Preliminary Overview

Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project

Malheur National Forest

Southern Oregon University
Laboratory of Anthropology

July 16-23, 2018

Figure 1. Fresh and eager to start: our crew on the first day!

Preamble

The discovery of gold in 1862 brought miners and entrepreneurs from around the world to the upper John Day River in the southern Blue Mountains. As the decades passed new and more intensive mining technologies were introduced in order to extract the dwindling gold deposits. The last extensive commercial placer mining enterprises were large dredges which operated on several stretches of the river as late as the 1950s. Today on the Malheur National Forest, primarily on the upper drainages of the Middle Fork John Day River, extensive remnants of this complex mining legacy can be found. These include ditches, holding ponds, tailings, waste rock piles, trails, roads, shafts, adits, test pits, penstock (water pipe), stamp mills, cabins, tent platforms, dumps and mining equipment. Making sense of this complex mining legacy has been both a challenge and an opportunity for the Heritage Program, who have been busy sorting out the overlapping evidence from various time periods and technological processes represented in the archaeological record.

Chinese Migrant Gold Miners

We do not know when the first Chinese miners arrived, but it was very likely soon after the discovery of gold in the early 1860s. By 1867 Grant County records document the sale of placer gold claims to Chinese owned and operated mining companies. Federal mining reports show that in 1870 82% of the placer gold claims in Grant County were owned by Chinese mining companies: "…Sixty-four placer claims in Grant County, eleven of which are worked by white men with paid labor, and the remainder by Chinese owners." This figure is supported by the 1870 census which puts the Grant County population at

2251, of which 940 (42%) were Chinese. Of the 1241 miners documented in the census, 69% were Chinese. These figures were similar in the early 1880s but by 1890 the total Chinese population in Grant County had dropped to 326, only 6% of the total population of 5080.

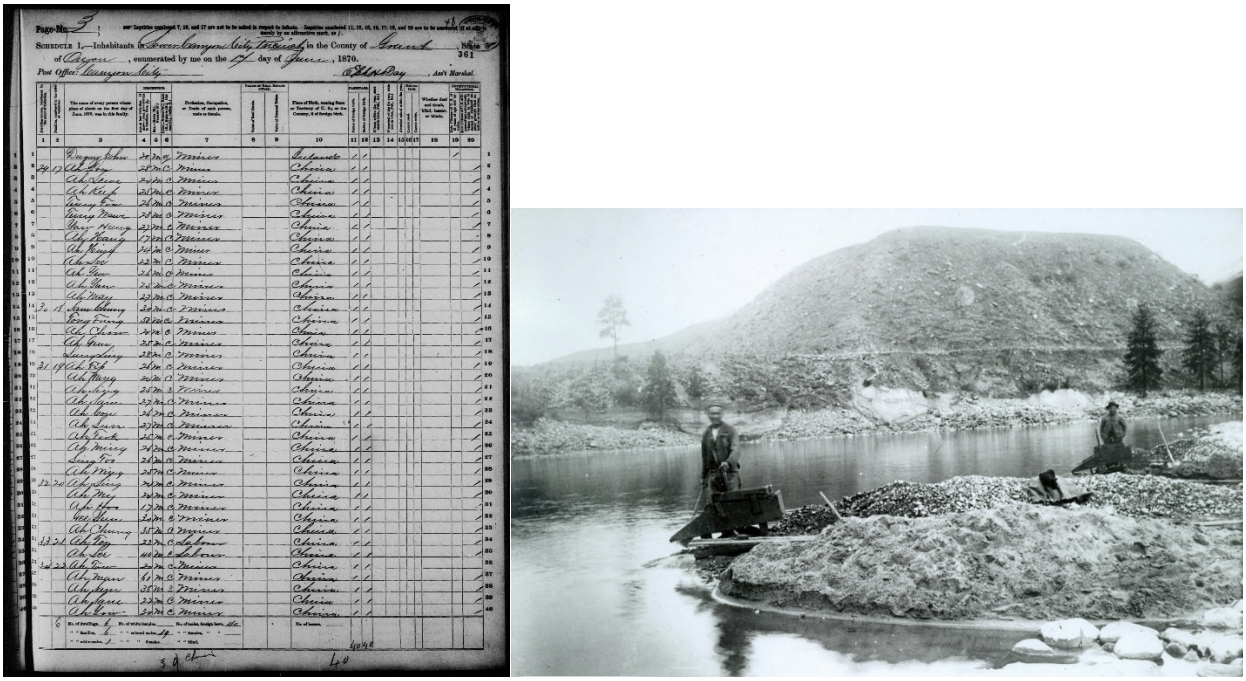

Figure 2. Sheet from 1870 census (left), Chinese placer miners along the Snake River (right).

