

BIZARRE STORIES OF MINING, PAST AND PRESENT

By Jungle George

..."Park County has been the site of intensive exploration activity during the past several years because of uranium discoveries in Fremont County to the south and the belief that Park County also could be a source of huge uranium deposits." - **The Park County Republican and Fairplay Flume, November 20, 1980.**

Much like the Pikes Peak rush that created the Colorado Territory of over 120 years ago, another mining boom in the late 1970's (perhaps the last that Colorado would see) was in full swing. About the same time, gold prices skyrocketed too, adding to the exploration frenzy. Even today, the cartoon series "South Park" celebrates a crazy, fictional (?) mountain community. I think it may parody some real-life situations experienced in remote areas of the west.

I've collected some mining artifacts during my career as a geologist, but the stories of people along the way are just as fascinating. Here is a little true story of the new (and the old) west:



AMBUSH AT TALLAHASSEE CREEK

Bruce and I were finishing up another busy, but beautiful summer of geologic mapping and sampling for uranium in the Tallahassee Creek area in the South Park region of Colorado, four-wheeling along a primitive dirt track toward town, looking forward to a beer and bed. We were prospecting for a large energy company and my project had just been approved for acquisition; this meant survey crews had already been at work staking mining claims under the still actively applied 1872 mining law. We had even spotted some fresh wooden stakes, brightly flagged and bearing the company's name. After years of exploring, the survey posts represented potential victory over other competing companies, also racing to get a foothold on a valuable resource... We had the pride of Conquistadores; the conquest of the land and its riches!

In the late afternoon sun, a glint of glass from another pickup in a side canyon caught our eye... better check it out to see if it was one of our survey crews. As we drove up, we noticed the truck was empty. Climb-

ing out to investigate, the afternoon quiet was broken by shouts from nearby bushes and rocks "...throw up your hands, you Goddamned SOB's!!" Then bursting out from cover came an old man hobbling along on a crude aspen-limb crutch brandishing a very large-looking .44 six-gun and a younger man wielding an even larger Winchester. Still screaming oaths and "...keep your hands up and step away from the trucks!", the younger man spoke with the frightening, advantage of a hare-lip "...we are going to fill you with so many holes, the undertaker won't be able to keep the formaldehyde in." (almost laughable, but the rage

and guns were real) and "...we'll bury you like the other SOB's we've killed out here... where nobody will find you." All this while they pointed the guns in our faces, and the mentally challenged younger man, hopped from one foot to the other, continually mouthing his hairlipped oaths, "...let me kill 'em now!" (cocking weapons). If this was an act of attempting to scare the mining companies, they would win Oscars in "Deliverence II".

Where were our soldiers...? The natives of South Park were restless!!

(Continued next issue...)

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