

The Golden Cavern of Kokoweef Mountain

Think of it! "Eight miles of gold-bearing black sand for an average width of three hundred and fifty feet and an average depth of eight feet along the banks of a river." That is the sworn statement of the finder of this legendary mine. And the river of the golden sands is in a great cavern two thousand feet underground!

The discoverer's affidavit also tells of an assay of the sand by a prominent chemist of Los Angeles showing the gold value of \$2,145.47 a cubic yard at the old gold price of \$20.67 an ounce. But sit tight while you read this story. Don't pack the old kit bag for a mad rush to this bonanza. It is in the hands of a syndicate and no shares are for sale. Nor will this once-lost mine be lost again.

At the time of this writing no one can say that the tale is true in actual detail, but reasons exist for suspecting that it has at least some foundation in fact. And operations are under way to learn the truth. If even a small part of this fantastic yarn is verified it would seem to belie conviction of the tired wage-earner that the last chapter of gold, of new unseen gold, has been written in musty books, and to deny his plaint that days of opportunity are over. And this story of how an Indian legend came to life will have its value, for the yarn is more far-fetched than the wildest of lost mine stories cooked up by a campfire. And those who are ready to laugh off all legends of lost lodes and vanished placer beds may think again of the great cavern beneath the floor of the desert.

Imagine finding this stream of cool water flowing over its golden sands down in vast, dark depths of a secret cavern—yes, beneath the Mojave Desert, where many a thirst-crazed gold-seeker has left his bones to bleach under the merciless sun! Imagine it, a scarce sixty miles south of the searing bottom of Death Valley! Imagine finding it almost alongside the concrete ribbon of U. S. Highway 91 (and 466) only sixty-five miles from Las Vegas. The artisans of Boulder Dam, twenty minutes away by air, would not have dreamed of it. Remember, too, the old days of the Spanish Trail, a few miles away, beaten again by the feet of Fremont and his men in 1844, and the Garces route of 1776, not twenty miles to the south, followed again in 1827 by Jedediah Smith and his crew. And give a thought then to the real pioneers of the desert's mineral wealth—those grim, lone, slouch-hatted men of pick and pan and patient burro—the misty horde of prospectors who passed this way through the long years and vanished into the sunset.

Perhaps no one will ever know just how long the cavern of the Ivanpah Mountains, near the eastern border of California, and of Koko-weef Peak, in particular, was known to the Indians. However, its known history begins years ago when the man whose affidavit, given below, was a small boy. Two Indians known to him and his father on their Colorado ranch gave the boy a map to hidden treasure, so they said, telling him that when he grew up he could get rich. Coming as it did, this news was given no more credulity than one might expect. An Indian legend that might have something in it, some time. The boy, now known as E. P. Dorr, kept the map, "grew up" and followed its directions. There was something in it. Dorr claims that the story told by the Indians appeared to be true.

Originally there had been three Indians, brothers, and from tribal history they had found again the small entrance to a cave so vast that no one could know its extent. Far down inside, down, down, was a river of rushing water. Along the banks was much gold, the Indians said. It was mixed with the black sands so no one could say how much was there. The three brothers had sifted and carried away much placer gold, but the tragedy of the yellow metal finally reached down into the cave and struck. Once while carrying their primitive torchlights, one brother fell down over a great cliff in the darkness and his brains were dashed out on the rocks below. According to tribal tradition, the two remaining brothers were forever barred from returning to the scene of the death, hence their gift of the map and its story to young Dorr.

Dorr's story is told in the following statement, sworn in an affidavit on November 16, 1934, and published in the *California Mining Journal* of November, 1940. The statement is reprinted through the courtesy of that publication.

DORR'S AFFIDAVIT

"This is to certify that there are located in San Bernardino County, California, certain caverns. These caverns are about 250 miles from Los Angeles, California. Traveling over state highways by automobile the caverns can be reached in a few hours.

"Accompanied by a mining engineer, I visited the caverns in the month of May, 1927. We entered them and spent four days exploring them for a distance of between eight and nine miles. We carried with us altimeters and pedometers to measure the distance we traveled and had an instrument to take measurements of distance by triangulation, together with such instruments . . . to make examinations, observations and estimations.

"Our examinations revealed the following facts:

"1. From the mouth of the cavern we descended about 2,000 feet. There we found a canyon which, on our altimeter, measured about 3,000 to 3,500 feet deep. We found the caverns to be divided into many chambers, filled and embellished with the usual stalagmites and stalactites, besides many grotesque and fantastic wonders that make the caverns one of the marvels of the world.

