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## URANIUM MINING IN THE COLORADO PLATEAU

In the year 1949, rumors were floating around that a mill had been built in Monticello to process uranium and vanadium ores. A large government program was encouraging men to prospect with bonuses paid for special high grade uranium ore.


They said that southeastern Utah offered great opportunity for discovery of uranium in the Morrison formation where dinosaurs had become most prevalent during the Jurassic age and also in an older formation--the Chinle during the Triassic Age.

Men by the thousands flocked into these erosional wastelands in old jalopy automobiles and army surplus jeeps. Here they would make camp, and then proceed by foot in all directions climbing steep slopes until they reached the mineralized sandstones. There the ones without Geiger counters would take samples to be checked later. Those with counters would follow the mineralized areas until they had a reading from their counters which was a loud response of amplified clacking reminding one of a rattlesnake showing its annoyance to man.

As a rule one of the worst things that could happen to a prospector would be to find just enough<sup>v</sup> to raise his hopes, his dreams, and encourage his irresponsibility to raise money in any devious way he could. Many men lost everything they owned, including their wife and family.

This is a history of my endeavors and the endeavors of my fellow men in the Colorado Plateau. Many were jeered at and made light of by our fellowmen. Few of us made any money in our exhaustive search, but it may be said that through this great effort by the many, uranium was found in a great enough supply to make our bombs, power our submarines, and to stop the great Soviet Union from greater conquest. At this time they are on their knees.

I guess if there was any one reason why I became a prospector, I would have to say that I was intrigued with the Geiger counter. L.T. Hunter, a pharmacist in Castle Dale, called me into his little office to show me how one rock would sound like an angry rattlesnake, and another rock was silent with only an



intermittent click. He showed me that yellow, black, brown, and green rocks were the ones that had the uranium. "It is the uranium the government wants," he said, and they would pay six dollars a pound for uranium oxide. They would do the buying at Monticello, Utah. It proved to be a very interesting little get-together. He said he had owned claims in Cottonwood west of Blanding and had sold them for a very profitable return. He put some of the money into remodeling the drug store and bought a new Packard automobile. When he told me uranium was found in places where dinosaur bone was found, I was hooked because I knew where tons of dinosaur bones were. This was the opening of a great friendship. I took tons of rock into his little office a paper bag at a time.

One day after work I drove down to Buckhorn Flat and turned south three miles from the White Rocks. It looked like it might rain so I parked the truck off to the side of the road, turning it around before getting out. Hiking east across the Sandbench, I had made it to the Red Ledge when it started to rain. In desperation I climbed underneath an overhang to get out of the rain. As I sat there, I spotted a mineralized piece of petrified wood which looked like coal with copper streaks running like spider webs through it. It was imbedded in a bleached white sandstone. I broke a piece off about the size of my fist and carefully put it into a brown paper bag. When the rain stopped, I had about an hour left to look around. I found the imprints of plants that looked like sagebrush in colors of black, green, and brown imbedded in a shaly sandstone in fine detail. There were three or four thin beds scattered on the eroded slope.

The Drugstore was closed when I returned to Castle Dale that night. Mr. Hunter lived in the back part of the store so I had to knock on his door and showed him the sample. "Hey, that looks pretty good," he said. "Where did you get it, and how much is there?" I must have heard those two questions hundreds of times from other people in my prospecting career. It didn't take long to go into his office where he got his geiger counter out. I thought he would never get it warmed up. Finally he put the

probe on the sample. It proved to be as good as any piece he had ever checked. That night we became full fledged partners. He would pay for the assays and all claim recordings, and I would stake the claims. The year was 1948, and Mr. Hunter was the only man I knew who had experience with uranium. He taught me how to make out a mining claim and how to overlap them to form a group. It was important to do it this way so you could do all the assessment work on one claim.

That night I don't remember sleeping a wink. It was one of the most joyful nights I ever had. Later I found that for every joyful moment you have while prospecting, you have to pay two moments of displeasure.

A few weeks later, Mr. Hunter showed me the assay of the sample I had given him. It showed 125 ounces of silver per ton and 2% uranium. The silver assay surprised us both, and then we remembered Horn Silver Gulch east of Ferron. This was found in the Red Ledge. We later found some of the old digs.

When Mr. Hunter saw how ready I was to look the whole world over, he suggested we get his brother, Albert, to come in with us. That way I would have a partner with me in case I should fall and break a leg. It was agreeable to me as I figured if there was enough for one there would be enough for three. Albert had a singing voice like Al Jolson and a wit like Red Skelton--maybe a little drier. He kept me laughing while we were prospecting and would sing to me all the way home. His hobby was raising race horses. After he met me, he changed it to prospecting.

One day I saw Albert lying on his stomach looking through a magnifying glass at an ant hill. I said, "Al, what in hell are you doing?" He turned on his side and said, "Many a gold mine has been found by pissants bringing the nuggets to the top."

We prospected from the Red Knoll north to the Price River, and south to the Last Chance Desert over to the Baker Ranch. We didn't find a vein thick enough to singlejack more than one drill hole in a place. The mineralization was not continuous. It was a come and go proposition something like every other mile. One could always tell because the sandstone was bleached. We could

sometimes walk on the rim and look down to about the middle of the ledge to see if there was a showing of white sandstone. I would have liked to core drill in places to see if there was an enrichment at the water table. I have learned later how easily uranium is leached and deposited into channels.

Everyone had to ship what he thought was ore to the mill a first time, and that is what we did. We drove the truck as close as possible to the vein, then used heavy seamless sacks to gather the ore into, then carried them to the truck to dump them, and went back to get another load. We loaded about a thousand pounds. The next morning we left early for Monticello. We had heard that the mill would not process the ore if it had too much copper in. There was an abundance of copper in our ore so we thought we would let the people at the mill be the judge.

We stopped on Main Street in Monticello to ask someone how to find the uranium mill. The first person we saw was Earl Jensen of Castle Dale who was working for the government surveying soil. We told him what we had come down for and showed him the ore. He said, "There goes a fellow named Cooper who has a uranium mine down in White Canyon. Let me call him over to introduce you." Mr. Cooper had a mine near the Colorado River eighty miles southwest of Monticello. He said his ore was high in copper and silver like ours, and the mill would not accept his ore, but he had just leased his mine to a company that agreed to build a mill and process his ore near the mine. A few years later we learned that Cooper and his partner, Walt Bronsen, sold to Texas Gulf for 22 million dollars. He died not too long after he sold.

We went down to visit the mill, and it was most interesting to go around to all of the piles of ore and see the different kinds. They were nice to us, looked at our ore, but said they couldn't accept the copper ore. With our dreams in pieces, we headed for home. We dumped the ore out in the back of my lot, and when I sold my place, the ore went with it.

One Friday night Mr. Hunter called and asked me to come down. When I arrived he showed me a beautiful piece of yellow and black uranium. He said Bill Hannert had been in and gave it to him, telling him he had made a strike in a butte sitting on

the East of the Muddy River in South Sinbad. He pulled out an old map which showed a road from Tan Seep to the Macky Flats, but it didn't show any kind of a road to get further south or down into the Muddy River. We called Albert over from Ferron. In the meantime we decided that Albert and I would leave early the next morning with our camping equipment. Daylight came the next morning while we were going down Buckhorn Wash. We were both in high spirits. We reached the Macky Flats where we saw Elmer Jeffs herding sheep for Karl Seely. He asked us to stop to have coffee with him. We told him we were trying to get down to the Muddy River to prospect for uranium. He said, "The road ends here, but you can make it four or five miles further south. Then you will have to walk down into Hondoo." Hondoo is a place on the Muddy River where nature has cut a big arch just below the rim that is shaped like the hondo in a cowboy lasso rope. This arch can be seen as a landmark for miles around. The coffee turned out to be breakfast. Elmer was a most gracious host.

