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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Van Camp-Tash Ranch
other name/site number: Amede Bessette and Xavier Renois Ranch, Isaac Van Camp Ranch, William S. Tash Ranch;
Tash Livestock, Inc. Lower Ranch

2. Location

street & number: 1200 MT Highway 278 not for publication: n/a
city/town: Dillon vicinity: X
state: Montana code: MT county: Beaverhead code: 001 zip code: 59725

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mark E. Baumer / SHPO 3/4/2008
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the
National Register
 see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the
National Register
 see continuation sheet
- removed from the National Register
 see continuation sheet
- other (explain): _____

Love
Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action
4-16-08

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Number of Resources within Property

Category of Property: District

Contributing Noncontributing

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

8 4 building(s)

0 0 sites

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

1 0 structures

0 0 objects

9 4 TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTANCE/animal facility
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTANCE/storage
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTANCE/agricultural outbuilding

Current Functions:

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTANCE/animal facility
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTANCE/storage
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTANCE/agricultural outbuilding

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Other: piece-sur-piece

Materials:

foundation: STONE; CONCRETE
walls: LOG; WOOD; METAL
roof: METAL; WOOD/shingle
other:

Narrative Description

The Van Camp-Tash Camp Ranch is located just three miles south of present-day Dillon, Montana. One of the oldest ranches in the area, it stands along the Van Camp Slough within the broad, fertile Beaverhead Valley. The Beaverhead Valley is one of Montana’s major drainages with its headwaters in the Pioneer Mountains. The Rattlesnake, Blacktail Deer, and Grasshopper Creeks drain the area, and flow into the Beaverhead River. The valley is renowned for its ranching history and as one of the earliest settled communities during Montana’s territorial period.

The valley floor is broad and well watered, with springs, side creeks and sloughs that cut across the valley bottom and run off to the river. It is a fertile environment for farming and stockraising, and one that attracted the attention of early agriculturists drawn into the region. Raising beef cattle to supply mining camps, and for sale and trade to overland travelers and others, the early ranchers of the area established large open-range operations that stretched throughout the Beaverhead drainage.

Ranch Description

The agricultural buildings on the Tash Ranch are located about one-quarter mile northwest of the intersection of State Highway 278 and Interstate Highway 15. The gable-front barn, labeled “TASH” in large white letters, is the most visible building on the property as viewed from the southbound lanes of I-15. The buildings are accessed from Highway 278 by a long driveway heading north from the road. The Van Camp Slough meanders in a north-south direction just east of the farm buildings along the edge of a hayfield. Fenced pastureland extends from the farmyard to the west and north.

The ranch consists of 12 buildings and one structure, including the farmhouse, a modern garage, bunkhouse, oil house, outhouse, two animal sheds, a dairy barn, springhouse, horse barn, cattle shed, blacksmith shop, and cattle chute. The buildings are arranged at right angles along a slightly curved north-south driveway that terminates just north of the barn. The buildings along the west side of the farm drive face east, except for the cattle chute and associated sheds, which face south. On the east side of the driveway, the farmhouse, garage, and blacksmith shop face south, and the horse barn faces east and west.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Significant Person(s): n/a

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Areas of Significance: AGRICULTURE, ARCHITECTURE,
EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

Period(s) of Significance: 1866-1949

Significant Dates: 1866, 1869, 1898, 1927, 1949

Architect/Builder: Xavier Renois (attributed)

Narrative Statement of Significance

The VanCamp-Tash Ranch reflects the non-Indian settlement era in the Beaverhead Valley, one of the earliest permanent regions of settlement in the Montana Territory. With construction apparently dating to the mid-1860s, the Tash log house and log barn are among the earliest remaining in the Beaverhead Valley. Significant according to Criterion A on a local level, they reflect the settlement patterns that eventually gave rise to the community of Dillon, Montana, and the agricultural patterns of large-scale stock raising that came to characterize the valley through the mid-twentieth century. The log barn and home on the ranch are also exceptional examples of piece-sur-piece log construction, and gain significance on the state level under Criterion C for the ways they represent this rare, early French-Canadian ethnic method of log construction. For these values, the Tash Ranch Agricultural Complex is eminently eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Settlement of the Beaverhead Valley

The Beaverhead Valley has an ancient and vibrant past that reaches far into prehistory. As archaeological sites and oral histories of native people attest, the valley was a corridor for travel and a hospitable environment for seasonal hunts and encampments. By the time of contact with the first white travelers to enter the region, the Shoshone and other tribes had established a presence in this area.

Discovery of gold on the banks of Grasshopper Creek, a tributary of the Beaverhead River, in 1862 was the first substantial strike in the territory and dramatically altered the human activity in southwestern Montana, and in the Beaverhead basin. The Grasshopper drainage yielded rich deposits of gold and silver, and gave rise to a mining camp on the creek, which was named Bannock for the Shoshone Bannack Indians who inhabited this inter-montane valley region.¹

The story of Bannack is a classic Western boom-and-bust mining saga. The gold strikes of 1862 touched off a mining stampede and by year's end some 400 people had gravitated to the camp. Hopeful miners flowed in from other mining camps in the West, their background mainly from the Eastern States, Canada and Europe.² By the following summer the population numbered between 3,000-5,000, and in 1864 the burgeoning town became the first capital of the newly created Territory of Montana.³

The high-grade gold ore from the Grasshopper Creek diggings assayed at 990 fine (99% pure) on average and the camp of Bannack grew rapidly, acquiring the rudimentary elements of a young town. Businesses sprang up that supported the miners, and provided them essential provisions and services. But the mining camp took on a bustling atmosphere and grew to accommodate a variety of businesses.⁴ The census of 1880 listed mining and milling businesses, merchandising, hardware, meats and liquors, a brewery, a saloon, a hotel, a druggist, an assayer, bankers, an attorney, a postmaster, a dressmaker, and tradesmen that included a blacksmith, wagon maker, and two carpenters.⁵

¹ Charles Stauffer (ed.) *History of Beaverhead County* (Dillon, Montana: Beaverhead County History Book Association, 1990).

² Ibid.

³ Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Remediation Division [online]. *Historical Context for the Bannack Mining District*, available from <http://www.deq.state.mt.us/abandonedmines/linkdocs/techdocs/4tech.asp>; Internet; accessed 28 June 2005.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ United States Census Office. *9th U.S. Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1872.

