

# Fabled San Bernardino Co. Golden River Subject of Prospector Suit

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A case involving a legendary treasure of the old west was entered last week on the dockets of the San Bernardino County Superior Court.

It involves the story of a vast underground river, whose black beach sand is heavy with gold, and it is entered now as Case No. 111534 in Department 1 of Superior Court.

The fabled river is (according to the story) vast enough to have huge underground waterfalls. The gold-laden sand is supposed to assay about \$7,000 a ton. And in the Mojave Desert where water is shorter even than it may be in San Bernardino after September of 1964, the river might be worth more than the gold.

## Two Groups Claim Rights

Two groups have tied up in court over the right to explore for this treasure.

On one side of the legal fence is Charles O. Thompson of the desert community of Llano. Thompson, in his request for an injunction against the opposing party, says he has a 320-acre mining claim called the Earl P. Dorr Rapids No. 2.

This claim, he hopes, lies over the golden river.

At any rate, according to Thompson's suit, he found a mining party headed by James L. Hoffman with a big drilling rig, right in the vicinity of his diggings.

Not so, said Hoffman and his party in their answering brief. Hoffman said he and his men scoured the area — about 13 miles southwest of U. S. 91-466 (the Barstow-to-Las Vegas highway) on the Cima road. The Cima road crosses Highway 91-466 some 21 miles east of Baker.

With Judge Archie D. Mitchell on the bench, the two sides squared away last week. Atty. James L. King defended Hoffman, and Atty. Richard Mulligan presented Thompson's side.

## "Possession is 9 Points"

King countered that the two sites were some 10 miles from one another — and that physical possession could not be extended that far without being backed by a recorded claim.

Mulligan argued that Thompson, if he had not filed paper claims, still possessed the mining rights because of physical occupation of the site.

Judge Mitchell heard the nearly day-long arguments and announced: "The case stands submitted." This means he will study it and make a ruling later.

## Discovers Cavern Entrance

Hoffman says he is a professional prospector and that he and his scouts spent what must have been three warm days — July 30, 31 and Aug. 1 — prospecting the site of the Cima caverns, believed to be the entrance to the river-caverns.

He said he saw no "discovery monuments" — the traditional pyramid of rocks marking a mining claim. Hoffman's brief says that he

and his aides then "diligently searched" the records of the county Recorder's Office and found no prior mining claim covering the area where they proposed to operate.

And there, with its claims and counter-claims, the case rests until the judge rules on it.

## Has Exploratory Group

Thompson's injunction request says the exploratory work is being carried on by Hoffman and a group including Emmett J. Culligan and two members of his family; James C. Cook and Kathleen M. Cook; Hoffman's wife, Maxine M. Hoffman; Larry Mann, Dudley Baggerman, Mike McCann, Lowell Mann and various John Does.

Thompson says he is suing on behalf of himself and eight co-owners of his Earl P. Dorr Rapids No. 2 claim. He asks the court to expel the mining party.

The legend is carried in a book of western lore, "Lost Mines of the Old West." It attributes the story to an affidavit by E. P. Dorr dated Nov. 16, 1934 and to an article in the California Mining Journal.

## The Discoverer's Story

The story goes that Dorr as a boy heard of the golden river and its caverns from two Indians who worked on his father's ranch. When he was grown, he decided to check the story out.

He said that with a mining engineer he visited the site in May 1927, and spent four days in the caverns. He located them as "almost alongside U. S. 91 (and 466), in the Kokoweef Peak of the Ivanpah Mountains — only 65 miles from Las Vegas."

Dorr says he and his companion descended 2,000 feet and entered a vast canyon which wound down farther to some 3,000 to 3,500 feet. Its floor was bisected, Dorr swore, by a river which rose and descended in volume as though with the tides.

At "high tide," Dorr said, the river was 300 feet wide. It then ebbed to 10 feet wide and about 4 feet deep.

This river under the desert had at places huge waterfalls, he wrote, and along its banks was a heavy, black sand.

## Explored River For 8 Miles

The sand stretched 100 to 150 feet wide at low tide and seemed some 4 to 11 feet deep, averaging about 8 feet. Dorr said he and his companion had altimeters to measure depths and pedometers to measure distances. He said they explored along the river for 8 miles. The sand lay all along this stretch with little variation.

## Samples Run Rich

And a 10-pound sample of that sand, Dorr swore, assayed at \$2,145 a cubic yard — with gold then priced at \$20.69 an ounce (compared with today's \$35).

Dorr returned later, the article says, to seek a more practical entrance for mining purposes. But his partner took ill, and he had to seek help. Fearing others might find his treasure, the legend goes, he sealed off the entrance by dynamiting. He spent most of the rest of his life looking for an entrance at a lower, more practical level.

How much credence is laid to the tale?

Apparently enough to have Charles O. Thompson out in the Mojave claiming he has filed a claim on it.

Enough to have Hoffman and his crew out near Cima with a drilling rig.

## Sheriff Halts Drilling

In fact, according to an affidavit filed by co-defendant Dudley Baggerman, the rig started drilling Aug. 21 and kept going day and night to Aug. 23 — when a sheriff's deputy served them notice to halt pending the court action.

And Hoffman's statement complains that in asking the injunction, Thompson was required to put up a bond of only \$500. Hoffman, who describes himself as a professional prospector for gold and minerals, says the legal squabble held up equipment valued at \$50,000 (including a drilling rig, bulldozer and tools for a crew of four); and that drilling costs were \$30 an hour for the day-and-night job.

Thus the next step awaits the outcome of the courts.

The Mother Lode formation extends from Mariposa County to northern El Dorado Co.