

**MYTH:** *A traditional story of unknown authorship, ostensibly with a historical basis, but serving usually to explain some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man, or the customs, institutions, religious rites, etc. of a people* 2. Any fictitious story, or unscientific account.  
3. Any imaginary person or thing spoken of as though existing.

**LEGEND:** *A story handed down for generations among a people and popularly believed to have a historical basis, although not verifiable. B) All such stories belonging to a particular group of people. 2a). A notable person whose deeds or exploits are much talked about in his own time. B) The stories told about the exploits of such a person.*

**FOLKLORE:** *The traditional beliefs, legends, sayings, customs, etc. of a people.*



Mountains ring the horizon in every direction that you look here in the Uintah Basin. To the north is Taylor and Dry Fork Mountains, south slope of the Uintas; west is Little Mountain and Asphalt Ridge; to the south the Bookcliffs and the Tavaputs Plateau; to the east Blue Mountain, Split Mountain, and Diamond Mountain. It truly is a basin. Our mountains are nothing compared to the Wasatch or even the Rockies, some would even consider them to be hills on a grand scale. The features and land types are generally not breath taking, but can be awe-inspiring upon occasion. Things here in the basin tend to be, well a little on the boring side, nothing dramatic. Native peoples first used this area for the resources that they found. This theme continued with the trappers and then the settlers. Today the distance to Salt Lake City, Utah, Grand Junction, Colorado and Green River, Wyoming is each 3 hours, and 6 to Denver, Colorado, that is one way. A hundred years ago, that time would have been greatly increased, taking several days at least to complete the journey one way. Entertainment is sparse like the rains in this region, which is why folks here in the basin had to become highly creative to survive in this isolated location.

Folks here in the basin began by creating myths. Myths regarding the Spanish who at one time owned the area, the outlaws who rode through seeking safe havens, and the Indians who were the original occupants of the land. Upon these myths, they created legends, legends that only existed here in the basin. Legends that have been passed down through the generations, spoken of around the campfire late at night in hushed whispers. Mixing this all together, the outcome of myth and legend, is folklore. These myths and legends have become who we residents of the basin are; they are part of our identity. Not everyone can claim bragging rights regarding famous outlaws, cattle rustlers, renegade Indians, and lost Spanish soldiers seeking a fortune in gold. They have interwoven over the years to become the tapestry upon which we reveal our history to the outside world.



## ***MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE UINTA'S***

By Cristina Bailey and Tami Merkley

August 2002

A story is told of a group of five desperados who were trying to elude their pursuers. In their haste, they bury their loot, containing many gold bars taken from an Old Spanish mine. Because there was a curse associated with the access to the mine, all five suffered ghastly deaths at the hands of their captors. The gold is never recovered, and a map detailing the precise location of the gold is still buried inside a rusty tin can under a giant rock at the bottom of a canyon.

This story has several variations, depending on who is doing the telling. Some versions involved six outlaws, and one of them survives to enjoy his share of the gold. In some reports, the treasure was in silver, not in gold. The pursuers could be Ute Indians, or a sheriff's posse. The gold could come from a robbery or from an abandoned Spanish mine. In any case, there is always a map left behind indicating where the loot was buried. In light of all these variants and no verifiable historical source of information, one has to wonder how all these stories got started.

Regardless of their veracity or of any lack of real evidence, the stories of Old Spanish gold mines in the Uinta Mountains have attracted many optimistic prospectors since the 1800's. Undoubtedly inspired by tales of immense riches just waiting to be discovered. Prospectors never seem discouraged by the stories of people allegedly killed while searching for these legendary treasures. It seems to give authenticity to the story if someone mysteriously dies or vanishes. The lack of tangible proof of the existence of gold will not discourage diligent searchers either. There must always be a challenge, and it cannot be too obvious to find the treasure or else someone already would have. It is like trying to solve a puzzle or a mystery. If the whispered stories fail to entice your curiosity, numerous newspaper articles and books, very popular among local residents and prospectors, probably will.

The following summary might help illustrate what readers will find in terms of semi-historical accounts, sprinkled with healthy doses of folklore on the subject of several lost treasures still awaiting discovery.



*“The Mine Of Lost Souls”* was an article published, by The Vernal Express, Dec. 19, 1946. William Schaefermeyer, Sr. relates the story as told by Fred Reynolds about a cave in Dry Fork, which seemed to fit the description of an abandoned gold mine. Schaefermeyer became very interested in the story and following a lead from Reynolds went to talk to a Mr. “H” in Roosevelt. Mr. H referred him to Mr. Mitchell, who seemed to have acquired a map showing the exact location of the mine. According to Mitchell, an old Mexican woman who made frequent visits to the mine with her family and some of her people drew the map. They would mine the gold and take it back to Spanish Fork, where they could sell it. On one occasion, as she and her husband returned to camp they found all of their people dead. As the story goes, Indians had killed them. Hurriedly they placed the bodies inside the cave and built a masonry wall, sealing the mine opening. They loaded as much gold as they could carry and fled to Mexico, never to return. Unfortunately, Mitchell had given the map away. Schaefermeyer scouted the area following all the clues provided by the story, but never found the mine.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> William Schaefermeyer, Sr. “The Mine of Lost Souls,” The Vernal Express, December 19, 1946.