Tash Ranch

Name of Property

Beaverhead County, Montana

County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 46.97 acres

UTM References: Zone: 12 (NAD 27)

	Easting:	Northing:		Easting:	Northing:
A	366834	5004747	F	366836	5004140
B	366979	5004709	G	366904	5004295
C	367051	5004768	H	366852	5004312
D	367273	5004638	I	366895	5004453
E	366962	5004092	J	366611	5004600

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): Located in the N 1/2 and the NE 1/4 SW 1/4 of Section 34, T7S, R9W, MPM

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, according legally recorded survey lines, to encompass the heart of the ranch and the buildings associated with it since its founding in 1866. Surrounding agricultural fields are sufficient to convey the ranch's historical patterns of use and setting.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Chere Jiusto and Christine Brown
 organization: MT Preservation Alliance
 street & number: 516 N. Park St, Suite A
 city or town: Helena, MT 59601
 telephone: 406-457-2822

date: May 2005, updated February 2008

Funding for this nomination provided by

organization: Montana Land Title Association Foundation
 street & number: 5 West Sixth Ave/Power Block, Suite 41, PO Box 6322
 city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59604

Property Owner

name/title: William, Jr. and Judy Tash
 street & number: 1200 Hwy 278
 city or town: Dillon

state: MT

telephone: 406-683-2495

zip code: 59725

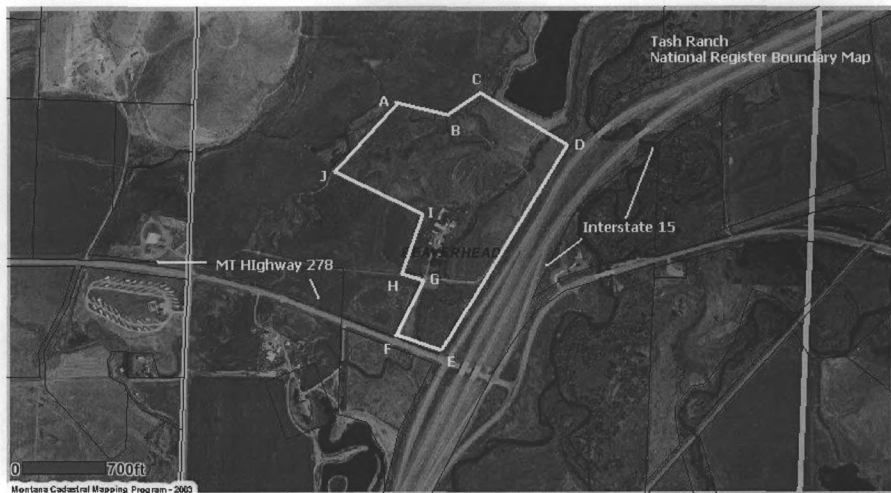
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Aerial view of Tash Ranch, showing location of National Register boundary.

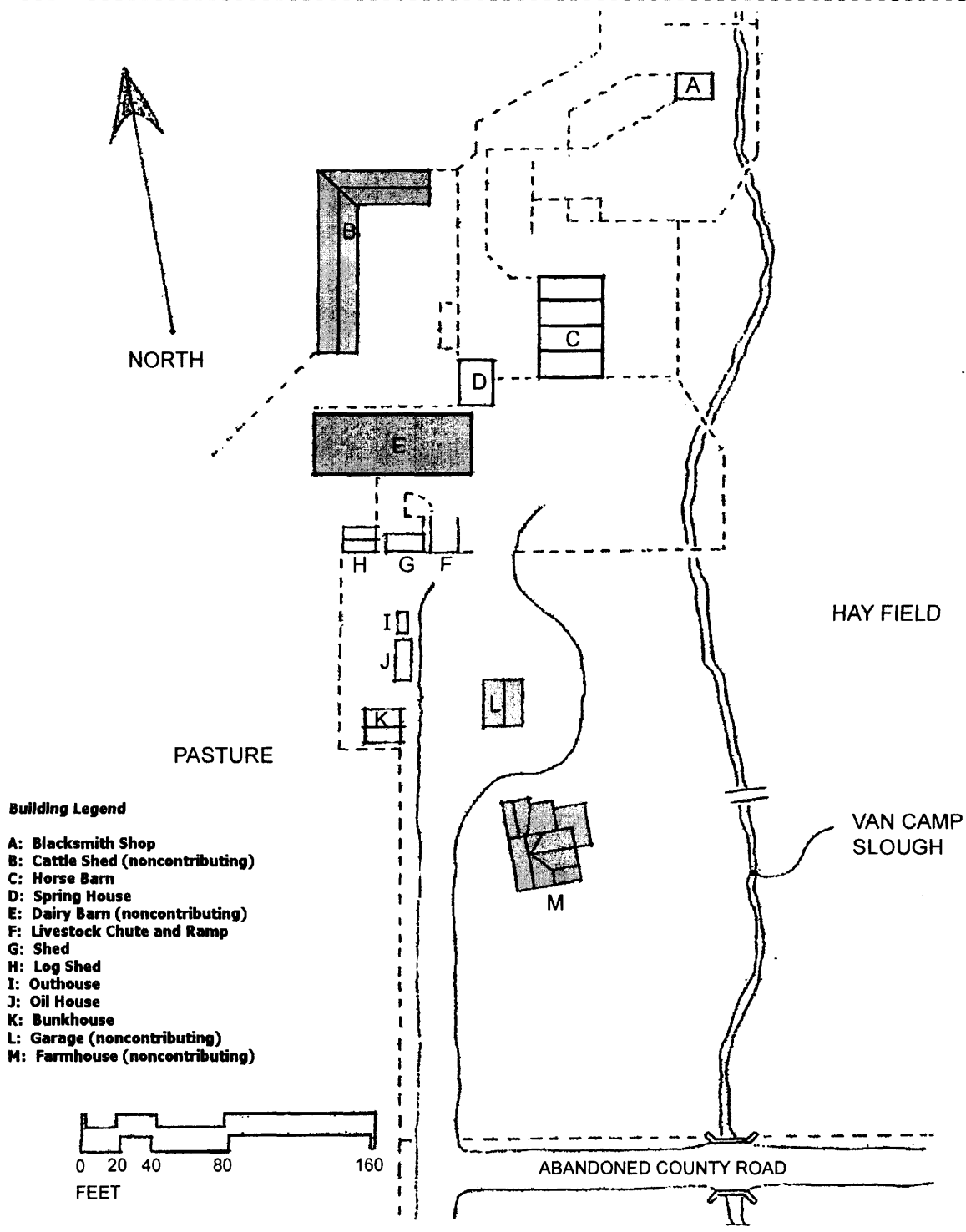
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Sketch map of building cluster.

