



# Out of the Dust

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UTAH'S LOST MINES AND  
HIDDEN TREASURES

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ANOS DE NUESTRA  
ORA DE LA LOZ

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## CHAPTER I

### *Out of the Dust*

The Uinta mountain range, located in the state of Utah, is a beautiful and mysterious place. It is full of stories, both told and untold, and tales of treasures and lost mines. Ute Indians and their white counterparts have sworn sacred oaths to keep secret the whereabouts of these mines and treasures. Blood has been shed many times by Indians and whites alike during the long centuries these lofty peaks have graced the skyline.

No one knows for sure just how long these mountains have been traversed by seekers of treasure, searching for all manner of precious ore, including gold, that most elusive of all metals! This range, along with many others in Utah and the surrounding areas, hides countless secrets and intriguing treasures in its high and lofty mountaintops.

Through the pages of this book, we'll explore the Uinta mountain range as well as many other Utah mountain ranges and other places of interest. Through historical information, documentation, and stories pertaining to mines, treasures, and significant geographical sites located throughout Utah and its surrounding regions, we'll uncover secrets that have long made this area of the United States a place of mystery and intrigue.

Let's begin this exploration at the east end of the Uinta mountain range. Here we find the rugged and beautiful Green River, cascading from its source in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming. Its cold, clear water rushes south to Flaming Gorge, filling the huge reservoir used by thousands of people each year. The Green River was known to the Shoshone Indians as the "Seeds-kee-Agie," or "Prairie Hen River." This name was adopted and widely used by the mountain men during the Great Southwest Expedition of 1826-29. Dominguez and Escalante, the great Spanish explorers who trekked in the late 1700s across much of what is now Utah, called the river Rio de San Buenaventura, but the river was known earlier by Spaniards and Mexican explorers as the Rio Verde, or Green River. By the time General William H. Ashley floated the river in 1825, the name Green River was in common use. Accounts vary as to why the river is called the Green. One account has it that it's because of the color of the water; another claims that it's named for a member of Ashley's original party of mountain men. John C. Fremont thought that the name came from the vegetation growing along the banks. At this point no single account is considered authoritative.

Along the banks of the Green River, stories have often circulated about hidden

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treasures and lost mines. Most of these stories lead one to believe that these mines and treasures are of Spanish origin. During the early 1900s, the outlaw gang called the Wild Bunch inhabited Browns Park and the mining town of Bullionville on the south slopes of the Uinta Mountains. What brought these tough western outlaws to these remote outposts? No doubt it was not only to hide from the law but also to find fortune in gold, silver, and copper.

Ute legend has it that ancient miners once worked the copper-laden hills north of present-day Vernal in northeastern Utah, just thirty miles southwest of Flaming Gorge. The old mining camp of Dyer was a copper mining community built around the workings of the Dyer Mine, about four miles north of the wild town of Bullionville at the foot of Dyer Mountain. At one time during its best years, Dyer had more than 150 miners and their families living at, or close to, the smelters some two miles northwest on Anderson Creek. The Dyer Mine operated from 1887 through the turn of the twentieth century and produced more than \$3 million in rich copper ore. The ore was shipped to the railroad spur at Carter, Wyoming, and then on to the Marsac Mill at Park City, Utah, 150 miles away.

A man by the name of Pick Murdock, a full-blood Ute Indian, found what would become the Dyer Mine. While Murdock was not interested in mining himself, he did enjoy finding a good prospect, and upon locating one, he would then sell it to the highest bidder. In this case, Murdock's discovery was sold to Lewis Dyer. The purchase left Dyer broke, so he set out to find investors to help develop the mine. He located an interested party in Salt Lake City banker Edward Gates, who invested thirty thousand dollars in the project. After receiving the money, Dyer began to have second thoughts about the hard life of a miner, especially since his mine was isolated and hard to access, so he took off for parts unknown, leaving the greenhorn Gates to run the operation. The little camp thrived for a number of years, but when the copper trade began to decline in the late 1900s, the camp died out.

Because Dyer was basically a one-mine camp, when the little mine closed, the town of Bullionville failed also. Today there is no trace of the town. All the old log buildings have long since been torn down or burned to the ground, but the mine and prospect holes on Dyer Mountain are still there. So is the copper, and with a little effort, some fine specimens can be had.

