

WIBLE

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Sen-374

Excerpt from
SURVEY AND EVALUATION OF THE IDITAROD TRAIL
AND CONNECTING TRAILS IN THE CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

DRAFT TECHNICAL REPORT
VOLUME 2: NATIONAL REGISTER EVALUATION FORMS

Prepared for
USDA Forest Service
Chugach National Forest
Anchorage, Alaska

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PHASE I EVALUATION FORM

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March, 1991

1. Name of Property: Wible's Mining Camp
AHRS Site #: SEW-374
2. Location: NE/NE Section 33, T.8N-R.1W, Seward Meridian
Seward C-7 Quadrangle.
3. Classification:
Ownership: Public-federal
Category of Property: Buildings
Number of Resources within Property:
Contributing: 4 buildings in 1 site.
Non-Contributing: 0
Number of Contributing Resources previously listed: 0
Name of related multiple property listing: Gold Mining
In the Chugach National Forest, 1895-1940.
6. Function or Use:
Historic Functions: Industry/Gold mine
Current Functions: Not in Use.
7. Description:
Wible Camp consists of ruins of four log buildings, an outhouse depression/trash pit, and various mining equipment and domestic refuse.

Feature 1 is a log structure of ten courses of logs. The logs are peeled and flattened on the tops and bottoms to allow a good fit. The corners are deeply square cut, and the logs are spiked together at the corners. The log ends are both sawn flat and V-cut with an axe. A rough-sawn wall plate on the east end is about full 2"x7". The roof has been removed or collapsed, and roof remains are not visible. A single square window is at the center of the south wall, and a low door is near the north end of the east wall. Interior walls were finished by nailing 1" rough lumber to the logs. The interior contains two large iron wheels, possibly from a pulley system, and a ca. 6" diameter birch tree. Square cut and round wire nails were observed in the walls. To the immediate west of the building is a heap of large iron wheels, a Teflon-coated frying pan, an enameled metal bowl, Ball canning jars, and an MJB coffee can. A copper tube runs from the southwest corner of the structure into the ground; this may have reinforced the corner or served as a lightening rod. The walls rise to approximately 2 meters and no chinking or daub was observed in the log walls.

Feature 2 is the ruin of a log structure about 10 meters south of Feature 1. Feature 2 now consists of up to 10 courses of logs in the northwest corner, but only up to 3 tiers elsewhere. The logs are roughly flattened on two sides to allow a good fit, are square-cut at the corners, and are spiked at the corners with 6" to 9" round spikes. The roof type is not evident, but several milled boards lie within and near the walls. Remains of a window casement lie on the north side of the structure. The interior appears to have been excavated to about 20 centimeters below ground level, and a board floor may have been installed. The interior contains a heavy steel bushing and large curved iron pieces which may have been leaf springs for a piece of heavy equipment. All observed nails were round wire type. The northwest corner rises to about 1 meter above an earthen berm; other walls rise less than 25 centimeters. The main entry was to the east.

Feature 3 is a probable privy depression which has been used as a refuse dump. The pit is about 1.75 meters north-south, 1 meter east-west, and now 40 centimeters deep. It contains numerous bottles which appear to date after 1920, including a plastic Dr. Pepper bottle and numerous clear and brown liquor bottles. No remains of a structure were observed. This feature may have been excavated by bottle hunters.

Feature 4 is the ruins of a log structure consisting of up to three standing courses of 8" diameter logs. The logs are hewn on upper and lower surfaces to allow a good fit, are peeled but not hewn on the other surfaces, and are square cut at corner joints. The logs do not appear to have been spiked together. The roof type and materials are not evident. The interior is at ground level, and artifacts were not observed within the heavily overgrown interior. Log ends are both sawn and bevelled with an axe. All observed nails are round wire type. Leaning against the exterior northwest corner is a 2" iron pipe, and an iron boiler is about 2 meters north of the structure. No chinking or daub was observed.

