

Treasure Chest of Caballo Mountains

New Mexico

The Caballo Mountains lie in a vast stretch of Southwestern desert country about 15 miles south of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico and to the east of Highway 25. This rugged range of mountains contain, perhaps, the greatest quantity of treasure lore ever assembled in the Southwest, or so I found out when we visited the area. The accumulation of treasure notes that I gathered read like a bibliography.

Probably the most interesting of these is the story of a man who we'll call Sam Cook. About 25 years ago Sam and a few of his relatives were out on a picnic in the Caballo Mountains. Like most residents, he was a prospector and miner and usually packed some mining tools in his old Model T no matter where he went and this Sunday outing was to be no exception. Sam had heard rumors of a Spanish treasure being secreted in the immediate area of their picnic site and even carried maps and drawings of the supposed location in his wallet. The cache supposedly consisted of two separate burials, one containing silverware and the other a deposit of coins in the amount of \$16,000 a short distance away.

Upon their arrival at the pre-selected spot in the Caballos, the group, which was comprised of Sam, his brother-in-law and their wives, set out in search for the landmarks set forth in the scribbled notes that Sam had carried around with him for years. One of the wives located a large rock which appeared to be similar to the one on the map and they decided to set out their picnic in the general vicinity. As Sam and his partner took out the shovels and began digging, the wives prepared the lunch.

When the hole was about 3 feet deep, the shovels struck an object in the ground. Sam reached in the depression and removed the dirt by hand, uncovering a deteriorated small wooden chest and a large quantity of silverware. Elated and excited by the first of their discoveries, the two men moved according to their calculations to a spot a few hundred feet away where the cache of \$16,000 in coins supposedly laid. They began digging a much larger hole than the first and soon, only their heads could be seen bobbing in the shoulder-high pit. It was late afternoon by now and the two men had worked up quite an appetite when their

wives called them for lunch. Climbing out of the five foot hole Sam and his brother-in-law went some hundred yards back to the picnic site where they ate the lunch their wives had prepared. The group discussed the treasure and examined the elaborate Spanish silver tableware that was uncovered a few hours earlier. Just about the time the men were preparing to go back to their excavation, a band of 15 or 20 Mexicans appeared on the ridge overlooking the newly-dug hole. Sam knew that his group wouldn't stand a chance at a showdown as he left his rifle in the Model T down the road. The Mexicans were armed to the teeth with pistols and rifles as they proceeded on foot to the hole. Picking up the shovels Sam left at the site, two of the men hopped into the hole and proceeded to finish the work while the others stood guard. After a short period of time the two men in the hole stopped digging and passed to the guards what appeared to be a heavy wooden keg. The group then went back up the ridge and disappeared. As the frightened picnickers approached the hole, a blaze of fire shot up from the pit. Scared out of their wits, they loaded their silverware, shovels and picnic supplies in the Ford and scampered home.

When Sam told me this story, he honestly believed that the fire was the work of the "spirits of the treasure" that were released when the cache was removed. I believe that the ingenious Mexican bandits poured gasoline into the hole to frighten the onlookers and help cover up the traces of their illegal activities. To back up the story, Sam exhibited the silverware, all 26 pounds of it. He still regrets the loss of the 516,000 cache that slipped through his fingers in what he insists was the other hole, but like he says, he's still alive!

Another interesting tale which was related to us in the Caballos is a Spanish church treasure consisting of silver bars. The area of its' location is near Palomas, New Mexico. I have conferred with several reliable individuals who have actually seen bars taken from this treasure.

The Caballo Dam, which was constructed on the Rio Grande in later years, forced backwater to cover quite a section of this old townsite. The lady that I talked to in regards to this treasure informed me that there was a tunnel close to the old town. A few years ago a group of 3 men went into this tunnel and extracted 16 silver bars; one of the group was a motel operator from Las Cruces. Rumors still circulating in the area today report that there are several men running around the region of the tunnel armed with all types of weaponry guarding the balance of the treasure. Some have even gone so far as to say that a number of people have been killed over this particular cache, but after trying to confirm or deny these reports, I found no substantial proof one way or the other. Gut believe the rumors are being circulated to scare off any interested search

parties.

