

# Dorr's tale of treasure

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By **MARK MUCKENFUSS THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE**  
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You can build a lasting legend on \$7 worth of gold. That is, as long as you have a great story to go with it.

A group of modern-day miners and treasure seekers believes that billions of dollars in gold lies somewhere beneath **Kokoweef** Peak, a mountain in the California desert near the Nevada state line. Much of their faith is based on a 1934 affidavit filed in Los Angeles County by Earl P. Dorr.

Dorr claimed to have found a passage to an immense underground cavern, 2,000 feet below the desert floor. The cavern itself went down another 3,000 to 3,500 feet. "There are numerous ledges above the canyon that are from 10 to 40 feet wide and covered with sand," Dorr stated in the affidavit. "And wherever examined, the ledge sands are found to be fabulously rich with gold."

Dorr carried out 10 pounds of sand, the affidavit says, panned seven pounds of it, recovering "more than \$7 in gold, with gold at \$20 an ounce." The remainder he sent to an assayer, with no mention of an actual return of money.

The affidavit also refers to a previous exploration of the underground river by Oliver, Buck and George Peysert that reportedly resulted in a haul of \$57,000 in gold.

The Peyserts were friends of Dorr.

"They sent their gold directly to the U.S. Mint and banked the returns in a bank in Needles, California, and another bank in Las Vegas, Nevada," the affidavit says. Modern investigators have been unable to confirm such an amount of gold being sent to the mint by the Peyserts.

Ralph Lewis is one who believes in Dorr's tale, at least to some extent. Lewis has been exploring **Kokoweef** Peak and the geology of the surrounding area since 1979. He has also examined, probably more than anyone, the historical trail of the legend and plans to publish a book on the subject.

Different versions of the Dorr legend abound. In most, the Peysert brothers are referred to as American Indians, among whom the location of the gold was long known. One tale speaks of Spanish Conquistadors coming inland from the California coast in 1527, using the Indians for slave labor and leaving the area loaded down with gold.

A diary by one of the Spaniards is said to be buried somewhere in the archives of the San Bernardino County Museum.

Lewis recently returned from doing research in Colorado Springs, Colo., Dorr's hometown. He says evidence shows the Peyserts may not have been Indians at all. "They arrived in Colorado Springs where Earl was growing up when he was 12 years old," Lewis says. "They had come out from New York and were probably Jewish." It's possible, he says, that the Peyserts heard the story of the gold, or even found it, and then relayed the information to Dorr.

Bob Reynolds, a geologist with LSA Associates in Riverside, has spent much of his life studying the California desert. He has serious doubts about Dorr's story.

In the mid-1970s, Reynolds, then a curator for the San Bernardino County Museum, supervised the removal of 11,000 pounds of sediment containing fossilized animal bones from **Kokoweef** Cave. Despite more than three decades of work at the museum, Reynolds says the conquistador story is new to him.

"I really don't remember any conquistador diaries," he says. "If I had it, I wouldn't be here."

Based on the geology of the region, Reynolds says it's unlikely there is anything beneath the initial layer of limestone other than solid granite.

Dorr died in 1957, six months after he was injured by a mining blast, taking most of his secrets with him.

"The story's always going to be there," Lewis says. "They'll probably be looking for gold up there forever."

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