In the 1950's, James P. Sharp wrote a series of three articles for the Salt Lake Tribune about the famous but elusive Uintah gold mines. Sharp suggested that Spanish explorers had reached the Uintas in the 1540's and learned about the location of an Indian gold mine, which they proceeded to mine. Later, when they were carrying the gold out of the mountains the Indians confronted them and took the gold back to the sacred location. Mormon Selman, missionary author of an English-Ute dictionary, who worked among the Indians for over forty years, allegedly told this account to Mr. Sharp in 1922. Since Sharp published the stories, many have attempted to find the gold mine, all without success.<sup>2</sup>



Richard E. Klinck wrote a story for the Deseret News published Aug. 24, 1951. This is a tale that began in 1863, the year of the Navajo's Long Walk. Two Army men, Mitchell (Mitchell's name also appears in other gold tales) and Merrick, were impressed by the fact that poverty-stricken Navajos were wearing thick silver jewelry they obviously could not afford. At the end of the long journey, they decided to explore the area around Monument Valley to find the mine where that silver came from. They found the silver mine, but on their way back to Colorado, Chief Hoskinnini confronted them and warned them never to come back and to forget about the mine. Once they reached Colorado, they showed the silver samples around with hopes of finding investors to finance the mining operation. Prospecting shareholders promised \$4,000 under condition that more samples had to be obtained in order to prove it was not a hoax. When they reached the mine again, Hoskinnini and his men killed them and sealed the mine. Others have since tried to find the mine without success.<sup>3</sup> A similar story with the same characters, and referred to as the Pish-La-Ki mine, is described by George A. Thompson, in his book Lost Treasures on the Old Spanish Trail published in 1992.<sup>4</sup>

A story written by J. Lee Correll for the Utah Historical Quarterly, provides additional information about the Merrick/Mitchell incident:

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<sup>2</sup> James P. Sharp, "Gold Mine in the Sky," and "Madre de Oro del Uintah", Salt Lake Tribune, 1950

<sup>3</sup>Richard E. Klinck, "The Mine of Mystery," Deseret News, August 24, 1951

<sup>4</sup> George A. Thompson, Lost Treasures on the Old Spanish Trail, (Western Epics, Salt Lake City, 1992) page 85.

In 1881, two prospectors, named James Merrick and Ernest Mitchell, lost their lives there (Monument Valley). It was later learned that they were robbed and killed by a band of roving Utes.<sup>5</sup>

There is some truth to the Merrick and Mitchell stories, but what was stolen from them, is mere speculation. This article also blames the Utes for the killings, not Hoskinnini or his people as Klinck's article asserts. This discrepancy is important, because it discredits the idea that silver was the reason for the murders. The historical accounts reveal a series of conflicting stories involving Navajo, Ute, white soldiers, and prospectors taking place during the time that Merrill and Mitchell were killed. Their deaths could have been the result of any of these assorted skirmishes.



On January 25, 1970, The Salt Lake Tribune published an article by George E. Stewart titled "*Mystery of the Outlaw Gold.*" According to Stewart, a grave marks the hiding place, of a treasure in gold bullion, near an outlaw hideout. As the story is told, five desperados robbed a large shipment of gold from a mine in the east. One of the outlaws was shot in the shoulder but they kept going, followed by the sheriff and his men. One outlaw from Utah supposedly survived the ordeal because he left the group early on, and there is no further mention of his whereabouts. They mysteriously loose the sheriff and his posse somewhere along the way to the hideout location. They built a shelter in Nine Mile Canyon. After they arrive two were killed by Indians, who also stole all their horses. The one with the shoulder injury soon died, and was buried next to the shelter. The last survivor buried the gold next to the grave of his friend and eventually made it back to St. Louis, taking whatever gold he could carry. Before dying, he told his nephews about the gold still buried in Nine Mile Canyon and gave them a map. The nephews had a prosperous business and did not need the gold, so they gave the map to someone they trusted to retrieve it. This person never returned.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. Lee Correll, "Navajo Frontiers in Utah and Troublous Times in Monument Valley," (Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 39 #2, 1971) page 151.

