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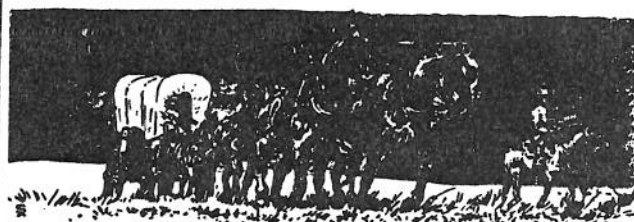


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FRONTIER TIMES

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In This Issue—

FRONTIER POST	4
UPRISING AT NEW ULM	6
A WIZARD WITH GUNS	10
FASTEST STAGE RUN IN HISTORY	12
MURDER RODE THE COLORADO	14
RABBIT, THE ROUNDUP COOK	18
VIVA VILLAL!	20
THE MAYOR OF ULYSSES	22
TREASURE OF THE CRATERS	24
THE BOOM WAS A BUST IN BOWLEGS!	26
FLOUR, FURS AND FREIGHT CARS ON THE RED RIVER RUN	28
UNCLE DICK	30
NUGGETS	32
PAISANO	35
DEWEY IRON HAIL	37
ASK FRONTIER TIMES	39
SWIFT JUSTICE	41
WESTERN BOOK ROUNDUP	54

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Frontier Times

We've been passing out hot treasure leads for years now —
and figure it's about time we showed you readers
what most treasure-hunting expeditions are REALLY like!

Treasure of the Craters

By C. G. HAMMER

I was born in a typically quiet western farm community. During my boyhood I knew many of the early settlers. My father and mother, who came to Idaho as very small children, in the late 1800's, were among them. Those people, steeped in the folklore of the West, and gifted with the art of story telling in the language and manner of the early westerner, were masters at spinning the yarns that go so well around the old potbellied stove or camp fire, late at night. To me, it was all very real and exciting. Real because those fabulous yarns were actually lived, and even more exciting because, in many cases, the story was told by the person who lived it.

As I grew older, my interest in the history and folklore of my native state increased. I came upon stories of gold discoveries whose richness had whipped its finder into frenzied efforts to harvest

the wealth therein, but when the finder would return with enough equipment to develop the claim, Mother Nature had suddenly hidden all the clues.

One such incident in particular struck my fancy. Some thieves, who operated during the late 1870's, had concealed their wealth among the cinders in what later became a part of the Craters of the Moon National Monument in Idaho. With tall mounds of red and black cinders on which to post their lookout, and completely surrounded by rough lava rock on all four sides to halt the more determined intruder, the outlaws had a natural fortress. The only access was by an old Indian trail, which is still visible today. This trail threads its way through the entire chain of cinder cones crossing the Craters of the Moon National Monument from northwest to southeast, and forms the only passageway across this formidable

terrain for many miles in either direction. One man could easily guard this trail. The old gnarled trees and the weird, grotesque rock formations tend to create an atmosphere of mystery.

All this was too much for me. The fever was upon me and I discussed the possibilities of finding such a cache of gold with Grant Gallup, my brother-in-law. His enthusiasm was equal to mine, so we started the slow, tedious task of gathering as much information on the subject as was available.

Some rather explicit instructions had been given for locating this treasure, which had been hidden for many years, but distances and directions were rather vague. The key landmark was a large volcanic rock, on which nature had carved the profile of a man. (This rock is located very near the present road through the National Monument and a sign beside the road marked, "The Old Man Of The Craters," will direct you to it.) The gold, which the highwaymen had never been able to return for, is supposed to be hidden in a cave located in a southward direction from the profile rock. Southward is any direction from southwest to southeast. There is also the problem of true and magnetic direction with a 19° deviation between the two. In an area such as this, that involves a lot of territory.

