

A ROCKY MOUNTAIN MYSTERY

by Roger Peterson

The Rocky Mountains used to be liberally stocked with mining artifacts strewn about its surface. The harsh winter weather took its toll on less durable items such as lamps, candlesticks, powder boxes, tins, etc. Sturdier items like tram and ore buckets, ore cars and horse whims used to be a part of the landscape around most old workings. Today, being able to find such artifacts lying on the surface is pretty much a thing of the past. Now, even finding component parts of these artifacts is rare!



Figure 1: Two items thought to be some sort of Blacksmith tools.

It is also a fact that most mining areas, including the Rockies have always had their “mysteries” – usually associated with lost mines containing caches of gold and riches hidden decades ago by untrusting miners who for whatever reason were unable to return to claim their wealth. Numerous books have been written about these lost fortunes, all designed to entice the reader to believe that he might well be the person with the intuitive skills to unlock the mystery and become rich in the process!

You may be asking yourself what the above two seemingly unrelated paragraphs have to do with one another: In fact, this is a story about another mining mystery the Rocky Mountains have presented us: not one

of hidden mines and wealth but one that relates more to artifacts and relics. Truly a mystery awaiting solution!

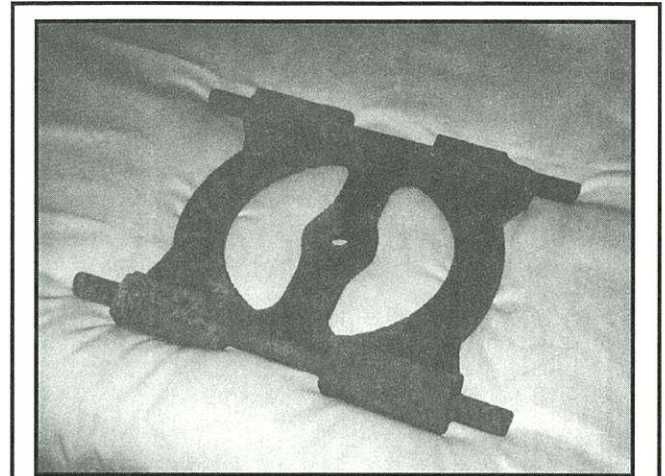


Figure 2: Unidentifiable part — thought to be a frame component of an ore car but the 4 possible axles were seemingly too short.

The mystery started years ago with several people finding unique parts laying in gullies and around mine dumps in the Rockies west of Denver. While not being able to identify most of the items, they were unique enough to merit the collectors hauling them home in hopes that someday they would be recognized for what they really were.

Figures 1 through 4 show several of the components and what they were thought to possibly be.

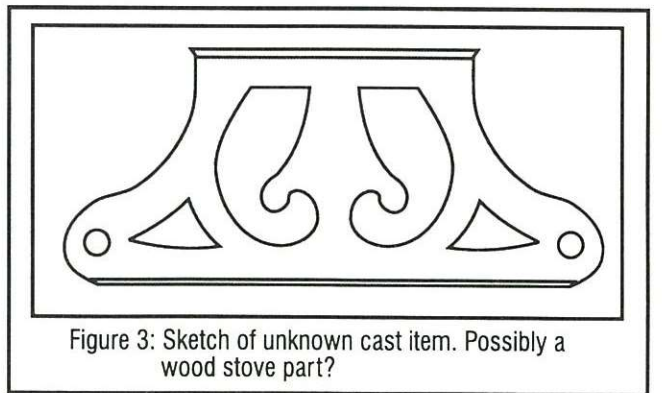


Figure 3: Sketch of unknown cast item. Possibly a wood stove part?

In late 1996 part of the mystery was destined to be solved! Steve and Malia Rush, while hiking at timberline west of Denver

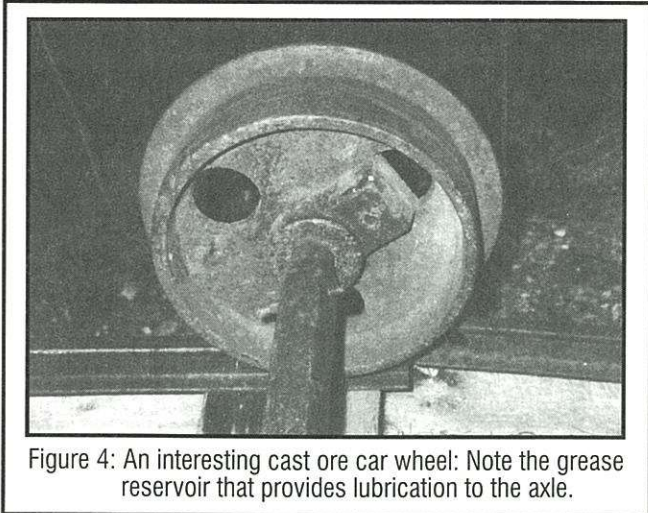


Figure 4: An interesting cast ore car wheel: Note the grease reservoir that provides lubrication to the axle.

discovered an ancient cabin perched precariously on the edge of a steep slope. The cabin had once been the home of a miner and was built in close proximity to the portal of his working. As there was no evidence of trams, roads or even a burro trail, how the enterprising miner was able to get the materials for the cabin to the site was amazing: much less any of the heavy items necessary for mining. Upon further investigation, just inside the mine adit rested an ore car, complete except for want of a tailgate!

