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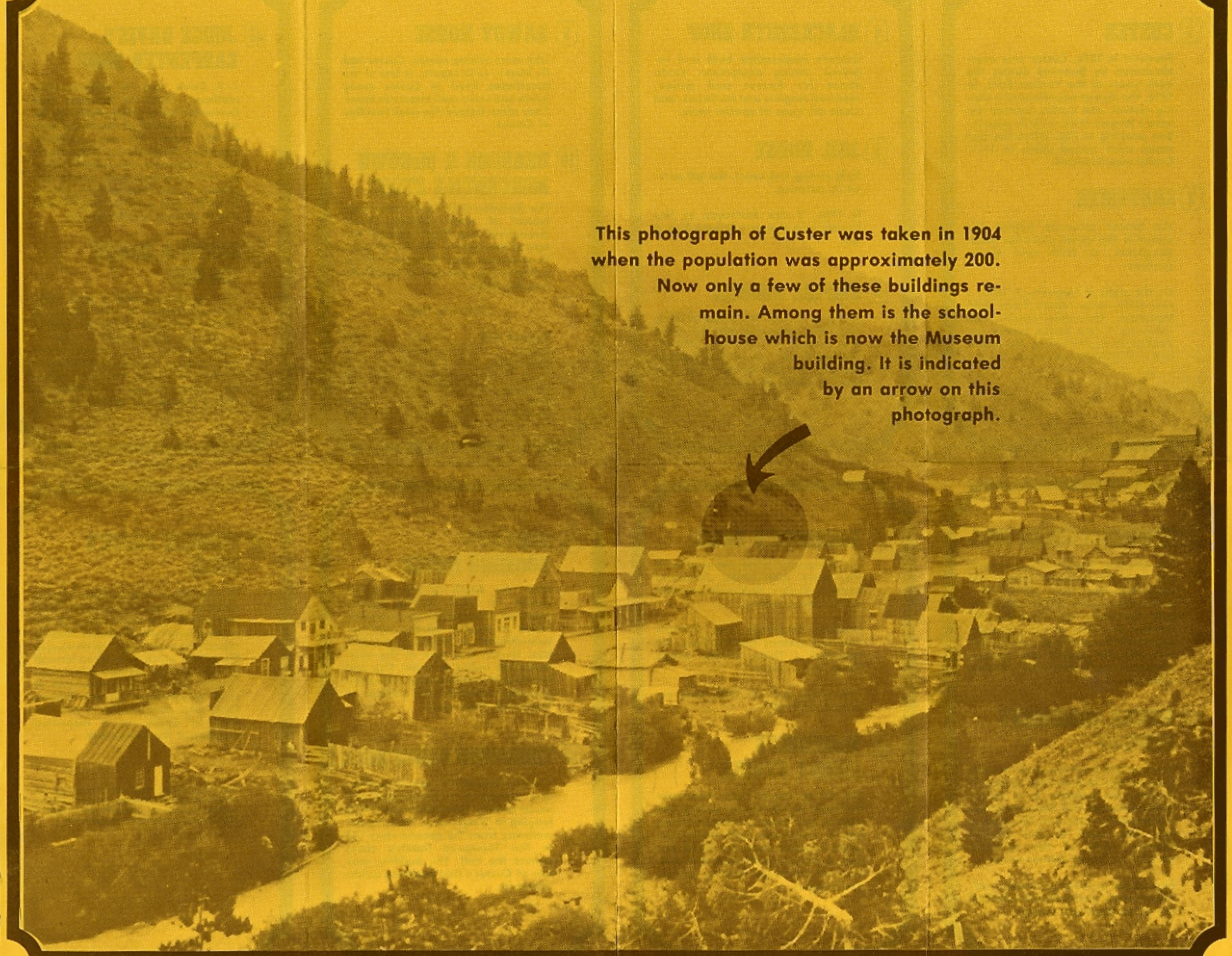

This photograph of Custer was taken in 1904 when the population was approximately 200. Now only a few of these buildings remain. Among them is the schoolhouse which is now the Museum building. It is indicated by an arrow on this photograph.

tour map of CUSTER

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INTRODUCTION

Mining activity started in the Yankee Fork District during the 1870's. Bonanza was founded in 1877 and the mining camp of Custer came into existence soon afterwards. The General Custer mine had been located in 1876 and named after the famous general of the battle of the Little Big Horn. Eventually the mine, mill, mountain, town, and county all bore the name of Custer.