Although some Chinese miners in the Blue Mountains worked for non-Chinese mining companies, most appear to have been part of Chinese run mining companies referred to in contemporary legal documents as corporations or co-partnerships. These companies may have been similar to *kongsi* business partnerships long used by Chinese mining companies operating in Southeast Asia. In *kongsi* partnerships individuals were not paid a wage but earned a share of the total profits based on the level of their contribution to the enterprise. Chinese merchants, doctors, cooks and others arrived with the miners to provide for, and profit from, the growing community.

Figure 3. Linear tailings piles (at right) generated by Chinese immigrant miners using ground sluicing techniques near North Bend, Washington around 1890 (City of Vancouver Archives Item: CVA 1376-375.24).

The Kam Wah Chung

Business partners Long On and Ing "Doc" Hay purchased the existing Kam Wah Chung mercantile building in the John Day Chinatown in the mid-1880s. Their business prospered due to Long On's business savvy and Doc Hay's skill and reputation as an herbalist and physician. As the gold deposits were played out in the 1890s most Chinese immigrants left for the larger Chinatowns where there were more economic opportunities and strength in numbers to resist rampant racism and Exclusion-era discrimination. Long On and Doc Hay chose to stay in John Day and were successful in adapting their business to serve the non-Chinese residents of the area. They lived out their lives here and are buried in the cemetery overlooking the town. Their business, the Kam Wah Chung, is a treasure trove of artifacts and documents relating to the Chinese diaspora in Oregon. It is a National Historic Landmark and managed by the State of Oregon as a State Heritage Site. Mining is the reason the John Day Chinatown and the Kam Wah Chung were created but most of the mining sites around the towns of John Day and Canyon City have been destroyed by the expansion of the towns and their associated industries.

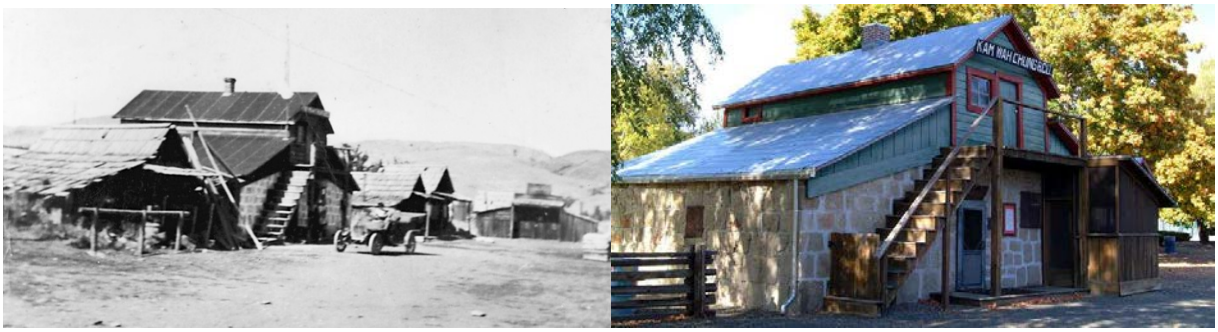

Figure 4. The Kam Wah Chung building in the early 20th century and today.

Figure 5. A view inside the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site museum.

The Oregon Chinese Mining Diaspora Partnership

In 2016 the Southern Oregon University Laboratory of Anthropology (SOULA), the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site, the Malheur National Forest, and the Grant County Historical Museum entered into a formal partnership to promote the study and public interpretation of the history of immigrant Chinese gold miners in Oregon. To date, we have started an online group of historians, archaeologists, other academics and the interested public to exchange ideas and expertise. We have also given presentations in a variety of academic and public forums, with more in the works. In 2017 SOULA archaeologists conducted limited test excavation at a suspected Chinese miners' habitation site on the Malheur National Forest (06040302388- Happy Camp 2). The results of the test excavation confirmed the Chinese occupation of the cabin and demonstrated the good potential for intact buried archaeological deposits for these types of sites.

Figure 6. Tailings at the Loy Fat and Company placer mine (left) and Chinese brown-glazed stoneware liquor bottle found in the mine tailings.

Oregon Chinese Diaspora Project

Buoyed by the success of the 2017 test excavations, SOULA and the Malheur National Forest have embarked on a multi-year site testing project to gather additional baseline information about the condition and nature of immigrant Chinese mining sites in the southern Blue Mountains. Chelsea Rose from SOULA and Don Hann from the Malheur National Forest are co-directing the project. Over the extended week of July 16-23, 2018 nineteen volunteers donated 660 hours assisting Forest Service and SOULA archaeologists on the first phase of the project. We conducted site clearing, surface artifact identification, metal detector survey, feature mapping, and test excavation work at four sites with known or suspected association with immigrant Chinese placer miners. The results from this work are summarized below by site.