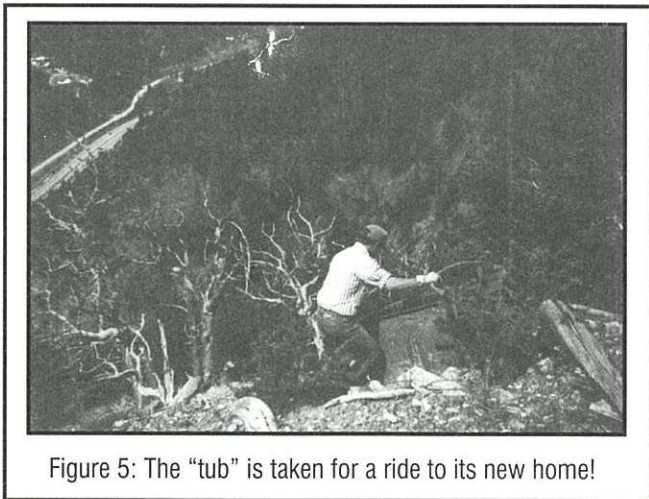


Figure 5: The "tub" is taken for a ride to its new home!

And, if you haven't already guessed, the components shown in figures 1 through 4 were all a part of this uniquely built car. Figure 1 was part of a brake system designed to be engaged by the operator pressing a foot

pedal at the back of the car. Figure 2 was indeed part of the turntable assembly but not as anyone had envisioned it – it was the surface that the turntable swivelled upon and was part of the frame that held the sidepieces (Fig. 3) together (note the unique design of the center curved slots in the side piece – apparently a feature that made the brakes self-adjust as wear occurred on the shoe and wheel). The wheels (Fig. 4) were the only part that had originally been identified correctly – but no one had envisioned the ore car to which they belonged would be so sophisticated. The cast components on the ore car trucks made it very heavy duty. The cost of such construction would have also been substantial – patterns and molds alone would have been a great investment for the manufacturer. Of all the ore cars I've seen from this vintage (many with patents) none compare in areas of design features and durability.

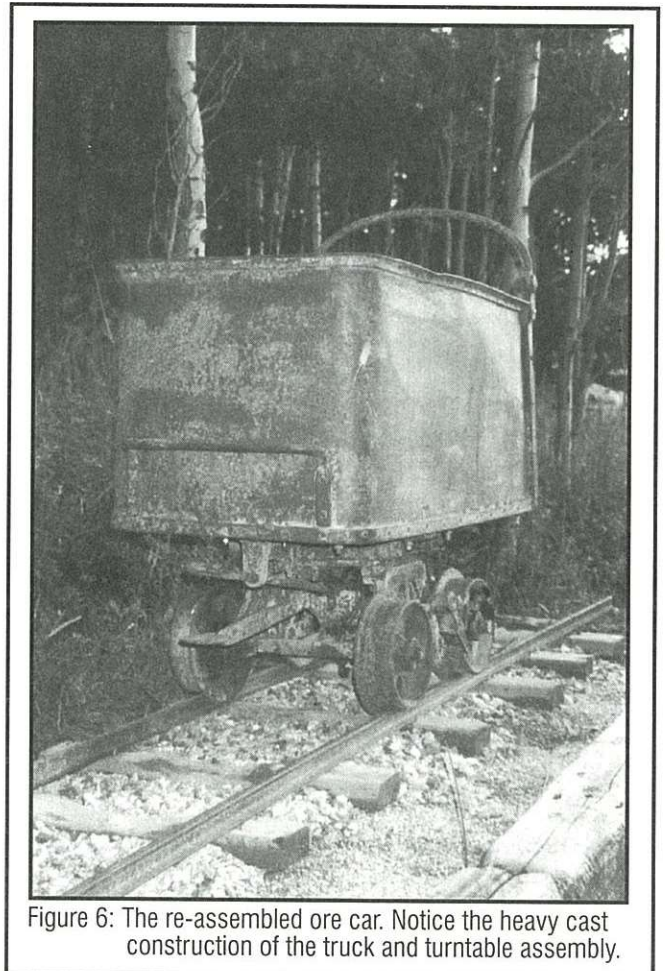


Figure 6: The re-assembled ore car. Notice the heavy cast construction of the truck and turntable assembly.

Unfortunately, there are no identifying marks or evidence of name-tags on the car so its manufacturing source remains a mystery.

Six months (and a lot of blisters) later the ore car was restored and re-assembled at the Rush household. Figure 5 shows Steve preparing the "tub" for its trip to a lower elevation (note the severity of the terrain-those little dots on the "white ribbon" in the upper left-hand corner of the photo are autos on a free-way!). Figure 6 shows the re-assembled ore car.

We have searched old catalogues and articles on the suppliers of this type of equipment but to date have not come up with any advertisements, photos or drawings that show this design or give a clue as to who the manufacturer might have been- So the maker of this particular Rocky Mountain mystery continues to be unsolved!

(Maybe one of our readers will have the solution to the mystery)- Ed. ✕



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