

is unfortunate, but perhaps this can be ascribed to a justifiable concern for the security of these dwindling remnants of the San Juan Bonanza.

This volume certainly is not a comprehensive history of mining in the San Juans. Printed on pleasingly thick ten-by-seven-inch stock, it is more like a pocket-sized coffee table book, and as such a very pleasant diversion.

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Patricia Roppel. *Striking it Rich!: Gold Mining in Southern Southeast Alaska*. Greenwich, CT: Coachlamp Productions, 2005; 286 pp., b&w ill., maps, bib., ind., ref., paper, \$24.95.

For years whenever I needed details on some facet of mining in Southeast Alaska, I would take one of Patricia Roppel's books down from my shelf and, more often than not, quickly find what I needed. *Striking it Rich!* expands her earlier work—especially *Fortunes from the Earth*, a study of base and industrial metal mines—by addressing gold mines in the southern part of Alaska's rainforest coast. Unfortunately, *Striking it Rich!* is an uneven study: While the descriptions of the various districts and individual mines are often exhaustive and illuminating, the treatment of mining and milling techniques is sometimes confusing and misleading.

If one needs a quick and useful introduction to the mines around Hollis or Hyder, this study is the place to go. If the complex sequence of occupations at the Sea Level mines on Thorne Arm is in question, there is no better place to start than with *Striking it Rich!* In short, Roppel makes the history of the Alaskan mining districts tributary to Ketchikan abundantly available to the researcher and the general public.

As the gold rushes moved north in the 1860s, placer miners worked areas on either side of the undefined border between Alaska and British Columbia. The great rushes to the Yukon and

Alaska at the turn of the last century also brought people with dreams of gold into Southeast Alaska, where the hunt for lode gold properties continued for nearly fifty years, until World War II. These strenuous efforts met with varying degrees of success. Roppel's narratives are liberally salted with phrases like "no new gold was found," "the mine lay idle," and "the option was dropped." Some efforts did produce gold, pay wages, and reward investors. Many did not. In that light, Roppel's study better illustrates the nature of gold mining prior to 1945 than many of the more spectacular successes elsewhere.

The discussion of gold mining technology has a number of problems that taint the larger work, however. For example, amalgamation does not "mean to separate the mercury from the gold (58)." The recovery of the gold from the amalgam is only part of a larger process. Blake crushers and Chilean mills are not generally viewed as interchangeable tools (60). The first is more suited to coarse crushing, while the second is best applied to fine grinding. The confusion surrounding tools and techniques suggested by these examples unfairly detracts from the larger study.

Striking it Rich! is a useful companion piece to *Fortunes from the Earth*. Jointly, they allow a close look at mining in one corner of Alaska. Studying less spectacular, work-a-day mining districts, in Alaska and elsewhere, provides a useful entre to a parallel part of the industry often overshadowed by the large industrial mining complexes that emerged after 1900. Small tonnage mills, perched over uncertain deposits and financed by a small number of investors dreaming of riches, were common features of the mining landscape until quite recently. Roppel takes the reader into that world.

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