Feature 5 is the ruins of a large, two-pen log structure, possibly a barn. Logs reach up to 10 tiers, and may have been the original wall height. Logs are 9" diameter spruce, square-cut at the corners, spiked at the corners with 6"-9" round spikes, and hewn flat on the interior walls. Chinking was rags and possibly moss. The walls contain both round wire nails and square nails. The structure had a door near the west end of the south wall, a door near the north end of the

west wall of the south pen, a window on the east wall of the south pen, a window at the center of the north wall of the north pen, and a door at the center of the wall dividing north and south pens. The roof type is not evident. The earth floor of the south pen is flush with the ground level, but the earth floor of the north pen is about 75 centimeters below ground level. A further excavation near the center of the north pen is roughly 1.5 meters square and up to 25 centimeters deep. No curbing or other structural remains were observed in this excavation. Window and door jambs and surrounds are full 1" milled lumber nailed to wall logs mostly with square cut nails. 2"x8" full dimension milled wall plates remain on the north wall. The interior contains a plank door, various milled lumber and hewn logs which may represent the roof, a tarp, a large iron disc, a plastic Gerry-can, an enameled metal coffee pot, an aluminum cake pan, and sheet plastic. This structure has been used as a hunting camp, as is evident from the cultural materials and from a frame erected over the north pen of Feature 5 to hold a tarp roof.

The site is located at the south end of a small ridge, overlooking extensive placer workings to the south. About 50 meters to the east of the site is a man-made pond and a prospect spoil pile. The site is heavily overgrown with grass and other plants, and roads were not observed leading to or from the site. The site contains extensive scattered machine parts, cans, bottles, pipes, sheet metal, milled lumber, and hewn and unhewn poles. A large diversion ditch is about 100 meters to the west of the site, and a smaller ditch runs from the man-made pond around the nose of the ridge to the south of the cabins. The two cabins shown on the 1976 U.S.G.S. quadrangle map, near Canyon Creek, southwest of the main site were not found.

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8. Statement of Significance:

Significance Level: State/Local

Applicable Criteria: A, B, D.

Areas of Significance: Industry

Period of Significance: 1909-1940

Significant Dates:

Significant Person: Samuel W. Wible

Architect/Builder:

State significance of property:

The Wible Camp was built in 1909 to replace an earlier camp, and it served as the headquarters for one of the most productive and profitable placer gold mining operations on the Kenai Peninsula. Gold was discovered

on Canyon Creek in 1895, and major gold rushes to the region occurred in 1896 and 1898. Among the prospectors attracted to the region was Samuel W. Wible, a mining engineer and bank officer from Bakersfield, California. Wible had experience in mining in the American West, and his first experience in Alaska was to buy a share in the Crow Creek Consolidated Mine to the north of Turnagain Arm and to assist in installation of ditches and equipment for large-scale hydraulic mining at that mine (Barry 1973:100).

Wible began buying and working claims on Canyon Creek in 1898, and in following years he also had claims on Falls Creek, Glacier Creek, Sixmile River, and Lynx Creek (Sleem 1910; Buzzell and McMahan 1986:12-15; Seward Weekly Gateway 9/17/1905, 4/14/1906). Wible worked the glacial and post-glacial gravel benches on the east side of Canyon Creek, but he also pioneered exploration of pre-glacial creek channels of the creek. At his Tyee Mining Company holdings he discovered a horseshoe-shaped pre-glacial creek channel which was rich in gold.

Wible had substantial financial resources, which he used to industrialize placer mining at his holdings on Canyon Creek. Beginning in 1898, he constructed a system of tunnels, ditches, and flumes to bring water to his claims for washing the gravel benches above the creek bed. Among the water system improvements was a diversion ditch more than two miles long that brought water from Moose and Roaring creeks to a series of man-made ponds and a natural lake to the north of the camp. He also is reported to have run a tunnel through a hill to tap a lake (Barry 1973:100). By 1906 he had installed a ditch system more than four miles long and was by far the most important mining operation on Canyon Creek (Paige and Knopf 1907:122; Buzzell and McMahan 1986:16). Wible hauled a huge "Pelton Wheel" weighing 900 pounds to his mine with mules; this water-driven apparatus supplied mechanical power for moving boulders.

