

MOJAVE DESERT'S LOST RIVER OF GOLD

Long John Latham's

50c

August
1970

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TRUE TREASURE

FORGOTTEN DIAMONDS

TAPESTRY GOLD

**VIRGINIA'S MISSING CACHE
OF COUNTERFEIT (?) COINS**

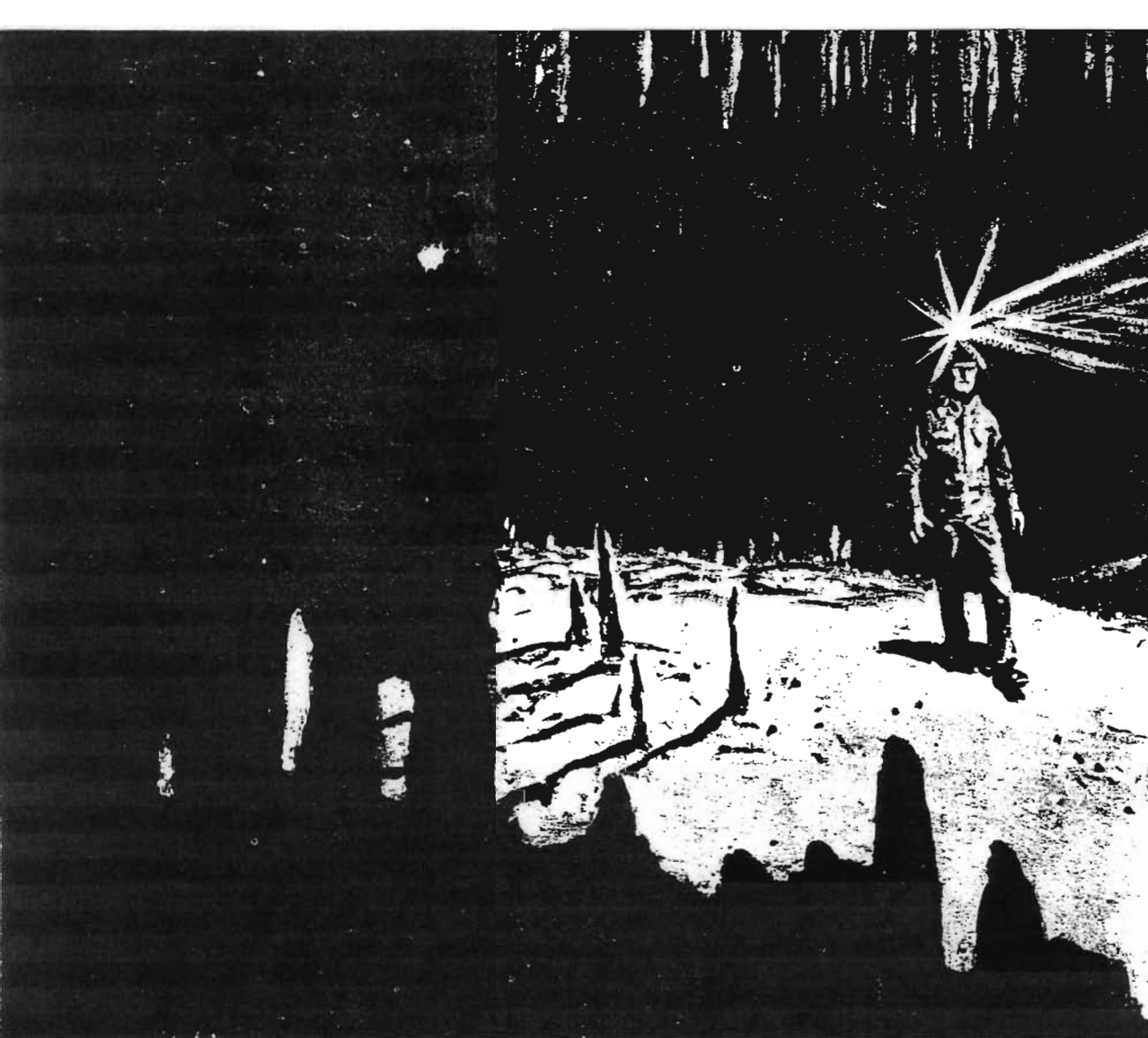
LOST GOLD AT TULE TANK

CHATTAHOOCHEE'S SUNKEN GUNS

HIDDEN HIGH-GRADER'S CACHE



TREASURE ISLAND OF THE CARIBBEAN





Dorr had squeezed through the tunnel and on the other side had found a huge chamber in which there was a deep canyon.