06040302388- Happy Camp 2

This site consists of the remains of a single structure located on a sloping ridge near the head of two large placer cuts and associated head races and lateral ditch. The mining features are documented separately as site 06040301206- the Happy Camp Placer Mine. No organic remains of the structure were identified on the site surface but the outline of a rectangular structure is visible as shallow linear depressions which likely once held sill logs from a cabin. When first identified the site was in a dense

pine and larch forest with thick ground cover. A small scatter of metal cans, miscellaneous metal fragments, a cast iron pan fragment, a shovel head, bottle glass and ceramics were all that were visible on the site surface. The ceramics included one sherd each of Chinese brown-glazed stoneware (CBGS) and a Winter Green cup rim. In 2017 SOULA archaeologists placed a single 1x1 meter test unit within, and a second just outside, the linear depressions which outline the feature. The test unit outside the feature produced limited material but the unit within the feature produced over 200 CBGS fragments representing a minimum of four liquor bottles. Artifacts date to around the turn of the 20th century.

Figure 7. Setting up for test excavation at Happy Camp 2.

In 2018 we placed three additional 1x1 meter test units within the footprint of the feature in an effort to better understand the function and layout of the structure. We recovered numerous additional artifacts of Chinese origin including CBGS, Winter Green, and Four Seasons ceramics fragments and opium container fragments. Overall the collection of artifacts indicate a short term occupation of the structure in the very early 20th century making this one of the latest Chinese immigrant mining habitations located so far. This corresponds well with a 1901 Federal mining report that notes there were still a few Chinese miners working the “old placers of the Happy Camp mining district.”

Figure 8. Four Season Flower and Winter Green Chinese porcelain bowl fragments from Happy Camp 1 and 2.

06040300322- Happy Camp 3

This site consists of the remains of one relatively substantial structure and likely included 2-3 additional ephemeral structures which did not leave an identifiable footprint (their presumed presence is based on the artifact scatter). The site is located near the outlet of the tail races from several large placer cuts. The mining features are documented separately as site 06040301206- the Happy Camp Placer Mine. The main structure was originally documented in the 1980s when two courses of logs were still visible and several artifacts of Chinese origin were described. Significant impacts from looting were noted at that time.

Figure 9. Metal detector survey around the dry stacked stone feature that forms one wall of the main structure at Happy Camp 3.

At one wall of the main structure is a large pile of stones that appears to be the remains of a dry stacked stone fireplace or similar feature. Several large slabs of flat basalt are incorporated into the feature. This is the largest of the dry stacked stone features we have found at any of the Chinese sites in the Malheur National Forest to date. Although the site as a whole has been heavily damaged by looting the stacked stone feature appears to be untouched.

The 2018 fieldwork included clearing the main structure area and the stacked stone feature of brush and small trees. We conducted a metal detector survey to pinpoint subsurface concentrations of metal and completed a surface survey to identify and map diagnostic artifacts. We numbered and removed stones that had clearly collapsed in front of the stone feature and began removing forest litter and soil from between two large basalt slabs that were set upright in the feature. We encountered metal, ceramic and bone fragments while clearing the feature and decided to place a formal 1x1 test excavation unit in this location.

Figure 10. Test excavations at stacked rock feature, center photo shows a medium sized mammal mandible (likely sheep).

Preliminary analysis on the faunal material recovered indicates that chicken and medium mammals were present, along with eggshell. Samples from within the hearth feature were taken, and will undergo botanical analysis in order to identify any seeds or plant remains that might be present.

Figure 11. Burnt earth and charcoal were found in back half of test unit, and the front was a different soil type.

Figure 12. Hundreds of surface artifacts were documented and mapped in order to better understand the surface expressions of the sites, and to assess the levels of disturbance by looting and other activities on the site.

06040301333- Ah Yee

The Ah Yee site is located a few miles away from the Happy Camp sites and is associated with another large placer mining complex (site 06040301837). It is situated at the head of two placer cuts and the associated ditch network. This site is the earliest Chinese mining site documented on the Malheur National Forest (to date) with a mine claim sales agreement dating to 1867. When first recorded in the early 1990s there were still some sill logs from a cabin structure present but these are now entirely deteriorated. At this time the site is visible through a light scatter of surface artifacts and two rock features. One feature is similar in shape to the rock hearth encountered at the Happy Camp 3 site.

Figure 13. The crew conducted site testing by excavating a grid of 50cmX50cm test units across the Ah Yee site.

As less was known about the condition and extent of the site, an archaeological testing strategy was used in order to identify key areas of subsurface deposits across the site that may aid in the interpretation of the two rock features. A grid of 50cm by 50cm units was excavated across the core of the site at 5m intervals, which led to the recovery of several interesting artifacts and some information about the activities occurring within the site area.

Figure 14. Artifacts recovered from Ah Yee site include (left) trigger mechanism from a percussion cap rifle and (right) hand perforated metal sheet likely used to patch a grizzly (part of a sluice box).