The gravels on the Wible claims are reported to have yielded 4 to 5 cents of gold per cubic yard on average (ca. 1900 dollars), and Wible was able to sluice up to 1000 yards of gravel per day (Barry 1973:100). Some of the gravel, particularly in the ancient streambed, must have been much richer than the reported average to justify the development and the employment of up to nine men. In 1906 the mine is reported to have yielded nearly \$20,000 in gold. The mine had yielded only

about \$5,000 in gold in 1907 before water supply problems caused Wible to shut the mining operation down for repairs. Wible is reported to have taken about \$10,000 in gold dust with him when he sailed to Portland from Seward in October, 1908 (Seward Weekly Gateway 9/8/1906, 10/5/1907, 10/24/1908).

Mining on Canyon Creek was not without hazards. In addition to the water problems in the ditches in 1907 noted above, Wible was reported to have been unable to sluice gravel in early July 1910 because seepage into the ditches had frozen and cut off the water supply. A snowslide in late March 1909 destroyed the bunkhouse, cookhouse, and another building at the camp and carried an uninjured mine foreman down the slope. Wible had rebuilt the camp in its current location by June 1909 and had six men at work on the mine (Seward Weekly Gateway 4/10/1909, 5/26/1906, 6/19/1909, 7/9/1910).

Wible returned to California each winter, and in April 1910 he was reported to be very ill. He returned to Alaska that summer and reportedly had a good cleanup from the summer's work. The Seward Weekly Gateway reported that he had sold the property to the firm of Finch and Campbell of Seattle in November, 1910, and he died shortly thereafter. However, representatives of his estate operated the mine at least as late as 1913 (Seward Weekly Gateway 4/2/1910, 11/12/1910; Seward Daily Gateway 9/29/1913). Tom Allison, a longtime employee of Wible, continued to occupy and operate the Wible camp and mine until the 1940s (Barry 1973:101).

The Wible Camp is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with an important pattern/event in the history of the Canyon Creek locality, the Kenai Peninsula, and Alaska. Canyon Creek and its tributary Mills Creek were the leading placer gold producers on the Kenai Peninsula throughout much of the initial gold rush and subsequent development period, from 1895 to 1945. The Wible/Tyee Mining Company operation was one of the leading gold producers on Canyon Creek at least from 1906 to 1913. The substantial water diversion and storage systems, the building complex, and the remains of mining machinery attest to the complexity and scale of operation necessary for profitable placer mining on the Kenai Peninsula during this period.

This property is marginally eligible under National Register Criterion B for its association with ~~Samuel W.~~ SIMON (SAM) Wible, who was important in the mining history of the

Turnagain Arm and northern Kenai Peninsula. Wible's historical significance was attained primarily at this property, and other properties are not known to exist which would better represent the portion of Wible's life in which he attained significance in the gold mining history of Alaska.

The recorded Wible Camp does not appear to be eligible under Criterion C, because the buildings and site organization do not appear to represent a distinctive period, type, or method of construction and do not appear to be associated with other properties which might cumulatively be considered a significant historical property. However, the larger complex including this site, diversion ditches, tunnels, man-made holding ponds, and placer mining remains might be considered eligible under Criterion C as an especially extensive and intact representation of placer mining in the region.

The Wible Camp may also be eligible under National Register Criterion D, for the information it may contain about mining engineering and the daily life of miners on the Kenai Peninsula in the period 1909 to 1940. Domestic items are known to exist in at least one subsurface context within the recorded camp site, within the privy pit, and the observed surface scatter of mining and domestic items indicates a possibility for identification of deposition patterns at least at the surface level. This property has not been recorded to the extent that such surface patterns are discernible, and archaeological testing has not been performed to determine the existence, nature, or integrity of subsurface cultural materials. Some degradation of the mining era artifact content is evident in the remains of hunting camps within the recorded site, but the site is remote and appears to have retained very good surface and subsurface integrity since abandonment ca. 1940. The historical significance of the site and its relatively undisturbed condition recommend this property to be especially valuable for archaeological study of this period of Alaska's mining history.