If one of your friends came to you and declared that he had found a cave on a mountainside in the desert with a lost underground river running somewhere deep under it, and that this river contained one of the richest gold finds imaginable—would you believe him?

This is just the story that Earl Dorr told his desert friends. Some of them believed him. Others didn't believe him, and said so. Still others said, because of the way Dorr looked when telling the story, that he had finally gone loco from the desert heat.

All kinds of questions cropped up. Some of them were answered,

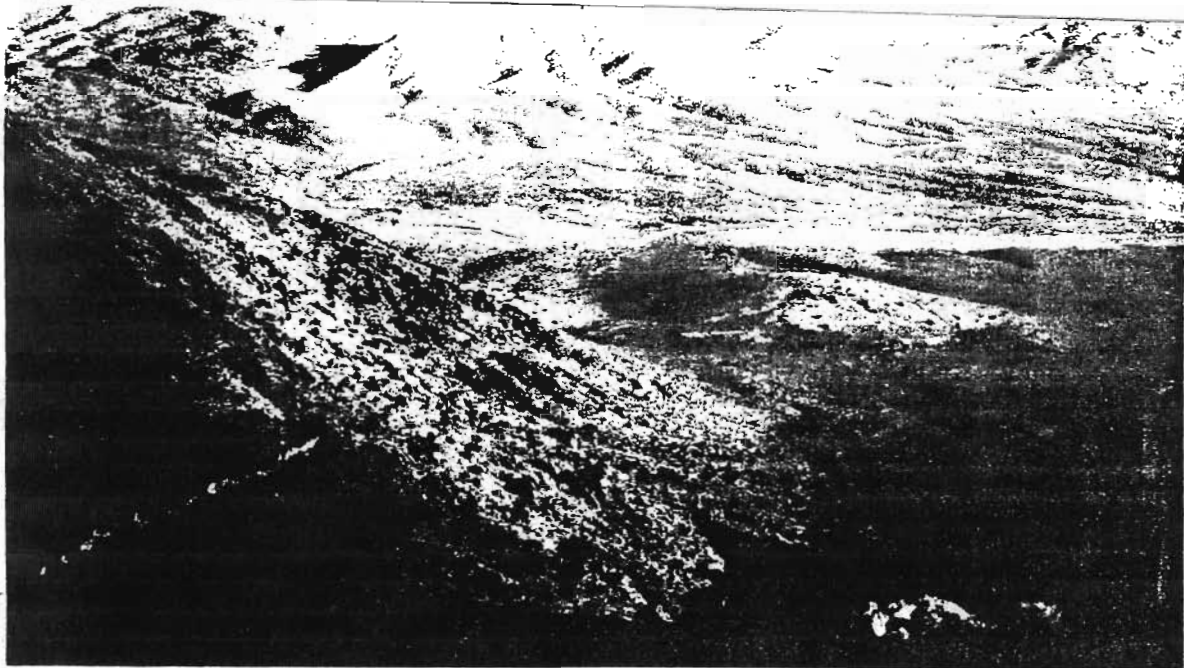
If this amazing river does exist, its wide black sand beaches could—as Dorr said—contain incredible gold values. Find it and you'll be rich for life!

some were left hanging—and still are hanging.

A river of gold? In the Mojave Desert? Did it really exist, or was it just a figment of Dorr's imagination, hallucinative or otherwise. Nor was it a secret. It was there then, and it is there now, high up on the side of Kokoweef Peak in the Ivanpah Mountains in California's Mojave Desert, a few miles southwest of the Nevada state line.