Follow the interpretive trail and see some of the building sites that existed during this period.

Custer and Bonanza are now historic sites. Collecting artifacts and using metal detectors are illegal and destroy the sites' historic value.

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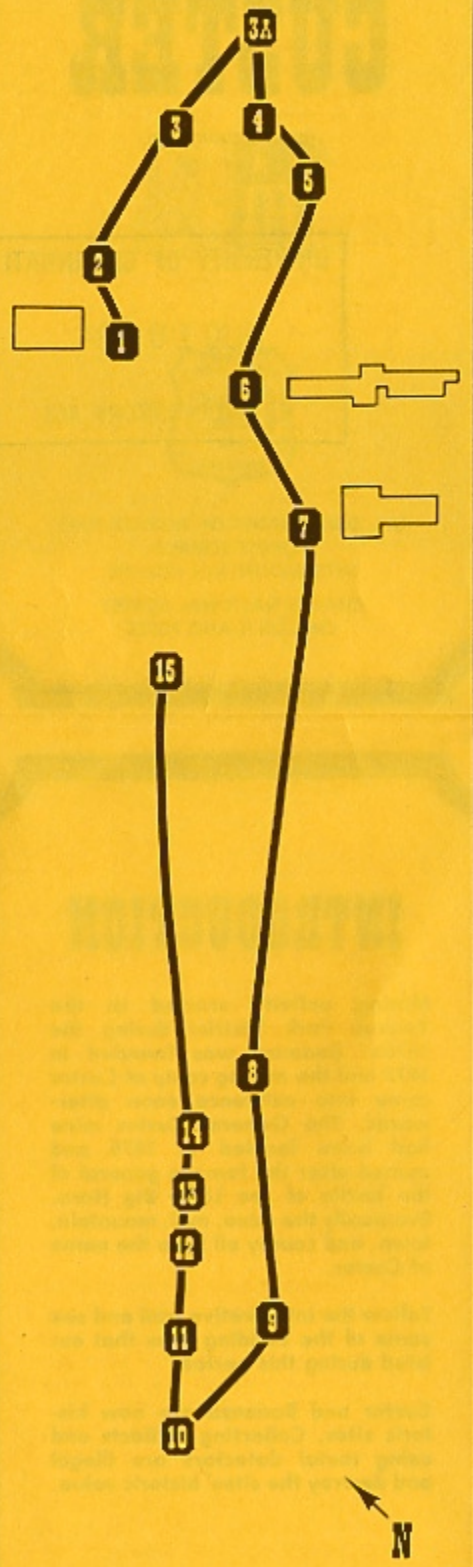
INTERPRETIVE TRAIL



1 CUSTER

Founded in 1878, Custer was overshadowed by Bonanza during the early years of the Yankee Fork. In 1896, the district experienced a mining revival, and Custer became the area's largest town with its population peaking at 700. When the last major mine closed down in 1911, Custer was deserted.

2 GRAVESITE

The fenced gravesite behind the school is the burial place for three daughters of Nels and Maria Johnson.

On the night of February 2, 1890, a snowslide came down from Bald Mountain. The slide carried the Johnson's frame house across the Yankee Fork, destroying the house and killing the three girls.

3 GENERAL CUSTER MILL

The General Custer mill processed ore from the General Custer and Lucky Boy mines from 1881 to 1904, producing twelve million dollars in gold and silver. The 20-stamp mill crushed ore down to a fine powder so it could be processed. The Custer mill was the largest and noisiest symbol of the Yankee Fork's mining industry.