FOR three years our leisure time was devoted to searching. Through the four seasons of the year (and there are few places with the weather extremes of the Craters of the Moon National Monument), the task continued. One night, following a hot day of treading across endless cinders and lava rock, we were returning to our car. The sky was clear, the moon full, and we were very tired. We stopped to rest by a small ledge of red rock, which was almost hidden by sagebrush. While sitting there we noticed an odd marking on the rock. On closer investigation it proved to be the symbol of a rising sun chiseled in the rock. Suddenly we were at the entrance of a small cave.

It was difficult to recognize, as the entrance had been filled almost to the ceiling with loose cinders. At that moment Grant and I became quite excited. We practically divided the gold right there

"The Old Man of the Craters"—the rock which serves as a landmark for seekers after the treasure lost in the craters.



on the spot, so certain were we that the search had ended. A quick check proved the cave's location coincided with the directions perfectly.

Our project had been discussed several times with the National Park personnel at the Craters of the Moon. We had been told by them repeatedly, "Search all you want, but if you get any ideas about digging, we're the fellows who will stop you."

The superintendent of the National Monument was taken to the cave, where he in turn checked the location with the instructions for finding the treasure cave. It was all very convincing. He told us to submit a written application for a permit to excavate. In it we were to state the exact location and extent of excavation intended, the reason a permit was being requested, the type of equipment which would be used, and the number of people who would participate. This the super-

Pictures were taken of the cave for later comparison. At the time we didn't give a thought to all those restrictions. A month seemed like having twenty-eight days to spare, we'd have so much money we'd never miss the government's share, and who could mind filling up a hole that had delivered so much treasure? Our camp was pitched near the cave. The next morning the work began.

We had gold fever, no doubt of that. We drove ourselves from daylight till dark, too eager to stop even for a noon-day meal. Each time a shovel dug into the cinders, we expected to uncover wealth beyond human imagination.

By the third day our enthusiasm was wearing thin. The pace had slackened considerably and we were not only taking time to eat, but were also taking breaks between meals.

On the afternoon of this day, at a depth of about three feet in the floor of the

razor sharpness by the fine volcanic cinder dust.

We still had a little time before the completion date of our permit, so in desperation, instead of starting the backfill we designed an auger with which we could probe thirty feet in any direction. With this we probed the walls and floor thoroughly. Nothing.

Then we borrowed a metal detector, but due to the high iron oxide content of the cinders, background interference was too great for it to operate effectively.

DEFEAT is a sorrowful flag to have to fly, but we had no alternative. The drudgery of backfilling was all that was left. With no fancy dreams of easy wealth to accompany the dance of our spades, this became a backbreaking task. There seemed to be no end.

During the long dull days of backfilling, I remembered a story a fellow had



The author at the entrance to the treasure cave. The rising sun which was cut into the rock many years ago shows very clearly.

intendent sent to the regional office and from there it was forwarded to the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. From Washington, D.C., would come our answer, approved or disapproved.

A whole year passed, during which our anxiety grew to almost uncontrollable proportions. In the late fall, fourteen months from the date of our request to excavate, the approval came through.

The rules were very strict, but we had expected that. We had one month to complete our project and backfill. Since we were working in a National Monument, every shovel full of dirt and every rock had to be returned to its original location when the project was finished. Our agreement also stated that all articles of antique value, and one-third of all gold, in any form, would be given to the United States Government.

cave, we uncovered the first foreign object in our digging. It was a very old rifle shell, a caliber which was discontinued shortly after the turn of the century. Chances were very good that this shell was associated with the bandits who had reigned supreme in this wilderness, long years before. We got a new blast of energy. Surely any moment now we would uncover the loot and the agonizing suspense would be over. At times our shovels would scrape across hard clinkers buried in the loose cinder and we would become weak with excitement, thinking we had hit a metal strongbox.