9. Major Bibliographic References:

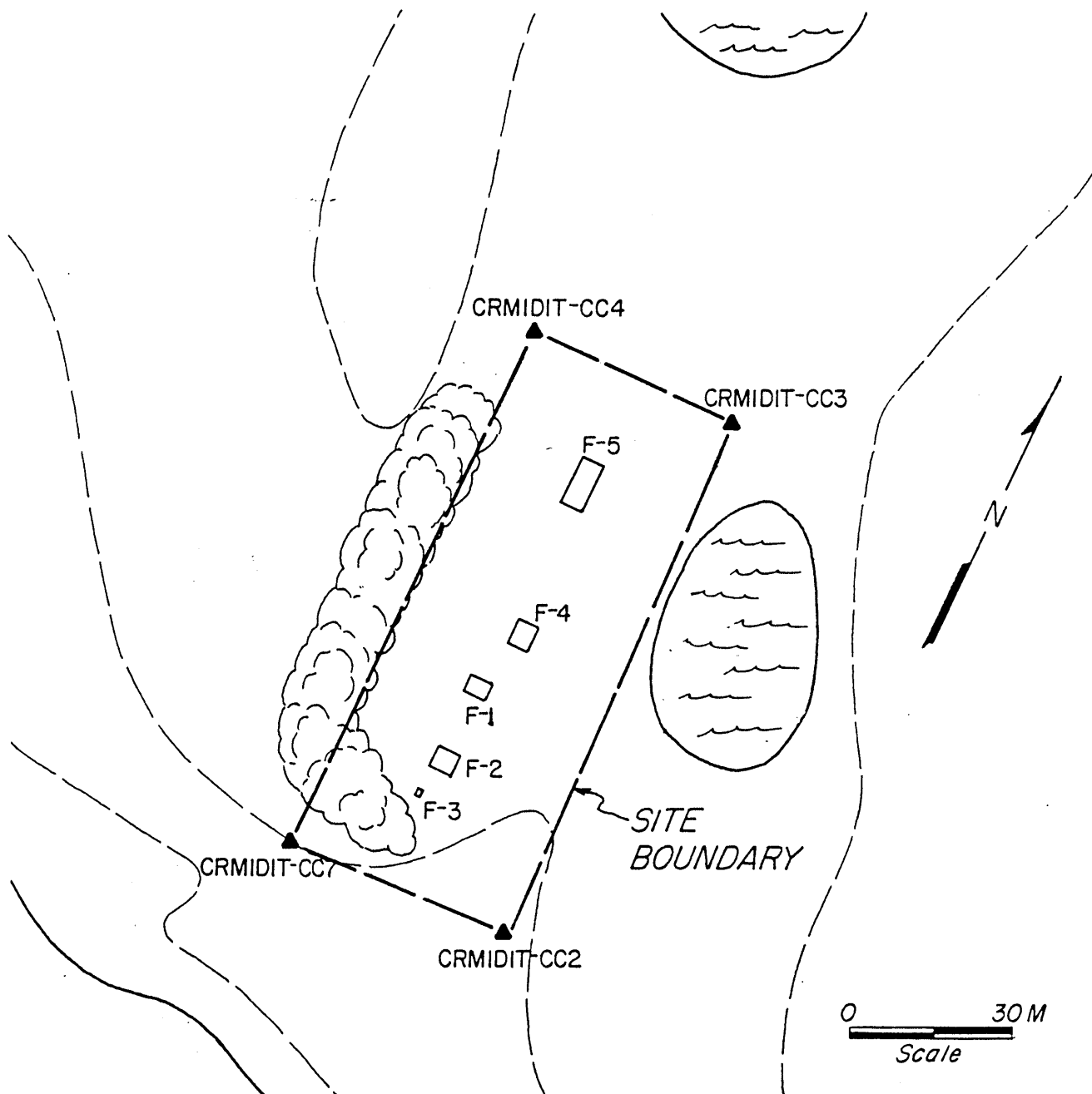
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