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The farmhouse (M), garage (L), dairy barn (E), and cattle shed (B) are considered non-contributing elements of the Tash Ranch given that the garage and cattle shed are not yet 50 years old and do not possess exceptional significance under Criteria Consideration E. In addition, the farmhouse and dairy barn have been remodeled extensively in recent years and do not retain sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Blacksmith Shop (A) one contributing building

The blacksmith shop is one of the original buildings on the Tash Ranch, and was likely built in 1865. It is a one-story log building measuring approximately 15 feet by 20 feet. The gable roof is supported by a double log ridgepole and log purlins, and is clad with corrugated metal. The building has no foundation except for a single stone support at each corner. The walls are made of rounded logs with V- or steeple-notching at the corners. The hinged double batten doors on the south elevation were added in 1968. Other openings include a boarded door opening on the east elevation as well as a boarded rectangular window opening on the north elevation.

The building interior is unfinished except for the wood plank floor. The boarded window and door openings suggest that the building was originally used as a cabin, perhaps before the main house was built. After that, it was used as a blacksmith shop well into the 1940s. Today, the building is used for storage.

Cattle Shed (B) one noncontributing building

The cattle shed is a large, L-shaped post-and-beam building located at the northwest end of the building cluster. Its south and west elevations are open to a fenced yard. Modern corrugated metal sheeting covers the intersecting gable roof. Horizontal wood siding covers the north and east elevations. Because the cattle shed was built after the period of significance, it does not contribute to the district.

Horse Barn (C) one contributing building

The barn is an original and outstanding architectural feature on the Tash Ranch. It is the centerpiece of this historic ranching complex, and consists of a central one-and-one-half story, gable roof log building (circa 1865) with two shed roof wings attached along the north and south elevations (circa 1890-1900). The central bay is approximately 30 feet by 35 feet and sits on a 3-foot-deep fieldstone foundation. It is clad with lapped siding (circa 1900) and the side wings are clad with board and batten siding. The roof is clad with modern corrugated sheet metal.

On the east elevation, there is a double Dutch-style batten door on the central bay, and directly above the door is a single hinged hay mow door. Windows include a diamond-shaped six-light fixed sash in the gable end, and matching four-light fixed sash on the side bays. On the west elevation, the central bay doors consist of two sliding board and batten doors hung on a modern steel track. Other doors include hinged plywood panel doors on the ends of the side bays, as well as the hay mow door, which is identical to its counterpart on the east elevation. The windows on the west elevation are also matched to those on the east elevation.

The log walls of the barn are particularly important for their method of construction. A type of piece-sur-piece construction, the style is called "poteaux et piece sur coulissante", or post and sliding piece construction. The technique uses squared horizontal logs, beveled at the ends, and stacked or slid down between vertical channel posts. The channel logs in the Tash Barn are found midway between the north and south walls, and as the doorjambs on the east and west walls, thus extending the wall length. The vertical channels rest on the sill log and the horizontal logs are held in place with square, hand-forged iron spikes. The sill logs as well, are not continuous, but are comprised of two logs lapped at the wall midpoint and held together with wooden pegs. At the corners, the logs are notched using a single dovetail joint. This ingenious method of using the channel post as the center post allowed for a larger barn using shorter lengths of log than would be necessary with corner post construction.

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The roof is supported by an internal post and beam structure with mortise and tenon joints. The tops of the walls are tied together with two tie-beams, which are notched into the top logs of the wall. Additionally, the two tie-beams are attached to the walls with iron straps. The gable roof structure of the original barn appears to be of later construction. Rafters, collars, and sheathing are of commercially sawn lumber fastened with square nails.

The shed roof additions to the sides of the original log barn are of post and beam construction. When they were attached (circa 1900), two logs were removed from both the north and south walls at about the hay mow level and used as support posts. The east and west walls are clad with board and batten siding, and there are no walls on the north or south elevations. The north wing is used as a livestock manger, and the south wing is used for automobile and machine storage.

The interior of the original barn has a central aisle with two hay mangers and a tack room along the north wall, and three hay mangers along the south wall. The mangers are separated by timber posts and tapered plank walls. The tack room was added in the 1970s and is finished with fiberboard walls and a standard hollow-core entrance door. The floors are covered with wood planks. A wood ladder in the southeast corner of the barn allows access to the hay mow. The floor of the mow is covered with wood planks and the log walls extend approximately three feet above the floor. The hay mow door openings, though narrower than those on the ground floor, also use the channel logs for jambs.

Spring House (D) one contributing building

The spring house appears to have been built in the early 1900s, and was reportedly located along the Van Camp Slough until the late 1940s. It was later moved to its present location and used as a bunkhouse. It is a one-story wood frame building with a concrete foundation. The walls are clad with lapped wood siding and finished with narrow corner boards. The side gable roof is clad with corrugated sheet metal. There are two paneled doors centered on the east elevation, each flanked by a double-hung sash that has been boarded over with siding. Also, there are two rectangular window openings on the north elevation that have been boarded with siding as well. The interior consists of two unfinished rooms, separated by a half wall constructed of 2-inch by 12-inch wood planks. The building is now used for storage.

Dairy Barn (E) one noncontributing building

The original 1905 dairy barn was a long, narrow one-story post and beam building with twin cupolas topping a bowed or rounded roof. The integrity of the barn was compromised when the cupolas were removed in the 1950s, and the eastern one-third of the roof was raised to accommodate a two-story shop with a front-facing gable roof in the 1990s. It is now used as a blacksmith and machine shop. The dairy barn features wide horizontal milled wood siding and plywood sheathing on the eastern third, and a combination of vertical and horizontal wood plank siding at the western two-thirds. The roof is covered with modern metal corrugated sheeting.

Livestock Chute and Ramp (F) one contributing structure

The livestock chute is constructed of vertical log posts with log cross beams and stacked lodgepole fencing. The ramp consists of 3-foot-tall vertical log corner posts and squared timber piles laid horizontally to form a retaining wall.

Shed (G) one contributing building

The shed is attached to the west side of the livestock chute. It is a simple one-story building with three walls, and a metal-clad shed roof. Rounded log posts support the roof and the three walls on the east, west, and south elevations are clad with vertical wood planks.

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Log Shed (H) one contributing building

This small one-story shelter is constructed of square-notched or lapped log walls, and has a metal-clad gable roof. It was built in two stages beginning in the 1930s. The western section is 14-feet wide and was built first, and the later, eastern section is six-feet wide. The north elevation has two wide door openings, but no other doors or window openings.

Outhouse (I) one contributing building

The outhouse is a one-story wood frame building with a concrete foundation and a shed roof clad with wood shingles. It appears to have been constructed in the late 1930s. The exterior walls are sided with vertical board siding, and the entrance door is on the east elevation. The interior has a concrete floor and a concrete bench with two toilet-hole openings.