<sup>6</sup> George E. Stewart, "Mystery of the Outlaw Gold," (Salt Lake Tribune, 01-25-1970).

Stewart along with a friend discovered the place in 1967. Stewart and his wife Elva, and their friends, Jack and Nona Rasmussen, and John and Renee Chasel then revisited the Nine Mile Canyon area in 1969. They found a stone dugout and mysterious jigsaw puzzle-like pieces of stone with faint, but baffling engravings. The stones seemed to have been part of a larger rock and some pieces were missing. They failed in their efforts to put it back together in a way that could be logically deciphered. There is no evidence he ever found the treasure.<sup>7</sup> Stewart's daughter published a compilation of his stories under the title Tales from Indian Country: Authentic Stories and Legends from the Great Uintah Basin. The book is a tribute to Stewart's ability to tell a good story.



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<sup>7</sup> George E. Stewart.

Identifying the person or persons who would know someone who actually found any of these treasures is not easy. Many seem to know “someone” who knew “someone else” who found “something”. But the trail to the treasures continues to be very elusive. Many people still allege that the Utes are hiding the information to avoid the exploitation of such a fortune. Yet, the Utes are trying to find the lost gold mines of the Uintas themselves, arguing that if anyone on the reservation had knowledge of its location they would not be so foolish as to leave it there unguarded. Moreover, if someone had access to the gold they would all know about it, since the reservation is a small close-knit community where nothing can be kept secret for long. In a recent conversation with John Martin, feature writer and photographer for the Ute Bulletin (a twice monthly publication) for over 25 years, he stated that he has never seen any gold from the Uintas, or any early Spanish artifacts. As far back as he can remember, nobody ever reported any prospectors being murdered in the area. The reservation has about 300 tribal members, divided into four communities. They have a weekly radio information program, and flyers are distributed in strategic locations when information needs to be circulated. Schools, churches and a bowling alley are some of the best places to receive the latest news. By far the best way to get information is by word of mouth, through a network of relatives and friends. Mr. Martin believes that the gold stories have been fueled by hearsay, rumors, and unconfirmed reports, and if anyone had found the lost gold he would know about it.<sup>8</sup>

The “gold stories” are fun and intriguing, especially when told around a campfire. However, the actual finding of the lost gold has been a very elusive endeavor.



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<sup>8</sup> John Martin, Ute Bulletin, (Fort Duchesne, Utah), personal communication September 17,2002.

## ***ARCHAEOLOGY; WRITTEN HISTORY AND FOLKLORE***

Rock art images attest to the presence of a unique culture that thrived in the Uintah Basin long before the arrival of the Spanish or English. The early inhabitants did not know about paper and pencil, but left written records on stone walls. These petroglyphs (stone carvings) and pictographs (paintings on stone walls) depict the presence of game, anthropomorphic (human-like) figures, birds, and many other symbols that have, for the most part, eluded the understanding of present day Native Americans and academics alike. Although the information left behind on the stone walls might prove difficult to decipher, its presence in the archaeological record leads archaeologists to other evidence that helps understand earlier cultures. Suggestions that early rock art messages were left to indicate the presence of gold mines is an illogical insinuation, particularly when one considers that something like water, for instance, was a far more precious commodity than gold. Cost effectiveness is not a modern invention. Allocating time to leave messages on stone walls had to be done for some vitally important reason. Warning family and friends of imminent danger, indicating where to find food supplies, or how to reach a water hole in the desert would certainly qualify as important reasons to allocate many hours chipping details in the stone walls. Certainly, the spiritual aspects must have been an important area of concern, and it is likely that some figures might represent spiritual forces or could indicate an attempt to communicate with the spirit world.

Unlike the Inca and the Aztec and other Meso and South American cultures for which gold was a valued commodity, there is no archaeological indication that gold had any worth to groups living in this area. To date, not a single piece of gold has been documented in the archaeological record of the Uintas. There is, however, ample documented evidence of the use of adornments. In 1992 and 1993, Richard K. Talbot and Lane D. Richens directed the excavations at Steinaker Reservoir. In their 1996 report they state:

A total of 2,201 whole bone beads and approximately 995 bead fragments were recovered from the site...The majority of the materials came from contexts directly or closely associated with the human burials. Beads were mostly small and ring-shaped and manufactured from faunal bone, but 13 marine shell beads and 13 lignite beads were also recovered.<sup>9</sup>

They obviously used materials that were easily available to them, but they also procured marine shells that had to come from the Gulf or Pacific Coast. Richens, Baker and Janetski in the same book concluded:

The presence of these marine shell beads in the Uinta Basin of Eastern Utah demonstrates an expanding network of interaction throughout the region shortly after the time of Christ (p.94).<sup>10</sup>