The cave containing Dorr's river of gold was no figment of imagination, hallucinative or otherwise. Nor was it a secret. It was there then, and it is there now, high up on the side of Kokoweef Peak in the Ivanpah Mountains in California's Mojave Desert, a few miles southwest of the Nevada state line.

Back in the 1920's this area was miserably desolate. Formidable, re-



Kokoweef Peak in the Ivanpah Mountains of California's searing Mojave Desert may guard the secret to a fabulous underground river of gold. In May of 1927, Earl Dorr claimed he found a huge cavern under Kokoweef and explored it for more than eight miles, following a rich gold-bearing subterranean river.

River of Gold continued

mote, a world apart, if ever there was a locale that fitted the scene of lonely old prospectors wandering through a spooky land of Joshua trees, this place was it. Highway 91, the road between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, was hardly traveled. There was nothing in Las Vegas to attract visitors as there is today.

Although there were "towns" of shanties made of packing crates and roofed with flattened tin cans at isolated wells and waterholes along the road, they were seldom occupied. These places died almost as fast as they were born. They were left to

rot in the ravages of desert weathering, the processes of decay not infrequently hastened by fire. Perhaps a few fragments of these structures remain today to mark their one-time existence.

Earl Dorr wandered in and out of these old shanty-towns like an errant pocket-mouse, and was known by just about every old prospector on the desert. He never seemed to rest, being drawn constantly on, as though by the siren's call, into the wasteland, always saying that a lot of gold was out there somewhere and that he was going to find it.

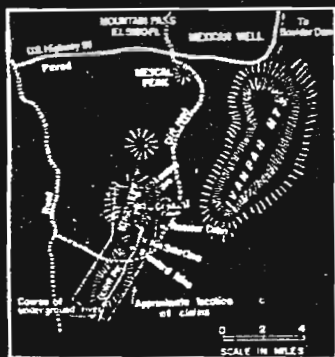
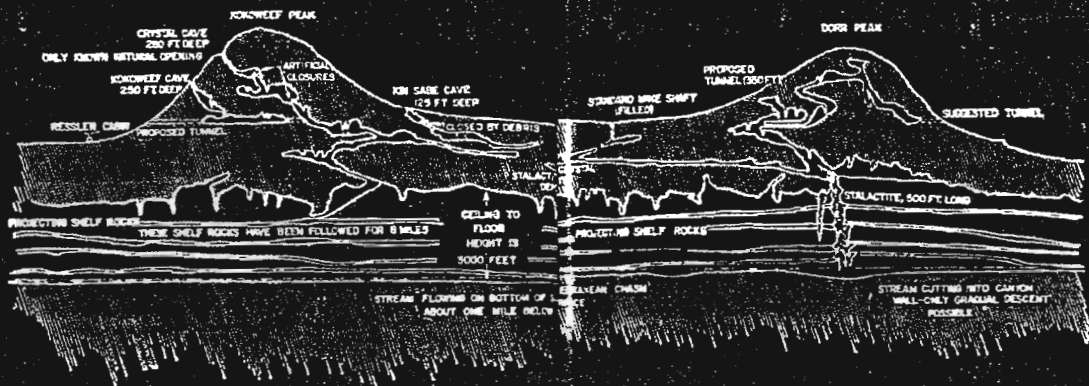
"Most people wander their lives away in fruitless searching," he often said, "but I'm not gonna be one of them!"

One night, as though arranged by fate, several old desert rats wandered into a little encampment near Mexican Well. They pitched in together to prepare a filling meal of the usual beans, slab bacon, sourdough bis-

cuits and rank coffee. Then, in the refreshing coolness of the desert evening, the little group lolled on bedrolls or sat on old boxes around a low-burning mesquite fire and swapped tales.

It was during this session that Earl Dorr brought up the fact that there was a big, deep cave up on Kokoweef Peak. This was no surprise to anyone. For a long time it had been known that a cavern with a yard-wide opening existed on the side of the limestone peak, approximately 85 miles east of the little desert town of Barstow.