Oil House (J) one contributing building

The oil house is a one-story wood frame building with a concrete foundation and shed roof clad with corrugated sheet metal. It appears to have been built in the 1930s. The exterior walls are sided with butt-jointed horizontal wood planks and the corners are finished with vertical corner boards. There is a wide hinged board and batten entrance door on the east elevation, and a screened ventilation window opening just to the south. The hinged door and transom on the north elevation are no longer used. The interior of the oil house has a tongue-and-groove wood floor and stores a large oil tank. In addition, there are two freestanding fuel tanks on the south side of the building.

Bunkhouse (K) one contributing building

The bunkhouse is a one-story log building with a log sill and a front-facing gable roof clad with corrugated sheet metal. It appears to have been built in the 1920s or 1930s. The walls are constructed of peeled rounded logs with V-notching at the corners. The roof is supported by a conventional balloon frame, and the gable end walls are sided with horizontal lapped siding.

There is a single glass and three-panel door centered on the east elevation, and a single six-over-six double-hung sash on the north elevation. On the south elevation there is a paneled entrance door flanked on the east by a six-over-six double-hung sash. The only opening on the west elevation is a centered two-light fixed sash.

Garage (L) one noncontributing building

The rectangular, wood-frame garage faces south, toward the farmhouse. Modern metal corrugated sheeting covers the front-gable roof, and modern metal siding covers the exterior walls. The garage is less than fifty years old, and does not contribute to the historic district.

Farmhouse (M) one noncontributing building

Built between 1865 and 1868, the farmhouse is one of the oldest buildings on the property, and was illustrated in a rendering pictured in the 1885 book, *History of Montana*⁶. The rendering shows a gracious two-story log house with a one-story side-gable wing on the east, surrounded by a large fenced yard with evenly spaced trees along the fence line. The plan of the house today shows that at least four additions have been added onto the original log house, including an enclosed front porch, and three large additions that encompass the north and east elevations of the original building. Several different types of exterior siding cover the original house and subsequent additions. Inside the modern interior, the alterations are evident in the uneven floor levels between rooms, and unusually thick interior partitions. Modern window and doors, together with non-historic additions and siding render the farmhouse a noncontributing resource within the historic district.

⁶ Michael A. Leeson, *History of Montana* (Chicago: Warner, Beers, and Co. 1885), 1017.

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Integrity

The Tash/Van Camp ranch has been a working ranch for the past 130 years, and is one of the longest run ranches in Montana. This continuity of use has ensured the preservation of the agricultural resources that comprise the ranch complex, as each building and structure on the property continued to serve a clear purpose in livestock and feed operations. As a result, the Tash/Van Camp agricultural complex displays very strong integrity, its setting, feeling and patterns of use still evincing the traditional, family-run approach to stock raising that took hold here well over a century ago. Eight of the twelve buildings within the ranching complex contribute to the integrity of the historic Tash Ranch, with the historic log barn a principle and dominant building. On the barn and the other contributing buildings, integrity of design and materials are well preserved, reflecting functional considerations and construction methods of the period. The integrity of location and the clear spatial relationships between various buildings on the property today convey a very clear understanding of the historic associations of the property, and the patterns of use and function that were incorporated into the ranch's design.

Where alterations have been made to contributing buildings, the modifications were often made within the period of significance, or are minor. The log barn, for example, retains integrity of construction and the massive log building methods, both of post and beam, and of pieced log wall construction, are still present on the interior. The wings and lap siding which were added a few decades later served to enhance the barn's function, and reflect a later but historic method of exterior treatment which served to protect the logs from weather. Nearby, buildings such as the bunkhouse, spring house, blacksmith shop are very well preserved and reflect a range of activities that made up the daily and seasonal work of this stock ranching operation.

Beyond the built improvements to the property, the range land itself and patterns of use reflected by pastures, corrals and irrigated fields reflect the property's broad agricultural context and family-centered management. Set along the Van Camp Slough, and carefully managed with well-built fencing and well-kept buildings, the Tash Ranch is a prime example of a well-run, diversified Montana cattle operation.

At the front of the property, the historic log home formerly dominated, however, it now has a modern exterior, and so does not contribute to the historic qualities of the site. Some of these changes are reversible however, and at a future date, the house could harken back to a more historic appearance.

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The competition for mining claims in the Grasshopper drainage prompted exploration for other prospects in the surrounding mountains. Here the miners were not disappointed, and as equipment that made underground lode mining possible was brought into the region, other camps were established where valuable metals were found. The Argenta district was developed nearby, with underground mines that were rich in silver and lead. The Argenta district included mines such as the Badger, the Goldfinch, the Goodview and the biggest producer, the Legal Tender. Proceeds of the Legal Tender mine helped to finance the construction of the territory's first smelter, and by 1890 several smelters had been erected in the Argenta District. Of them, an ill-fated smelter is of interest here since one of the original partners in the ranch operation was Xavier Renois (likely builder of the Van Camp-Tash buildings.) This smelter, dating to ca. 1870, was constructed by George M. Brown, J.P. Haskell and Xavier Renois. Constructed of inferior firebrick, the inner combustion chamber melted during its first firing, and it was never resurrected.⁷ Other major silver-producing mines in the area included Lion City and Glendale, owned by the Hecla Mining Company.⁸

Like so many mining camps, the town of Bannack's prospects were short-lived. Following major strikes in Alder Gulch in 1863 and Last Chance Gulch in 1864, Bannack was on the wane. After just one short year, the capital was moved to the Alder Gulch mining camp of Virginia City in 1864. Bannack's placer era lasted until about 1875, and a later period of dredge mining took place 1895-1902.⁹

Agriculture in the Beaverhead Valley

The earliest agricultural settlement in southwestern Montana was the St. Mary's Mission founded by Catholic missionaries in the Bitterroot Valley in 1841, and the nearby settlement around Fort Owen some 75 miles north and west of what would later become the mining camp of Bannack. In the Deer Lodge valley, 150 miles to the north, Johnny Grant established an early cattle and horse ranch in 1858. Wheat and produce were the staples of the Bitterroot, beef cattle of the Deer Lodge Valley, and when gold strikes were made in the mountains east and south of these settlements, the early agriculturalists quickly adapted their enterprises to provision the miners of the gold camps.¹⁰

These early farmers and ranchers sold directly to the miners from wagons and off the street, as well as supplying the first butcher shops and grocery purveyors in the budding mining camps. In Bannack, Conrad Kohrs, Hank Crawford, and Granville Stuart were among the first to market beef in the mining camp.