We made our way further south, following the tracks we thought were Bill Hannerts. When he turned west, we turned west. We went as far as the tracks had gone, then got out. Each of us put a can of beans and a spoon in our pockets, took a big drink of water, and grabbed our prospector picks. The tracks we were following led to a wild horse trail which meandered downhill at a 4% to 5% grade. It was the best damn trail in the roughest damn country I ever saw. We sat down to rest about half way down to get our bearings of the country and to rest our legs. We could see the big butte that Bill Hannert had told Hunter about. We could see where the Muddy River had cut its way through the west reef, then south to cut another big canyon to turn east. There was a beautiful butte standing all alone north and west of us. It was later named North Butte. The footprints we were following led right up to the first discovery monument under the slope of the big butte. We were surprised to find only one name on the claim paper which read John Tomsick, Dirty Devil #1. The next monument had a paper which read W.J. Hannert, Dirty Devil #2. They were staked the same day, April 15, 1950. They were going it alone each claim-- what a hell of a way to do. I felt that partners should trust

one another right down to the last crying dime." Later it proved their undoing and resulted in tragedy.

We followed their Dirty Devil claims down to the river which we waded and headed down to the canyon of the Hondo. By now every time we looked up at that beautiful arch, we saw a piece of blue sky which was prettier than anything either one of us had ever seen. We turned into the canyon and climbed up to the ledge. There we saw coal-looking trees imbedded in the sandstone with round yellow haloes around each tree. We didn't have a Geiger with us so we picked out some samples. Then we started building claim markers. We named the first claim Muddy River #1, and moving north was Muddy River #2. That's when we stopped to open our can of beans. We had to walk up a shady wash to get some snow to finish eating the beans. We staked eight claims by sundown. It's a good thing we quit when we did or we would never have found the trail out.

Ten pm found us about a mile from the truck. Albert said he had gone as far as it was possible for him to go. He told me to go on and he would sleep on the trail. It had turned off real cold, and I was afraid he would freeze to death, so I sat down and talked to him about the big strike we had made. Soon he said, "I'll try it again." He seemed to take new heart even though the trail got steeper. We made it to the truck, and though we were hungry we made our bed and climbed in with our clothes on and conked out. We had just finished what I called a "Do or Die Trip." We couldn't wait to get to Castle Dale the next morning so Albert's foot was pretty heavy on the gas feed. He belted out some songs my Mother used to sing, and I held on for dear life. His truck was a GMC with extra springs to carry big loads so every bump was magnified about six times.

When we walked into the Drugstore, Mr. Hunter, with a smile, said, "How did you do?" We broke out into smiles. *see pg 5* He warmed up the counter, we dug out the sample. He on the rock, and I thought, "If every beat of that counter represents a dollar bill we will all be millionaires."

John Tomsick built a road down the same old horse trail we had walked, hauled a compressor in, and went to work drilling and loading a big truck of ore. He hauled it to Monticello to the

mill, came back and built a bin to hold his ore. When his check came from the mill, it must not have been as good as he expected, and for a time it was rumored that all was not well with him. It came to an end one day at his home when he went down into the basement, got his rifle and shot himself in the head, having pulled the mattress out on the floor to fall on.

Bill Hannert opened a mine on one of his claims and was able to make a go of it. For a few years everything was roses for him. He bought a big truck, a compressor, and a mechanized shuttle buggy to haul the ore out into a bin.

In those days, uranium was red hot, and hundreds of stock companies sprang up. Buyers would look up prospectors to buy their claims, so there was a ready market for both good and bad claims. At first the stock company could sell stock on anything as long as the salesman told the people they had found petrified wood. Later they had to have a geologist go over their claim holdings and find at least one claim which had a good showing.

I met a fellow who wanted to buy some real good mining property. He said he had big bucks to pay so I took him to Bill Hannert's. Bill took him through the mine, showed him his shipping reports, and the fellow offered him \$275,000 which was a lot of money in those days. Bill turned it down. I said to him, "Bill, that's a lot of money." He said, "McClenahan, I have two faces of ore, and the ore will run all the way through the mountain." I said, "Bill, you have seen it when these veins didn't run all the way through." Three weeks later he ran out of ore. He had to sell to Spanish Trail Uranium and take stock for most of the money. Two or three years later I loaned him \$50 to take out bankruptcy.

We had decided to sell our claims as there was no way we had an equitable setup to mine it. All I could offer was my labor, and Mr. Hunter and Albert didn't want to put up the money for expensive equipment. I didn't want them to do it anyway.

Albert and I would go down to our claims in June to do our assessment work. We were camped on the river one night and watched the moon sail through the Hondo Arch. It impressed me so much I later wrote a poem and called it the "Hondo Moon."

We sold our claims in 1955 to Spanish Trail Uranium for \$16,000. The mine produced over 300 tons of ore for which we

were paid 10% royalty.

Uranium prospecting became a learning process. The uranium in the San Rafael was different in appearance from the rest of the uranium in the Colorado Plateau. San Rafael Uranium was mostly black in color, and it was found with a mixture of an asphaltic base. A prospector saw lots of black in the rock, but it didn't always have uranium in it.

I think it was in the fall of 1949 that I heard they had found uranium in Buckhorn Wash. Saturday came around so I went down to see what it looked like. I stopped when I saw a car parked where a couple of fellows were working. I introduced myself and told them I had come down to see what their ore looked like. They showed me a thin line of brownish black sandstone that showed good on the Geiger counter, but it was only two to three inches thick. They were putting wooden crossbars up for the portal of their mine so I stayed to help them. I think he said his name was Dee Smith, but it might have been Clifford. They later shipped about five tons of rock, but the mill wouldn't let them dump it. At that time I thought, "I'll never make that mistake," but I did.

The next big strike was four miles south of the San Rafael Bridge and a mile west of the road in an area known as Calf Mesa. The cowmen used to put their calves up on this mesa to wean them from their mothers. A sand rock cistern held enough water to furnish them with water. Len Wilson from Huntington remembered finding copper on Calf Mesa years before when he was working with cattle so he asked two brothers, Nolan and Harold Olsen, from Wattis if they would like to go with him to check it out. They staked seven claims known as the Dexter claims. They moved a mountain of rock and stretched a cable from the portal of the mine to a loading bin. They had the Atomic Energy Commission come in and drill a pattern of holes to evaluate the ore deposits. In the meantime, they patented their claims. As far as I know the Dexter claims were the only patented uranium claims in the San Rafael.

The Olsen boys told their cousin, Theo Ungerman, about their strike at Calf Mesa so he went down accompanied by Douglas Harrison, Louis Albrechtsen, Lionel Jones, and Russel Palmer.



They prospected north of Calf Mesa. One night they came to my home. They knew I had a Geiger Counter, and they wanted me to check their samples. One sample was real hot, but the problem was that no one remembered where they picked it up. They asked me if I would go down and find it with my geiger counter, and find it I did. It made them so happy they put my name on the claims which became known as the Lone Tree claims. We mined five tons of ore, slid 200 pounds at a time down a rocky slope in a tin bath tub to the place where we loaded it into a truck. Now that doesn't sound like much, but by the time we got through we didn't ever want to try it again.

We had heard how the Government had opened a new buying station in Marysvale, Utah--probably because they had found a vein of pitchblend which had high expectations from their drilling reports. We decided to drive down there. We arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon and drove into the yard where four or five men came up to look at our ore. One fellow climbed on top of the truck with a Geiger counter. When he turned it on everyone came to attention. They said it was the best ore that had come into the yard.

Marie Windor was born and raised in Marysvale. She was Miss Utah one year, then had become a big movie star in Hollywood. She financed her father in his uranium venture on the mountain east of Marysvale where the pitch blende had been found. He introduced himself and said he wanted to lease our mine. We told him we didn't have a road built to the mine, but he said he would build a road and he had the trucks to haul the ore. We took his name and address and said we'd let him know. It wasn't long before we received a check for \$524. It had assayed 44 hundredths of 1% which was very good ore.

The mine carried about a foot of shale which was on top, and we shoveled it into the dump. The rain had brought the uranium salts out to the surface in each particle of clay so what was greenish shale was now bright yellow. One of the guys sent it off for a chemical analysis. They found it ran 5%, and that was almost 10 times higher grade ore than we had shipped. The Geiger counter would not show the correct count because the uranium in the shale was millions of years younger than the other ore.

We leased the claims to a gold mining company named the Black Warrior Mining Company from Washington state. They agreed to pay us 20% royalty and let us do the mining for good daily wages. They had the Nielson Brothers build a road up to the portal for \$1500. A big loading bin was supervised by two carpenters from Washington. They gave us a real education on how to build a durable bin on a rocky ledge sidehill. The day the big boss came down he brought a set of tents and a kitchen that reminded me of an African Safari. The next day we started to mine ore. We would mine the barren rock under the ore and then drop the ore. It was black in a dark brown fine conglomerate.

The first day all went fine, but the second day the drill started bringing out a red shale which showed we had come to the end of the vein. That was a sorry old day for all of us. That afternoon we went a hundred yards to the west of the mine and made a new opening. We found with a little sorting we could ship it to the mill. Two hundred tons was shipped out of this mine, but the company decided to pull out. To this day there stands a 75 ton ore bin that had only 15 tons of ore go through its doors. One can still see the bin standing beneath a vertical ledge three miles south of the San Rafael Bridge and west one-half mile. I've thought maybe we should have leased to Marie Windsor's Father. I'm sure if she had become acquainted with us, she would have made movie stars out of us, and we would have ended up with broken lives.

In the early days of the uranium boom I was always searching new layers of rock to see if they might carry uranium. For some time I wanted to check the oldest rock in the San Rafael Swell known as the Coconino. The best place to start would be the Crawford Holes. This canyon started at the Crawford Holes and ran east, coming out of the San Rafael Reef. It was called the Old Woman. In time of drought the Crawford Holes furnished water for many herds of sheep that had no other place to go for water. It had to be dipped out with a rope and a bucket.

It was winter with not very much snow above the canyon, but there were places in the bottom of the canyon that snow had blown in. You had to wade through it, and as I made a final jump, I lit

in a snowbank that broke my fall. When I looked back up the bank, I was not sure I could climb back out. Anyway I had come to prospect so that's what I was going to do. As I walked down the canyon, the rims got higher and higher. I kept checking the rock with my Geiger counter, but it seemed less active than in most places.

I was interested in the great number of calcite veins which cut perpendicular through the sandstone walls. Inside the dog-tooth spar were chunks of tar. In one place I stopped and made a little fire and put some of the tar on it. Sure enough it burned, and the smell was that of genuine roofing tar.

I was so deep in the canyon that I had lost the sunshine. I thought to myself, "My clock will be stopped until I get out of here." I kept an eye on the rim to find a slot I could climb out. I wasn't sure I could get out where I had come in. As I walked along, I fantasized how old the rock must be. Two Hundred and Twenty-Five Million years old is what the book said. It also said it was eolian deposition. This meant that at one time the sandstone looked like the Sahara desert when it was the top of the earth and the other layers had not yet been piled on it. Then as I was wondering why the canyon was so deep and narrow, I came around a bend and ran right into five head of sheep. I jumped back just as they saw me and they jumped back too. Down the canyon they ran, and I sat down. It had scared me just as bad as if I had run smack dab into five grizzly bears. I noticed they had never been sheared and all had long tails so they could have been of a second or third generation heritage. I never saw them again although I walked another two miles before I found a place to climb out.

<sup>1</sup>On December 8, 1949, Frank Blackburn, Elden Bryan, Ervin Olsen, and Thomas Worthen trucked two horses out to the Family Buttes on the rim of Red Canyon. Two men rode horses and the other two walked, taking turns when they became tired. Following a horse trail into Red Canyon and then south toward the Muddy River, they came to a large side canyon. Frank Blackburn said this was the canyon he was herding sheep in when he found the rock that looked like uranium. They staked three claims and named them Lucky Strike #1,2,3.

1. DATES RECORDED IN EMERY COUNTY COURTHOUSE

They were able to bring samples out which assayed over  
They almost died from exhaustion before they made it  
truck. They were riding the horses double. One day  
me about it. He said he didn't know whether they could load on  
horses or the horses would have to load them.

By the summer of 1950 they had a road down to their claims.  
I drove down to see them. They had a big open pit mine with a  
compressor and a wheel barrow for machinery. A large truck was  
backed into a bank, and they loaded the truck with the wheelbarrow.  
The ledge at that time was 30 feet high with two black bands 24  
inches thick running parallel and equally spaced. The very top  
had a band of yellow uranium and a band of rose-red cobalt bloom.  
In all my years of prospecting I never did see a prettier face of  
ore. They were able to ship it all, but they had to break it up  
so there was no rock over five or six inches.

The men were over 60 years of age, and they were all doing  
their own mining. I was interested in the efficiency with which  
they were going about their work. Two men were breaking the ore  
with sledge hammers, one was loading the truck, and the other was  
doing the drilling and loading the holes. Ervin Olsen's son  
was trucking the ore to the mill. For a long time their ore ran  
over 1% at the mill. I never heard how much they made, but it  
wasn't long until they were riding around in Buicks and Lincolns.  
There was no "go broke" story for those guys. It was all "four  
roses."

Here is the story from Howard Staker about his experiences  
in his own words: "I Had my first introduction to this excitement  
in the spring of 1950. An Uncle, Frank Blackburn, approached my  
Father about going out into the San Rafael Swell, in Emery  
County, Utah, to do some prospecting. I was not at all interested  
at the time, but my brother, Lyman, a Chemical student at Brigham  
Young University, and having a greater knowledge and interest in  
this sort of thing, accepted the invitation to go with them.

"In earlier days, Frank Blackburn and Ervin Olsen had run  
cattle and sheep in the San Rafael Swell and also farther eastward.  
These men were well acquainted with the area and had remembered  
seeing colored stains in the rock that looked the same as some of

2. Story Taken From Howard Staker  
of his mining exploits.

the uranium samples they had recently seen. So these two men, along with Eldon Bryan and Thomas Worthen, all of the Ferron, Utah area, went into the Swell in the fall of 1949 searching for signs they had seen before. They camped in the Family Butte area and then went on down into Red Canyon by horseback. In the process they discovered and staked the Lucky Strike claims in that area. Hence, their enthusiasm and excitement.

"In the spring of 1950, they were preparing for another trip when they approached us. My brother, Lyman, did go down with them this time and again they camped in the Family Butte area. The Blackburn-Olsen group prospected on a mesa a mile or so north of Family Butte, and staked what was known as the Green Vein claims. This area was later named Green Vein Mesa by the Atomic Energy Commission. Lyman prospected the area right near Family Butte and staked what became known as the Dolly claims just west and south of those that we later called the Elliott group of claims. Lyman also went down in Red Canyon with them and staked some claims a mile or so south of the Lucky Strike. These were known as the Conrad claims.

"During the late summer and fall of 1950, the Blackburn-Olsen group began doing some work on the Lucky Strike and Green Vein claims. Later they leased the Green Vein group to a Glenny-Cutler firm, who mined most of what was available on the claims. By the fall of 1950 the Blackburn-Olsen group had also discovered a larger outcrop of ore on the Lucky Strike than they had previously found. It was here they decided to start mining. Ervin Olsen put up the money for a compressor and some road work, and they began to work the property. None of these people had had any practical hard-rock mining experience, so things went rather slow at first. In fact the slow process began to worry Olsen as to whether the operation would succeed even though they were shipping a load of ore out every few days or so.

"In the meantime, a son of Frank Blackburn, Elbert, and a friend leased a part of a claim to try to open up another mine near the Lucky Strike workings. They had built a chute to store the ore and had driven a tunnel into the mountain a short distance. The small amount of ore did not increase in quantity or value at this

time, so the friend gave it up. In the spring of 1951, I was given an opportunity to buy the friend out for a hundred dollars. The risk looked good, and I took him up on the offer. In a week or two the prospects of any amount of ore had not become evident so Elbert decided he should go back to the coal mines where he had more security. I stayed with it for a while then began to wonder what I was doing there.

"I had some previous hard rock mining experience at Park City and began to talk to Uncle Frank about things they could do to improve their output. I was offered a job with them, but really didn't want it because the pay was only ten dollars per day. However, I did need a job. I agreed to stay there a week or so to get them started. It was about this time that Ervin Olsen got serious about leasing out the mine as they had a lot of offers. The rest of the group didn't want to lease, but wanted to operate the property themselves, at least until they had mined enough to get the bonus due from the government. It developed into some differences among them so I teasingly told Olsen I would lease his share if he really wanted to lease. I didn't believe that he would lease without the others doing so, but the next morning I was offered the lease for six months if I wanted it. I jumped at the chance because everything was set up and going.

"We made some good progress and was soon shipping a truck load every day. In about two months or so we were shipping two truck loads per day. We mined some ore that assayed over one percent U308 and over one percent copper. Some of the ore also contained cobalt, but it was not high enough grade for the mill to pay for it or for any copper less than one percent. At the end of the six month period, we had mined more than enough to get their bonus. They sold a fifth interest to an Ogden mining man. After that things went down hill as the ore became more difficult to mine.

"Finally the property was leased to a man named Webster from Cripple Creek, Colorado. He was supposed to be an expert in mining but as it turned out he took what was easy to get and then left. The property was then leased to some Day brothers from Moab who did very well. I worked for both of these groups for a short period of time and began doing some work on the Conrad claims at the same time.

"Having whet my prospector appetite with the experience at the Lucky Strike, I also felt the Conrad claims offered some real promise. Besides my brother, Lyman, myself, and my Father, there were two brothers-in-law, Martın Cullum, and Wallace Jensen as owners of the claims. Then we sold a sixth interest to Carroll Cullum if he would supply a few pieces of equipment including a compressor. We enlarged our holdings by Staking out a total of five Conrad claims on the north side of the canyon and five Cross-Bow claims on the south side of the canyon. The canyon walls were very steep and over 600 feet high which made it difficult to put in some of the rear markers. We climbed up on the ledge and painted markers on the edge of the cliff, by hanging one guy over a bit, so anyone could tell where the lines would run to the markers on top of the ledge.

"We camped out for a time, then we moved a small older trailer house onto the property. That was certainly a great improvement over the tent and open air camping. We began to drive a drift into the side of the outcrop. The ground was very hard and we only had a handheld jackhammer which was slow and cumbersome. We drove a couple of drifts in about twenty feet or so over a period of several months. We were part time workers at the mine, and things went slowly and expensively.

"During this period the Atomic Energy Commission started some drilling programs on some claims in that area. We had attempted to do some work on the Dolly claims, and the Elliotts had done some work on the other claims there. A little ore had been blocked out on the Dolly claims by drilling, and it looked promising although thin ore was all that was found. We attempted to drive a drift into this ore. We built a chute and drove a drift into the first ore. It was very thin and marginal at best. The weekend after we got the first ore in the bin ready to ship, one of those big summer flash storms that are so prevalent in that area, came across the desert and washed our chute full of ore down the hill. WE were so discouraged we gave the whole thing up. We then leased out these claims to Glenny-Cutler, and afterward they left them to a man named Haney. We got a little out of these claims, but certainly not as much as we had put into them. The moral to this story is to lease the, don't work them.

"Elliotts worked the other claims for several months and did ship a little ore, but again the expenditures exceeded the income by a wide margin. They gave up the claims in about 1953.

"We continued with the Conrad claims until about 1957 or 58, then leased them to Cliff and Orvil Mathews and their associates. They put an organization together and raised about three thousand dollars and hired a drilling outfit to come in and drill a few holes. They blocked out what turned out to be about two hundred thousand dollars in ore. Now we could see the error of our ways, or at least that is what we thought. If they can do that, we can also. So we took a good part of the royalties we received from their operation and decided to drill the Cross-Bow claims.

"Wallace Jensen was the bulldozer expert in our group so he built a road up on the top of the formation of the Cross-Bow claims and got a drill rig in there and drilled some holes that looked very good, we thought. We drilled a few confirming holes around the first discovery holes and all seemed well.

"We bought a front end loader and built a road up to where we wanted to start the drift, and were ready to go to work getting that rich ore out. We used the front end loader to run the drift back to the ore. It really looked great. So we built a big bin and got ready to haul out our fortune. To our great surprise, we went right through the ore in about two days or less. It was a high lime ore and there was only the spot where the drill had gone through. Well, that might be a condition once, but the other places also showed ore, so we proceeded onward. This time we had a little shuttle buggy so we could make the drift smaller. Carrol and a cousin, Lawrence Olsen, drove the drift into some of the other drill holes. When they got there, everything seemed entirely out of reason--these also were small pods of ore. How could it possibly be that we drilled right into those pods of ore and they went nowhere? That put an end to that mining venture.

"A year or so later, thinking that the body of ore must be there somewhere, I bought a small drill rig from the Glenny-Cutler group, and brought it down there and drilled a number of holes in the area of the ones we had already drilled. We did drill into some other pockets, but nothing that extended more than fifteen feet or so in any direction. THEN we gave up the entire venture." --



On March 8, 1950 Russel Snow, John Petitti, Ben Naillon, Bryant Nelson, and Charles Petitti prospected the area south of the Wickiup and staked 19 claims. They named them the Wickiup claims. They shipped a few loads and then leased to a Texas Company that did a lot of drilling and shipped some ore. A man was killed while they were building a road up the face of a ledge. A rock rolled off the uphill side and hit one of the workers, and he was killed instantly.

One of the interesting things about this area was that they found thick beds of iron pyrite in their drilling. Some of their ore contained copper. I knew some of these fellows and stayed overnight with them. The next day I walked up to see their operation. They were a fun bunch--joking about what they were going to do when they were millionaires, as did most prospectors.

#### SINBAD SCORPIONS

We were working the Lone Tree Claims in Sinbad  
Three miles south of the Swinging Bridge.  
We were clearing the talus from the bedrock  
Along a steep and sloping ridge.  
We would dig till we ran into brown sandstone  
Being held up by a layer of blue shale.  
We would then check it out with a geiger counter  
With the hopes that it would hit the last scale.

The blue shale was exposed with picks and shovels,  
And we had to watch it with care.  
There were scorpions as big as flapjacks  
All ready and loaded for bear.  
Scorpions and snakes are never the same  
As man fears one or the other.  
When Theo Ungerman saw those scorpions,  
He let out the most mournful shudder.

Theo laid down his shovel and walked back to camp.  
When he returned, he had fruit jars and laces.  
He tied up his pant legs as tight as he could  
To get AWAY FROM THE SCORPION'S EMBRACES.  
We put the scorpion in the fruit jar bottle,  
Turned it over to get it to fall.  
Before this special day was over,  
We had the scorpion's Dad and Mother and all.

Ben Naillon had a few claims south of this group. He found iron pyrites in balls the size of baseballs in the shale. He gave me one, and I put it in the museum at Castle Dale. We thought he might have something commercial when they built I70 next to his claims, but they fenced him out and nothing came of it.

<sup>3</sup> On Aug 18, 1949, John Petitti, Russel Snow, and Bryant Nelson staked claims on the reef west of Sagebrush Bench. This used to be wild horse country. More wild horses ran on Sagebrush Bench than any other place in Sinbad. Many hot spots were found, and a few roads were built up to the vein but nothing worked out. The channels were not defined enough to make a trap for the ore. The claims were staked early in the boom, and at that period of time anything that buzzed on a counter was taken to be an ore body. Some copper, mostly the blue azurite copper, was found in the mineralized beds.

It all happened one beautiful day in March. I had driven to the Family Butte to prospect for uranium in Reds Canyon the night before. I drove up the road as far as it went and ran into Leo Nelson and Elbert Behunin. They graciously invited me to stay and go prospecting with them the next morning. The night was lit up by the stars in the heavens, and the fire that was steeping the last bit of flavor the coffee grounds could produce was slowly being reduced to glowing embers. One more cup and we were ready to turn in.

The next morning we stopped on the rim of Reds Canyon. Leo and Elbert had horses, and I was afoot. They chose a canyon in the west reef, and I chose a butte on the bottom.

Reds Canyon is a wide drainage from the Head of Sinbad running south to the Muddy River. On the west side is a high reef which rises 1500 feet; on the east side is a highly eroded Moenkopi with canyons flowing to the west, making up the Reds Canyon drainage.

We parted at the foot of a flat topped butte, wishing each other encouragement for finding the Mother Lode. I trudged up to the vertical ledge which rested on the formation that hid the uranium. I had prospected around to the north side of the butte where I found a small snowbank, and being very thirsty, I sat down to munch on handfuls of snow. All of a sudden I heard one of the

*3. Located in Emery County Courthouse*

loudest roars ever. My first instinct was that a ledge above me had caved off and was headed in my direction, but "no," the ledge was still intact. I turned and looked around, and there to the northwest I saw a huge cloud of dust rising up into the blue sky. As it moved to the north, I saw a great bleached scar. At least a thousand feet of the vertical ledge had slipped and had scattered boulders all over the lower slopes. Like lightning a black crack ran up the same vertical ledge. I could see the rock tumbling before the sound of thunder carried to where I was. As I sat helplessly exhausted, I thought of my buddies. It was this canyon they were going to prospect. Climbing down the butte, I set off for the canyon two miles away. I wanted to run, but I thought I had better conserve my energy. As I neared the west reef, I suddenly saw two sets of horse tracks headed south. I sat down, thanking God that the tragedy I had envisioned had somehow not happened. I followed the tracks for three miles and then gave them up, knowing they were alright. I turned toward the trail and headed for camp.

The trail out of Reds Canyon was about two miles long and was all uphill. It was made by wild horses which have the ability to climb at a five or six percent grade with never any sharp climbs and never any dips.

I was exhausted when I got to the camp; I opened both doors of my Jeep and stretched out on the seat. That's all I remember until I heard the horses. I jumped out of the truck and yelled, "I'm sure as hell glad to see you two good-looking guys. Where were you when the rock came down?" They laughed and said they had gone into a little side canyon and weren't able to see the slide, but they almost went crazy when they heard it.

The layers in which we were looking for uranium were the same formations where silver was found at Leeds, Utah. This was the famous Silver Reef mine. The records show that they took out 10 million ounces--a little over \$10 million in the late '90s. Dr. Englesby showed me some of the ore from Silver Reef so we sent some samples taken out of the Reed Neilson Draw into Salt Lake for an assay for silver. It came back showing five ounces to the ton. I sent samples from other mineralized places, but the highest assay was ten ounces per ton. I have often thought

that maybe somewhere there might be another \$10 Million ore body. Also maybe we should have been looking for silver instead of uranium.

I have observed the Wickiup for hours. Even though it stands hundreds of feet high, the contour map shows that it has dropped over a hundred feet. In other words it is setting in a sump. The uranium bed has long been eroded, but at one time there may have been a large rich vein of uranium.

Owen Price and I came along one day, and it looked as if someone had filed a claim on it. We saw what appeared to be a prospector's monument on the very top. We couldn't imagine why anyone would want to claim that beautiful peak. We stopped and looked through the binoculars. When we had it focused, it all came in loud and clear--there sat one of the largest white headed bald eagles I have ever seen.

It's time I told you about the chance I had to hit the big one but couldn't get across the canyon to claim it. The first time I went to Temple Mountain I noticed all the ledges were bleached a snow white. When I hiked down into Hondo, that area was also bleached. Both these areas produced a lot of uranium. I had observed an area where the Muddy River cut through the east Reef being bleached also. I was telling my Dentist, Dr. Harry Nielsen about it between the times he would push the drill an inch or two into one of my molars. The more I talked the less drilling he would do. Finally I asked him if he would truck some horses down to where his brother, Iver, and I would try to get down to the bleached area. I told him I could be ready at daylight the next morning. He called that night and told me to be ready at daylight.

This was the first time I had been out with Iver. He had a nickname, everyone called him Ike. He called me Kelly so it was Ike and Kelly who went prospecting, and we left Owen and Iver home. We stopped the truck by a round high knoll, found a place to unload the horses and fed them some hay we had brought along while we fixed some bacon and eggs.

It looked as if it were three miles to where we had to go so after we ate, we mounted the horses. A wild horse trail led us to the general area we wanted to follow. We were crossing a sidehill when we found a large calcite vein that had a lot of

black in. It was one of the largest calcite dikes I had ever seen in the San Rafael.

We reached some ground where we could see the Muddy River and the bleached area, but it still looked three miles away. We then ran into a deep narrow canyon. The horse trail turned to the southwest. We held a meeting to discuss how we were going to cross the canyon, and we decided to follow the wild horse trail. Somewhere they would come back and lead us to the crossing. The trail entered a canyon and soon other canyons joined. I stopped to build a rock monument so we could find our way back. All the canyons had wild horse trails and there were fresh tracks in all of them. The most interesting formations had formed along the rims. Large gun turrets with a long barrel protruded from them. They reminded me of the big guns on a battleship. For at least two miles the country looked the same. Every time a canyon came in on side or another we had to build a rock monument. I was never so afraid of getting lost in my life. The scenery was marvelous, but we had no camera.

We didn't know how far we were from the river, and we weren't sure if we could get out to see a layout of the country. Finally we decided the wash emptied into the river and it was the way the wild horses had to get a drink. We were almost lost in one canyon trying to get across to another so back we came. We were happy for the monuments to show us the way back. It was almost dark when we got back to the truck. The last thing I remembered before going to sleep were those gun turrets sitting on the edge of the canyons like sentinels.

We awoke about sunup and fixed breakfast. Ike reminded me we had to get the truck and horses back that day so we decided to ride around to the north to see if we could get a lay of the country and maybe come back another time.

The canyon we had found that day was impossible to cross and very hard to follow due to canyons coming in. We had to ride out to the head of those only to find others. We gave up about noon, loaded our horses, and headed home. We had a hundred miles to go on the roughest, longest road in the San Rafael.

Almost two years later Vernon J. Pick Staked the Delta claims on February 26, 1952. He later sold them for \$9 million, but that's another story.

There was a knock at the door, and though it sounded like any other kind of knock, it was different because of the man who was doing the knocking. Little did I realize that this man was to alter my life forever. I shook hands and invited him in, and although I had known the man most of my life, I didn't have a clue as to why he had come to see me as he was fifty years older and lived on the other side of our small town. I recognized him as Sterling Curtis.

"Owen," he said, "do you have a geiger counter that will show uranium?" "Yes," I replied. He sat back in his chair and said, "I've got to tell you a story. Back in the early twenties my Father filed on a homestead out in what's known as Brickly Pear Flat six or eight miles southeast of Cedar Mountain on the north end of the San Rafael Swell. My brother, Willey, and I stayed out with him to help him prove up on the homestead. At times I used to trap coyotes and bobcats."

"One day I was over east of Box Flat where huge canyons drain into the Green River desert. Here many ridges and sandstone buttes stand between the canyons. As I crossed a little wash, I saw a black vein about eight inches thick running lengthwise toward a bleached butte. I broke a piece off and noticed how heavy it was. I carried it back to the ranch, and the first time I went to town I took it to the Emery County Bank and showed it to the Vice President, Edmund Crawford, and he agreed it should be sent to Denver for an assay."

"Sometime later a representative of the assay firm came into the Bank at Castle Dale and wanted to see the vein the sample had come from. I wasn't home at the time, but I had shown my brother, Willey, the vein so he agreed to take the representative out to show him whatever he wanted to see."

"It was a big two-day trip out and back so they bought a few groceries, threw in a frying pan, coffeepot, and water bucket, stepped into the buggy, and after a long weary ride they arrived at Box Flat. There they left the horses and buggy, put a pack on their backs, and walked into the area Willey remembered. It was getting dark so they made camp. The next morning they looked for the vein and the morning went into the afternoon. Then they gave up and walked back to the buggy. What had been planned to be a two-day trip turned into a three-day trip with nothing to show for the extra day."

*4. Interview with Sterling Curtis.*

"When the fellow from Denver left, he said the sample assayed higher than any sample he had assayed in the Colorado Plateau. They had also found high grade silver in the sample.

"When I arrived home, Willey told me what had happened so the first chance I had I went out to look for the vein, but I couldn't find it either. I thought there must have been a cloudburst in the area which had covered it up, or the little wash had maybe changed course. During the thirties my son, Duane, and I went out two different times. I also took my brother-in-law, Fame Price, out to find it--but no luck."

By the time he came to this part of the story I was ready for any kind of a deal. I told him that all we had to do was get into the right wash and work uphill because the Geiger counter would pick up any little fragment that had broken off the vein, and that it would be almost like finding gold in a stream; he had already figured that out because that's why he had come to see me about the geiger counter.

I remember it was early in the spring and too cold to go at that time. He wanted to go before it got too hot so we decided May would be a good time. Mr. Sterling Curtis had just made my day. When he left, I sat down and went over the story. I knew about the general area. My Structural Geology told me it was a radioactive magma that pushed this part of the San Rafael up and a pitchblende dike broke through. As far as I knew, there was no granite underneath to produce a pitchblende dike, but I knew an anticline a few miles east had been drilled and 4% helium gas was discovered and the government had stopped further development. It was named Helium Dome #1. I knew that when uranium isotopes were formed, helium and lead were the by-products. So why not? Maybe this was just like all those other first times that have happened in the world.

Oh, Oh, you guessed it--Sterling Curtis died before we got together, and as the uranium boom got hotter, I was diverted to other things. One night Kent Howard and I dropped into the Price Cafe in Price, Utah, for a cup of coffee. As we sat down, we saw Clarence Pilling who had found the famous Pilling Doll Collection thought to have been left by the Mokie Indians in a rock overhang. We called him over to have coffee with us. The conversation was

light until he told us about the time in the thirties when his family ran cows on the east side of the San Rafael Desert known as Cottonwood Wash. <sup>5</sup> He said he had met a man who was in his eighties from Pennsylvania, and he told Clarence that when he was a young man he worked on the old railroad grade which was never finished. It went up Cottonwood Wash and over to the Buckhorn Flat area. He said that one Sunday there was no work so he went up a canyon known as Spring Canyon and climbed out on top of a big ridge where he could see for miles. He hiked up to an area to get a better look and saw a black vein about 10 inches thick so he knocked a piece off. Years after he got back to Pennsylvania he had the sample assayed and found that it was rich in silver and uranium.

With the help of a few more cups of coffee, we scheduled a trip and down to Cottonwood Wash we went. We found a big rock manger where we drove the truck as far as we could go, then walked.

Spring Canyon runs east and west. After we got up in the canyon, it forked; one fork continues west, and that was the one we were interested in, but to make sure, Kent went up the north fork while Clarence and I walked a mile or so the other way. We noticed the canyon getting narrow and more steep. Finally we came to a place where we could climb out on top. One slip would be very serious so we decided to leave it in the bank for another day when we had ropes and pins. We thought the old man from Pennsylvania could have walked up and out on top so we were happy that the story was holding up.

The trip home was exciting. Kent Howard, who had flown many bomber missions over Berlin in World War II, suggested getting a plane and using his scillenometer to fly over the area to pinpoint the exact place. Then we could come in with horses from the other side. This was to be known as the Curtis side.

In order to pinpoint the Curtis side, we contacted Fame Price, Curtis' brother-in-law, to show us where he and Sterling had prospected. Bob o'Santa from Helper, Utah, had a plane so we decided we would cut him in. He was well qualified to fly the San Rafael well enough so that he knew where he was in relation to the surrounding area. We waved goodbye at the Huntington Airport to Fame and Bob as they got into the plane with map in hand. Soon they were out of sight heading for Box Flat. I reached for my thermos bottle. When

*5. Clarence Pilling*



we were drinking the last cup, we saw them coming back. The touch-down was smooth on the dirt runway, and as they taxied up to the hanger, we met them and saw smiles on their faces. They climbed out of the plane and said, "The Curtis story and the old man's story are in the same area." They said they saw the canyon coming up from the east where Sterling Curtis and Fame Price did their prospecting.

Kent grabbed his scillenometer and said, "Come on Bob, let's go get it. As they flew out of sight, we drove into Huntington, re-filled our thermos bottles, and on the way out the thought occurred to me, "It sure takes a lot of coffee to prospect.

When Kent and Bob returned, I sensed something wrong as neither of them showed the emotion they had before. As Kent walked over, he said it wasn't showing a definite enough pattern to be able to pinpoint it. He said he got a few counts, but they were in unlikely places. They both agreed the air was a little rough and maybe it would be better to come back in the morning when the air was heavy enough to get down lower to tell a little more about it.

Bob came in just after sunup and they wanted me to fly with him to see what I thought about it. As we went over Box Flat, the radiation from the Geological Syncline halo was strong, but then it dropped immediately. In a minute we went over the crest of the anticline which showed up as a long north-south sandstone ridge. Bob pointed to the run he wanted to make. All the ledges here were dipping to the east so he cut his power and held the plane as close to the rock as possible. I watched the scillenometer rise a few points and drop a few points, but I saw no fluctuation that was different than normal terrain. The run had been in an east-west directions so I suggested we make a north-south run. Bob had to be very careful because there were about twenty buttes in the same area standing all alone, with the surrounding country mostly flat but dipping to the east about 8%. He lined it up so we would go over the favorite spot flying in a southerly directions. We intersected the other flight line and crossed another deep canyon. On the south edge near a butte I picked up a real good anomaly. I signaled Bob to turn and come back for a second pass. Sure enough, we picked it up again so we flew a crosspattern, and it held as a true anomaly. Bob got a little altitude so we could see how to get to it on horses. We then did a reconnaissance flight around the general area, picked up a good

anomaly to the north over a large fault--also in a place near the highest part of the anticline.

The trip back to the airport seemed smooth after flying over deep canyons, dodging buttes using sudden bursts of power to pull out of near stalls while we were flying to get the anomalies.

After getting out of the plane, we held a little meeting, and I suggested that we would have to go in with horses to look each of the places over that showed the anomaly. I agreed with Kent that there was no special pattern. It was the middle of January with over a foot of snow on the ground--too much to go at that time. Fame Price said he had horses for anyone who needed one. Kent said he had a big truck, so little by little we made plans for going whenever the weather broke. For a month we would get with one another, feeling bad about the cold winter days and hoping the weather would change. Finally the change came, the snow started to melt, and the days were clear and sunny.

It was noon when we pulled out of town. We all knew we were going too soon, but we were not afraid of hardships. With a truck load of horses and a Jeep, there was no chance of failure. Fame Price said with snow on the ground there is no chance of dying of thirst.

I never went on a prospecting trip but what the ride out was the most fun. Our hopes were high as we reached Buckhorn Flat. Here we dropped into six inches of mud with slushy snow and water in every direction. We left the Buckhorn Wash road and started up a little grade headed for Furniture Wash. Here the truck came to a spinning stop. All was not lost because we had been following a herd of cows for some time and had noticed a truck and bulldozer following the cows. We turned our motor off and then we could hear a powerful diesel engine just ahead of us. We walked around the bend, and there was Rufus Wilberg clearing a drift of snow away for his truck to go through.