Known as Kokoweef Cave, the cavern was rumored as being bottomless, as are most unexplored caves. Practically every old desert prospector who prowled by the opening took time out to toss rocks into the chasm and listened for them to hit bottom. Being prospectors, not spelunkers, none of them apparently had ventured inside.



The Cavern of Gold beneath Knoxwee Peak and nearby ridges. Original drawn by Herman Wallace, Jr., under the instruction and per-

sonal supervision of E. P. Dorr. Redrawn by A. Kellers, and used through the courtesy of Herman Wallace, Sr.

Schematic drawing of the fantastic underground cavern was done under Earl Dorr's personal supervision. At one place the ceiling towers 3,000 feet above the floor, Dorr said that on both sides of the river that ran through the cavern was 100 to 150 feet of black beach sand, rich in gold.

But this was not the cave that Dorr was talking about—he had found a new cave, one shown on an old map which he had obtained from two Indians. The mouth of this cave was only a crack, but once one got a little way beyond the opening, the passage became larger and expanded into a chamber.

From this point the explorer would be forced to let himself down by rope. Dorr hadn't been prepared for that, so he had returned later to the cave with the necessary equipment.

He found it to be about 70 feet down to the first level. Here he had found a small room, about 20 feet wide, with walls covered by a white, chalky substance. Taking his miner's lamp, Dorr had written his last name across the wall in large, sooty letters.

From this room he had gone down about another 70 feet, but this had been easier because it was not



Just below this area of Crystal Cave, Earl Dorr sealed the narrow passageway with a dynamite blast—perhaps forever.

straight down. However, there was an overhang that had been hard to get over in order to reach the bottom. Here he had found a second small room, with a small passage running off to one side. It had led to a room where there were dried-up pools with some kind of crystals that had been left when the water evaporated. In one of these rooms he had found a little tunnel, so small that he could just squeeze through it.

Although afraid, Dorr had squeezed through the tunnel and on the other side had found a huge chamber in which there was a deep canyon. Here, a huge stalactite hung from the top of the chamber. Dorr claimed the giant mineral "icicle" was "500 feet long, if it was an inch."

Dorr had walked along the underground canyon but could find no way to get down into it. The cave went on for miles, and he had felt

fresh air several times along the route, so there must have been other openings. Dorr figured that an opening might exist somewhere on his own claim—the cave ran in that direction. The claim was located across the valley, several miles southwest of Kokoweef Peak, and was immodestly called "Dorr Peak" by the owner.

After relating these experiences, Dorr vowed to return to the cave in the hope of finding a way down into the apparently inaccessible canyon. In the months that followed, he occasionally encountered one or more of the men who had listened to his original story.

Dorr had, he told these friends, finally found a way down into the great underground canyon. There were wonders of the world to behold down there, he said, but this was not the important thing—he had found gold. And what gold! Great deposits of placer gold, a whole river of gold, and miles long!