Nearby to the mining camp of Bannack, the broad Beaverhead Valley attracted farmers and ranchers whose livelihoods centered around provisioning the miners with food and livestock. The well-watered grasslands found in the Beaverhead valley, and the smaller valleys that fed into it, became an important early territorial center for production of wheat, barley, produce, cattle, sheep and horses. Some of the ranches were huge, open range operations that became renowned in Montana history including the Poindexter & Orr (P&O) Ranch. The P&O was a pioneering livestock company that trailed some of the first cattle into the region from California through Montana's Centennial Valley in the early 1860s.

Accessing the agricultural region of production were a number of early roads. From the south, the Corrine Road was a major artery conveying overland travelers up from Utah to western Montana. And railroads arrived in the vicinity with the completion of the Union Pacific to Melrose and Dillon. Completed in 1881, the railroad was the Montana territory's first rail line and was an important link between Montana's producing metals mines and ranching frontiers, and markets to the east and west. The Dillon railhead became an important point of connection between farmers and ranchers, and outside markets. Beginning in 1881, Dillon became a destination for those accessing the rail lines serving a vast rural

⁷ Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Remediation Division [online]. *Historical Context for the Argenta Mining District*, available from <http://www.deq.state.mt.us/abandonedmines/linkdocs/techdocs/4tech.asp>; Internet; accessed 28 June 2005.

⁸ DEQ, *Historical Context for Bannack Mining District*

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kingston Heath, *Striving for Permanence on the Western Frontier*, PhD Dissertation, Brown University, 1985: 65-66.

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hinterland; Beaverhead County alone held 8 million acres.¹¹ The community of Dillon, Montana sprang up rapidly along the line of the Union Pacific Railroad. It was estimated in 1910 that the railhead served a rural population of about 11,000 throughout southwestern Montana and the Lemhi region of Idaho. Dillon grew rapidly through the latter 19th century, and in 1897 the Montana Normal School was established there, lending the growing town a sense of permanence and maturity.¹²

Situated at an altitude between 4,000 and 5,000 feet above sea level, Beaverhead County contains a high valley environment well suited to pasturing livestock and raising cereal crops such as wheat, oats, hay, and other grains. The Beaverhead Valley became a center for horse and stock raising, and from 1900 well into the 20th century, ranchers in the county consistently raised some of the state's best stock. As the 1916-17 Directory for Dillon City and Beaverhead County boasted, "the best grade of horses in the world are to be found here."¹³ Indeed, with a third of the county's land in farm acreage, Beaverhead County for decades consistently ranked among Montana's top-producing counties in cattle, horses and sheep. Beaverhead County did not experience such tremendous volatility through the homestead era as counties to the east, and the production numbers across the decades remained fairly steady. The census numbers for county livestock over the first decades of the 20th century averaged roughly 70,000 head of cattle, 16,000 horses, and around 200,000 sheep. By the mid 1920s and early 1930s when the Tash family acquired the ranch, Beaverhead County was Montana's number one cattle and sheep producer and ranked third among the counties for numbers of horses raised. The Van Camp-Tash Ranch, in other words, was situated in the heart of some of Montana's most productive livestock country.¹⁴

History of the Van Camp-Tash Ranch

The first recorded entry on this property dates to Dec 1, 1865, when Amede Bessette and Xavier Renois filed claim to 320 acres in T7S, R9W. Because the GLO survey and plat mapping of the area were not completed until 1870, it may well be that their claim was filed under the Preemption Act of 1840.¹⁵

Amede Bessette was a French Canadian from Beauharnois, Quebec who traveled to Virginia City from St. Joseph, Missouri via the South Platte and the Bridger Cut-off in 1864. Bessette served as a translator to those traveling the routes and after his arrival in the Bannack area was an active miner with both placer and quartz interests in the Bannack, Argenta and Hecla mining districts. Over the years he invested in a number of mining claims, and was a vocal proponent of hardrock mining, authoring an article on Bannack's mining history in 1910. His diversified investments also included a store that he operated in Argenta during the 1860s, and sheep. Bessette was also involved with the vigilante movement in Bannack and was present at the hanging of Henry Plummer and other road agents.¹⁶

Xavier Renois was likewise born in Quebec, and traveled to St. Louis in 1862 with an uncle, Clovies Renois. Following that trip, in 1864 Xavier and Clovies set out together from Quebec to travel to Montana. They opened a general store in Bannack, and for two years sold dry goods and provisions to the miners. After this time, the fate of Clovies is unknown; Xavier remained in Bannack for the rest of his life. He was a leading contractor in the mining town, and built many of the prominent buildings in both Bannack and nearby Dillon.¹⁷

Renois' career as one of the more successful contractors in the Beaverhead Valley implies that the log barn and home on this property may well have been his work. The barn may have been constructed prior to selling the property the

¹¹ R. L. Polk & Co., *Dillon City and Beaverhead County Directory* (Chicago: R.L. Polk & Co. 1916-17) 86.

¹² Stanley R. Davison and Rex C. Myers, "Terminus Town: The Founding of Dillon, 1880". *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 30, no. 4 (1980): 24-26.

¹³ R. L. Polk & Co., *Dillon City and Beaverhead County Directory for 1916-17*, 86.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of the Census, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 Census of Agriculture (Washington, DC.: Government Printing Office).

¹⁵ Peter L. Steere and Fred Quivik, *Evaluation of Tash Ranch*. Butte, Montana, Montana Tech Foundation, 1981, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

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following year to Isaac Van Camp, or perhaps built by later contract after the property changed hands. Van Camp and his wife Martha were born in Illinois, and moved to Bannack in 1863. The Van Camps made the journey with a wagon train and trailed some cows along with them in order to establish a ranching business. After two failed attempts due to bad winter weather and other factors, Van Camp moved into Bannack and opened a feed stable, selling hay and refreshing the mounts for overland stages. In 1866, he dissolved his ranching partnership with Simon Estes and purchased 320 acres of ranchland on what became Van Camp Slough. The exact date of construction for the barn is not clear, but the house appears to date to ca. 1868-69, according to newspapers that were used to line the original log walls of the house.¹⁸

Isaac Van Camp served as Beaverhead Valley Justice of the Peace 1871-1873, and continued to operate the ranch, raising horses and cattle, along with hay for over 30 years. Van Camp and his family expanded their land holdings and the water rights associated with it throughout this period. Martha Van Camp died in 1892, and in 1898, Isaac Van Camp sold he ranch to Coleman C. Barnett.¹⁹

Following sale of the ranch to Barnett, the property turned over in succession. William Reed and William J. Hollingsworth purchased the property in 1902-03, ranching in partnership until 1910. From 1910-1913, Samuel K. (and wife Eliza) Clark replaced Reed as a partner with Hollingsworth; and in 1915 purchased Hollingsworth's former interest in the place. In 1917, George E. Ditty purchased the entire 8369 acres that by then comprised the ranch, raising cattle and horses for the next 10 years.²⁰

