

A Chest of Wolf Safety Lamps & Parts

Bob Werner

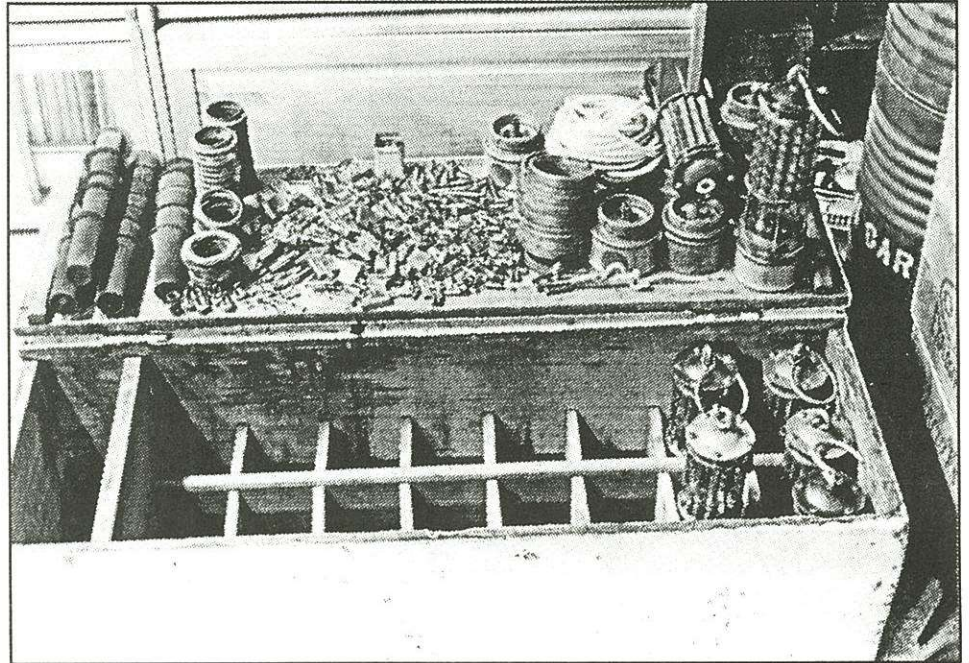
Motorists traveling Interstate 80 tend to pass through Rock Springs, Wyoming as fast as possible, stopping only for gas or a meal. The eroded, wind-swept landscape is barren and desolate with wintertime temperatures sometimes falling to forty below zero. At an elevation of 6271 feet, Rock Springs seems an unlikely location for a town. The area is, however, rich in history, as the town lay in the path of the Union Pacific Railroad as it pushed west over the continental divide in the 1860's.

Howard Stansbury reported coal from the area in his 1849-50 survey of the Great Salt Lake and Southwestern Wyoming for the Bureau of Topographical Engineers. In 1862 the Overland Trail Company established a stage station here adjacent to a spring in the rocks, hence the name Rock Springs, and by 1868 with the arrival of the railroad, the first coal mine was opened. The town and surrounding area became a major coal producer with numerous mines operated by The Union Pacific Coal Company. Coal mining flourished here until diesel locomotives forced the closure of the mines in the 1950's-60's. By 1965 the last mine had closed and except for a recent resurgence in mining activity, very little remains today to remind us of that early heritage.

In the summer of 1990 I met a retired scrap dealer in Rock Springs who had the salvage contract for the UP mines in the 1960's. Most of the mining equipment in the area eventually wound up in the melting ovens

of steel mills. A few items however, had been salted away and I had the good fortune to examine a garage with possibly all that remains to be discovered today of that coal mining era. Buried in a pile of blacksmith tools and assorted mining implements

hard bargaining, I was able to give the chest and its contents a new home. The mice, however, have had to find other quarters and have surely died of lung cancer by now!



was a wooden chest which caught my attention. Extracting it from a nearly floor-to-ceiling pile of treasures, I found that it contained a number of Wolf Model 100 Flame Safety Lamps and hundreds of lamp parts, not to mention being home to a family of mice. The glass, which is often the first part to go, was in short supply: only eight remained. The mice had chosen the asbestos gaskets for nest material in preference to a new roll of wicking and bundle of cotton wadding for the fonts. Nearly all other parts were in abundant supply, especially the relighter assemblies which totalled nearly 100. It was a fortunate find and after some

References:

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3. A. Dudley Gardner, Verla R. Flores, *Forgotten Frontier - A History of Wyoming Coal Mining*, 1989.
4. Craig Storti, *Incident at Bitter Creek*, 1991.