They had established vast routes of exchange and if obtaining gold was important to them, the archaeological inventory would provide evidence of the use of gold to create their adornment. Richens lists 28 archeological sites in the Colorado Plateau and the Eastern Great Basin where marine shells were present, and none of these sites indicated the presence of gold.<sup>11</sup>

The use of trade materials for adornment was not just confined to the early residents of this area. In 1982, the Bureau of Land Management removed skeletal remains from a narrow vertical crevice in Pariette Draw, south of Ouray, Uintah County, Utah. The remains were determined to be of a Ute Indian, buried between 1850 and 1875. Numerous artifacts were recovered, including a number of glass beads and some miniature brass hair plates. Roderick Sprague analyzed a sample number of beads to determine their date and origin. In the report, he writes: "The most likely source for this assemblage would be Murano; however, the wound beads, especially the transparent types, could be assigned to China."<sup>12</sup> Again, if gold had been available some gold artifacts should be present.



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<sup>9</sup> Richard K. Talbot, and Lane D. Richens, *Steinaker Gap: An Early Fremont Farmstead* (Museum of Peoples and Cultures, Occasional Papers No. 2, Brigham Young University, 1996), page 89.

<sup>10</sup> Talbot & Richens, page 94.

<sup>11</sup> Talbot & Richens, page 95.

<sup>12</sup> Richard E. Fike and Blaine H. Phillips, II, *A Nineteenth Century Ute Burial From Northeast Utah* (Cultural Resource Series No. 16, Utah State Office, Bureau of Land Management, 1984), page 69.

In historical times, fur trappers, Indians, trail blazers, pioneers, farmers, business ventures, mining towns, even train robbers, outlaws and slave traders have left evidence of their presence in this area. Fathers' Dominguez and Escalante kept a journal of their Expedition, the first to leave a written record of the area that they crossed. These written records give us a first glimpse of a people that came to the Uintas, as well as the reasons they ventured so far from familiar territory. Fur trappers shared their discoveries and adventures in dairies and letters sent to their families or associates, and some even left their names inscribed on canyon walls. The Mormon Pioneers meticulously documented their long journey to Salt Lake Valley. The stories of Spanish gold miners, on the other hand, have remained speculative, at best.



How important is it to distinguish historical events from folklore? Looking at archeological or historical information, scientists in these fields find concrete evidence to substantiate oral accounts. If there was a battle, some remains will be noted. If there was a community, utensils of daily use will be present. Artifacts can be traced back and dated using advanced technology. Conclusions can then be drawn regarding usage, dates, and technological development from the artifacts.

Folklore, on the other hand, relies on oral accounts and does not need to prove, substantiate or demonstrate any of its assertions. Take for instance this early folk belief in a cure for pneumonia:

To cure pneumonia, get your wife to wear the same pair of underpants for one month. Then put the underpants in a bowl (of specific dimensions) of warm water and wash them (with some particular kind of homemade soap). Drink the water left in the bowl after washing.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Richard C. Poulsen, "Some Botanical Cures in Mormon Folk Medicine: An Analysis," (Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 44 # 4, Fall 1976), page 379.

It would be difficult to find a volunteer to test this potion for obvious reasons. In early days, however, it might have been a successful tool to cure pneumonia, since by the time the underpants were ready to be concocted into a drinking potion the pneumonia would have run its natural course. It would have been fitting in the 1800's when doctors and pharmacies were inaccessible, to come up with alternative treatments to alleviate aches and pains.

Almost everyone in the Uintah Basin is familiar the stories of people who have dedicated years of their lives seeking "The Gold Dream." It would be understandable if someone found a large fortune in gold and kept the information confidential, since letting neighbors (or the IRS)- know might lead to an unwanted flood of requests. Unfortunately, it seems to be part of our human nature to brag about our accomplishments, and finding gold would definitely be a good thing to brag about.



## ***THE LURE OF GOLD***

The economic advantages of gold prospecting (expenses vs. discovery) are meager. One can easily conclude that prospecting is not conducive to a predictable cash flow. Consequently, for a person seeking wealth, prospecting is not a good career choice.

Eighteenth century historical accounts reflect more profitable enterprises than the search for precious metals. The European market, for instance, anxious to profit from the acquisition of furs, influenced the fashion industry, which quickly engaged in purchasing exotic furs in response to this demand. Trading between trappers and Indians was intense, and the two major fur companies in the U.S. were trying to bid each other out of business. As a result, the price of furs reached record highs, profiting trappers, Indians and traders.