06040300020- Ah Heng 1

The Ah Heng site is located several miles downstream from the Happy Camp and Ah Yee sites. It is situated along one edge of an extensive placer cut. Historic documentation for this site includes a lease agreement, now located at the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site, and some newspaper accounts from the late 1880s. In the site record from the early 1990s the remains of four structures were measured and described based on heavily deteriorated logs and a light scatter of artifacts. Evidence of significant looting was noted in the report.

Figure 15. Test excavations within and adjacent to the footprint of a probable house feature at Ah Heng 1.

At this time none of the sill logs described in the 1990s site record are identifiable. Due to the excellent site mapping completed for the 1990s site record, we could easily relocate the area where the structural features were found. Most of the area was obscured by a thick stand of young spruce and lodgepole pine. In an open part of the site we located several ceramics sherds of Chinese origin. Some intriguing level areas were visible within the spruce/pine thickets near the artifacts. We removed the smaller trees and brush from these areas and conducted a metal detector survey which confirmed the presence of a significant subsurface deposit of metal—presumably artifacts. Once the site was cleared of dense vegetation, it was a confusing matrix of undulating terraces scattered with artifacts and small rock piles.

Figure 16. Test unit at Ah Heng 1 and a close up of fragments from a CBGS liquor bottle (right image).

Due to uncertainty about the extent and layout of the site, a testing grid was again used and units were excavated at 5m intervals. A single 1m by 1m unit was excavated in an area that appeared to be within a house feature. These excavations indicated that a rich and complex archaeological deposit is present across the Ah Heng site. The metal detection survey also identified a dense cache of ferrous artifacts to the east of the habitation areas, which appears to represent an area where broken tools and scrap metal was being stored and repurposed for other uses.

Figure 17. Some masters of the fine art of shading a test unit for photographs!

From Bartlet, Wallace A. 1893, Digest of Trade Marks (registered in the United States for Machines, Metals, Jewelry, and the Hardware and Allied Trades: N. E. (and crossed arrows) 4722. June 12, 1877. Shovels, etc. Oliver Ames and Sons Corporation, North Easton, Mass.

From The Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office, Vol. 19, No. 14, Tuesday, April 5, 1881: 8,339- Shovels, Spades and Scoops, Oliver Ames and Sons Corporation, North Easton, Mass. Application filed May 10, 1881, "The crossed arrows and letters 'N. E.'"

Figure 18. One of the several shovels found in a metal cache area had a maker's mark stamp on the handle.

The names and stamped seals of Hong Kong opium producers were among the first internationally recognized brand names in the history of Asia. From the 1870s onward (until opium was outlawed in the United States in 1909) they were recognized in North America as well. This was one of the two most popular, and most expensive, brands available, both produced by the same manufacturer. These same two brands comprise the entire collection at Kam Wah Chung. Sheung Wan was a well-known part of Hong Kong.

http://www.cinarc.org/Opium.html#anchor_89

06040300020 Ah Heng 1, Sheung Wan Fook Lung brand ***上環福隆***

Figure 19. One of many five part gold pans found during the project.

Summary

Over the course of the 2018 project, the team worked on four sites from three discrete placer mining districts associated with Chinese miners in the southern Blue Mountains. Each site led to the recovery of hundreds of artifacts associated with the former Chinese occupants. We confirmed the presence and overall good integrity of the subsurface archaeological deposits at all of these sites. We created maps and illustrations which will help us to better understand what the modest cabins were like more than a century ago. Over the next year SOULA will be busy sorting, analyzing, and reporting on our finds, and we already have lots of research questions in place for next summer!

From the public land management perspective the information gathered during this project helps us better understand the nature and significance of the sites. Historic sites such as these are very vulnerable to the effects of wildfire and land management activities. This project has confirmed the presence of organic and other fire sensitive artifacts. In the current climate regime wildfires are growing in severity and scale. It is impossible to eliminate the risk of wildfire so we need to balance the risk associated with removing fuels (trees and brush) on the sites to reduce the severity of the fire with the risk of allowing wildfire to burn through the site at the current fuel load. The information our volunteers are gathering helps us to find the proper balance to preserve these sites for future generations.

Figure 20. The crew at the end of the final day of the project… looking fresher, and cleaner, than we felt!



Thank You Volunteers and Partners!

Volunteers: Lukas Aberle, Scott Bowen, Diane Browning, Jacque Chung, Beverley Clement, George Collier, Jane Collier, Kyle Crebbin, Jim Fitzgerald, Kimberli Fitzgerald, Eric Gleason, Eric Hanson, Katie Karman, Al Newnam, Doug Reynolds, David Root, Erin Ross, Bob Shive, and Emily Williamson

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SOULA staff: Tyler Davis, Katie Johnson, and Madison Noggle

We hope we see you in the mines next year!

Don Hann and Chelsea Rose