1800's there were upwards of 2500 people living in Silver City, rivaling Boise in size and services. Just beyond the center of town are the remains of China Town, here shanties were abundant but now little remains. The Chinese were important to the town and provided much manual labor including clearing the road of snow all winter long and delivering water to residents via buckets on yokes. The Chinese laundry is one of the larger buildings still standing and sits right across the street from the Idaho Hotel.

Silver City was the Owyhee County seat from 1866 to 1934. Some of the largest stage lines in the West operated in the area, and Silver City had the first telegraph and the first daily newspaper in the territory in 1874. (Before Idaho was a state) Telephones were in use here by 1880, and the town was "electrified" in the 1890's. Hundreds of mines pock-mark and honeycomb the mountains; one had upwards of seventy miles of tunnels laboriously hand-dug through it. Between 1863 and 1865, more than two hundred and fifty mines were in operation and hundreds more were developed thereafter. Through the seventy-odd years of mining, more than twelve ore-processing mills gleaned rich rewards in tons of gold and silver. Large stacks of gold and silver ingots were photographed for posterity. At the very least, sixty million dollars worth of precious metals were taken from the area. At today's prices, that amount would be even more impressive.

LOCAL OUTFITTERS

Guided trails rides are available through Sinker Creek Outfitters. A lifelong local and authentic cowboy, complete with a handlebar moustache, Paul Nettleton took us around town and had a story for every turn. If you take a trail ride with Paul be sure and ask about Dead Man's alley. The hotel also has a book for sale that Paul's mom, Helen Nettleton wrote, *Historic Silver City, The story of the Owyhees*.

Nested high in the Owyhee Mountains of Southwest Idaho, Sinker Creek Outfitters conducts guided trail rides of the historic area surrounding Silver City.

Their signature ride offers a two-day event through the backcountry, with overnight accommodations in the historic mining town of Silver City. They also offer 1, 2 and 4 hours tours. You are invited to enjoy their relaxed atmosphere and share their love of the land. They strive to provide all guests with a strong sense of their Western heritage and a greater appreciation of the rugged and beautiful Owyhees and the pioneers who settled here. Take a ride back into history with them.

08-863-7960 208-834-2237

email : sinkercreekoutfitters@historicsilvercityidaho.com

FACTS OF INTEREST

- 1899 the Silver City mining district was the nation's second ranking silver producing area, surpassed only by The Comstock lode of Nevada.
- From 1863 to 1875 it was estimated that Silver City mines produced over \$30,000,000.00
- In 1890 the population of Silver City was 2,021 and Owyhee mineral production was for the year was \$651,000. Gold, and silver at \$1.00 an ounce was \$325,000.
- In its heyday Silver City had six general stores, two hardware stores, a tin shop, two meat markets, two hotels, four restaurants, eight saloons, a bakery, a shoe shop, a foundry, a photograph gallery, a brewery, a soda bottling works, two livery stables, a feed store, three drug stores, a jeweler, three blacksmiths a furniture store and undertaking parlor, two lumber yards, a tailor shop, three barber shops, a newspaper, four lawyers and two doctors and a miners' Union hospital.
- Owyhee County was organized December 31, 1863, out of all territory south of the Snake River and west to the Rocky Mountains. In 1864 Oneida County and in 1879 Cassia County were cut off of Owyhee County. Since the reappointment act of the 1966 Legislature, Owyhee County is included in District 13 with Canyon County and no longer represented by officials living entirely within the confines of the county.

Sources: *Historic Silver City, The story of the Owyhees* by Mildretta Adams and www.historicsilvercityidaho.com