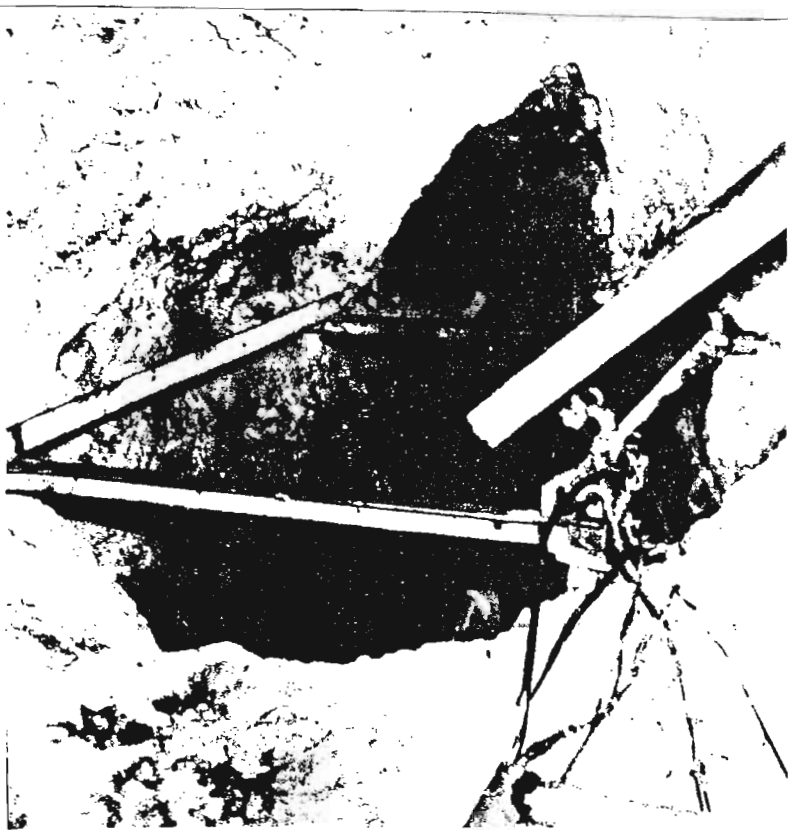
In the spring of 1927, Dorr revealed that he had taken a mining engineer down into Crystal Cave, as he now called the place, and that the engineer had confirmed his discovery. His river of gold was all that he had thought it to be.

A year later he turned up at Mexican Well again, this time loaded down with equipment. Some of his old cronies were there and he showed them ropes, fuses and dynamite. He was on his way up to Crystal Cave, he told them, but would be back in two or three days, at which time he would really have something to tell them.

A week passed and Dorr did not return. Members of the group climbed Kokoweef Peak to the mouth of Crystal Cave to look for him. There was no sign of Dorr, but items of equipment were found cached nearby and knotted ropes were discovered, fixed in place and leading down into the formidable depths.

Although each man had previously sworn that he would never go into such a place, the group took an extra miner's lamp that had been found among the tarpaulin-covered stores, and descended into Crystal Cave to look for their friend.

Instead of a dead or dying old



This opening about six feet wide on the steep eastern slope of Kokoweef Peak is said to be the one used by Earl Dorr to gain access to the underground cavern and its golden riches. But the passageway below it is now closed.

prospector, however, they found a menacing accuser whom they hardly recognized. Disheveled and wild-eyed, Dorr unceremoniously accused them of trying to get his gold. While they were trying to convince him of their good intentions, the sound of a muffled explosion rolled up from somewhere underfoot. Obviously, a large charge of dynamite had gone off somewhere below. Following this, Dorr relaxed but kept muttering that at last his gold was safe.

What happened to the desert friendships after that is not known. Years afterward, Dorr tried to persuade various persons to go in with him in a scheme to run a tunnel into Crystal Cave from a point down below Kokoweef Cave, on the lower slope of the peak. Dorr's idea of partnership, however, was unattractive—whoever paid for the costs of the tunnel and other incidentals would reap but a small percentage of the profits.

Some prospective investors viewed this as a one-sided affair, while others couldn't understand why

Dorr had deliberately destroyed an already available means of access. A rumor spread that Dorr had tried to file claim on the land on which Crystal Cave was located, only to find that someone else had already done so, apparently without knowing what lay in the depths. So Dorr, for obvious reasons, had blown shut the only passage on the claim that led to the underground river.

In the fall of 1934, Dorr drew up a certified affidavit which he used in efforts to obtain a grubstake. This affidavit was finally published in the November, 1940, issue of the California *Mining Journal*, an informal, newsy little magazine published for miners and prospectors.

Regardless of what the old prospectors, desert rats and sourdoughs may have thought and said about Earl Dorr, one has only to read this affidavit concerning his "Lost River of Gold" to be convinced that he was no real crackpot, and that neither was he an idiot. If he suffered from desert madness, it certainly does not

show up in the words of the affidavit, which is given verbatim below:

To Whom It May Concern:

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 travelled, and had an instrument to take measurements of distance by triangulation, together with such other instruments convenient and necessary to make observations and estimations.