3A MINING EQUIPMENT DISPLAY

Represented here are types of mills used on the Yankee Fork during its heyday. An arrastra is a simple water-powered mill that uses grinding stones to crush ore. This type of mill was used at the Charles Dickens, one of the district's earliest and most famous mines.

Beyond the arrastra is a stamp mill. These steam-powered mills crushed ore using large iron stamps.

4 BLACKSMITH SHOP

Custer's blacksmiths built and repaired mining equipment, made shoes for horses and mules, repaired wagons and carriages, and made all types of special tools.

5 JAIL HOUSE

Built strong and erect, the jail served its purpose.

In 1964, it was destroyed by fire caused by a cigarette thrown from a car.

6 EMPIRE SALOON

At first a saloon, this large building was later converted into the office and home of Custer's doctor, Charles Kirtley. Dr. Kirtley married a Custer girl, Josephine Malm, and lived in Custer until 1909.

7 McKENZIE'S HOME

The McKenzies' home was said to be the most elaborately furnished house in Custer. Notice the wooden arch in the doorway.

Kenneth McKenzie was Custer's most prosperous businessman. He operated a livery stable, buggy shed, and a saloon.

The home, built in 1880, was occupied until 1909.

8 McKENZIE'S LIVERY STABLE

The livery stable was necessary business in all towns during the days of the horse. Animals belonging to freighters and individuals were boarded here for $1.50 per day. A person could also rent, sell, buy, or exchange horses, mules, and buggies.

9 BAWDY HOUSE

Like most mining camps, Custer had its houses of ill repute. A few of the prostitutes lived in Custer many years and were well known in town. They often helped the poor families of Custer.

10 DEARDON & McGOWN MERCANTILE STORE

The Deardon & McGown store was typical of most general stores throughout the West around the turn of the century. The list of items in stock was long, including almost everything in the way of foodstuffs and hardware.

Prices in 1888

Canned Milk	1 case	$11.00
Sugar	1 pound	.14
Chocolate	1 pound	.62
Ham	1 pound	.25
Whiskey	1 quart	1.50
Boots	1 pair	7.00
Overalls	1 pair	1.50

11 BURTON'S ROOMING HOUSE

After the death of her husband James in 1895, Estella Burton operated a restaurant and rooming house to support herself and her four children. A longtime resident, Mrs. Burton was one of the most respected ladies in town. She and her daughter Winnie also conducted a Sunday School for the children of Custer for many years.

12 THOMPSON DANCE HALL

The first floor of this two-story structure served as a dance hall and social center. The upstairs provided lodging for single men. An elevated walkway from the second story led to the Thompson family's cabin behind the hall. The building was one of Custer's first business establishments.

13 JUDGE DAVIS'S CARPENTER SHOP

J. F. Davis was a Yankee Fork oldtimer, living in Bonanza and Custer for thirty years. Although he served as Justice of the Peace only a few years, he was popularly known as Judge Davis. Judge Davis was a carpenter and cabinetmaker by trade, and also made most of the coffins for the Yankee Fork towns. A coffin, plus a large rough board box to place it in, cost $25.00.

14 CASTO & McGEE SALOON

This saloon boasted a pool table and specialized in stud poker. A bottle of whiskey cost $1.50 - half of a miner's daily wages - while a large shot cost 25¢. Besides beer and whiskey, a man could enjoy a variety of drinks including wine, gin, cognac, ginger, and brandy. A saloon license cost $101.10 in 1903.

15 CHARLIE RAINE'S HOME

Charlie Raine was another Custer oldtimer. A native of Iowa, he lived out his later years in Custer with the nephew who bore his name. Charlie owned his own mines up on Custer Mountain, which he worked himself or with the help of a few other men. Charlie was typical of a number of small mineowners on the Yankee Fork, who never struck it rich but lived in Custer as a respected member of the community.

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