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Reading Log #6

Mica Jorgenson, Thomas Thorner, and Thor Frohn-Nielsen on the Gold Rush

Full of false hopes and riches, the gold rush was a significant period in British Columbia’s history. Thomas Thorner, Thor Frohn-Nielsen, and Mica Jorgenson give us insight to the harsh realities that unfolded before prospectors’ eyes, the social aspect that the rush had brought to British Columbia, as well as the diverse groups of people who held significant roles during the gold frenzy.

Because of rigid topography, and trying terrains, British Columbia was very difficult to navigate, and in some cases, fatal; however, many thought that there were promising riches on the other side to make up for it.[[1]](#footnote-1) The preceding successful gold rush in California gave men assurance of striking gold in British Columbia, however, these were false pretenses as gold was much more difficult to find and extract in British Columbia.[[2]](#footnote-2) C. Gardiner and Charles Major experienced the realities of the gold rush themselves and they both advised, through their writing, for men to stay at home and not follow after the craze of gold mining in the Fraser River.[[3]](#footnote-3) Thorner and Frohn-Nielsen go on to say that “British Columbia indeed offered too few rewards for too much effort”, which captures the very essence of the gold rush.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Throughout Canadian history, Europeans were the leading settlers of the land, but as the gold rush broke out, people from different cultures, careers, and race found themselves in Victoria to become involved in this new “profitable” country.[[5]](#footnote-5) Chinese, African-American, and Indigenous peoples were active in the gold rush in various ways such as directly mining, or taking on jobs in the settlements and Victoria.[[6]](#footnote-6) This intermixing of people created the advancement in development of the nation.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Jorgenson’s article addresses the issue of Indigenous peoples being historically known to not have a significant role in the gold rush, which by reading this article, we can understand that this is a myth.[[8]](#footnote-8) The region in which Barkerville, the largest mining settlement in British Columbia, is located, is Dakelh territory, who’s people actively participated in the gold rush.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Dakelh, St’at’imc, Tcilhqot’in, Haida, and the Coastal Salish, travelled to Barkerville during the summer months to take advantage of the seasonal berry picking and gold mining activities; which included selling salmon, laundry services, horse packing, hunting, letter carrying, mining, and some of the indigenous women were involved in prostitution.[[10]](#footnote-10) Because of the Indigenous peoples knowledge of the land and watersheds, the gold rush was more efficient because of their participation.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Through the first accounts in Thorner and Frohn-Nielsen’s book, and Jorgenson’s article, the gold rush was a time in history that enticed extreme hardships and disappointment for many, yet greatly impacted the colonization of what we now know as British Columbia. These documents also give light to the economic roles of Indigenous peoples and people of other races in the gold rush; a topic that has been neglected in historical documents.

Thomas Thorner and Thor Frohn-Nielsen. “A Great Humbug,” in *A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Pre-Confederation Canadian History.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009),

Mica Jorgenson.”’Into that Country to Work’: Aboriginal Economic Activities during Barkerville’s Gold Rush.” *BC Studies,* no. 185 (Spring 2015):

1. Thomas Thorner and Thor Frohn-Nielsen. “A Great Humbug,” in *A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Pre-Confederation Canadian History.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ibid.* 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid.,* 237, 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibid.,* 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Ibid.,* 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Mica Jorgenson.”’Into that Country to Work’: Aboriginal Economic Activities during Barkerville’s Gold Rush.” *BC Studies,* no. 185 (Spring 2015): 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Ibid*., 109, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid.,* 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ibid.,* 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)