

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES OF THE OLD WEST

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SPRING, 1975

TRUE

PANCHO VILLA'S
LIFE AFTER DEATH

LEGEND OF THE ONG

VANISHED WAGON TRAIN

BULLETS THAT
WOULDN'T KILL

Cow Chaser's Diary

RODEO

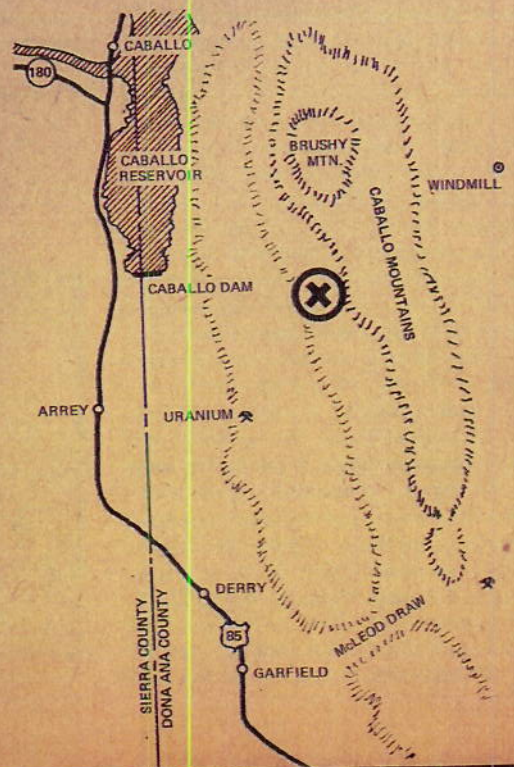
Murder on Putney Mesa

Tom D. Hall

ALMOST THE EXACT LOCATION IS KNOWN!

Legend says that in the Caballo Mountains south of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, there is a very rich church treasure that became cached during a bloody attack and ultimately lost during the turbulent religious unrest which transpired around 1828.

During this well-chronicled sect

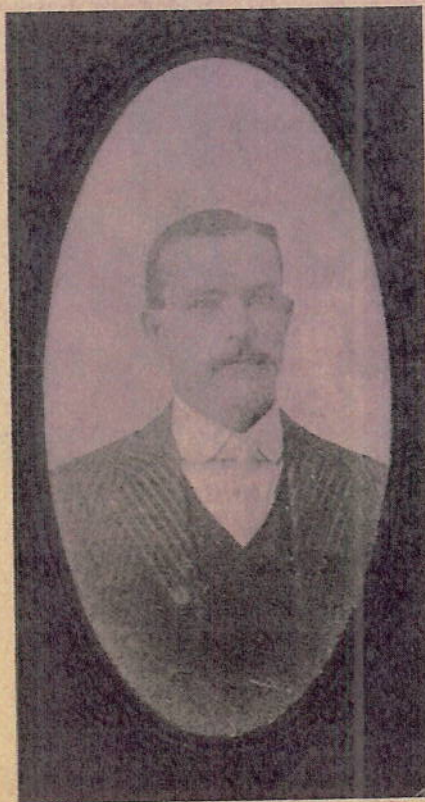


disbandment, a mass movement of all the invaluable church treasures was started from the New Mexico Province to Mexico City, to insure a safe keeping until an overseas delivery could be made to the King of Spain.

Transportation of this treasure was indeed slow, laborious and precarious, being accomplished almost solely by the use of two-wheel wooden ox-carts, referred to by the Spaniards as *carretas*. A big percentage of the precious cargoes became loot for renegades and powerful bands of heartless road agents that used Indians to reduce the protection forces of the caravans.

The Caballo Mountains, because of the range's ruggedness and strategic location, has claimed a major portion of New Mexico loot, even since the advent of civilized man in the Great Southwest. The lost church treasure of our legend fell into this category, the recovery of which remains a challenge today.

In the localities surrounding the rugged mountain region, the story goes that some time ago a Louisiana rockhound arrived in Truth or



PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUTHOR

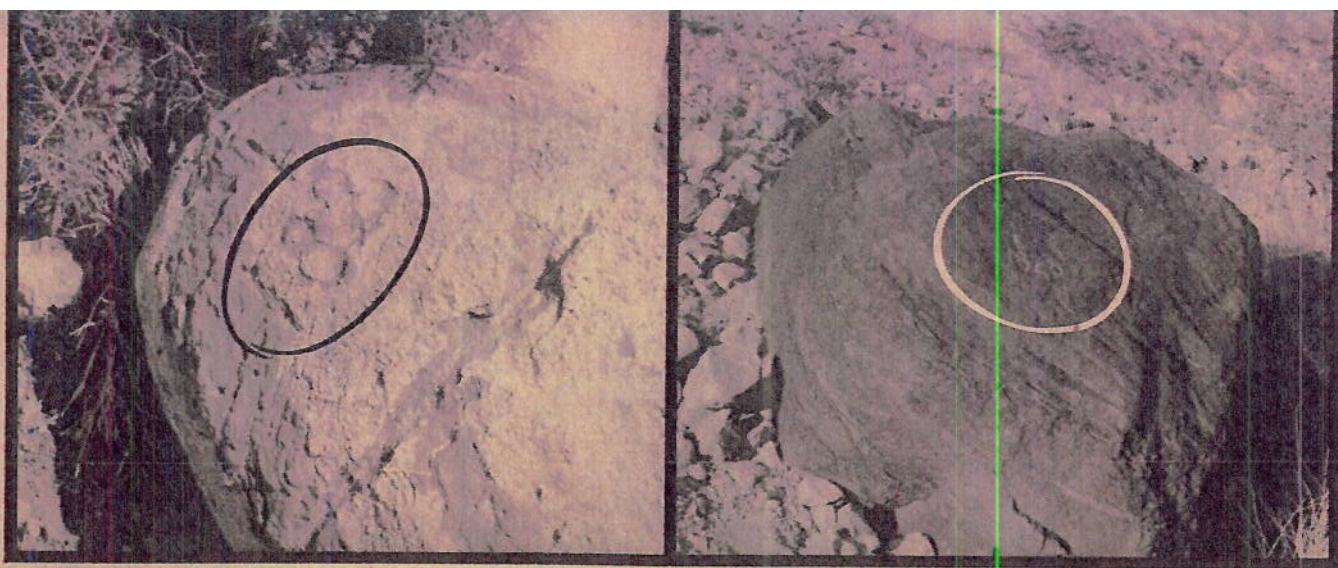
Consequences. Right away in pursuit of one of the reasons he was in the locality, he started asking for directions to the Caballo Dam, and the location of the long-ago wagon trail that followed generally the course of the Rio Grande from the *Paso del Norte* (El Paso) and turned eastward to lead through Apache Canyon on the south end of Caballo Mountain.

