

The Gold Hunters DRIVEN FROM Treasure Peak

Unable to Procure Food, They Resort to Cannibalism--Only Thirty-Two of the Original Two Hundred Survive

PART III
(By JOSEPH M. WARD)

(Continued From Last Week.)

The amount of painstaking labor bestowed by the gold hunters on the safe disposal of the hidden hoard was characteristically French. The construction of the shaft was evidence of the finish and perfection of the work. The process of concealing the secrets of the shaft was equally laborious.

First, the well was filled with rock laid to imitate a natural formation. On the top, level with the floor of the tunnel, slabs or rocks were laid and probably cemented; at any rate the well was never found by explorers within one time, as were both tunnel and shaft, so it must have been most artfully concealed. Some wood must have entered into the work, as chips have been found in recent time in the tunnel, which yields no evidence of ever having been timbered or lagged.

The tunnel itself was not filled in, but the opening into it was sealed with so much skill that American miners sunk the shaft to a considerable depth lower before its existence was disclosed than by use of a diving rod, as related to me by Morris Huyler. I will tell you about that later.

It now remained to fill and camouflage the shaft. Loose earth mixed with country rock was dumped into it, but so skillfully was this done that, using the words of Huyler, who did the digging and clearing away, "it was not until we struck the reinforced wall that we discovered it was a shaft."

Brush and rock were then piled upon the top of the shaft to represent a natural mound.

The mound rendered the spot too conspicuous in the minds of the Frenchmen. So they dug quite a number of holes in other places on the mesa, near and remote, filled them to the height, generally, of the first mound, and shaped them to crudely represent graves. This was done to deceive the Indians and Spaniards into the belief that all the digging thereabouts was for the burial of the dead. It was the discovery that one of these holes, which he cleared out, contained no human remains and was a sham grave made of deliberate purpose that ultimately in our time put one of the most persistent hunters of the buried treasure upon the trail that he and others pursued. This same investigator found holes in the hard rock of the shaft that undoubtedly were used in burying ore. They were all square in shape and could well answer the purpose of a crude examination for gold.

Value of Hidden Hoard.

The exact value of the gold left in the tunnel has always been a matter of controversy in Archuleta county. How the sum \$33,000,000 came to be generally accepted is a matter depending on the exchange value of gold a hundred or more years ago and its value in modern dollars. As a matter of fact, the man who found the shaft and he and his associates obtained in some way information from France that the value of the secreted hoard on Treasure Peak was \$27,000,000. If the gold was left there prior to the French revolution its value would have been stated in livres, which would have to be converted into francs and the francs into dollars to obtain an American valuation. But no sum mentioned has fallen below \$27,000,000, whereas the higher valuation has reached \$33,000,000.

It is difficult, now, to piece together the happenings on Treasure Peak after the Frenchmen's preparations preliminary to their departure had been made. The original report of the men who were driven away was vague in detail and the copies of it, or purported copies, sent by Americans in Archuleta county certainly gave no basis for an accurate account. Apparently, the Indians never let up for a day in their attacks. They stole, stampeded, or killed so many of the party's horses that the Frenchmen became alarmed over this loss in view of their contemplated flight. The dead horses that were retrieved served one good means; they furnished food, the supply of which was rapidly approaching the vanishing point. Sheep attacks in force were systematically made, causing the loss of



The Frenchmen Make a Hazardous Escape.

powder on the part of the French. The water in the small creek where they obtained this necessity was poisoned and several men died before the evidences of poison were observed. This compelled the French to dig a well but as the side of the peak is underlain with spongy it was no difficult task.

So ceaselessly was this campaign of harassment and malevolence prosecuted that there could be no doubt that it was conducted with an intelligent purpose. The French, wearing, grinding, determination of a strong force was of Latin inspiration; it looked ahead too far for the Indian mind.

And as their food and powder lessened the effect of the stealthy warfare began to manifest itself. Horses were slowly killed for food and in the end the guard over the breeding place of a particularly venomous and rapacious mosquito which, the small in size, was as eager in the pursuit of blood as the monster eel of the Alaskan bogs. This pest, drawn by blood of slain horses and men, fed viciously on the living from sun to sunset, and the sufferers waxed desperate. Savage counter-attacks upon the Indians were attempted, but the redskins vanished like scared rabbits, artfully maintaining a show of resistance which only resulted in wasted ammunition.

There is great obscurity in this part of the legend. The intimation of cannibalism among the French is too strong to be lightly set aside. It is possible that they ate those of their companions who were killed by the Indians. Such things had been done before and have been done since. The officers probably knew what was going on and shut their eyes to it.

What became of the horses that had been erected at the rendezvous is not difficult to surmise. The nights are intensely cold in that high altitude. Formerly wood for fires had been hauled from the forest. The Indians put an end to that. The French must then have resorted to the timber in the houses for fuel, destroying one after another to obtain warmth for their shivering bodies. The destruction of the last house undoubtedly marked the time for their dash to liberty.

The Last Days in Camp.

Imagine the plight of those surviving members of that gay and vivacious 300 who settled there temporarily five years before to dig out virgin gold from a virgin country. It seems as if the demon of the mines—that mythical spirit which is so universal in Mexican folk-lore—had permitted them to ravage his lands until they had accumulated gold in quantities beyond the dreams of avarice, and then had turned the batteries of his enmity upon them. Gold they had in plenty; gold patiently and laboriously gathered, and carefully and skillfully hidden away; but food and comfort and

the liberty to move beyond a circumscribed limit was gone or was vanishing.