"2. On the floor of the canyon there is a flowing river which . . . we estimated to be about 300 feet wide and with considerable depth. The river rises and falls with the tides of the sea, at high tide being about 300 feet wide and at low tide about 10 feet wide and 4 feet deep.

"3. When the tide is out there is exposed on both sides of the river from 100 to 150 feet of black beach sand which is very rich in gold values. The sands are from 4 to 11 feet deep. This means there are about 300 to 350 feet of rich bearing placer sand which average 8 feet in depth. We explored the canyon sands a distance of more than 8 miles, finding little variation in the depth and width of the sands.

"4. I am a practical miner of many years experience and I own valuable mining properties nearby which I am willing to pledge and put up as security to guarantee that the statements herein made are true.

"5. My purpose of exploring the caverns was to study the mineralogy in order to ascertain the mineral possibilities and actualities of the caves, making such examination in person with my engineer to determine by expert examination the character and quantity of mineral values.

"6. I carried out about 10 pounds of the black sand and 'panned it,' receiving more than \$7.00 in gold. I sold it to a gold buyer who allowed me at the rate of \$18.00 per ounce. Two and one-half pounds of this black sand I sent to John Herman, assayer, whose assay certificates show a value of \$2,145.47 per yard, with gold at \$20.67 per ounce.

"7. From engineering measurements and observations we made I estimated that it would require a tunnel about 350 feet long to penetrate to the caverns, one thousand feet or more below the present entrance, which is some three miles distant from my property.

"8. I make no estimate of even the approximate tonnage of the black sand, but some estimate of the cubical contents may be made for more than eight miles and the minimum depth is never less than three feet. They are of varying depth—what their maximum depth may be we do not know."

Needless to say, publication of the above affidavit caused a flurry in mining circles at the time, but nothing came of it. Obviously any de-

velopment of such a property called for extensive resources. Dorr's story changed in minor details from that told in the affidavit but still stretches credulity. The two men told of climbing 1,200 feet down from the opening on top of Kokoweef Mountain between overlaying limestone and metamorphic rock beneath it. The cavern below was of unknown size and the small stream, after a few miles, finally plunged over a precipice 3,000 feet high, or that much farther down into the earth!

Dorr and his partner filled pockets with specimens of sand, but the steep climb was too much for the partner, so Dorr had to assist him and was reviving the man when other prospectors appeared. Some of the sand was spilled and likewise the secret. Dorr climbed down and set off dynamite charges at two points to seal the cave, the upper one 300 feet below the opening. That level is as far as anyone has been able to descend and the engineers decided against reopening the natural entrance. Instead they have started to drill at a lower level for the sake of a shorter shaft. At the time of this writing no one has peered into the strange depths below.

Meanwhile the traditional fatality of gold has struck once more. Dorr's partner died, from natural causes. And Dorr is out of the picture. The two men spoke of rushing winds in the cave. They believed that the draught could exist only because of a second opening which they imagined they saw, far away in the roof, apparently offering easier access. Both were so convinced of this that they allowed their registered claim to the original entrance to go by default. Another prospector then staked the claim and sold it. Meanwhile Dorr has failed to find a clue leading to another entrance.

Fantastic as this story sounds, both Dorr and his partner have told it separately to persons unknown to each other and in substantially the same version. Inquiry has disclosed that even the Indian brothers of the tale had bank accounts of proportions. And a desert river out there does disappear from the surface. The mining firm in control at the time this is written is already operating a producing zinc mine on the same mountain, almost right at the spot. In a talk with a member of this company, he told the writer—"we don't know what we will find. We just discount the whole thing one hundred per cent and then we know we at least will have a lot of fun."

Discussing the Aladdin Cave angles of what is a venture into matter-of-fact hard rock with an outlay of modern cash, the writer said: "When you get the gold out, just let me have the tourist rights." For if there is a 3,000-foot waterfall under Kokoweef Mountain, then an

LOST MINES OF THE OLD WEST

intriguing bit of scenery would seem to have escaped from Yosemite Valley and hid underground. Yet, the geologists who have walked over the terrain say there can be little doubt of the existence of a giant cavern down there—how big is only a guess. Could it be another Carlsbad? They are definitely interested.

If a half of the Arabian Nights elements of this sworn tale materialize, the most modern of realists will concede a bit of sympathy for the lure that drew the swashbuckling conquistadores over endless reaches of desert and dale in search of the Seven Cities of Cibola.