Our examinations revealed the following facts, viz:

1. From the mouth of the cavern we descended about 2000 feet. There, we found a canyon which, on our altimeter, measured about 3000 to 3500 feet deep. We found the caverns to be divided into many chambers, filled and embellished with the usual stalactites and stalagmites, 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 by careful examination and measurement (by triangulation) 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 approximately 300 feet wide, and at low tide, approximately 10 feet wide and four 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 value. The sands are from four to 11 feet deep. This means there are about 300 to 350 feet of rich gold bearing placer sand which averages eight feet in depth. We explored the canyon sands a distance of eight miles, finding little variation in the depth and width of the sands.

4. I am a practical miner of many years' of 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 are true.

5. My purpose in exploring the caverns was to study the mineralogy in order to ascertain the mineral pos-

sibilities and actualities of the caves, making such examination in person with my mining engineer necessary to determine by expert examination the character and quantity of mineral values of the caverns, rocks and sands.

6. I carried out about 10 pounds of the black sand and 'panned' it, receiving more than \$7 in gold. I sold it to a gold buyer who offered me the rate of \$18 per ounce. Two and one-half pounds of this black sand I sent to John Herman, assayer, whose assay certificates show a value of \$2145.47 per yard, with gold at \$20.67 per ounce.

7. From engineering measurements and observations we made, I estimate that it would require a tunnel about 350 feet long to penetrate to the caverns, 1000 feet or more below the present entrance, which are 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 depths—what their maximum depth may be we do not know.

Sworn to by: E. P. Dorr
309 Adena Street
Pasadena, California
November 16, 1934

Dorr's relentless quest for a grubstake eventually met with success. Backed by Herman Wallace and several Los Angeles investors who were willing to gamble, the Crystal

Cave Mining Corporation came into being and forthwith set about exploring possibilities.

Viewing the lay of the land, company officials saw the peaks of Kokoweef and Dorr rising from the desert floor, with a sloping valley between. At a point near the base of Kokoweef Peak, they saw the cabin of Pete Ressler, another old prospector and discoverer of "Kin Sabe," a small cave on the southwestern slope of Kokoweef Peak. Kin Sabe, they were told, came from Ressler's interpretation of the Spanish words, "quien sabe?" or "who knows?"

It was near Ressler's cabin that Dorr wanted to run a tunnel, known in mining terminology as an adit, into the mountain to connect with a Kokoweef Cave passageway. From the Kokoweef Cave passageway a short tunnel would then be dug to connect with Crystal Cave.

Above the proposed tunnel site was Kokoweef Cave, 250 feet deep. Above this, halfway between Kokoweef Cave and the top of Kokoweef Peak, was Crystal Cave's only known natural opening. Across the valley was Dorr's Peak, where Dorr's mining claim was located.

After much consideration, it was finally agreed that Kin Sabe Cave could be entered and a link-up made to Crystal Cave at a point on one of Crystal Cave's arms extending under Kin Sabe from the main Crystal Cave passageway.

Equipment was brought in and soon work began on installation of an inclined railway track. Kin Sabe was filled with debris to a level not



Kokoweef Peak, a lonely landmark on the busy highway from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, is the site of one of the most incredible treasure stories ever told.

far from the opening, a circumstance caused by Ressler's having earlier thrown dynamite into the cave in an effort to enlarge its passageway, and this mess had to be cleared out.

Work progressed steadily until the miners were down 125 feet. They were laboring under adverse conditions, however, because the air in Kin Sabe was completely stagnant. As a mine goes down, fresh air becomes a problem. Temperatures go up as the probe goes deeper, and fresh air must be available to crews working underground, or else. A conference was held at which it was decided that the crews were now face to face with "or else," and despite Dorr's strong protests, all attempts to go any further were discarded. The Kin Sabe project was abandoned.

Next, the possibilities of Koko-weef Cave were explored, and the decision made to try a link-up with Crystal Cave from there. During operations, which included road building, tunnel drilling and rubble hauling, an important discovery was made. In the wall of the peak, not far from the projected tunnel, high grade zinc ore was found.