To make a long story short, he helped us and we helped him drive his cattle and truck because he was alone with two little boys who could top a horse but could not manage the equipment. We had to make camp near the point of Cedar Mountain. I had brought my sheepherding tent and stove, so after we set it up and made a fire, we had all the comforts of home. It was a most forlorn and cold wintery night so I felt sorry when Rufus and the two little boys had to leave to go out in their open truck to go to bed. When the fire went out, I was still

awake, and I could feel the cold freezing my ears so I put them under the covers too.

We had cut the shavings to make a fire that night so it didn't take long the next morning to get the tent warm, breakfast made and the coffee perked. While we ate breakfast, we decided to follow the cows and the bulldozer out to Prickly Pear where Rufus had a cabin. There was more snow than we had figured there would be in the higher country. Mr. Wilberg said we would be welcome to stay with him. Each day we rode horses over to Box Flat. After four days the snow was about gone on the south facings so we moved the camp over into Box Flat.

It's a good thing our buddy, Fame Price, was along. He knew all the trails weaving in and out of the sandstone ledges and canyons. He showed us three different trails to get to the same place. In one place he showed us where Butch Cassidy and Joe Parker had ridden their horses down Spring Canyon to the San Rafael River after the Castle Gate holdup. It looked impossible, but in later years we found the trail and had a fellow from California photograph and narrate the story for a TV short. A thousand feet short of finishing the film he had stroke so it was never completed. We were all losers when that happened.

We worked with our Geiger counters in the area where the two stories had come together. Each day we widened our circle. We were able to ride horses into the area across the canyon to the south. This proved to be an iron-filled fault, but no hot spot. We climbed the long high ridge, and there the count was a little better so we sent Bob O'Santa to his plane, and at 10 o'clock the next morning we were on top of the ridge when he flew over. He made a few passes, and finding the best anomaly he rocked his wings. We then built a rock monument, and with our counters on we worked every foot of the area--but no hot spot. This went on for nine days. Each day we went over the stories. Each day we had a new idea and a new plan. Our courage lasted about as long as the weather. When a cloudbank appeared, we broke camp and went home. We had given it our all. Even our horses looked bad; we were almost out of food, and everyone had neglected duties at home longer than planned.

Not until May did we feel the urge for another trip. Little by little the planning took shape, and finally we went out again. We

stayed only four days, and by that time figured the two generations before us had some bullshitters here and there who were equal to the present generation.

In the late fifties the old spark started to glow once more. I ran into Fame Price one day and told him I thought we had given it a good try but I thought those two old boys somehow had the same dream. He strongly told me that Curtis wouldn't have taken his son out if his story had not been true. Before the conversation was over, we had planned a quick trip the next day. Fame said he would like to bring his brother, Owen Price. We left late in the afternoon, and by the time the sun was setting, we arrived at Box Flat. We took our sleeping bags out of the truck and each found a spot to spend the night. We gathered some wood and made a fire and spent an enjoyable evening. I had known Owen for a long time and had been out with him many times. I can say here I have never been out with better guys than Owen and Fame. They both pull their own weight, and they have been over many trails.

When morning came, we ate a big breakfast, grabbed our counters and walked into Jackass Flat, then north to the big ridge. There we stopped to catch our breath. As we sat there, we turned our counters on to see if they were working properly. The amplified click came through too fast to count. We immediately came to life and started to check everything in sight, especially the low spots like little gullies in the flat; those places were the hottest. I checked underneath a rock overhang and found there was no count above the background anomaly. Finally it dawned on us that it was fallout from an atomic bomb test at the Nevada testing ground. We had heard about the testing a time or two before. This ended our prospecting as we had to quit.

When we returned to the truck, we checked the area where we had slept overnight, and even in the back of the Jeep it graded up to .20 on the first scale on my Lucky Strike counter, and it was set on the conservative side. When we returned to Castle Dale that night, it was announced that they had tested a bomb a day or two before at the Nevada testing ground.

Fame and Owen Price were prospecting north and east of the Family Butte. <sup>6</sup> On March 6, 1950 they were in a small canyon and discovered a uranium vein which ran from the bottom of a wash up

*6. Recorded in Emery County Courthouse.*

the north sidehill. The lower part of the vein showed pink cobalt bloom which is a good indication of a substantial body of ore. This proved to be the case. They named their claims Consolidated #1 and 2. Owen and Fame opened the mine and shipped a lot of ore. Then they leased it, and the leasers found a great deal of ore of a good grade.

Owen Price built many of the roads in Sinbad for the prospectors who had located claims but had no way to get the ore to the mill without a road to haul their ore down the steep slopes from the mine to the bottom of the canyons. Owen Price built these roads where it seemed impossible. I have watched him bulldoze some of these roads, and it would scare me just to watch him push the dirt over a bank. It looked like the bulldozer was going to roll down the mountainside, but at the last second, he would stop and back up for another load. He built some of the toughest roads in the world.

<sup>7</sup>On March 10, 1950, Elden Bryan, Ervin Olsen, Frank Blackburn, Foster Nelson, Lyman Staker, and Thomas Worthen staked Green Vein #2 and 3 north of the Family Butte and south of the Price claims. Very high grade ore was shipped from the Green Vein. They had the Atomic Energy Commission drill an ore pattern to show where the ore was. It was rumored that they may be able to earn the bonus of \$20,000 for shipping 20 tons assaying 20%. This bonus was made by the Atomic Energy, and it stayed in the mind of every prospector every time he turned his Geiger counter on in a new area. In those days \$20,000 would build a new home and purchase a new car--yes even a Lincoln.

Every truckload of ore made them money. Many of the uranium people made a special trip to see their operation and would then try to improve their own. Most of these same men opened the Lucky Strike mine in Reds Canyon.

I traveled from one place to another staking claims. I also bought and sold claims. One of the uranium centers was in Salt Lake City on Second South between Main Street and West Temple. Spanish Trail Uranium Corporation was put together there. I furnished

7. Recorded in Emery County Courthouse.

most of their property. They paid cash for some. I took stock for others which were put in escrow for thirteen months. Then I sold it at the highest price it ever reached.

Spanish Trail bought the claims on Tomsick Mountain which belonged to Bill Hannert, but they didn't find any ore after spending \$50,000 and running drifts hundreds of feet into the mountain. They had obtained a government loan.

I sold to different parties and used one party against the other, telling them first there first served. It made it sound as if they were losing a chance of a lifetime. I tried to stake most of the claims myself as the business became full time, but occasionally I would get Bill Chidester and his boys to help me. I called them mountain goats. Sometimes it was so hot we would drink all the water the one boy could carry from the pickup which had a ten gallon milk can full of water.

I always carried a grub box, sheepherder bed, springs, and three or four quilts because in the summer a sleeping bag was too hot. I'll never forget the time I had just bought a new sleeping bag, and I couldn't wait to try it out. I was east of Cedar Mountain and north of Camel Wash. I inflated the rubber mattress and was just settled in the bag when I heard the buzzing of mosquitoes. I zipped the bag to get away from the pests, but soon I broke out into a sweat. I finally got up, put my clothes back on and slept in the pickup.

One night I was late getting to Tan Seeps. I pulled in after dark and threw my springs down on the first flat place I could find. I fell into bed as I was so sleepy and tired. I was almost through my prayers when I felt something crawling in the coils of my bed springs. I never did know whether I heard it or felt it, but I decided it was a mouse. When I felt two, then three, I knew it had to be mice. I laid there wondering if I could put up with that all night, but decided I could as tired as I was. I almost fell asleep when the thought came to me, "What if a rattlesnake is on the chase and wants to devour the things that were keeping me awake." To hell with that, I thought, I'll sleep in the pickup. The last thing I remembered was that I couldn't get to the pickup because I might step on the damn snake.

