The LEGEND OF THE LOST DUTCHMAN

The Lost Dutchman Gold Mine, still hidden in the Superstition Mountains east of Phoenix, Arizona, has it all—fabulous wealth, Spanish treasure maps, Apaches, claim jumping and murders, including mysterious 20th Century deaths and disappearances.

450 years ago, Coronado searched the area for the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola, the legendary wealth of earlier civilizations of the Indian and Mexican empires. For centuries, the Apaches watched as foreign men brought invading hordes in search of gold in the mountains that were their god—the Superstition Mountains.

In the winter of 1847-48 the Apaches began to attack in earnest; and when all foreigners had been destroyed, the medicine men holding solemn council upon the matter stated that, should foreigners come again to disturb the gods, the Apaches might be “forever cursed by storms and floods and all manner of the natural disasters which angry deities could contrive.” So it was decreed that a band of thirty Apache women and two youths would be sent back into the Superstitions to cover the mines and destroy all traces of the fabulous workings.

And there in the mountains this work party labored for one full moon, throwing ore and hastily abandoned tools back into the shafts. Then they covered the mines with stout logs, which in turn were covered with the natural caliche cement that hardens into rock. Over this they placed in cunning Indian fashion yet another covering of dirt and surface stones to match the surrounding ground.

In 1871, with the help of old Spanish treasure maps, Jacob Walz, “The Dutchman” and his partner, Wiser, were prospecting the Needles Canyon area of the Superstitions looking for lost Spanish gold. Both were well known throughout Arizona as “thorough-going scoundrels, capable of most anything.” At the unmistakable sound of hammering by miners, Walz grabbed his .45-90 Sharpses, and Wiser his .45-70 Springfields, and they proceeded to ambush two miners (Jacobs and Ludi) near Weaver’s Needle. Jacobs and Ludi, both mortally wounded, fled with Ludi dying soon. Jacobs stumbling on alone, finally reached Andy Starr’s cabin in the desert, where he collapsed in Starr’s arms, babbling wildly about Spanish-mapped mines and hidden ambushers before he, too, died.

Meanwhile, Walz and Wiser were examining the mine in a veritable frenzy of activity, for the fantastic ore was almost a third solid yellow gold. And, thought the Dutchman, wouldn’t that ill-gotten wealth be worth twice as much to one of them alone? The Sharpses fired again, and Wiser was left to die in the mine. However, Wiser, like the miners before him, was able to crawl from the mine and, when found delirious in the desert by friendly Pima Indians, was taken to Col. Walker’s ranch near Florence. There for days Wiser hovered between life and death, telling his incredible story of murder, bonanza gold and greedy treachery before he, too, died.

Back in the Superstitions, the Dutchman had gathered up his first sack of fabulous ore and gone to Florence, where word of his strike spread like wildfire. There he squandered his gold in an uproarious manner and regaled everyone who would listen with expansive tales of old Spanish workings and unbelievable amounts of gold. But of its location—ah, that was the secret worth a king’s ransom!

Walz vanished from Florence as abruptly as he had appeared. Then, weeks later, he turned up again with more of his fantastic ore, but this time in Phoenix for another drunken spree. He told even wilder tales than before of his bonanza, which promptly whipped the little village into such a frenzy that practically every able-bodied man there made immediate and secret preparations to follow the Dutchman. However, Walz was no fool, drunk or sober. He vanished suddenly one night, dragging a blanket behind him to wipe out his trail.

A few weeks later, he reappeared. This time after his usual spree, the Dutchman, upon leaving town, not only found a stampede-sized crowd waiting to follow but saw that many more were already camped out upon the desert hoping to intercept him. After that, he continuously changed his course. His tracks often ended abruptly, as though he had sprouted wings and flown off.

Shortly afterward, he appeared in Tucson with two burro-loads of ore. It was there it was discovered that Walz had never recorded his claim, meaning anyone who found it could own it. By this time everyone in Arizona was convinced the Dutchman was secretly working a hidden bonanza. In fact, there could have been no doubt of it in the face of his well-known ore sales and continued production of the same fabulous ore for more than six years.

In Phoenix, he rented a plot of ground and an adobe hut near Henshaw Road and 16th Street and settled down at last for another drunken spree. He told even wilder tales than again with more of his fantastic ore, but this time in Phoenix abruptly as he had appeared. Then, weeks later, he turned up with more of his fantastic ore, but this time in Phoenix. He told even wilder tales than before of his bonanza, which promptly whipped the little village into such a frenzy that practically every able-bodied man there made immediate and secret preparations to follow the Dutchman. However, Walz was no fool, drunk or sober. He vanished suddenly one night, dragging a blanket behind him to wipe out his trail.

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In Phoenix, he rented a plot of ground and an adobe hut near Henshaw Road and 16th Street and settled down at last to a life of ease and the prosaic pastime of raising chickens and wine grapes. There he guarded his secret with all the delighted perversity of a child who knows something but won’t quite tell it.

Whenever he needed money for himself or for his small group of friends (who were in frequent need), he simply went into his backyard to a certain spot, but different each time, and dug up a tin can containing gold dust and nuggets. He did that for the next 14 years, until he died on February 22, 1891.

The Dutchman gave numerous clues, and even drew maps, as to the site of his now legendary mine, and more than a dozen have died trying to find it. The clues and maps are readily available, but America’s most famed lost gold mine is still lost.