In the 1700's, Spanish pelt traders also ventured into Ute Indian Territory. Joseph J. Hill provides information from the "*Documento para la Historia de Mexico*":

...It further refers to the apparently rather common custom, which the Spaniards had of going to the Yutas and remaining there for a great while—two, three, and four months at a time for the purpose of obtaining pelts.<sup>14</sup>

Another profitable venture was the slave trade; bartering for firearms, ammunition, horses, or cash. The rate for female slaves ranged from \$100 to \$150, and for males \$50 to \$100. Utes and Navajos would take prisoners to sell to the Spanish or Mexicans. Dr. William J. Snow wrote for the Utah Historical Quarterly:

Walker and his band raided on the weak tribes, taking their children prisoners and selling them to the Mexicans. Many of the lower classes, inhabiting the southern deserts, would sell their own children for a horse and kill and eat the horse.<sup>15</sup>

The slave trade became so widespread that in 1855 the Legislature of the Utah Territory passed a law against Indian Slavery. The document stated:

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph J. Hill, "Spanish and Mexican Exploration and Trade Northwest from New Mexico Into the Great Basin 1765-1853," (Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 3 # 1 January 1930) page 6.

<sup>15</sup> William J. Snow, "Utah Indians and the Spanish Slave Trade" (Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 2 # 3, 1929), page 70.

“From time immemorial, the practice of purchasing Indian women and children of the Utah tribe of Indians by Mexican traders has been indulged in and carried on by those respective peoples, until the Indians consider it an allowable traffic, and frequently offer their prisoners or children for sale...<sup>16</sup>” (Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol2, #3, ch.24).

Slave trading was a common practice between the Ute and the Mexican people in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and into the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through this interaction, the Ute were able to obtain objects that would re-appear in the historical record of the area as objects of Spanish origin.

Since trading was customary, the presence of artifacts of Spanish or Mexican manufacture in present times should not be construed as evidence that Spanish gold mining took place in the area. It simply indicates that regular trading between the Ute and the Mexicans took place before the 1850's. As an old time prospector declared: “I have many Taiwanese objects in my home, that doesn't mean a Taiwanese ever came for a visit”. Besides, from an economic standpoint, the trading of slaves was by far more profitable than attempting to find gold in unknown territory.



The late nineteenth century brought about another mining rush into the area. The Dyer mine was the most profitable in the area, not because of its gold or silver, but because of considerable copper deposit. Within fifteen years, however, the profitability of the mine ceased. Afterwards, people bought and sold the mine until the government seized it for non-payment of taxes and later sold it to E.J. Longhurst and George Pope. Bouillonville, the town that had flourished south of the mine was abandoned and the mine was closed.

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<sup>16</sup> Snow, William J. “Utah Laws Against Indian Slavery” (Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 2 # 3, 1929) page 84-86.

Many precious metal mining ventures also emerged during this time, but all were short lived. Doris K. Burton gives a more detailed account of these ventures in her book A History of Uintah County- Scratching the Surface. She states, “The Uintah Papoose [the first newspaper in Uintah County] was full of “strike it rich” stories for many years. Most of the finds were pockets rather than veins.”<sup>17</sup>

The lure of precious metals also brought con artists in the late 1800’s. Well-rehearsed stories enticed people to buy land or to invest in lucrative enterprises. Aware of the significance of human greed, two swindlers arrived in the area in 1869 with an elaborate performance aimed at attracting investors to mine an allegedly extensive fortune in diamonds. The enterprise was so well planned and organized that Philip Arnold and Jack Slack, the masterminds behind the “salted” diamond mine, convinced wealthy banker William Ralston and others of the authenticity of the mine and sold their claim for \$600,000. After the fraud came to light, it was learned that Arnold and Slack had purchased rough diamonds in London and Amsterdam for \$50,000. The gemstones were rejects from African mines.

In 1905, a gold hoax created a new farmstead on Indian land before the reservation opened for white settlement. Mr. Stockman and Mr. Moore obviously had a deep understanding of the mechanics of greed. They advertised the presence of gold in the upper Duchesne River Valley in a low-key fashion. One of their accomplices showed up at various gambling establishments paying his debts with gold nuggets. This created a stir among the other patrons, and after a well rehearsed performance the stranger revealed where the gold came from. To further increase the number of land sales an article in the “Eastern Utah Advocate” of Oct.12, 1905 advertised:

The mineral resources of the region are not yet determined, prospecting being in its infancy, but specimens of gold, silver, copper and coal are being brought in daily from the surrounding country.

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<sup>17</sup> Doris K. Burton, A History of Uintah County- Scratching the Surface (Utah State Historical Society, 1996) page 135.

Prospectors flocked to the region eager to buy property. Soon, a general store, three saloons, a hotel, several homes, and even an assay station were in operation. The hoax was finally revealed when the town decided to hold an election. When settlers sought advice from a neighboring community it was learned that their new town was not registered. This prompted the sheriff to come investigate the sale of Indian land. Stockman and Moore vanished, taking with them the proceeds from the illegal land sales. The area is named after the two, Stockmore.