The collector of valuable rocks had in his possession an old chart drawn with legends in the Spanish language. He made no explanation about the origin of the map which was about the only matter that he kept secret. The person seemed to know what he was doing, and worked tirelessly with lots of confidence being portrayed.

While conducting local investigations, the individual was not

A rare photo of the Louisiana rockhound (name unknown) who had the original treasure map. Because of hillslides in the area it is unlikely that he got out with very much of the treasure. Arrow points to suspected treasure site.





MOUNTAIN TREASURE

too secretive about matters of his mission. He told that he was in search of a certain stone marker on the old Spanish road. This huge boulder, with some smaller ones, he said would reveal the location of a cave in which a very rich church treasure had been cached while the people of a carreta caravan were suffering a violent attack by road agents.

There were several people, accompanied by two or three padres, traveling with the train that was transporting precious treasure cargoes from the northern New Mexico Province churches, headed for Mexico City.

The caravan was traveling under special orders of the church officials, who suspected that the Spanish Province would soon undergo attack, and the territory would fall into the hands of other governments. The wagons were loaded to the gills with valuable church ornaments, and gold and silver bullion that had been stored for safe keeping in the northern missions, as tax due the King of Spain, the customary one-fifth of all precious minerals taken from the land.

At the time, the chart legend revealed, there was a mass, hurried movement of such riches, the possessor of the ancient document told. History bears out the chart statement, branding it as an authentic drafting.

Tragedy overtook the train at a precarious turn in the trail. The horseshoe bend had been formed by necessity in order to make passage around precipitous cliffs and deep arroyos. This section of the old Spanish road fit the plans of the nefarious robbers perfectly.

The site is well pin-pointed and not difficult to locate, being about two miles east of the Caballo Dam on

the Rio Grande where the New Mexico Caballo State Park is located.

At the horseshoe bend the road agents struck. A fight started in earnest as those following along with the wagons offered stiff resistance to protect their lives and the precious cargo in the wagons.

A furious battle ranged for several hours. The people of the caravan were able to stand off the attack long enough to remove the treasure from the carts, store it in a cave, and mark the site carefully with figurations in the forms of numerals and letters on nearby boulders and stones.

After the cache had been carefully made and somewhat mysteriously marked, those who survived the gory attack slipped out of the country, following closely the trail to the *Paso del Norte*, where they told about the tragedy.

For some unknown reason, legend says the survivors never returned to claim the treasure cache. And we may well understand just why they did not, after an understanding of the violence that caused the riches to become lost. No doubt the survivors later, as perhaps the last act on earth, drew up the chart that the Louisiana rockhound carried. Many lost treasures in the Spanish Province of New Mexico became documented in this manner.

So far as is known the cache remains in the area today. And after an exploration of the site, we well understand this, too. The old trail and the arroyo that it follows requires 4WD equipment. And since 1828, which is the date chiseled on a large black boulder about 300 paces from the supposed cache site, the treasure cave area has become greatly eroded, bearing evidence that the face of a cliff has tumbled over the entrance of the

The rockhound who knew the treasure location carried this small stone (left) to his cabin in Truth or Consequences. It is believed he found it in the cliff at the mouth of the treasure cave. The large boulder (right) even today stands guard on the hillside of the old wagon trail. Note the dates 1828, etched into both the location stones.

cave during the last few years.

To enter, you can try the accompanying map. Travel along the arroyo in an easterly direction over a ranch road to a sharp turn in the old trail. This is obvious by an old, old road bed which has in a few places been protected and preserved with a curbing of native stones, placed there, no doubt, by people of long ago.

Only a few paces above the trail, on a steep incline rests a black boulder, bearing the inscription of which a photograph was made. Locating the boulder is no problem.

The Louisiana rockhound removed two smaller stones which were originally in the vicinity of the cave, including the second stone of which the party allowed a picture to be made.

This whole matter seems to be a metal detector task, with a lot of heavy digging equipment to remove the cave-in that has covered the cave entrance, all of which will indeed be a greater task than locating the cache site.

And undertaking to recover this valuable old Spanish church treasure has one definite advantage: There is a convenient campsite for mobile recreational equipment in the State Park area at the Caballo Dam on the Rio Grande, with tables and shade trees, providing an ideal prospecting headquarters.

Good Luck!!