Tash Family History

In 1927, the ranch sold to William S. Tash and it has remained in the Tash family almost 80 years, serving 4 generations of Tash descendants over that time. William S. Tash was part of a large Iowa family born to Lewis & Mary Elizabeth Tash; of their eight children, seven moved to Bannack in the 1880s – early 1900s. William S. Tash and brother George were the first of the family to make the journey, making the westward journey in 1884. George worked first as a ranch hand outside of Bannack, and then rode shotgun and drove stagecoach with younger brother Noah Ray. George and William S. followed similar paths, both served as deputy sheriff in Bannack, and George also served as the community's deputy marshal. They homesteaded together, establishing a home ranch on upper Grasshopper Creek and engaged in the livestock and meat business. George ran the home ranch known as the on upper Grasshopper Creek raising shorthorn milking cattle; the brand for the home ranch has been the DL since early days. William S. Tash partnered with John and William Lenkendorfer in the meat business, in the budding town of Dillon where the partners ran the Montana Meat Market at 32 East Bannack Street.²¹ Brother George moved into Dillon from the ranch in 1917, to run the meat market.

The Tash-Lenkendorfer partnership dissolved in 1919, as the story goes, on the banks of the Big Hole River. The Lenkendorfers were responsible for calving and delivering the cattle in the spring. When one of the Lenkendorfers was two days late delivering their cattle, William went looking for them and discovered him in a Big Hole bar. The parties agreed to a price and dissolved the partnership then and there. During the 1920s, the Tash Livestock Company converted to Hereford cattle and gained a reputation as breeders of high quality stock. During this time they trailed their cattle to graze in the Ruby Valley and calved along Grasshopper Creek.

William S. Tash married Etta Adelia Meade whose parents, Dr. and Mrs. J.S. Meade, were proprietors of Bannack's Meade Hotel. William S. Tash and sons Harry, Wilbur and Earl established the Tash Livestock Company, moving their cattle between the home ranch in the Grasshopper Valley and the lower Tash Ranch on Van Camp Slough, which

¹⁸ Bill Tash, Personal Communication with Chere Jiusto & Christine Brown, April 1, 2005. The Tash family discovered many issues of the Christian Science Monitor on the walls during a renovation of the building.

¹⁹ Steere and Quivik, 6-7.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Stauffer, 536; R. L. Polk & Co.

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William S. purchased in 1927 and operated with his son Harry. Located lower down, with open water on a springfed creek, the Van Camp-Tash Ranch was suited to earlier calving and became the calving ranch for the Tash operations.²²

Other Tash siblings to arrive in Bannack included Homer, who worked in dredging and mining; Noah Raymond who worked as a rancher and freighter; and sisters Cora, Ora and Clara. Cora and her husband Harvey Jackson operated the Goodrich Hotel in Bannack during the early 1900s. Following the death of Etta Tash in 1919, William S. remarried to Emily Taylor. William S. Tash died in 1949, and Emily passed away four years later in 1953.²³

The Tash sons, Harry, Wilbur and Earl, grew up ranching, and following the death of their father jointly ran the Tash ranches. In later years, Harry's son William T. "Bill" Tash and brother Harry Jr. took over operation of the lower ranch on Van Camp Slough. The family divided the ranch in 1986, with Harry Jr. keeping the registered cattle on the home ranch, and Bill and his wife Marlene taking the grade cattle and the lower ranch. The ranch today remains a family affair, with Bill's sons William "Billy" and Todd running the operations; Billy and wife Judy manage the family corporation with its trademark brand, the T Diamond. "Bill" Tash Sr. has also served in the Montana Legislature, representing the Beaverhead district for 12 years, as a state representative 1993-2000, and since 2001 as a state senator.

Architectural Significance

Across the mining West, log buildings became synonymous with settlement patterns of the 19th century. In the forested regions of Montana, there were literally hundreds of mining camps, each with its share of temporary architecture that relied upon native materials from the surrounding environment. The earliest shelters were very crude and included tents, dug outs, wickiups and wagons covered with canvas. Log buildings, particularly in the western part of Montana, replaced such crude shelters in the mining camps were the standard for first generation buildings throughout the Territory.²⁴

The entrepreneurs who circulated to the western gold camps included those with previous experience in mining, and many with important skills and trades to contribute to the building of communities. Miners, merchants, farmers, ranchers, and tradesmen all shaped the formation of the young mining camps and supported their growth and expansion. Builders and carpenters skilled in log construction work provided the necessary skills to erect the first permanent shelter in many camps, and their work bridged the transition from chaotic mining camp, to burgeoning town.²⁵

The Tash Barn (and presumably the log structure for the family home) is an example of better quality building techniques executed by craftsmen with the skills to erect buildings to last for more than a century. The barn is an excellent example of piece-sur-piece construction, created of hand-hewn logs with snugly fitted dovetail joinery. And because the barn was sided within a few decades of the time of its construction, the log walls have remained true and protected from weather and deterioration over time.

The log walls of the barn are particularly important for their method of construction. The style is a kind of piece-sur-piece construction called "poteux et piece sur coulissante," or post and sliding piece construction. The technique originated as plank wall construction in France, and was translated into a sturdy form of log timber construction in Canada by fur trappers and traders. This method, often found extant at Canadian fur trading posts, uses squared horizontal logs, which are beveled at the ends and stacked or slid down between vertical channel posts.²⁶ The technique was common on larger fort buildings, and on barns and other agricultural buildings. While the channel logs are often used as corner posts, in the Tash Barn they are found midway between the north and south walls, and as the doorjambes on the east and west walls. This ingenious method of using the channel post as the center post allowed for a larger barn using shorter lengths of log

²² Stauffer, 536.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Heath, 20.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ J. Gottfried, *Fur Post Construction*, Northwest Journal [online]. Available at <http://www.northwestjournal.ca/PostCon.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 June 2005.

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than would be necessary with corner post construction. The method was an alternative to splicing the logs together, another format, which was often employed to extend the length of, log walls during the frontier era.

At nearby Bannack, where about three dozen log buildings contemporaneous to the Tash Barn remain, a survey of the historic log buildings there reveals that the Tash Barn is of a comparatively high quality of construction, and that some of the same techniques used on the barn are represented in the former mining camp.