Over the years, dredges have been installed along the Green River in an attempt to gather the fine placer gold deposited in the river. The Mitchell family operated the company but because of the meager amounts of gold obtained the company ceased operations. At least two more large gold mining operations were launched along the Green River, but were later abandoned for lack of profitability.<sup>18</sup>



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<sup>18</sup> Doris K. Burton, page 136.

## *KILNS AND THE SPANISH*

Several gold prospectors have indicated that a number of kilns found in the area were used by the Spanish to process the gold ore. This process would have produced great mounds of tailings, which at present nobody has located near these kiln sites.

One of the most unconventional and unique stories in the Uintah Basin is the construction of the Bank of Vernal. In 1916 when the bank decided to move to the northeast corner of South Vernal Avenue and Main, they came up with a very creative way to ship the 80,000 bricks needed for the front of the building. Since the cost of freight was four times the cost of each brick, they decided to send them by parcel post at a cost of fifty-two cents for every fifty-pound parcel. The building became known as the “Parcel Post Bank”. The post office had to change its regulations in view of the incredible amount of work involved in the delivery of bricks and its low margin of profitability.

The bricks used on the frontispiece of the bank were textured, not like the regular bricks used to build homes. Obviously, the parcel post strategy could not be used long enough to obtain enough bricks to build the whole town, as the postal service soon regulated the weight and size of items to be mailed. The need for regular bricks to build schools, commercial buildings and homes rapidly increased as Vernal kept growing. Kilns were necessary to manufacture bricks, process limestone for mortar, and plasters. Many brick making enterprises emerged in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s to provide the materials needed for construction.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Doris K. Burton, page 171.



*Remains of a limestone smelter from late 1800's, early 1900's.*

Robyn Watkins wrote an article about the limekilns in the Uintah Basin, documenting what remains of the old kilns in the region. Karl and Brig Swain were interviewed regarding their early 1900's brick making operation. They described the construction and use of kilns in detail.<sup>20</sup>



*Typical limestone smelters from the early 1900's found at Maeser and Little Mountain.*

After an extensive research, Watkins concluded:

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Brig Swain, p3, Vernal Library folder # 1858, also Vernal Express article by George E. Long.

Due to the evidence from local and historical descriptions of liming, slaking, and brick making, it does not seem unlikely that there is evidence of lime kilns near spots on the Ashley such as Lime Kiln Springs and Dodd's Hollow.



## *A PROBLEM OF SEMANTICS*

Studying the documentation associated with these mysterious Spanish gold mines, a persistent question kept resurfacing. Why were they called “Spanish”? The alleged Spanish maps showing the location of mines, contain too many grammatical inaccuracies to be attributed to any Spanish author. The document circulated as a Spanish waybill from the 1700’s contain numerous incorrect spellings, grammatical errors, and Anglicism to be accepted as an authentic Spanish documents. To attribute the construction of any trail to Spanish manufacture would be a denial of the toil of all the people who lived here before the Spanish ever ventured this far north.

In 1941, the Utah Historical Quarterly published an article by Herbert S. Auerbach’s entitled “Old Trails, Old Forts, Old Trappers and Traders”. In one insightful paragraph, Auerbach explains how the trails were formed:

The myriads of interlacing trails throughout the Rocky Mountains date back through the centuries. Long before the visit of white men to these regions, the trails were traveled by the Indians, roving over the country on their hunting, trapping and war expeditions.<sup>21</sup>

Before the Europeans came to America, the millions of people already here had a considerable trading network. They also migrated to warmer areas during the winter in pursuit of game, and returned north in the summer to gather plants, roots and seeds. They had their favorite quarries, where they could obtain flint and quartzite to create their tools. All this continual movement of people required an intricate road system. They were not a motionless crowd waiting to be discovered. To assume that the Europeans were in any way responsible for the creation of trails renders the Natives unproductive, indolent, and incapable of generating any changes in their environment.

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<sup>21</sup> Herbert S. Auerbach, “Old Trails, Old Forts, Old Trappers and Old Traders” (Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol.9, #1 and 2, 1941) page 13.

Two opposing theories tried to explain the cultures and customs of indigenous people. The first theory emerged upon first contact, when living conditions and level of subsistence profoundly perturbed the Europeans. They explain this condition according to the mores of the time: Lack of religion lead to human degradation and laziness. This moral label was hung around the native's neck from the southern tip of South America to the northernmost regions of Alaska. The second theory swayed to the other extreme of the pendulum and came as a product of later revisionism: glorify the natives, and exemplify their actions placing them as foremost custodians of the land. The natives were portrayed as the "gentle savage", carefully planning every move to preserve the integrity of the earth. There are still people who subscribe to either of the two theories, unable to understand that people will adapt to their environment utilizing the resources available to their greater benefit.