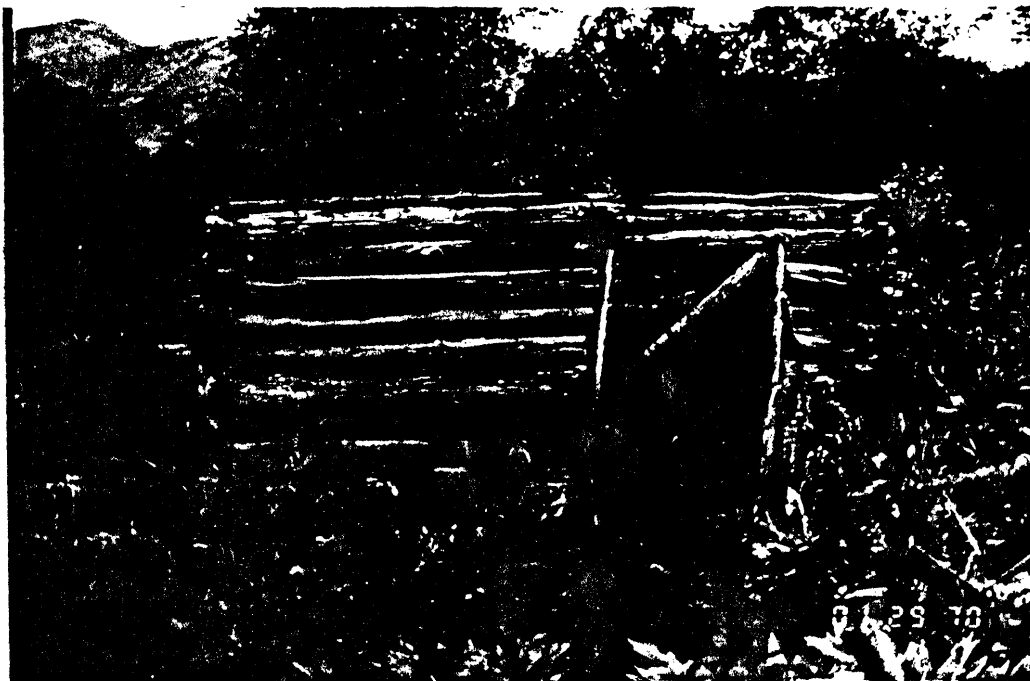
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CRM 327-7
WIBEL MINING CAMP

