

Tales of gold never get old

September 8, 2001

By **MARK MUCKENFUSS THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE**
{SOURCE:+}

Rivers of gold, Piles of nuggets. Tunnels filled with ore.

It's all there in the Mojave Desert, If you believe the stories.

There are plenty of them, all pretty much following a common theme. A solitary prospector wanders out of the desert with pockets filled with gold nuggets claiming to have found some mine or location littered with the stuff. But, either because of being brutalized by the elements of the desert, just plain old bad memory or even death, the miner can't reveal the location of his find.

After more than 50 years of searching, the Dutch Oven Mine in the Clipper Mountains near Essex was rediscovered. But apart from a few pockets of gold, the ore was too low grade to warrant extracting it.

The Lost Arch bonanza has never been found. Nor has the river of gold running under **Kokoweef** Cave.

But that may change.

The **Kokoweef** legend is more recent than many of the old lost mine tales. Located just south of Mountain Pass on Interstate 15, the cave became the stuff of legend in the 1920s, says local geologist Bob Reynolds. It was during that time that the Paysert brothers reportedly deposited \$28,000 in the bank. They talked about an underground river, accessible from the **Kokoweef** Cave, where gold was plentiful. Then the brothers disappeared.

Later, a prospector named Earl Dorr and his partner claimed to have found the river. But Dorr, who gained a reputation for being a hermit, said he needed financial backing to develop the claim.

"My great-aunt knew him," Reynolds says. She lived in a Pasadena boardinghouse and Dorr would come into the boardinghouse and make calls on the pay phone trying to raise money. Fund-raising didn't go well and Dorr became more and more embittered.

"One day some people were coming up to see him and they heard a blast and Dorr came out of the cave and said, 'You'll never find the treasure now,' " Reynolds says. He was right to an extent.

For earth scientists, the cave yielded treasure of another kind.

While working for the San Bernardino County Museum in the mid-1970s, Reynolds found fossils there.

"We went out and removed about 7,000 pounds of sediment and made a fine collection of half a million fossilized bones," he says. "That was our gold that we got out of **Kokoweef**."

Over the years, the legend has grown more outlandish. One story had a Russian submarine coming up the underground river and filling its ballast tanks with gold. More recently, Explorations Inc. of Las Vegas has been on its own quest for the river of gold.

Andy Leszykowski of the Mojave National Preserve, which borders the cave, says this latest group, led in part by Ralph Lewis, brother of Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Redlands, is taking a scientific approach.

"They've been doing a lot of electromagnetic surveys and drilling bore holes,"

Leszykowski says. "It's been fairly active in the last couple of years."

Efforts to contact Lewis were unsuccessful. No one at the Las Vegas office would comment on the operation other than to say that Lewis and president Larry Hahn were on-site at **Kokoweef** and not reachable. It's too remote even for cell phone service.

"The aura of secrecy prevails throughout all this history," Reynolds says.

Maybe the new miners are on to the stuff of legend.

Zone: SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY; EAST VALLEY

Edition:

Section: LOCAL

Page#: B01