By the time the Spanish came, the trails were already here. Centuries of migrations and trading expeditions had created them. To think that the Spanish needed to come this far to develop trails only validates the first theory that the natives were too apathetic to carry on their daily life. The term "Spanish Trail" has become a general term used to identify the already established Indian trails used by the Spanish Padres on their trek from Santa Fe, New Mexico to California. From that expedition, additional items were subscribed to the Spaniards: Spanish mines, Spanish diggings, Spanish tree markings, Spanish gold, etc. In 1941, Herbert S. Auerbach writing about the History and Romance of the Old Spanish Trail explained the use of the term "Spanish Diggings":

They were so called [Spanish Diggings] by cowboys who discovered them. However, we have no evidence to show that they were worked by the Spaniards.<sup>22</sup>

These diggings refer to quarry sites that were utilized by native peoples for the production of stone tools. They were not "digging" for gold or other precious metals as some have assumed.



One popular belief in the Uintas suggests that tree carvings were made by early Spanish miners to indicate the presence of a nearby mine.

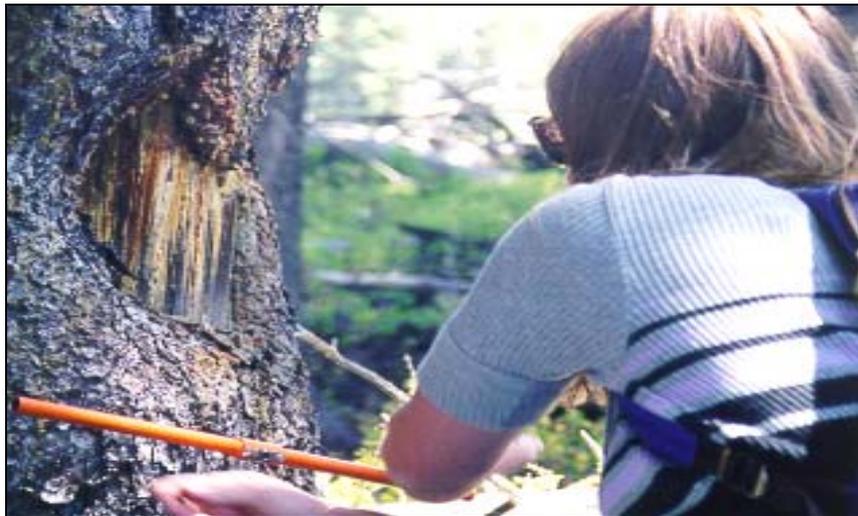
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<sup>22</sup> Herbert S. Auerbach, page 13.



*Heart shaped carving believed to be a Spanish gold marker- the tree, however, was carved in 1947.*

Two carved trees, considered by prospectors to be “Spanish mine markers” were cored in July 2002 to establish the date when the carvings were done. The core test indicated that the trees were carved less than fifty years ago, establishing the date of carving in the 1940’s.<sup>23</sup>



*Obtaining a core sample – Colette Webb, Forestry Tech.*

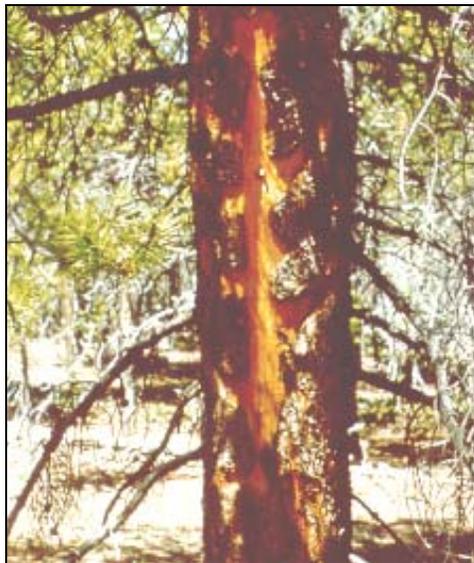
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<sup>23</sup> Bailey, Cristina “Core Samples from Two Spanish Mine Trees in the Ashley National Forest.” Paper on file at the Ashley National Forest Archeology library, Vernal, UT.



*Tree ring counting – Colette Webb, Forestry Tech.*

In 1982, a local resident reported the location of “Spanish carved trees” in the Ice Cave Peak area to the forest archeologist. Core testing determined that the carvings had been made in the 1930’s.<sup>24</sup> Tree ring dating is a relatively unobtrusive and very accurate way to measure the age of trees. It can also provide the date when a tree was carved with a very high margin of accuracy. Some of these trees have appeared in books dealing with Spanish gold mines and have been suggested to be signs left behind by Spanish miners long ago.



