

LOCAL DIGGERS PURSUE ELUSIVE CAVERN AND ITS LEGENDARY RICH RIVER OF GOLD

By COLIN MCKINLAY

A few miles south of the Mountain Pass summit in California, 15 miles from the Nevada state line, a group of workers at a mining commune are pursuing a dream of riches of fantastic proportions.

The group's enthusiasm for the legendary project is being spurred on by Larry Hahn, president and treasurer of Explorations Inc., of Nevada, and owner/operator of a surplus store in North Las Vegas.

While the West thrives on fanciful stories of lost mines and the lore of misplaced riches, there is real money and muscle being poured into this operation to break into an underground cavern where the wealth supposedly lies.

Finding the lode has been an almost intangible dream, or vision, of Bill Herkert, a 73-year-old retired rigging foreman at the Todd Shipyards at San Pedro, Calif., who now lives in Barstow. "If we find what we are looking for, we'll control the world banks. We'll put a lot of people to work," he says.

The goal of the exploration is a story of unbelievable proportions. Inside Kokoweef Mountain is a cavern which would make the

Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico look like a hole in the wall, according to the legend.

While the deepest cavern at Carlsbad is 294 feet, the deepest cavern at Kokoweef is a reported 3000 feet.

There is supposedly a river flowing through the cavern, and untold amounts of black sand containing gold which assayed at \$2000 per ton in the 1930s, according to reports provided by Earl Dorr, who visited the cavern in the early 1930s.

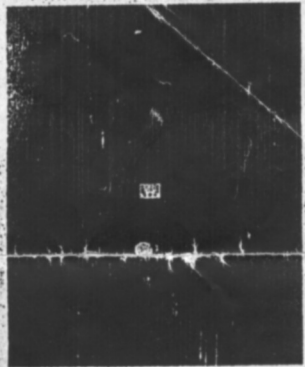
In an article appearing in *Argosy* magazine in 1967, written by Ray Dorr, nephew of Earl, he said that Uncle Earl either "discovered the richest gold deposit in the United States in 1931, or was the most imaginative liar in the state of California."

The article says that Dorr explored the cavern, saw the river and brought out samples of the rich black sand. In an article made in 1934, Dorr swore to the authenticity of the lode for purposes of inducing investors to put up money to recover the gold. Historical documents shed no more light on the pursuit.

That there is a cavern in Kokoweef (an Indian word meaning "dripping water") appears to be incontrovertible. Just a few

weeks ago a trespasser entered one of the abandoned mined shafts and suffocated after reaching a cavern extension.

What has accelerated current exploration was the acquisition of a \$57,000
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SEARCH—Workers worm 400 feet into mountain for legendary riches.

MINERS SEEK LEGENDARY GOLD LODE SOUTH OF LV

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load, haul and dump machine which allows a crew to dig about six feet per day with a combination of drilling, blasting and scooping.

Herkert believes that the tunnel, now about 400 feet into the mountain, is half to two-thirds of the distance to the cavern. Barring any equipment breakdown, they expect to enter the cavern before the end of the year.

For the first six months of this year 201 of the 326 investors have put up \$41,000. It has been totally disbursed on such costs as equipment note payments, explosives, fuel, camp supplies, parts, legal fees, repairs,

leases, safety equipment and industrial insurance for workers.

While Herkert has been probing the Kokoweef mountain most of his life, the current project started to take off 10 years ago when he teamed up with Hahn, and they formed Exploration Inc. of Nevada.

Books are kept by Hahn on donors who provide money or work units, and they will share in the reward when the pot of gold is reached. For that reason there is no payroll or any of the inconveniences placed on businessmen by government.

Hahn says that they are in compliance with all safety requirements imposed on the mining industry. They have also registered

with the Securities and Exchange Commission although they have no stock to sell.

"We've got all the investors we need right now," Hahn said.

The trailer village where the workers live is at about the 5000-foot level. Water has to be brought in by a tanker truck, and everywhere there is evidence of the materials scrounged by Hahn, which someone foresees as being items of necessity at some future time.

The crew averages six to eight persons. There's only room for two or three to work in the tunnel. It is about six feet wide, just

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Explorers
id to lode.

enough clearance for back loader to operate. It has the capacity to remove half a yard of rock at a time.

Last week the drilling and blasting chores were being handled by Jerry Erick, a veteran hard-rock miner, and Steve Clement, a former engineer for General Motors.

Herkert says they have done all of their legal paperwork.

"We're not selling anything. This place isn't for sale, but they can't stop me from giving it away to those people who helped me," he says.

The property, about 1200 by 1500 feet, is five mining claims, and is in an area pockmarked with natural cave formations and other mining exploration. The most notable is the Morning Star Mine, a leach operation, a few miles to the south.

On a map, Herkert shows that the Kokoweef cave is in a perfect fault line with Mitchell Caverns to the south, and a little-known cave on Mt. Charleston, discovered in 1961, but sealed up by the U.S. Forest Service because it was too dangerous to explore or allow visitation.

But Hahn sees the real gold in the cavern as a tourist attraction. He would use the gold — without taking it out of the ground — as security for loans to build an underground Disneyland type of operation with an American-made bullet train bringing in tourists from Las Vegas.

"There should be 60,000 to 70,000 people per day coming to the caverns," Hahn says. "There's 27,000 cars a day using I-15."

By any other name...

Kokoweef Peak appears on some maps as Ressler Peak, named after a miner who worked the area in the last century named Pete Ressler. Ressler was a member of the Butch Cassidy gang of outlaws, and had a cabin and mine on the southeast slope of the cavernous mountain. Vandals burned down his cabin some years ago, but his hole in the ground and the remnants of his root cellar can still be seen.

Only a level spot on the ground remains where the cabin once stood.