Cold, emaciated, hungry and fevered; subject to insidious assaults of the redskins, desperate from the stings of the still more savage mosquitoes, their blood thinned by lack of proper food and the probing of a vicious insect pest, their tempers frayed to the snapping point, and no man knowing when his life would be sacrificed for the flesh on his bones, suspicion and hatred in everyone's mind, the last days of the encampment on Treasure Peak must have resembled such a hell as Dante pictured.

I have not named any of the officers for the simple reason that none has cropped out in the stories that are afloat in Archuleta county. There must have been some, of course, and if they were of the pre-revolutionary stock they also must have been aristocrats. The identity of the sole survivor is another mystery. That he must have been a man with a constitution capable of enduring the extremes of hardship and exposure is evident beyond qualification. That he was a lettered man would seem to appear from the fact that he made a report on the expedition; to he might have dictated its general details to some other person. Therefore, we cannot say with certainty that he was a commissioned officer or even a minor one. It is quite probable that all the higher officers were killed early in the fighting. For convenience we will call the only survivor Labreau.

Only Thirty-Five Men Left.

Being near the limit of their resources the Frenchmen decided to set promptly. What was left of them, with the few remaining horses, made a dash for the lower country, with which they were quite familiar. They did not get away scatheless. The Indians hung upon their trail, killing a number of the fugitives and more of their horses. There was no attack en masse. It was a continuance of the kind of warfare that had been so destructive on Treasure Peak. Getting into action restored the morale of the soldiers. Labreau, judging from the report to the government, to he does not claim the precedence, was the man who held them together by reassuring that if they did not present a united front the Indians would soon destroy them.

The legend states that only thirty-five of the original number of two hundred of the Frenchmen escaped from the besieged rendezvous and reached the Arkansas river. The remnant struck that river at about the site of Buena Vista, and they were on known ground. They knew that by following the course of that river they would come to the habitations of white men.

The First Mishap on the Way Out.

The Frenchmen were now in the country of the Ute Indians (designated by the early voyageurs as Utahs), with which tribe amicable relations had been established when their exploring party was in that region the year previous. No Utes, however, were encountered without delay they started eastward along the banks of the Arkansas river. Game was easily obtained and they fed well. Recent campfires

Misfortune Dogs Them in the Flight Down the Arkansas River-- Indians Stampede and Steal Their Horses

along the trail and the tracks of ponies' feet indicated that a large number of Utes was not far ahead of them, bound for the plains to procure buffalo meat. Pursuing them, they almost in silence, for the recollection of their sufferings and acts of cannibalism hung upon them, the party followed the Ute trail, which made a wide detour to avoid the Royal gorges of the Colorado, reached the ramparts of the Rockies and looked out upon the vast, undulating plains which stretched nearly to the Missouri river. It was in the fall of the year, the ground was bare and yellow, with only the green nibs of cottonwood trees along the Arkansas river relieving the expanse of its desolate appearance. Had their arrival been timed earlier they would have observed gaudy patches of color made by innumerable wild flowers surrounded by patches of the rich prairie grasses so eagerly sought by countless buffalo, large gangs of wild horses, deer and antelope. Most of these animals had moved north or south, as their grazing habits directed, but many stayed in the river bottom. Bear and wolves and small game remained there throughout the year. They probably got back to the banks of the Arkansas near the site of Canon City. Not far beyond there a band of Utes returned from a successful game hunt surprised and surrounded them. Recognition forestalled hostilities and after the formalities of a feast in honor of the whites the two parties separated and went their respective ways.

Their next encounter with the Indians was not so fortunate. Safety from attack had bred carelessness and one morning they were awakened by a commotion among the horses, which had been hobbled and left unguarded. They rushed to the spot, only to see the entire bunch in wild flight with Indians on ponies snatching off with the stampeded animals. Hastily snatching up their guns the Frenchmen followed on foot and fell into an ambush from which showers of arrows poured, killing seven and wounding nearly all more or less seriously. Two died later of their wounds.

The Frenchmen fired a volley in the direction from which the attack came and beat a retreat to the bushes near where they had camped. The Indians pursued them but met such a determined resistance that after a number were killed they withdrew and disappeared.

Makehift Canoes Constructed.

They were now left on foot. They had to go on or wait where they were, exposed to more attacks and confronting the same conditions of privation from which they escaped by evacuating their camp on Treasure Peak. The loss of the horses was a severe blow. Labreau, who had gone out to look over the land, came back with the information that a short distance down the stream was a heavily timbered island covered with dense undergrowth, principally hickberry and wild plum. He advised that the party take refuge there before proceeding to further operations. Conveying all the goods and food to the island consumed the better part of the day. Watchers stationed on the hill banks saw no signs of the Indians, but the men that attacked them, judging from the location, must have been Comanches.

The leaders deliberated far into the night over their next move. They were under no misapprehension concerning the Indians. The persistent campaign carried on at Treasure Peak had taught them that the red men would continue their aggressive by stealthy onslaughts as long as there was an object to be gained. The white men's guns and ammunition constituted the object in this case.

Labreau held to the view that there was but one way of getting out of their predicament and that was to build canoes and float down the river. To this plan all assented. He appeared to have some knowledge of canoes and directed the work. The first built were quite simple and also crude, but they served as samples. They had some buffalo skins, but not enough for the purpose intended, so the men were sent out to find buffalo and kill them. While they were away twenty boat frames of stout woven willows were put together and the hides at hand were stretched over ten of them. It was calculated that each canoe would hold ten men and the others could be filled with provisions and other necessities. What could not be carried thus would have to be abandoned. There were now twenty-six men in the party, seven of them so severely wounded that they were unable to move.

The buffalo hunters did not return that night, their failure to arrive causing much anxiety.

(Continued Next Sunday.)

LADAMIE HOLDS THE REIN

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN