



# The Ghost of the Kings

Clarence Quigley  
and the  
Kings River

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Kings River Canyon



## **Clarence Quigley**

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# The Ghost of the Kings Clarence Quigley and the Kings River



**On the Kings River, in the Sierra National Forest, there's a place called Hermit Hole.**

Hermit Hole is a flat spot on the river bank, shaded by large oak trees, used as a rafting launch and picnic site. Its unusual name derives from an unusual man: Clarence Quigley. Quigley was a lumberman, miner, trapper, and hermit who lived most of his life in the steep canyons of the Kings River.

Clarence Quigley received the appellation “Ghost of the Kings” probably in the 1950s by a newspaper writer. He was described as a hermit of a man with an ability to vanish before one’s eyes by ducking into one of his many passages in the brush. He was often glimpsed by hikers or fishermen who frequented the Kings River canyon, but few knew much about him. Once encountered, he was friendly and affable, neighborly offering fishing advice or inquiring about the visitor. A 1961 article about him in the Fresno Bee newspaper entitled **‘Ghost of the Kings’ Proves Friendly Flume Riding, Bear Clubbing Man**<sup>1</sup> told his story, and the nickname stuck, even in his obituary in 1975.<sup>2</sup>

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Clarence Quigley was born in 1892 as the middle child of five to parents who had moved to California from the Midwest. In 1900, eight-year-old Clarence was living with his father and mother William and Victoria Quigley in Sutter Township in Sutter County in northern California. He had a sister, Lone, and four brothers, George, Warren, Orvil, and Raymond.<sup>3</sup> What brought the family members to Fresno County is unknown.

Clarence and his brother George were partners in some mining ventures. Leon Akers, an old-timer of the Kings River area, knew both of them:

“I knew George better but I knew them both well. I wasn’t around Clarence much. He stayed up on the river all the time. He and his brother George worked together and they knew the country up there all the way to the forks of the river, the junction of the Middle and South Fork. They had all that country prospected. If it looked anything like gold, they staked it. They filed mining claims on it. George married and raised a family. Clarence was just an old hermit.”<sup>4</sup>

George brought food supplies to the Ranger Station on the Kings River by Trimmer for Clarence and always worried about him. Forest Service employees would sometimes carry the food into Quigley.<sup>5</sup> Clarence and George also owned properties near each other in the Tollhouse area at one time.<sup>6</sup> George worked as a miner, and had two sons, Roy and Kenneth who were also miners.<sup>7</sup> George Quigley died in a cave-in at a Madera County tungsten mine in 1942.<sup>8</sup>

Single until almost 30 years old<sup>9</sup>, Quigley did marry, but his wife Della died in 1935. Clarence spent his last forty years alone.<sup>10</sup>

## **Lumberman:**

In 1890, the Kings River Lumber Company commenced timber harvesting in the great pine and sequoia forests of Converse Basin south of the Kings River. A 54-mile flume to transport lumber to the city of Sanger was erected. Financial problems in 1893-1894 caused reorganization as the Sanger Lumber Company, and in 1905, the Hume-Bennett Lumber Company succeeded the Sanger Lumber Co. By 1910, 17 more miles of flume were built and the operation was in full swing. In 1917, the name changed back to the Sanger Lumber Company, but World War I made workers scarce, and the mill and a portion of the flume burned down. More fires in 1926 and 1931 destroyed the flume and in 1935 the lumber company lands were sold to the Forest Service.<sup>11</sup>

Into this huge logging enterprise of men and machines and the flume came Clarence Quigley as a young man. Quigley was described as one of the engineers that worked on the Hume Lake Flume.<sup>12</sup> He worked on the flume for twelve years, off and on. He may have been a ‘flume snake’ or ‘herder’, in charge of a section to make sure the lumber passed down the hill. Quigley recalled the thrill of an occasional ride down the flume. Officials of the company, employees, and a few select VIPs and cases of emergencies were allowed to ride the flume; workers used to ride the logway to Trimmer for a holiday or a day of carousing. Quigley spoke of reaching almost 50 miles an hour, seated on flat board surface, hurtling around curves, passing over trestles 108 feet high and looking down into the canyon 50 feet below – “this was ‘riding the dinky’ down the Sanger flume” as far as Maxon ranch at Trimmer.<sup>13</sup>

Working on the Hume-Bennett flume gave Quigley time to pursue other interests, namely prospecting and trapping.

## **Miner:**

Mining records show that Clarence Quigley was a busy man in locating, prospecting, and mining gold and tungsten in the Kings River canyon in the early twentieth century. The Garnet Dike mine, which proved to be the principal source of tungsten in Fresno County during World War II was discovered by Quigley in 1918. The Garnet Dike mine was on the steep slope of the Kings River in Fox Canyon, about a

mile north of the river. Quigley sold the Garnet Dike claim to the Sheridan brothers in 1935, and with the Bennetts, they commenced working the mine in 1936. When the claim was first located and worked, it was reached only by seven miles of pack trail, but the Sierra National Forest built the Garnet Dike Road in 1944 as part of the war effort to increase tungsten production.

Several other tungsten claims of Quigley were located within a few miles of the Garnet Dike mine, and three of them produced ore (Quigley, Quigley Kings River, and Lime Ridge mines). The Quigley mine was near the Kings River, about a mile southwest of the Garnet Dike mine. The mine was in operation in 1941. The name Kings River Mine was used as a general term for several properties owned by Quigley near the Garnet Dike Mine. To avoid confusion the Quigley Kings River Mine was locally referred to as the 'Beziuk' mine, and later became the Greenstone and Molybdenum Canyon claims. Both of these were productive before 1945, but then idled. The Lime Ridge claim, also part of the Quigley Kings River Mine, was organized in 1943 by the Quigley brothers and R. Beziuk; mining was abandoned there in 1945. Quigley also had the "R Spot" prospect about a mile west of the Garnet Dike mine and a tungsten prospect on the Bunch Rock claim; no production was made.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>

As late as 1961, Quigley as a senior citizen made a trip once a year to Fresno to file proof of labor on his claims. He had registered 14, of which 13 were tungsten and one that carried gold. Quigley told the newspaper, "Mainly I am working on the gold mine where I have some pretty fair ore, rather large quantities in some places, but it is such rough country I may never be able to realize anything from it."<sup>17</sup>

## **Trapper:**

During the slack period on the flume, Quigley would try his luck at trapping foxes, bears, raccoons, lynx, mountain lions and wolves. He claimed to have shot 60 or 70 bears between 1923 and 1936. Quigley also reported that he avoided using his rifle so as to prevent someone from hearing the report and horning in on his prospecting: "I killed one fairly good sized bear with a pole ax, another with a small sledge hammer, another with the hammer end of a foot adz, and one went down under a heavy club I carried during the summer for the purpose of killing rattlesnakes."<sup>18</sup>

Quigley told the story of one bear:

"The biggest battle I ever had with a bear was with a long handled prospecting stick. The first lick knocked him down. He was plenty mad. He got to his feet and made for me and lunged to the end of the trap chain. I landed again on the top of his head, but did not hit him in the right place and then we went round and round. I hit him three or four more licks, but failed to floor him. About that time I turned to the pick side and I drove the pick into him just behind the shoulder, clear up to the eye of the pick, which slowed Mr. Bear a little. The next lick I got him on the top of the head, which put the bear on the ground and brought the battle to an end. After that, I shot every bear with my rifle, regardless of the noise. Gold or no gold, I didn't take any more chances with a bear."<sup>19</sup>

## **Hermit:**

Following his brother George's death, Quigley continued his solitary life in the river canyon. He would go out prospecting and trapping for three months at a time, carrying a pack on his back. He made regular trips on foot to Trimmer for supplies hiking the rugged 20 miles along the river carrying on his

back sufficient food and supplies for about six months. Quigley described his diet as consisting mainly of cereal flakes, dried milk and canned peaches. On his sojourns, he would also carry flour, beans, peanut butter, raisins, cocoa, and bacon for grease and the basis of a savory meal of raccoon, rabbit or quail. In the winter, when grasses were scant for his mules, Quigley would hike to Trimmer for fodder in the form of cornflakes and canned milk. He often packed back to his camp a carton of flakes to feed himself and his animals. One winter when the snow had beaten down the grasses, he back packed a bale of hay 20 miles from Trimmer to his shack.<sup>20</sup>

His main companions were his pack stock. He had mules to pack in heavy mining equipment, doublejacks, drills and dynamite. At one time "he had two little horses; they weren't ponies, they were small horses. Big enough to ride...he rode one and packed the other."<sup>21</sup> In 1961, he still had three mules and a few horses which foraged off the countryside, grazing in a box canyon, fenced off by poles, a few miles above his cabin.<sup>22</sup>

Other companions in his later years were other miners in the area. Quigley stayed with the neighboring Winfreys of the Winfrey Mine near Hermit Hole on his return home from ventures into the mountains. Louis Winfrey would pick up Clarence's supplies periodically in his truck.<sup>23</sup> Family members also were close. In 1969, heavy winter rainstorms hit the Kings River canyon, causing landslides which marooned the miners living there. Clarence's nephew Roy Quigley and his wife and his brother Warren Quigley were living in house trailers at the Garnet Dike Mine; Clarence was in a cabin further back in the mountains.<sup>24</sup>

During the summer Quigley traveled over a region as much as 30 miles from his shack, located near the Garnet Dike Mine. He would camp in one of the several lean-tos and hideouts he had scattered all over the Kings Canyon area, or camp where darkness found him. He carried no other bedding than a well-worn blanket. In cold weather, he would find a large pine tree, and then find a fallen fir or oak. He would peel off slabs of bark and arrange them in a semi-circular fashion at the foot of the pine. Next he fit a slab of bark to his length, and used it as a bed to insulate himself from the cold ground. He would build a fire in the semi-circle and sleep in the radiated heat, awakening to refresh the fire.<sup>25</sup> He would also pull willow trees together, cover them with burlap bags and burrow under them to sleep at night.<sup>26</sup>

Quigley had some personality quirks that were known. On acquaintance said that Quigley had excellent hearing, and could hear anything going on in the Kings River area.<sup>27</sup> He certainly was aware of other people in the area.<sup>28</sup> He filed his own mine claims, and was also known as an erudite, educated man. His 'No Trespassing' signs at his properties used language that was polite, but firm, requesting to be left alone:

### **NO TRESPASSING**

Nevertheless there is nothing within the house of any particular value.

And I am writing this for the purpose of saving those who have a desire to pillage the trouble of breaking in. Also that it may save myself the trouble of gathering up old boxes and papers from off the floor and placing them back out of my way as I have had to do before.

And I would rather not have to patch and nail up the windows of my house again.

This sign or note is not placed here for honest people, but for crooks, meddlers, and pillagers. Nevertheless, I know not who may be honest or may not be; so my advice to everyone is not to enter over this fence; for I have a few things inside that I do not want others to be moving around and placing them out of order.

The majority of people cannot leave things as they find them but must be meddling, turning things upside down to see what they look like so, I suppose, also leave them upside down like some pillaging bear would. Therefore, I have traps set to catch pillaging bear, and the said traps may also catch pillaging people, providing they were to enter over this fence – so my advice is for everyone to stay on the outside, for it is much safer than on the inside.

Left: Sign on Quigley's shack<sup>29</sup>.

Right: Sign on a fence around Quigley's mine on Rodgers Ridge, SNF files<sup>30</sup>.

Quigley was remarkable because of his unusual lifestyle. He did not purposefully avoid people, except maybe to protect his secret gold prospects, and he was generally friendly when approached, as told by some who met him:

Ben Flanagan, Forest Service: "I first met him on the trail that came down through there [Kings River]. He wore rubber boots; I think to keep rattlesnakes from eating his legs."<sup>31</sup>

Floyd Lobree, hiker: "...we went up, climbed the trail which leaves the river altogether. It comes to a meadow and there were three or four burros and the guy in a barbed wire enclosure. It was old Quigley, and then he slept in a little metal covering, a shack. I said, 'Well, Mr. Quigley.' This was on a Saturday and he was a Seventh Day Adventist, regardless of it being his Sabbath, he talked to us. He said, 'You are the first fellows I have seen since last fall. Two guys were down the river fishing'. I told him that was us. I said, 'What are you doing with those burros?' He said, 'Oh, they just carry ore.' I asked him how much ore he had carried out and he said, 'None yet. I just haven't gotten to it.'"<sup>32</sup>

Lobree: "My wife, a gal by the name of Belle Lowell, and Ernie Cook and I were going up that same road a few years later and down comes old Quigley carrying a gunny sack. I stopped the car and said, 'Hello, Mr. Quigley,' and he stuck his head inside the car and the gals had the durned thing fumigated after that. He hadn't had a bath in years."<sup>33</sup>

Leon Akers, packer: In 1948, "When I came back from the camp he [Quigley] was waiting for me. We had quite a visit. We talked about old times."<sup>34</sup>

Clarence Quigley died at 83 years old on July 9, 1975 in the mountains that he loved.<sup>35</sup>

## Hermit prospector found dead

FRESNO (AP) — A hermit prospector nicknamed "The Ghost of the Kings" because of his reluctance to talk to people has died near his Sierra Nevada campsite, authorities say.

The body of Clarence Quigley was found near the Kings River by a hiker, Fresno County coroner's officers said Thursday. He was believed to have been in his late 80s.

Quigley spent more than half a century mining an estimated 100 claims, trapping and shooting game in the rugged mountains. He once told an interviewer he shot 60 to 70 bears between 1923 and 1936 but preferred trapping "to prevent someone from hearing the report and homing in on my prospecting."

Hayward Daily Review, Friday June 11, 1975.

Ben Flanagan of the Forest Service said, "He died in the springtime while bathing in one of the pools. Artie Cox, a deputy and I put Quigley in a body bag and packed him out."<sup>36</sup> Quigley was buried with his wife in the Tollhouse Cemetery.<sup>37</sup>

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The Ghost of the Kings may be gone, but his memory lives on in the name of Hermit Hole. His secret mines and hide-outs remain largely unknown in the steep river canyon. No one now lives the life of a hermit like Clarence Quigley did, in the mountains of the Kings River.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Newspaper article, 'Ghost of the Kings' Proves Friendly Flume Riding, Bear Clubbing Man. By O. C. Miller, The Fresno Bee, Thursday, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>2</sup> Newspaper article, Hermit Prospector Found Dead. Hayward Daily Review, Hayward, CA, July 11, 1975.
- <sup>3</sup> 1900 US Census.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with Leon J. Akers and Carol Akers Legare. September 1986. By, June English. In SNF files.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview with Benjamin Flanagan, Forest Service. Oral Histories of the Sierra National Forest – 2006. Central Sierra Historical Society and Museum-Learning Center, Shaver Lake, CA.
- <sup>6</sup> General Land Office plats. <http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov/default.aspx>.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with Edgar McMurtry of Watts Valley Road. Transcript in SNF files. Unknown interviewer. March 12, 1991.
- <sup>8</sup> Newspaper article, Funeral Arranged for Mine Cavein Victim. The Fresno Bee the Republican, June 18, 1942.
- <sup>9</sup> 1920 US Census.
- <sup>10</sup> 1930 US Census; [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com).
- <sup>11</sup> Cultural Resources Overview of the Southern Sierra Nevada. 1984. Theodoratus Cultural Research, Inc. and Archaeological Consulting and Research Services, Inc., USDA Forest Service, Bishop, CA.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with Russell Croft, Forest Service. 1984. Unknown interviewer. SNF files.
- <sup>13</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>14</sup> Historic Property Survey for the Garnet Dike Mine, High Sierra Ranger District, Sierra National Forest. 2004. By, Jon Brady, J&R Environmental Services, Clovis, Ca.
- <sup>15</sup> California Journal of Mines and Geology. January 1951, Vol. 47, No. 1. Division of Mines, California Department of Natural Resources, San Francisco, CA.
- <sup>16</sup> Tungsten Deposits of Madera, Fresno, and Tulare Counties, California. Special Report 35, October 1953. By Konrad Krauskopf, Division of Mines, California Department of Natural Resources, San Francisco, CA.
- <sup>17</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>18</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>19</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>20</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>21</sup> Akers and Legare interview.
- <sup>22</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>23</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>24</sup> Newspaper article, Copter Again Seeks to Reach Trapped 10. The Fresno Bee the Republican, Feb. 1, 1969.
- <sup>25</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>26</sup> Flanagan interview.
- <sup>27</sup> McMurtry interview.
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with Floyd Lobree, Sierra Club Hiker. By June English. August 14, 1991. In June English Collection, Madden Library, California State University Fresno.
- <sup>29</sup> Fresno Bee, March 2, 1961.
- <sup>30</sup> Sign on Quigley's Mine. Transcript in SNF history files.
- <sup>31</sup> Flanagan interview.
- <sup>32</sup> Lobree interview.
- <sup>33</sup> Lobree interview.
- <sup>34</sup> Akers interview.
- <sup>35</sup> [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com).
- <sup>36</sup> Flanagan interview.
- <sup>37</sup> [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com).