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EARLY BOOM TOWN, "CLIFF CITY"

High up on the back side of the "Mine Hill" located on the north side of Cliff Creek canyon near its beginning, lies the remains of the early town site of **Cliff City**. This was one of the early boom towns that played a significant role in the beginnings of Mackay's mining history. It shared the distinction of being one of very few settlements in this area of the valley in the late 1800's, a number of years before the village of Mackay would come into existence. Cliff and other small mining communities of this area were the result of early copper ore discoveries, the first in the Alder Creek drainage in 1879. Later finds in this same general area would lead to a mining boom and the sudden emergence, by 1884, of the mining camps of Alder City, Houston, Carbonate, and later that same year, **Cliff City**. Initially these camps sometimes consisted of no more than a few tents or crude shelters until more substantial buildings could be erected.

As the year progressed and new "strikes" were made, it became evident that only two of these boom towns would prosper and survive. Though early in 1884 Alder City would get a post office and a few business buildings, the town would soon evaporate, as did Carbonate, giving way to the more popular and more strategically located Houston. Its location along the river and at the foot of a canyon leading up to ore discoveries in the Cliff Creek drainage proved a winning combination. **Cliff** was assured a promising future when outside interests with investment capital bonded the mine property in Cliff Creek and selected the site for a smelter. The smelter, a two stack, 20 ton facility powered by steam, was constructed about four miles up the canyon from Houston. The boilers would be fired with charcoal produced nearby. According to accounts noted in a history of the early Anderson family, the charcoal was made in holes, dug in the ground. These pits would be filled with wood, covered over with evergreen boughs and a layer of mud. A vent hole would be left in the center and bottom for a draft, then set fire to. When the fire was well established the vent holes would be blocked off and the smoldering wood was converted to charcoal.

As construction of the smelter proceeded, so did expansion of the town which was located adjacent the nearby smelter in a small side canyon, called "The Saddle", near the first "diggings". Early references indicate that by the time smelting operations commenced in late 1884, Cliff boasted a store, about 20 cabins, 2 or 3 saloons, and a saw mill that had been erected below the town. Optimism ran high, and in the years to follow the population of the small town grew to 200-300 miners and family members, though it never did get a post office.

But utilization of the smelter was an on again off again operation in the years following its initial start-up. Though there were many lapses in the area's mining production, most shut down periods were due to technological problems with the smelting process which used slaked lime from the surrounding hills. Early records show 1891 may have been the last year of any appreciable smelting operations. But new ore discoveries and investment on White Knob's southwest face, on the hillside above what is now Mackay, would sustain the life of the little town, at least for a time. **Cliff City** persisted through the up's and down's of early mining activity and by the early 1900's was still enough of a town to attract a few miners and their families who were, by then, employed in the extensive workings of the White Knob Mines. This included families like the Andersons, Grays, and others. But being about three miles from the active mines above Mackay and with no school for the children, a number of mining families opted to relocate a little closer to the "diggings", many to White Knob, the new little town on the hill. Some did remain however, and there were enough transient area newcomers, utilizing the abandoned quarters, to keep it on the map. As late as 1912

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the Rukivina family was living in Cliff and that year welcomed the birth of a daughter, Mattie. Mattie(Rukivina) Whitney, present resident of Mackay, may be the only, if not the oldest, surviving person born in the little mining community.

By 1915, Cliff had pretty much become a ghost town, structures dismantled or moved around the mountain to where the mining activity was greatest, the smelter scrapped and moved away. What remains of the town site and smelter today belies the activity and prominence that the small mining community enjoyed in the late 1800's. If you know where to look, there are the foundations of some of the early structures and remnants of two lime kilns in the creek bottom that supplied the smelter furnaces. It is hoped that the Cliff City site can be included in state and national registers of historic places and identified with interpretive signs for interested visitors to the area.