

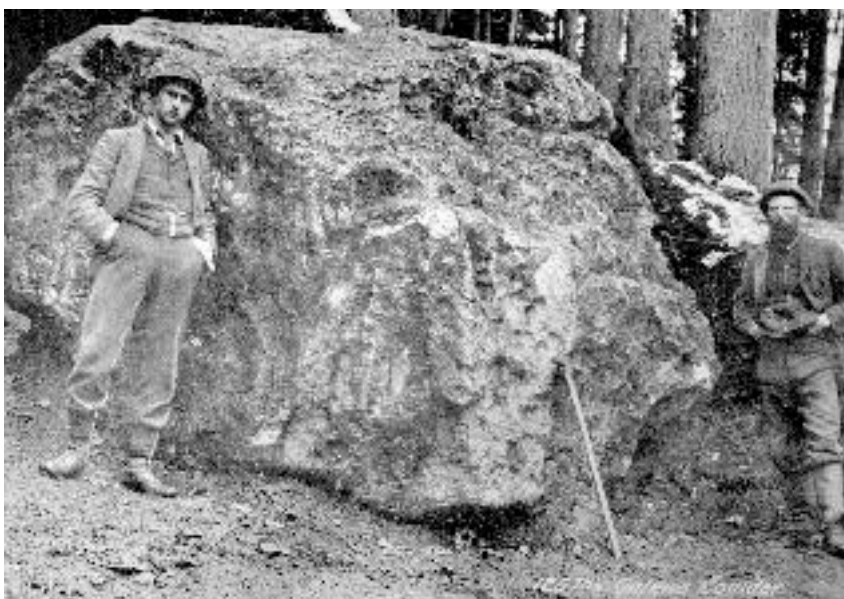
J.M. Cockle and The Big Boulder, 1892

The photograph that started a stampede

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Within weeks of Carpenter and Seaton's initial discovery, several hundred prospectors from the region had rushed into the Sandon area to stake as many claims as possible. The onset of winter soon forced the men back to the established communities of Ainsworth Camp and Nelson, but with the approach of spring the men returned, including a novice prospector from Ainsworth named J.W. Cockle.

Early that summer, Cockle was cutting a pole while standing atop a large rock in the creekbed of Sandon Creek. In the process, his axe slipped, and he sheared off a chunk of the rock he was standing on. To his shock, Cockle saw the unmistakable sparkle of galena ore, and realized he was standing on top of an enormous nugget, also called a piece of float. Clearing the mud and rocks away from around the rock, Cockle and his partner were astonished to find that the piece of float was actually a gigantic boulder, which later turned out to weigh 125 tons.



Cockle and his partner were elated, and immediately staked a claim on the site where they had discovered the boulder. The two men, flush with success and with visions of future riches in their heads, sold the boulder for only \$2,000. After smelting, its value was later determined to be in excess of \$20,000. As it turned out, however, there was no more ore on the site Cockle and his partner had staked. More experienced prospectors quickly realized that the boulder had actually rolled downhill many years before. Looking for its original location, these men found and staked the Slocan Star mine, one of the richest in the entire region. All Cockle and his partner ever received, however, was the original \$2,000 for their boulder. Disheartened, Cockle eventually gave up prospecting and ended up running a profitable ferry service on Kootenay Lake.

However, this picture of the Big Boulder and the two men was soon in print in papers all around North America, and tales of gigantic boulders of solid silver in the fabulous Slocan district began to spread like wildfire. At the same time, the California gold rush was beginning to peter out, and soon a tidal wave of men, including thousands of Americans, began to flood into the Slocan district. Before the summer was out, a townsite was staked, businesses were springing up like wildflowers, and life in the remote Slocan would never be the same again.