As architect Kingston Heath has noted, construction in Bannack was a rangy affair, and reflected an ethnic mixture of styles and construction methods. The quality of construction of the Tash barn and the house, and the ethnic French method of construction lead to the attribution of Xavier Renois as the likely builder. One of the original property owners, Renois was a leading carpenter and building contractor in the nearby mining camp of Bannack. His skill is evidenced in construction of his own cabin there, which exhibits square-hewn logs joined at the corners with double-dovetail notching. Renois was credited with construction of many of Bannack's buildings, including the town's most prominent building, the original Beaverhead County courthouse (later the Meade Hotel). Although most of the buildings at Bannack have no credited builder, the two cabins that served as jails, the Sing cabin, and the cabin which belonged to Renois' partner Amede Bessette all exhibit the dovetail notching employed on better quality cabins in the camp,²⁷ and on the Tash buildings. In addition, there are at least two buildings in Bannack where some form of extended log wall was built.

Within the state of Montana, there are other examples of pieced ethnic French construction, and although there has been no organized study of the technique in the state, the type is noteworthy here for its rarity, its representation of early settlement period design and the outstanding level of craftsmanship that generally is seen on buildings employing these techniques.

* * *

The Van Camp/Tash Ranch was built as the Beaverhead was first settled, a time when open range livestock ranchers prospered and area mining camps promised a bright future. The ranch has been an anchor in the agricultural community and a landmark in this corner of the valley for its entire lifetime.

²⁷ Historical Research Associates, *Preliminary Report Master Plan Bannack State Park*, Unpublished report, Missoula, Montana: 1981.

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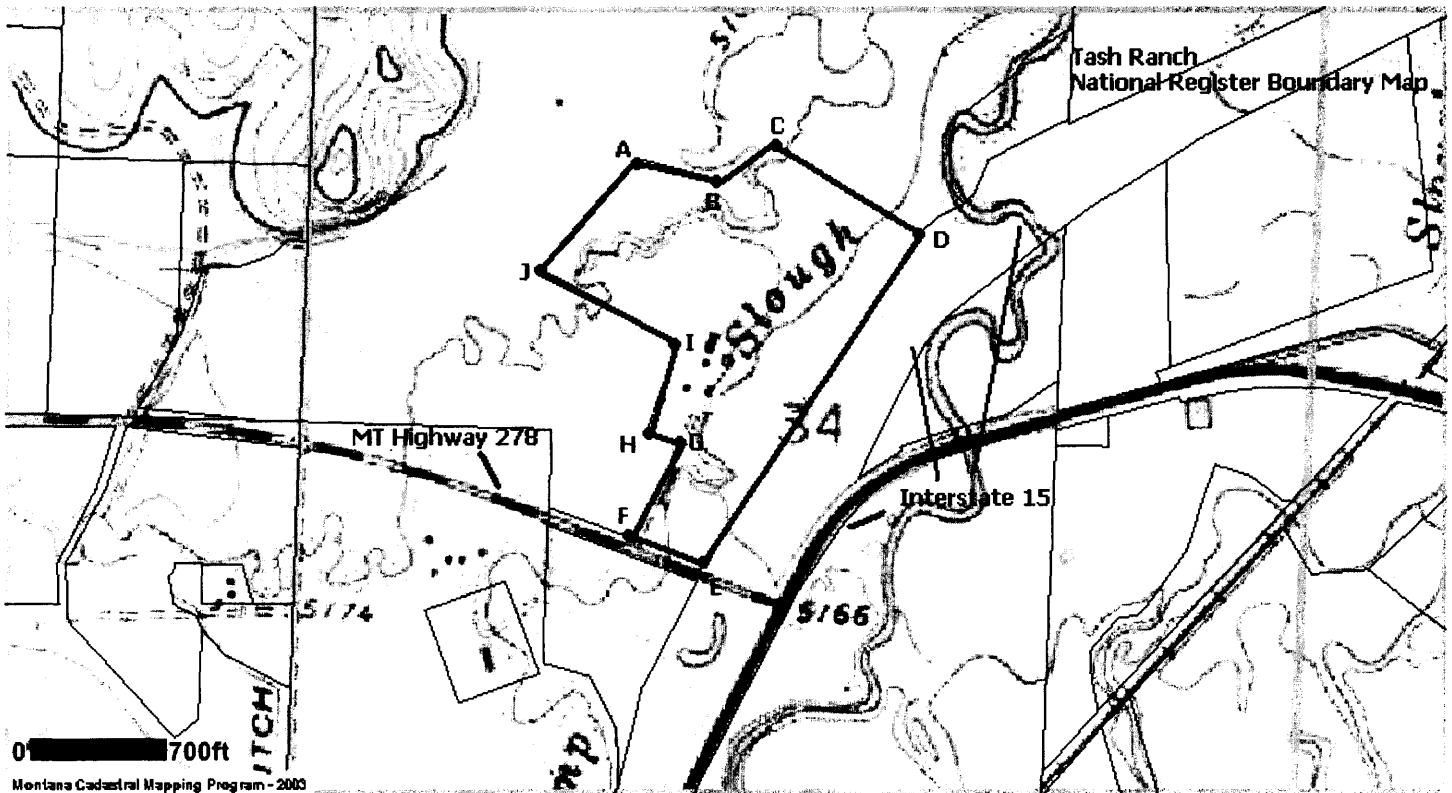
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Verbal Boundary Description

A tract of land in section 34, T7S, R9W, P.M. Beaverhead County, Montana, described as follows: Commencing at the section corner common to sections 27, 28, 33, and 34, T7S, R9W, P.M. Montana; Thence S.28-33-20E., 3669.07 ft. to the northeasterly right of way line of State Highway No. 278, which is the true point of beginning (UTM point F); thence S.70-40-45E., along said right of way line 403.94 ft., to the westerly right of way line of Interstate Highway No. 15 (UTM Point E); thence N.25-35-47E., along said right of way line, 269.77 ft.; thence N.31-45-55E., along said right of way line 463.86 ft.; Thence N.31-01-35E., along said right of way line 1094.40 ft., thence N.30-53-27E., along said right of way line, 235.42 ft. (UTM Point D); thence N.61-28-00W., 892.29 ft. (UTM Point C); thence S.52-51-02W., 315.34 ft (UTM Point B); thence N.76-59-22W., 443.04 ft. (UTM Point A); thence S.38-38-22W., 590.20 ft.; thence S.43-51-55W., 215.78 ft. (UTM Point J); thence S.65-53-55E., 817.13ft. (UTM Point I); thence S.16-46-16W., 501.89 ft. (UTM Point H); thence S.80-23-12E., 181.31 ft. (UTM Point G); thence S.23-09-46W., 563.78 ft., to the point of the beginning (UTM Point F).



Detail of Dillon West 7.5 minute Quadrangle, showing National Register boundary of the Tash Ranch.