Utilized in the manufacture of brass, in galvanizing sheet iron and steel, in the production of die-castings for instrument panels, carburetors and fuel pumps, and in the form of zinc oxide for use in the manufacture of vehicle tires, World War II was placing zinc at a premium. So the Crystal Cave Mining Corporation started mining zinc. As far as the company was now concerned, Dorr's lost river could stay lost. Dorr's dream was abandoned, along with Dorr.

Dorr never gave up, however. "The tunnel from Ressler's cabin site would have succeeded," he contended, "if only it had been tried instead of other attempts which failed."

But mining people only called this "sour grapes." When Dorr finally went to his grave in 1957, he was still telling the story of the Mojave Desert's Lost River of Gold. Ironically, his estate included only a few hundred dollars.

Those who have been down into Crystal Cave say that it is just as Earl Dorr described it until one

comes to the point where, years before, a shattering dynamite blast closed off the small passageway that leads to the deeper chasms and the fantastic wonders. They say that Dorr was responsible for this blast, as evidenced by his name written in big, sooty letters on the flowstone wall.

One such trip to the scene was described by a Pasadena newspaper, under the heading, "Lost River of Gold Still Lost."

"The Lost River of Gold is still lost," the article states. "Last weekend 34 members of the Pasadena Grotto, National Speleological Society, and others interested in cave exploration, climbed and slipped and slid down 285 feet into Crystal Cave, 85 miles east of Barstow, only to find the probable passage to Lost River blasted shut.

"On last week-end's search, the Pasadenans found evidence of rock piled in a way that seemed unnatural for the existing formations, and probably the result of a long-ago blast. And in the rock they found the remains of an old detonating cap.

"Dr. William R. Halliday, chairman of the Grotto, said the name 'Dorr' was found etched in smoke on the side of the cave, and that there were other evidences of early exploration. The cave is about 100 yards from a major fault and there is a possibility that an underground river does flow along this fault, Dr. Halliday said.

"Herman Wallace of Highland Park, one of the owners of the Crystal Cave Mining Corporation, which operates lead and zinc mines on the property, is planning excavations and continued exploration in search

of Lost River and its gold-lined banks.

"The party had portable telephone lines strung from the cave entrance so that communication could be maintained from any point along the line of communications to the surface. Rope ladders were used for perilous descents from one level to another, with the climbers using belaying belts for additional protection, and metal helmets which proved valuable because several were pelted by rock fragments. Three caverns were explored, the largest being about 50 feet in diameter and 75 feet high to the ceiling. Besides the two main levels that required vertical climbing, there were several sharp slopes. Some excellent stalagmites, stalactites, and crystalline formations were found, members of the party reported."

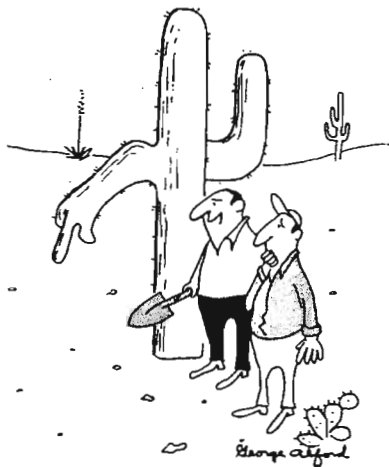
The exploration cited above took place in November, 1948. The cave was then closed and is now abandoned.

Some geologists say that Dorr had described a geological phenomenon that cannot possibly exist. Officials of the Crystal Cave Mining Corporation had also begun to indicate some doubt. But there is one lingering question which no Doubting Thomas can answer—if there is no river of gold beyond the stone barrier of this passageway, why did Earl Dorr go to the trouble of sealing it shut?

Now that you've heard the story, how would you like to take a crack at solving this riddle? Reports indicate that it would be no herculean task to remove the stone barrier that Earl Dorr blasted across the cavern passageway. This has been evident for some time. Then why one will ask, has nothing been done about it?