*One of the most famous “Spanish Gold markers,” the scar dates to the 1930’s.*

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<sup>24</sup> Ashley National Forest Service Site report, (Mlazovsky 1982).

Unfortunately, the date when the carving was done does not corroborate the Old Spanish Trail theory. In reality, sheepherders on the forest during the 1930's and 1940's are responsibly for the vast majority of these carvings. Sheep herding is a boring occupation and usually relegated to the younger generation. Out of sheer boredom, many would take up the art of tree carving, for fun and as a means of marking locations that they had been to.<sup>25</sup>



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<sup>25</sup> Tami Merkley personal communication with Mervin Slaugh.

## *THE VALUE OF FOLKLORE*

Folklore not only is a reflection of the customs, views, and ideas of a culture, it also creates a common historical perspective very unique to each community. Historical accounts of an early diamond hoax, the sale of land under “gold” pretenses, cowboys and Indians involved on a “gold quest,” several accidental deaths in the mountains attributed to ancient curses and other such accounts, have supplied good material for endless campfire stories. These folktales give the quiet town of Vernal an aura of mystery that “non-natives” find very alluring. Tourists driving thru town almost expect to find the occasional outlaw, gold prospectors, or gunfighters around the next bend in the road. They are probably also hopeful to find their own souvenirs from the past as well, or at least a small gold nugget to prove the validity of these stories. One only needs to ask any old timer about the gold in the Uintas to receive a knowing smile. Then they’ll wait to find out which side of the issue you take before giving you the appropriate answer. After all, nobody wants to destroy other people’s dreams. If you believe you’ll find gold in the Uintas, you might be referred to someone who owns an ancient map. If you do not believe the stories, they’ll refer you to the local library or to the resident historian.

Folklore is, by no means, a negative or harmful cultural attribute. On the contrary, folklore can tell a great deal about the culture that originated the stories, the beliefs of the community, their attitudes regarding different traditions, and how they deal with everyday events.



## ***HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN ‘MYSTERY GOLD MINE’ STORY***

For those who have read some of the books about where to find gold in the Uintas, the following suggestions might come in handy if you later decide to write your own “Gold prospecting” story:

- The story should include an old person, preferably of some exotic ethnic background, who knows where a mine is. The storyline should have this person die before he/she can provide precise directions to the mine.
- Have someone produce a map that, by some creative means, will be destroyed, hidden, or lost before the site can be found.
- If the main character(s) actually finds the mine and actually contains an incredible treasure, have him/them die mysteriously, or,
- Have some obscure historical character kill the main characters to keep the mine a secret.
- Have the main character carve, on his deathbed, some secret message, preferably on stone, but a tree would do.
- If the secret message happens to look Spanish in any way, it will make the story more credible; after all, Spanish seemed to have been very popular in the 1500’s!
- Incorporate an old Indian curse, it will work wonders for your story.
- Even better, add an Old Spanish curse!
- Events do not have to conform to documented historical accounts, but mentioning one or two easily recognized events or names would lend an air of authenticity to your story.
- Always use aliases or first initials when naming witnesses, and make sure you add the clause: “to protect their privacy.”
- Make sure real witnesses are no longer around to corroborate or deny your story.
- When using pictures, ask some old local to point to somewhere on the horizon, preferably a game trail and use attention-grabbing captions to suggest anything you want to suggest. (Make sure the caption reads “Spanish Trail”; it always sounds more attractive than “game trail” or just plain “trail”).
- The local museums are a good source to take photographs of old artifacts, particularly when the pictures look blurry or distorted.
- Maps are always remarkably interesting, mainly when there is no hope of finding the places marked on them for lack of any identifiable landmarks. Objects like “old pine tree by stream” or “deer carcass on road” would make very good unverifiable landmarks.

- Old Spanish maps are a personal favorite. They don't have to have accurate translations or even accurate Spanish on them. If you learned some Spanish in high school, (those silly words you never had a chance to use) will look perfect on the map. Better yet if you have one of those mini computers that can translate different languages. Who knows how many foreigners will venture out in search of gold? A note to the wise: these translators offer several different meanings to the same word. For example, if you want to say in Spanish: "The mine was named after Josephine" you might end translating as: "The mine was named behind Josephine", since the word "after" and its many different uses can create some interesting confusion. On the other hand, reading the map will provide hours of entertainment and amusement to any native Spanish-speaker.
- Never use conclusive terminology. Words like "might," "may," or "could" should be used profusely throughout the story.

Well, I'm off to find the hidden gold, which, a friend, of a friend, of my cat's groomer, told me could be found on the bluff behind an old scarred tree, north of town. Good luck with your story, and your search!



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