What's interesting is that what these prospectors and miners, such as Murdock and Dyer, uncovered along the southern slopes of the Uinta Mountains had most likely already been worked or explored by ancient peoples who inhabited this region, along with the Spanish who explored and mined this area from the 1600s through the end of the nineteenth century. Old maps that have been uncovered are evidence enough that these explorers had traversed the area and were familiar with its geography and resources. Take for instance the Don Bernardo Mierra Map of 1776. This map indicates that a river ran westward through the Laguna De Los Timpanogos, the massive body of water that is now known as the Great Salt Lake. Today, there is no such river running through the lake. But perhaps the creators of this map drew it with the knowledge that there was indeed a river running

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westward from this lake. It is quite possible that when the original map was produced, the water had not yet totally receded from the flood of Noah's time. Lake Bonneville was still in existence, and stories were told by nomad natives of this great river that drained into the sea at the western edge of the continent.



Don Bernardo Mierra Map of 1776.

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Numerous maps of Utah and its surrounding regions have surfaced over the years. Some are accurate while others are not. But the fact remains that there were scores of people living on this continent many years before Columbus was born who mapped the land as it looked in their day. The Don Bernardo Mierra Map reveals two things that are often overlooked as mistakes made by the mapmaker. First, the people depicted on the map are very interesting in that the men have beards. Modern historical scholars claim there were no bearded people in the area other than the Spaniards and nineteenth-century mountain men. Secondly, there is a river running west from the Great Salt Lake. If one were to search out other old maps made of this area, one would discover that California was depicted as an island, with a river running from the east to the west emptying into the sea. If the seas had not completely receded after the Flood, perhaps there was a waterway into the interior of America, making the maps more authentic than one might realize.

Much of the Uinta mountain range has seen its share of people coming and going along the many trails, rivers, and roads that crisscross its vastness. Stories have been told of Spanish mines and treasures hidden deep in the darkest parts of some of its canyons, unknown by most who venture there. Perhaps some of these treasures once belonged to ancient travelers. Some of these explorers, including the Spanish, did indeed leave their marks, making it possible to identify their existence in these mountains. Canyon by canyon across the Uinta range, the reader will be introduced to a few of those hidden treasures and historical accounts.

As a final note to this chapter, it's important to understand that while many people and societies today view the prospector or treasure hunter as a looter and vandal, if it weren't for such people, most if not all mining would have never begun. Every mine that ever produced an ounce of gold or silver came into being because a prospector, out looking for outcroppings or for a lost horde of some kind, stumbled upon a strike.

Most prospectors and collectors are concerned about the environment and, for the most part, are lovers of the land and keepers of the soil. They respect the earth, trees, rocks, and animals, and they want to see things preserved for as long as possible. While some treasure hunters give prospectors a bad reputation by damaging the natural resources of our forests and other public lands, most are dedicated to preserving the environment. I started out as a prospector and a hunter of Spanish gold and artifacts relating to it, and I developed a love of history and all that it can teach us. Every one of us who ventures into the hills to look for rocks, coins, gold, silver, rock and tree art symbols, or just to enjoy nature should do everything we can to protect the environment and our natural resources.





## CHAPTER 2

# *White Rocks Canyon*

The scenic backdrop visible as you climb up the hill leading into White Rocks Canyon will take your breath away. Located some twenty miles northeast of Roosevelt, Utah, White Rocks Canyon is legendary for its historical Spanish mining activity. Each time I go into the canyon, I am thrilled and excited by its beauty. When I was a boy of sixteen and seventeen, I would venture into this canyon with a Ute Indian friend. Together we fished, hunted, and talked about the Spaniards who mined the area and forced Indian slaves to carry gold out to the smelters that once lined the bottom of the canyon.

We found an old Spanish cannon that we let slip out of our hands because we trusted someone we didn't really know. After discovering the cannon, I contacted a friend who claimed that he had associates in Salt Lake City who would excavate the site and donate all recovered artifacts to a museum. I was promised, of course, that I would get the credit for the discovery. Soon after, the cannon and other artifacts were removed from the site, and I lost contact with the men who had excavated it.

It was in White Rocks Canyon that the famous Caleb Rhoades, a prosperous gold miner and prospector during the 1800s, had one of his richest gold mines. It is also in this canyon that a massive cache still lies hidden not too far from the mouth. White Rocks Canyon holds more secrets than can be told in one book.

Many stories have been written and several maps have surfaced over the years, each telling about a fantastic mine or treasure hidden somewhere within the deep, dark, pine-covered ledges of White Rocks Canyon. Stories of hidden Spanish armor, gold and silver artifacts, and caves that hold great hordes of hidden and unimaginable wealth circulate constantly. However, most of these stories are just that—stories!

