MINERAL DEPOSITS IN THE SOUTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAINS OF CANADA

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INTRODUCTION

Placer gold was discovered on Wild Horse River in 1863, and on Bull River in the same year or shortly after. The only other stream in the Rocky Mountains known to contain placer gold is Maus Creek, a short distance south of Wild Horse River. The total production of placer gold is not known because records were not kept in the earliest days, and the most accurate statement that may be made is that more than one million and possibly several million dollars worth of gold was produced.

The earliest prospecting for lode was in the vicinity of the placer diggings, and a good deal of exploratory work was done prior to 1900. No source of the placers has been found, inasmuch as no vein containing important quantities of gold is known. Most of the deposits are of copper, lead, and zinc minerals, with associated small amounts of gold and silver.

Prospectors in search of lode were active in the years of the early railroad building, starting in 1883, and principally in the general area between Windermere and Golden. The metal chiefly sought was silver, in the early recognized absence of gold ore, and because of the common association of metals many deposits of lead and zinc were investigated, in the hope of discovering silver ore high enough in grade to be worked. In this second period of activity discoveries were made chiefly in the Purcell Mountains, but some were also made in the Rockies, and many prospectors must have worked east of the Rocky Mountain Trench.

The Monarch lode in Mount Stephen was discovered in 1884 when float was found on the location line of the railway. The Kicking Horse lode was discovered at a somewhat later date, and did not receive much attention until 1925. Development of the Monarch was rapid, and shipments of ore were made from it to Vancouver in 1888. A comparatively late discovery was that on Hawk Creek in 1929. In 1912 lead-zinc ore was discovered in Alberta at the head of Oldman River, and in 1951 silver-lead mineralization was discovered near Windermere.

G. M. Dawson’s report of 1885 mentions “lead and copper ores, containing silver” between the Ottertail River and Field, copper about 5 miles north of Castle Mountain, copper on Copper Mountain on the south side of the Bow River, lead on the east side of Mount Ball, and copper on the Cross River.

Production has come from the Monarch and Kicking Horse mines, and in recent years from the Estella and Kootenay King. Shipments of a few tons of ore have been made from two or three prospects in past years.

It has been the practice to look upon mineralization in the Rocky Mountains as a rarity, and to consider it to be in a somewhat different category from mineralization in the Purcell Mountains. The important ore deposits at Field have been referred to as related genetically to the Ice River Complex, that being the nearest known body of igneous rock, in spite of the fact that the deposits are separated from it by 128 miles. This attitude has cast doubts on the possibility of finding additional important ore deposits in the Rockies as a whole, whereas evidence of mineralization actually is widespread, and deposits are known even farther from any known igneous rock than Field is from the Ice River Complex. The structures in the western Rockies are not greatly different from those west of the Trench. There is no definite information on the age of mineralization, but deposits on the west side of the Trench are more likely post-