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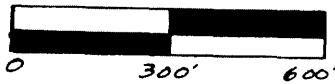
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SCALE



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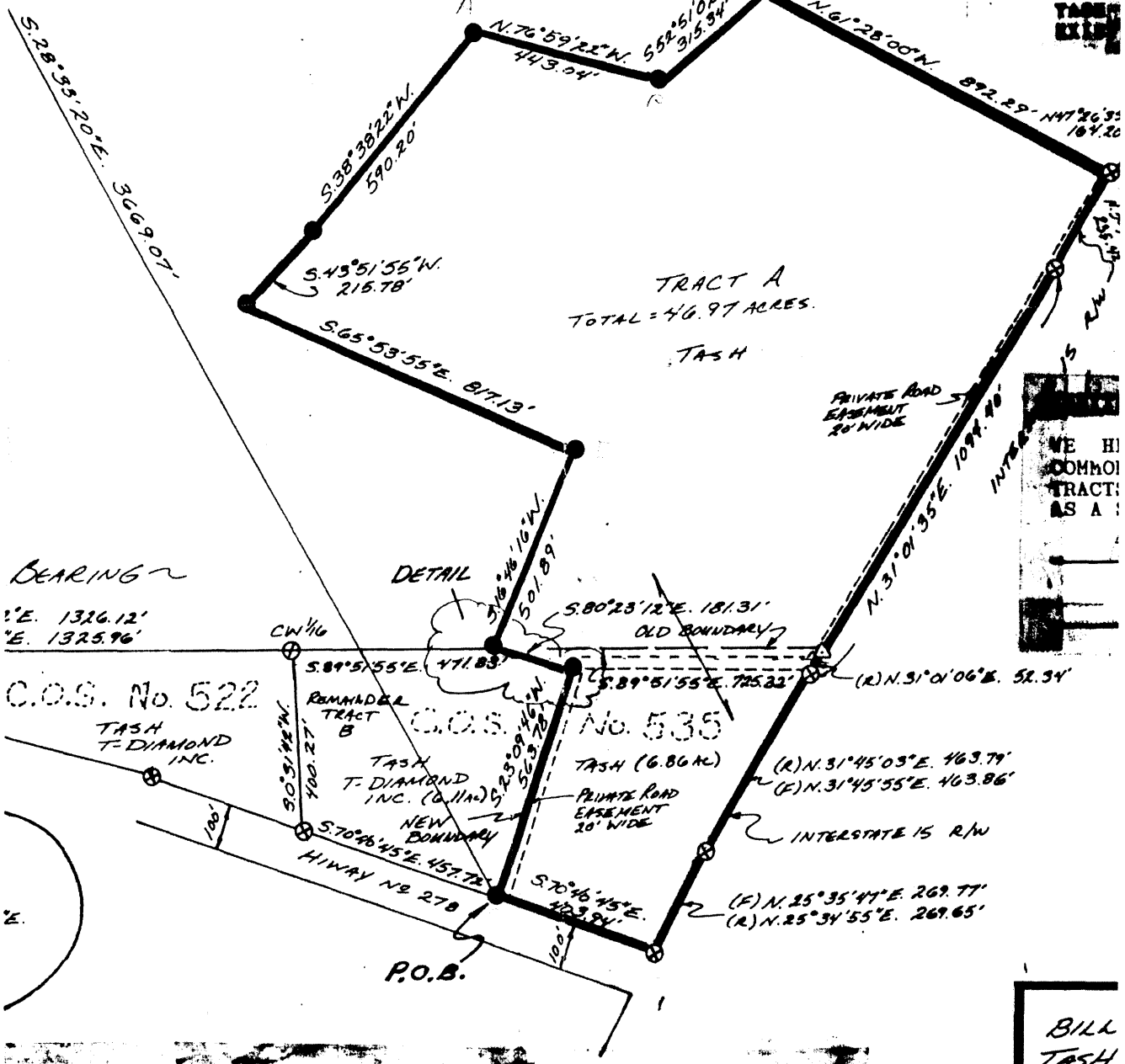
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BILL
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Detail of survey of the Van Camp-Tash Ranch Historic District

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Photographs

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The photographs that accompany this nomination were taken using Kodak Tri-X black and white film and printed on Kodak Professional RC paper. The photos were taken by Christine Brown, May 2005. The photos were field checked for accuracy in September 2007. The negatives are on file at MTSHPPO, Helena, MT.

- 1: Overview of Van Camp-Tash Ranch from the southbound lanes of Interstate 15. View to southwest.
- 2: Blacksmith Shop (A), south elevation. View to north.
- 3: Blacksmith Shop (A), north and east elevations. View to southwest.
- 4: Blacksmith Shop (A), east elevation with Horse Barn (C) in background. View to southwest.
- 5: Cattle Shed (B/noncontributing), south and east elevations. View to northwest.
- 6: Horse Barn (C), east elevation. View to west.
- 7: Horse Barn (C), north shed elevation. View to southwest.
- 8: Horse Barn (C), south shed elevation. View to northwest.
- 9: Horse Barn (C), west elevation. View to east.
- 10: Horse Barn (C), interior view of horse stalls. View to east.
- 11: Horse Barn (C), interior view of horse stalls. View to southeast.
- 12: Horse Barn (C), interior view of inscriptions on east door jamb. Detail view.
- 13: Horse Barn (C), interior view of piece-sur-piece construction of north wall. View to north.
- 14: Horse Barn (C), interior view of timber cross beam in hay loft. Detail view.
- 15: Spring House (D), north and east elevations. View to southwest.
- 16: Spring House (D), south and east elevations. View to northwest.
- 17: Dairy Barn (E/noncontributing), south and east elevations. View to northwest.
- 18: Dairy Barn (E/noncontributing), south elevation. View to northwest.
- 19: Dairy Barn (E/noncontributing), north elevation. View to east.
- 20: From right to left, Cattle Chute (F), Shed (G), and Log Shed (H), south elevations. View to west-northwest.
- 21: Log Shed (H), north elevation. View to southwest.
- 22: Log Shed (H), south elevation. View to west-northwest.
- 23: From right to left, Outhouse (I) and Oil House (H), east and north elevations. View to southwest.
- 24: Oil House (H), south and east elevations. View to northwest.
- 25: Bunkhouse (K), north and east elevations. View to southwest.
- 26: Bunkhouse (K), south and east elevations. View to northwest.
- 27: Bunkhouse (K), notching detail at southeast corner. View to northwest.
- 28: Farmhouse (M/noncontributing), south elevation. View to northeast.
- 29: View of cattle pasture and fencing, looking northwest from Blacksmith Shop.