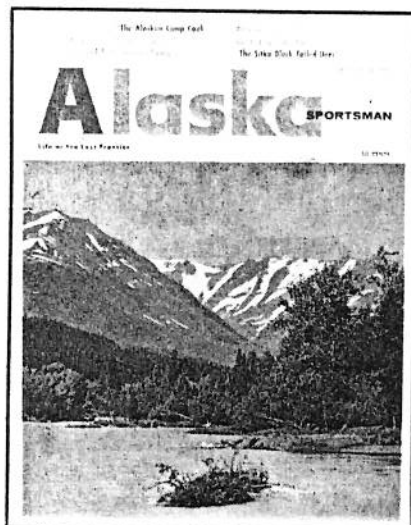
The depth of the excavation specified in our agreement was finally reached. All we had to show for our efforts was worn-out clothing, badly scuffed shoes, and picks and shovels which, instead of becoming dull with use, were honed to

told me. One of the stories we had heard while doing research and gathering information on the Treasure of the Craters. Since we hadn't found anything in writing to confirm it, not much importance was given to it, but now I got the uneasy feeling that it might be true.

Many years before the Craters of the Moon became a National Monument, and just as many years after this rock fortress had ceased to be a haven for all renegades, white and Indian alike, an old Indian woman at the Fort Hall Indian Reservation was discovered to be in possession of a small amount of gold dust and several articles of jewelry, which she traded for food and clothing. Some of the jewelry, which consisted of watches, rings, etc., was engraved with the names of persons known to have been

(Continued on page 36)

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Maye and Billy Stilwell in 1913.

The Boom Was a Bust in Bowlegs!

(Continued from page 27)

Maye landed on top and was jumping up and down on Nell when Mack came out and called to her. Realizing she might be killing someone, she stepped off, got in the car, and hummed cheerfully all the way home.

Next day Maye packed up and went by to tell Jake Sims goodbye and to thank him for all he'd done. Jake laughed about the fight and said, "Maye, don't you leave on account of her; I'll keep an eye on her; she won't touch you."

Maye stiffened, looked up at that tall sheriff and said, "Jake Sims, I am not

Maye Stilwell. This photo was taken in Seminole, just after the boom hit.



afraid of Nell or Blacky or anyone in this whole country. That's not why I'm going home. I'll tell you, I work hard and live right and I am getting doggone sick and tired of everytime I turn around having someone tell me I am not a lady. That's why I'm going home and don't you doubt it for one minute."

As she walked to the car in which she was to ride to the bus stop, Jake noticed she walked right past Big Nell, and—sure enough—she wasn't afraid. She looked that gal right in the eye that was not too bruised to see, and then she turned up her nose and didn't slow down a bit.

Treasure of the Craters

(Continued from page 25)

robbed by the thieves who operated from the Craters of the Moon.

She claimed to have found these trinkets hidden in a cave on the desert, but would not disclose the exact location. Several men combined their efforts to keep a constant watch on her activities. When she finally slipped away into the desolate sagebrush and lava-covered desert, the small group of men were following.

In the midst of the desert she stopped at a large butte known as Cerro Grande. There she camped by a small stream which trickles down the side of the butte, and rested for the last lap of her journey. From Cerro Grande it was only a short distance to the lava beds, now included in the boundaries of the National Monument. Once on the rocks, the best of trackers could not follow her. Later attempts made to trail her to the hidden treasure proved as unsuccessful as the



"I told you they wouldn't fight after dark."

first. Only a very small portion of the loot was recovered by her and the belief is the secret was never shared with anyone, Indian or white man. There is a possibility, however, that she may have moved the gold from its original hiding place. That is the story as it was told to us. If true, it may explain the cause of our failure.

So far as I know, my brother-in-law and I had the only permit ever issued by the United States Government to search for lost treasure in the State of Idaho. In fact, that distinction is all we got out of the most grueling excavation work any amateurs ever tackled.

Thus, the mystery remains unsolved. And as further proof of what complete suckers some treasure hunters can be, the truth is we'd probably head out all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, ready to dig our silly heads off again, if we happened to run across another lead.