

# Searching for Gold

## The Adams Diggings Lost Gold

By Anne Groebner

A few weeks ago, I found a book. It was an atlas of Arizona. It was full of information about our state, including land formations and county boundaries, past and present, but the one thing that popped out at me was the page with a map of all the lost gold mines — particularly the Lost Adams Diggings Gold. I read so many stories about the lost gold and found out that there are a lot of different stories about what happened but the one book that I felt held the real truth was by a writer who recently died here in Pinetop. His book, “Die Rich Here,” was written in 2012 and based on 60 years of research. Ralph Reynolds grew up in Luna, New Mexico right around where this tale takes place. He wasn’t a historian but had a Master’s degree in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin in Madison and he knew about this area because he grew up here and that’s just what journalists do...they investigate. And not only did he search for answers about this mystery, he physically explored the area and knew it like the back of his hand. It is a mystery --- a very horrific and interesting mystery. Strangely, while sleeping the other night, I dreamed about it. I was talking to someone about this story. I can’t remember everything that was said but I woke up with the first line of this article in my head ---”I found a book.”

The story starts out with John R. Adams who left his family in Illinois and headed west with freight to California. In 1864, he ran freight between Tucson and Los Angeles where his wagons were plundered and burned by thieves. He took his remaining 12 horses and went to a Pima Indian Village near Maricopa Wells (close to where Phoenix is today) and found a large party of prospectors there from California. In the midst of the crowd was an Indian guide with a crumpled ear named “Gotch-Ear” who was trying to trade a gold nugget for a miner’s vest he admired. When the miners saw the gold nugget, they asked him where he got it. He pointed to the northeast and said, “El Toro de Canon Sno-Ta-Hay.” For only two horses, he would show them the way. Since they were low on horses, they offered leadership of the expedition and double the shares in gold to Adams if he threw in his horses.

According to Adams, they paralleled the Gila River east, skirted the White Mountains and, after leaving the Gila, climbed northerly for days into the mountains. From the top of what some believe was Mount Baldy (but Reynolds suggests was actually Rose Peak), Gotch-Ear pointed the way toward other peaks that, to Adams, looked like a reclining woman’s breasts. “Those peaks,” said Gotch-Ear, “stand guard over the Canyon of Sno-Ta-Hay.” From there, they traveled over the border of Arizona into New Mexico, crossing two streams and a rutted road that Gotch-Ear told them was the road to Fort Wingate, located a few days north. They rode a narrow canyon, then crossed a high rocky mesa toward the twin peaks. Reaching the rim of the canyon, they found sheer cliffs that plunged 100 vertical feet or more; they turned left and followed Gotch-Ear to a crease in the rocks that was narrow and steep. This, according to lore, has come to be known as the “secret door.” The steep trail that they followed to the bottom of the canyon

switched back and forth and gained the name “Zigzag Trail.” Once at the bottom of the canyon, the miners found a little stream and a waterfall. “They panned for gold and found gold nuggets in every pan.” Gotch-Ear took his two horses and left, riding one and leading the other.

The next day, a band of Apaches (led by “Nana”) gathered silently and peacefully on the rim of the canyon, but armed with arrows and lances. Nana, in good Spanish, told Adams that “Sno-Ta-Hay belonged to the Apache people but the miners were permitted to work there “because the Apaches love peace and have no use for the yellow rock. However, my people are camped above the waterfall and you are not allowed upstream from where you are.” Since their supplies were running low, Adams asked Nana if there was a shortcut to Fort Wingate and how many days it would take and he answered, “Muy facil. Tres or cuatro — Very easy...three or four.”

A few day later, John Brewer and three volunteers climbed back up the trail through the secret door and headed to Fort Wingate. Another miner from Germany left, with some of the gold he had mined, because he feared the mountains, the wilderness, the coming winter.

After nine days passed and the miners didn’t return, Adams took one of the other miners named Davidson and climbed up the trail to look for them. He found three dead bodies. The party had been ambushed on their way back. The supplies were scattered and the horses were gone. Adams and Davidson covered the bodies and headed back down the trail to warn the others who were still down in the canyon. About halfway down, they heard shots and screams — then silence. Adams and Davidson waited until dark and then crept down to the bottom of the canyon to try and get some water and maybe some of the gold that they stashed under the fireplace in a dutch oven but the cabin had been burned and the coals were still too hot. They climbed back up the trail and wandered for days until a troop of U.S. Calvary picked them up. They delivered them to an army post where Davidson died but Adams made a slow recovery. In his rage, he shot two unarmed Apaches and was facing jail time but managed to escape to California. Years later, he returned to look for the gold.

They say each time Adams came to look for the gold, he would base his expedition in Reserve, New Mexico. So, I called a friend and we hit the road on a scouting trip, traveling on Route 260 south to Alpine and then over the New Mexico border. We traveled NM State Road 180 to Reserve and then up NM State Road 32 to Quemado Lake. They say the gold lies within a triangle from south of Quemado down to Reserve and over to Luna. While in the Gila National Forest, I stopped at the ranger station and bought a map. Our next trip we will be packing some gear and heading into the wilderness.

While there we ate lunch at the *Adobe Does BBQ* in Reserve. We highly recommend it. The food is great and our waitress, Sandy, was outstanding. After crossing the border back into Arizona, we stopped for our “traditional after a hike” ice cream in Alpine at the Lollipop Shop (Can’t wait for May when the Foxfire Restaurant opens there).

Don't miss next month's issue... There are so many unanswered questions -- like "What happened to Brewer and the German guy?" and "Is the gold still out there?" I'm pretty sure I found the answers and I think I know where that canyon is. 'Til next month...