WIBLE'S CAMP



Feature 1, Log House, View to West

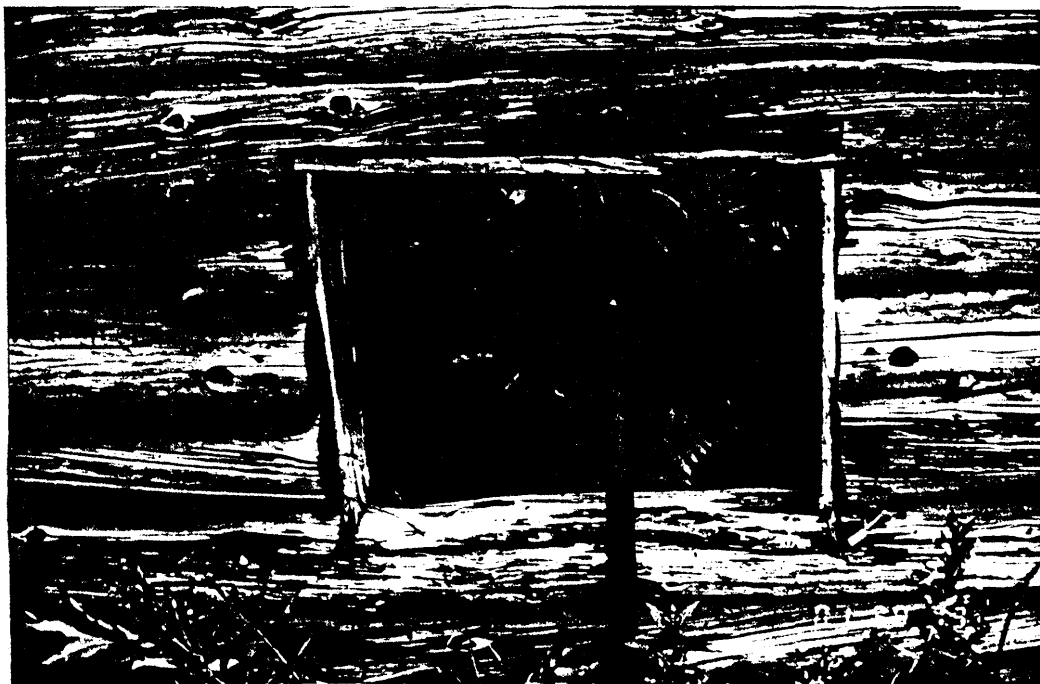


Feature 1, Log House, View to NE

WIBLE'S CAMP



Feature 1, Log House, View to SE



Feature 1, Log House, Window Const., View North

WIBLE'S CAMP



Feature 1, Log House, Corner Joining, NE Corner



Feature 2, Log Structure Ruins, View to SE

WIBLE'S CAMP

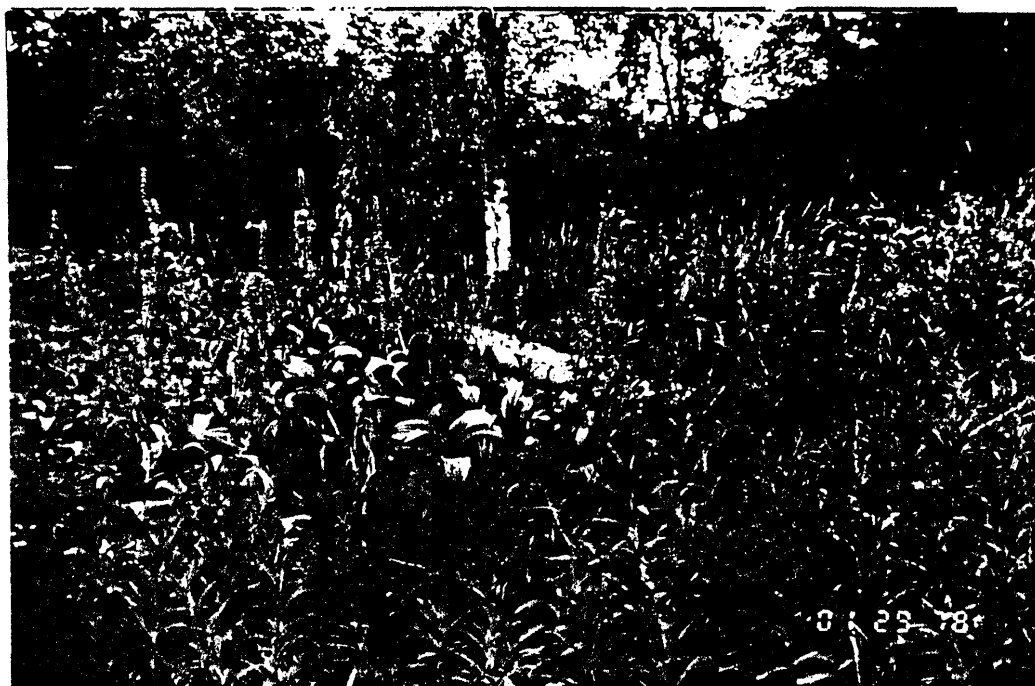


Feature 2, Log Structure Ruins, View to NW



Feature 3, Privy/Trash Pit, View to SE

WIBLE'S CAMP