One story has it that a group of Spaniards made their way down the canyon with a horde of gold. They were pursued by angry Utes but had a good day's head start on the Indians. The Spaniards knew that they had to get rid of the heavy gold so that they could get out of the area with their lives. Not wanting to lose the treasure entirely, they decided to hide it near a river at a point just before it leaves the canyon. They hastily buried the many sacks of gold nuggets in an overhang on the west side of the river, above the high water, so it would not get washed out during the spring runoff. Next, they went into a little meadow that had several pine trees six to twelve inches thick. They marked the roots above ground

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with hatchet marks giving directions to the hidden cache. Next, they made several marks on the upper portions of the trees, indicating what was buried in case they couldn't come back to claim the prize personally. With this accomplished, they hurried out of the canyon not too far ahead of the band of angry Ute warriors.



Artist's rendition of one of the stumps.

As it turned out, the Spaniards never came back to claim their booty. However, their story was relayed to an old Mexican, Manuel Torez, who lived in Sonora, Mexico. He decided that after he retired, he would make the trip north to see if he could find the gold. In 1930, Torez came to Vernal, Utah, searching for White Rocks Canyon. He knew only of its magnificent rock outcroppings and the white rocks at its entrance. He was directed to the canyon and, once there, began his search. He looked all summer for the Spanish treasure, but he never found what he came for. Torez managed to make a few friends while he was there, and ironically, they just happened to be Ute Indians. He told them of the hidden cache, and in return, they told him that they, too, had heard the story of their ancestors chasing a group of Spaniards from the canyon.

Finally, Torez decided to leave for his home. He told his two Ute friends what to look for and asked them to contact him should they ever find the cache. This they promised to do. But they didn't keep their promise, although it wasn't their fault for not doing so. Both Utes passed away before they could find the treasure. But before they died, they told the story to others.

In 1965, two prospectors, Darrell Chen and William Knight, were hunting for a Spanish cannon that they had heard about at the mouth of the White Rocks River. As the two treasure seekers walked upstream, they came into a small, swampy meadow with grass that was knee-high. They noticed markings on one of the trees in the meadow, so they

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went to investigate. The mark they found was a cross, indicating a trail. They followed the direction indicated by the cross until they came to the river's edge once again. Confused, they went back to the tree with the cross to see if they had interpreted the sign correctly. It was then that they noticed the hatchet marks on the tree roots. They had no idea why anyone would cut a tree's roots in such a way. They left the site not knowing what to think of it. Then in 1976, an old Ute Indian by the name of Wabbin Wansitz visited the site. The trees had all been cut down, yet the stumps were still there. There were seven stumps like the one represented in the drawing at left, with two hatchet marks on each root. The cross was now gone, making it impossible to tell where it had been. Today the roots are all but gone, with only two old rooted stumps remaining. But the cache is still there, somewhere on the west side of the river, waiting for someone to find it.

In addition to the supposed buried treasure in White Rocks Canyon, there are mines in the canyon, and they have produced some fair amounts of gold and silver in their time. It is believed by many seasoned prospectors that the gold the Spaniards obtained from the region came from higher up, near White Rocks Lake. This line of reasoning most likely stems from the old Spanish markings on ancient pine trees on the east slope of White Rocks known as Ice Cave Peak. Here there were once dozens of beautifully carved symbols giving directions to several different locations where mines, camps, trails, and perhaps a cache or two existed. My prospecting friend and colleague, Gale Rhoades, and I spent many days in that area, photographing, mapping, and logging all the symbols that we could find on the mountain. We discovered that all the mines to which these symbols referred were miles north, west, or east from the site of the symbol trees themselves. We deduced from that discovery that this site was actually a staging area for the Spanish miners. It had water and feed, and most of all, it was defensible.

History tells us that Caleb Rhoades once mined gold in Red Pine Canyon, on the east side of White Rocks Canyon. An inspection of this canyon reveals very little gold ore. It is thought that perhaps he knew of a cache site there and that that horde was what he was taking out. In Bridger Draw (a side canyon within White Rocks Canyon), there are several old diggings, and they, too, reveal hardly any mineral worth the time and effort to open up a full mining operation. Had Rhoades indeed discovered the lost Spanish treasure? If so, it would explain his continued presence in Red Pine Canyon within White Rocks, despite the fact that very little gold ore exists in that area.