Inaction in this matter is simply due to the fact that most miners today are commercial miners who cannot afford to dig for gold. Many likely-looking claims have been staked in the desert, but that is as far as the process has gone. Mining companies find costs of operation steadily increasing, while the price for gold remains the same—\$35 per troy ounce. No one wants to lose money by mining gold when uranium, borax and yttrium represent new kinds of mining wealth.

Regardless of these facts, some prospectors still bring in enough gold nuggets from private diggings to slowly build up small personal fortunes—and this is not to be



"Freak of nature or not, I'm digging here!"

sneezed at as a self-employment occupation today!

The surest approach to the lost river site is over Interstate Highway 15, ribboning 285 miles long between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. The stretch from Victorville to Las Vegas was completed in 1966, replacing Highway 91-466. The same route was covered and parts of the old road were incorporated into the new freeway, which is sometimes referred to as the Barstow Freeway.

The area is still bleak, rugged and deserted, with only a few mining roads crossing the region. The nearest community is Ivanpah, with Cima nearby and Kelso not too far away. All are small towns with doubtful travel facilities.

West of Kelso is the "Devil's Playground." Barstow, to the southwest, has become headquarters for outfitting expeditions into the furnace called Death Valley—loneliest, lowest and hottest place in America.

A major rail terminus and mining center, the U.S. Marine Corps has large supply centers in the Barstow area, capable of storing thousands of vehicles and weapons outdoors, where the dry desert air inhibits deterioration.

Northeast of Barstow are the Calico Mountains, where millions of dollars in silver were once discovered. The old mining town of Calico, which sprang up afterward, has been resurrected from its ghost town status and restored as a tourist attraction.

If you are in the area and decide not to look for gold, consider this—20 miles northwest of Barstow, at the head of Black Canyon, precious opals may be found. They may also be found by Leadpipe Springs in the Eagle Crags district. Although in this instance the exact location has been geologically pinpointed as "one and one-half miles northeast of spring on north side of steep hill," this site is within the confines of the Naval Ordnance Test Station, Mohave Range B, a restricted area that should not be entered without permission. There are many kinds of opal, but the finest variety is the precious opal.

From the vicinity of Highway 15 near Mexican Well, south to Kokoweef Peak with its elevation of 6,038 feet, and down to Dima, the area is replete with old mine sites. Some of these bear such fanciful names as Birthday Mine, Sulphur Queen Mine, Windey Claims, Carbonate King, Iron Horse Mine and Allured Mine. Waterholes are just as picturesque, being called China Springs, Hard-

River of Gold continued

rock Springs and Groaner Springs, among other designations.

Mining activity in this area is still extensive, though not for gold. For example, not far from Mexican Well, just north of Highway 15, is the Mountain Pass Mine, owned by the Molybdenum Corporation of America, largest U.S. miner of rare earth. Believed to be the world's biggest producer of rare earth, Mountain Pass turns out an annual supply of 50 million pounds of a product that is essential for America's color television industry.

No matter how attractive the prospect of finding millions or billions in an old mine appears, however, one must never forget that danger lurks in many forms in every old abandoned mine. While you don't have to be what the speleological people call a "caver" to recognize this fact, it helps. But caver or not, there are certain things that must be observed when creeping around underground—don't travel alone, be alert for cave-ins, watch out for gas, don't use old ropes and ladders found in old mines, and don't fool around with explosives unless you know what you are doing.

Also, don't trespass! Much of this area is under legitimate mining claims, and is off limits to both prospectors and treasure hunters.

Publications which may prove valuable are a summary of federal laws governing mining claims on public domain, published in circular form by the Bureau of Mines, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C., and a 128-page booklet, "Legal Guide for California Prospectors and Miners," available at \$1 from Division of Mines and Geology, San Francisco. There are also various publications issued by your local speleological society.

Since more and more people are becoming interested in treasure hunting, it is no mean possibility that some day soon someone will uncover the Mojave Desert's Lost River of Gold under Kokoweef Peak, and emerge a billionaire.

Maybe it could be you!—Al Masters