An old-time prospector related this story about the Caballos:

"Some time ago a man by the name of Willie Duffy found \$180,000 worth of gold bars south of Burbank Canyon near a wooded hill. (While here, I had heard that this canyon was in the Black Range Mountains and not in the Caballos, but I do not know for a certainty-Ed.). He sold them to the Denver mint, if you don't believe me you can check their records. It's all there. Anyway, I found out that I was near another cache similar to his so I sank a shaft to find out. My tunnel runs down quite a ways, somewhere around 70 feet and I had some fellows go down with some electric machines and they got a reading that they say is 4 feet by 4 feet by 8 feet. I just haven't had the time to finish the tunnel and find out what's there but I suppose that I'll get back there later on this year."

He indicated that his shaft was in the North range of the Caballo Mountains and went on to say that he once operated some heavy machinery for one "Doc" Ness near Victoria Peak, south of the Caballos, in the 1930's. I asked him if he honestly believed that "Doc" Ness ever really found the treasure that he claimed was at the Peak.

"Doc Ness was a promoter...he never had any treasure. He made his money on the dreams of others and it finally caught up with him. You know he got killed over that deal in Hatch. He was nothing but a damn liar.

"You know, he might have had the right idea though, the only trouble was he was too far south. He'd heard about the treasures like everybody else around here has for years. Now this one I'm onto in my tunnel has some writings on the wall and I've been told by those machine guys that they'll tell where all the Spanish treasures in the Caballos are when they're figured out. You know there's not just one treasure but a whole series of them, those Spaniards never did put all their eggs in one basket and I guess mine's from old Spanish workings, maybe even that LaRue treasure."

Fact or fantasy? Draw your own conclusion.

I entered a small store in a town not far from the mountain range and found a gentle lady behind the counter whose story authenticity I didn't question and which read like any tale one could find in any number of treasure publications.

"When I was a little girl just after we moved to New Mexico I found raw chunks

of native silver laying on the ground in the Caballo Mountains to the left of the dam that's there now, over the mountain toward the head of Apache Canyon. It was lying right there in the open, all over the ground."

The treasure lore of the Caballos didn't end here either. A longtime resident and full-time prospector took us out one day to inspect his silver mine. After a grand tour of his workings, the conversation turned to buried treasure. He bent down on the dirt road behind our jeep, which was parked next to what once was an old Indian camp several hundred years ago, picked up a twig and proceeded to draw a map in the sand.



"There's an Indian Treasure over there in the Caballo Mountains that folks around here call the 'Yellow Horse Treasure. His cave supposedly ran in a question mark type way below the ground. On the hill above it they started to run a shaft at a 45 degree angle to try and hit it. They haven't dug deep enough yet. The Yellow Horse Mine is on the other ridge across and above this place, I don't know for sure but I think it's on government land."

And as if this lead wouldn't satisfy our inquisitive thoughts, he went on to drop a hint to yet another site in the same range.

"I've heard that down in Sardine Canyon is a big church treasure. I guess it was buried by the Spaniards a long time ago."

With my notebook already bulging with leads and information I just couldn't resist driving by the mountain range that seems to be a living treasure legend one more time. I guess it was intuition that made our car pull up in front of the Caballo Post Office where we caught the postmistress about to enter the small, one room structure. Out popped the notebook for the final time.

"Joe Townsend says he knows just where the gold bars in the Caballo Mountains

are," she said very emphatically, "in fact he comes here to pick up his mail every other day or so...I think he's from Michigan. Why he hasn't got them (the gold bars) I don't know but he says it's dangerous."

We thought we'd really put her on the spot and asked her if she really, honestly believed the story of Mr. Townsend.

"As for the mines I can believe it because this is real mining country, but as for the gold bars, well, I really don't know. You know they say that some of those caves have bodies in them but I don't know of any factual deaths concerning the Caballo Treasure."

And with that little bit of mysterious nostalgia we left her to her ZIP codes. As our car slowly increased the distance between us and the Caballos, I couldn't help but wonder how these legends and stories remained so vividly prominent in the minds of the average residents near the mountains. If I could be so lucky and none of the local residents find them first I just might make a return trip to the Caballos and search for the treasures that are surely hidden in its soil. After all, they say that this is the year of the hunt and from what I have discovered, the Caballos are the place. Only this time I'll leave the pencil and notebook at home.

Facts:

- 1. Treasure was buried in the Caballo Mountains**
- 2. Gold Bars have been found in the Caballo Mountains**
- 3. Miners buried/hid their valuables**
- 4. Miners died and their valuables remain buried/hidden**
- 5. Gold & Silver was found in the Caballo Mountain**