Feature 4, Log Structure Ruins, View North

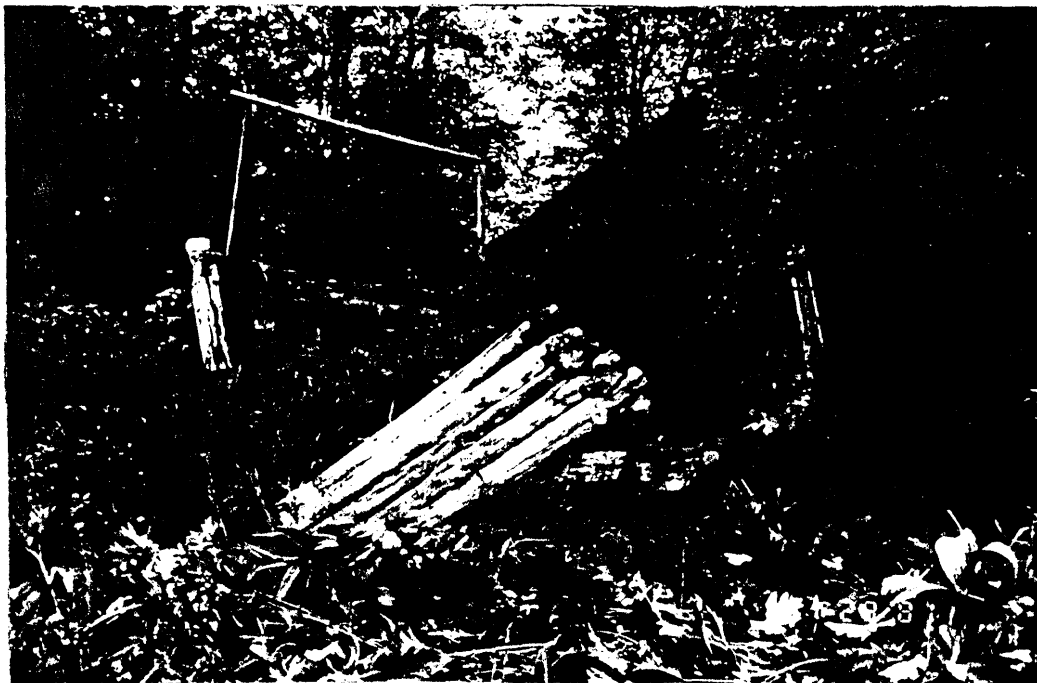


Feature 4, Log Structure Ruins, View to SSE

WIBLE'S CAMP



Feature 4, Structure Ruins, NW Corner Construction

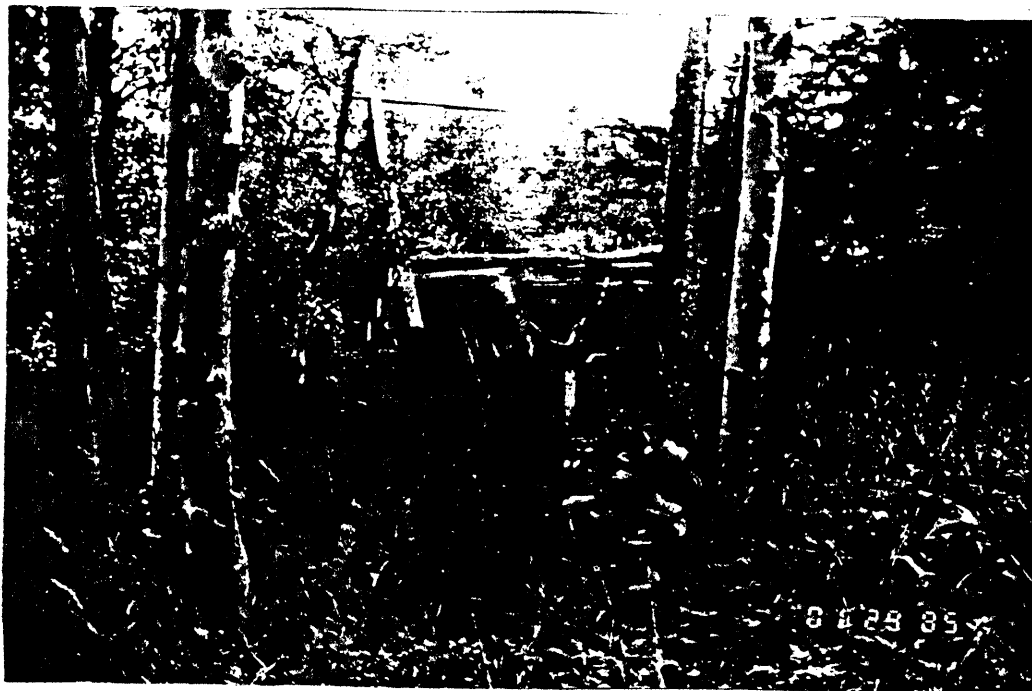


Feature 5, 2-pen Log Structure, View to NE

WIBLE'S CAMP



Feature 5, SW Corner Construction, View West



Feature 5, Log Structure, View to South

WIBLE'S CAMP



Feature 5, Door and Window, North Pen, View to North

WIBLE'S CAMP



Overview of Wible's Camp, View to WSW