One evening I was on my way to Hondoo in the south end of the San Rafael where I had a uranium mine. I was crossing Sage Brush Flat, and I saw a fire up near a reef where people by the name of Snow, Nielson, Olsen, and Petitti owned some uranium claims. I felt a little tired so I thought I would pull over and maybe stay with someone I knew. As I pulled near the fire, I didn't recognize the man who was sitting there in a folding chair drinking coffee; he looked old enough to be my father. Anyway, I thought, "There's nothing like getting acquainted," so I got out of my truck, walked over, shook hands, and introduced myself. He said he was Charley Petitti. I told him I knew his partners and had heard of him and was very happy to meet him. He told me to throw my bedroll off and stay for the night. He offered me supper, but I told him I had eaten before leaving home, but that I would have a cup of coffee. As I sat down on my bedroll, he threw a little more wood on the fire, and we both decided to get better acquainted. Finally he said, "What was your last name again?" I articulated it as plainly as I could as it seems that people have always had trouble pronouncing it. He was silent for a minute as if he was doing a powerful amount of thinking. Finally he said, "I worked with a fellow in the Wattis coal mine named Clyde McClenahan who was killed in an accident there Was he any relation to you?" "Yes," I said, "he was my Father." When I could finally speak again, I walked around the fire and shook his hand and said, "I'm truly grateful to have made your acquaintance as all my life I have been searching for someone to tell me just what happened to my Father. I was only fifteen months old when my Father was killed so I have no memories of him." He told me my Father was picking the coal off the rib when a bounce threw the coal at him, burying him in coal up to his head. When they dug him out, he had no control over his legs so he knew he was badly hurt. I told him my Mother said his bladder was punctured, and in those days there was no way to repair it. Something inside me felt relieved. Until then there was always a gap as I felt as if my Father was taken away from me and no one was ever there to witness it.

The next morning when I was ready to go, I said, "Charley, there is no way I'll ever forget spending the night with you. I almost went on without stopping to visit you last night."

I walked out of the Wilson Hotel in Salt Lake City, put a nickel in the paper stand, and pulled out a paper. Large headlines "Vernon Pick sells Muddy River uranium claims for nine million dollars". A few weeks later a story came out in Life Magazine telling how he walked many miles up the Muddy River to stake his claims. He constructed a raft, and with his drinking water gone, he rode down the angry current of the Muddy River which was polluted with arsenic. Near death, he trudged from the river to his pickup. It made a good story, but it told little about the main character. In the San Rafael country we call these kinds of people "Bullshitters."

Let me tell you what did happen. Two Atomic Energy officials were flying around the area where I had so desperately tried to get to, and they picked up a big anomaly from their probe which hung from the plane. It was so good that when they returned to the landing strip in Grand Junction, Colorado, one of them phoned Vernon in Greenriver and the other called Clarin Barney in Escalante. Clarin Barney told me about it a year later; this is his story:  
"The one official had worked with me on claims which I had in the Circle Cliffs. We worked together for a year or more and had become very good friends. When he called, I knew I could depend upon what he had to tell me. He pinpointed the spot, saying it was on the north side of the river where the Muddy cuts through the east reef. I got there the night after he called and slept in my pickup. It was in February. I had parked as close as possible. When daylight came, I put a lunch in my sheepskin and walked from there. I saw footprints coming and going as I walked up the canyon of the Muddy River. In a couple of hours I had walked up to the Uranium ledge,

*S. Interview with Clarin Barney of Escalante, Utah.*



and there I found a monument staked by Vernon J. Pick February 26, 1952. I spent a few hours checking the claims. The area was limited. I saw a large body of ore fifteen feet or more thick showing yellow and resuty brown. He had named them the Alpha 1-5.

"It was late afternoon when I returned to Hanksville and called my friend from the AEC in Grand Junction and told him someone else had already got the claims the day before. Later the FBI came into it, and they had several hearings. I was glad I didn't get the property. I would have had to lie or go to jail."

The rumors I heard later from the prospector grapevine was that Pick pocketed the money and left town, leaving grocery bills and gas bills to the poor little people of Greenriver.

Emery County's Uranium king was much different than Moab's Uranium king, Charley Steen. Charley gave back to everyone who helped him a thousand fold. He was a respecer of the little man.

This Uranium discovery created a great deal of activity. They brought a drill in, lifted it on top of a ledge with a helicopter and drilled on the other side of the river as well. Most of the ore assayed .40 to 1%, and in places the ore body was over 30 feet thick. Atlas Uranium Corporation bought the claims for nine million dollars and shipped the ore to their mill in Moab. The Pick claims were the second largest producer in the San Rafael.

I have often thought about how close I came to finding the deposit two years before Vernon Pick staked his claims. I never have heard how Pick ended up with all that money. His character was pretty well tarnished in Greenriver when he left there.

It's just as well I didn't get it as I made out just fine without it. Sometime later Seely Peterson's Father told me that if I had gone around the hill to the north instead of around the hill to the south, I would have found this trail that crossed the canyon and that would have led me to the nine million dollar mine.

*Owen McElvahan*

## TEMPLE MOUNTAIN

Temple Mountain is located on the south side of North Temple Wash and on the east side of the San Rafael Swell. Temple Mountain is a sandstone replica of the Mormon Temple in Manti, Utah. Early settlers have recognized the resemblance.

The Swaseys were the first to stake a claim on it for gold, silver and other valuable metals. No shipments were made until Oscar Beebe staked it. Uranium was shipped to Green River in 1912 and sold to Madam Curie's buying station. The uranium had to assay 10% or more. This would pay the miner \$10 a pound. A Frenchman who mined for Madam Curie said they had to mine with spoons instead of shovels because only the highest grade could be mined and sold.

In 1915 uranium was found in Africa which was a much higher grade. From then until the Government set up a mill and a buying station at Monticello, Utah, in 1948-49, uranium was only mined in other places for the vanadium that was found associated with the uranium.

In 1949 Byron Howard and Ralph Malatchi hauled the old dumps to the mill at Monticello.

Later Consolidated Mining Company got control of Temple Mountain, and the Atomic Energy Commission came in and drilled out large ore bodies. Consolidated Mining brought in a large Calax Drill which cut 36" holes down into the ore zone. Loaders and drills were taken apart and taken down the shafts and reassembled at the bottom. An extensive mining operation followed.

<sup>9.</sup>  
A history of what it was like to live in the settlement was written by Armenta Hewitt states: "In 1953-54, the Temple Mountain settlement contained a boarding house for men who didn't have families there. There was a cook shack where they sold groceries. There was a combination bath house and rest rooms. There was a commercial washer for dirty clothes. There were three duplex houses that housed 2 families each. There were some shacks and trailers and a shop where machinery was repaired.

"Water was hauled from Green River in a big water truck. The mail was brought by the man who brought the water.

"Al and Ruth Garret were the couple who ran the cookshack. One morning when Al went to the cellar, butane gas had seeped in, and with a lighted cigarette in his mouth, the gas exploded and Al was burned badly on the face.

"The highway down to the main road was graveled, but when the wind blew, it would cover the road with sand. The road was oiled in 1954.

"The mine supervisor was Bell Genetti. There were quite a few people living in the camp. The Mexicans lived in a section by themselves. There was another settlement north of the mine. There were about five families there. Some were Mexicans.

The little settlements were fun to live in. It was so peaceful, and the desert scenery was so beautiful--especially the sunrises and sunsets."

Temple Mountain was the largest producer of uranium ore in the San Rafael Swell. There was a pending lawsuit of ownership all during the mining. The special cases were Lawrence Malatchi vs Consolidated Uranium Company, and Jesse Fox vs Consolidated Uranium Company. Consolidated won both cases.

*9. interview with Armenta Hewitt, Emery, Utah.*

It was the only area where the uranium was found in the Wingate and the Chinle.