

Frontier Times

ALL TRUE — ALL FACT — STORIES OF THE REAL WEST

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FORTY TIMES A KILLER!

—the story of **John Wesley Hardin**

Book length, by **Norman B. Wiltsey**

It's
DIFFERENT!

This is the way the West

REALLY WAS!

Have a Look Inside



Canyon de Chelly
Place of Evil Spirits

What Brought About Jesse James' Death?

Crazy Horse, the Enigmatic Sioux

History's Greatest Horse Race

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In the Sierra Madre with the Punchers

Silver Reef

PIONEERS' GOLD

By WILLIAM MAHAN

In a little county down in Texas there are enough treasure clues to keep the old blood pressure jumping for a lifetime!

ONE COOL, rainy afternoon this spring I pulled into a filling station on the outskirts of Fort Worth, Texas. While the attendant was busy filling my tank with gasoline, I got out and struck up a conversation with an old fellow who looked like he was well past ninety, at least.

I am always trying to find authentic treasure tales, each one of which I hope to run down some day, and the tip I got from that old fellow led to one of my favorite and most provocative "leads." I made the remark that it sure would be a cool day for digging for treasure over in Arizona. The old-timer smiled and replied, "Don't know why everybody is always a-talking about Arizona fer buried treasure. Why, about fifty miles from here is enough gold to keep a man in style for life."

He finally told me that if I wanted to know more about real buried treasure, just to go see Ben and Tom Trammel up in Bridgeport. He said that they had a map rock that showed (if you could read it) where a whole wagon-load of gold was buried! A couple of weeks later, over to Bridgeport I went, arriving in town early in the morning.

There were very few people about and after looking the town over a little, I arrived at the Frontier Cafe. It lived up to its name, with old saddles, horns and other pioneer equipment displayed on the front as well as inside. It is owned and operated by Bennie Trammel.

Bennie is a friendly cuss and we got acquainted over big mugs of coffee strong enough to float an iron wedge. I soon found that the history (and legends) of Wise County was one of Bennie's favorite subjects; he was more than willing to talk about some of its many treasures, particularly around Bridgeport.

I was very eager and Bennie was very willing, so we soon made all necessary arrangements for a tour of the area. The first and most important spot we were to visit was to be what is locally known as the "Devil's Den" and, in my opinion, it is very appropriately named. It would take the Devil himself to stay there!

BENNIE'S Frontier Cafe is filled with antiques and relics, many of which



Tom Trammel

he found himself in the Devil's Den region. According to local legend it has harbored many notorious outlaws and criminals in the past. Jesse James and Sam Bass are among those reported to have hidden in its vast reaches. Judging by some of the early Army relics Bennie has found there, it was either an Army camping place or was a hide-out at times for deserters. It also was the campground for various Indian tribes from time to time.

Devil's Den is virtually impossible to get to by land. It opens out on the waters of Lake Bridgeport on one end; the other end is almost completely hidden by thick brush and undergrowth and is on private property with no trespassing allowed.

This rocky, broken-up gash in the earth runs north and south, is approximately one mile long, and in places is over a quarter of a mile wide. Its rugged, rocky canyon walls sometimes reach over eighty feet high.

Weathered walls and crevices conceal many natural caves where a man could hide out for weeks without discovery. Overhanging cliffs offer a natural shelter for the numerous deer, bobcats, armadillos and rattlesnakes that inhabit the area.

On a snake hunt recently, Bennie killed 153 in one day, and he said that was no record. In the Frontier a chain of rattlers that he cut from the snakes killed that day measures fourteen feet.

The natural spring in the center of the canyon was a favorite camping place for Indians and travelers. Bennie says that its water in summer is ice cold and in winter is quite warm. Several buffalo skulls have been found nearby.

According to all reports, this spot is the location of the largest of the many treasures of Wise County. As the story goes, \$200,000 in gold coins had to be buried in haste during a running gun battle with Indians and was never recovered. Ben thinks that he has what might be one clue to the location of the fortune—what he calls his "treasure rock."

The Trammel brothers were digging and hauling rock in the Devil's Den in July, 1937, when the rock was found. It was lying face down and was complete. It has since had one corner broken off. That corner, according to Ben, had the



Bennie Trammel

Photos Courtesy the Author

figures, "\$80,000," cut into it. Bennie and Tom both believe that if they can ever interpret the signs, they will have the key to the location of this treasure horde.

ANOTHER Devil's Den treasure story is about an old hermit who lived in one of the caves and kept a herd of sheep. He never left the canyon; a local doctor, who lived in Chico, made it a habit to go through the Den on his many trips to Wizard Wells and always carried him the supplies he needed. The doctor also treated him from time to time for various ailments, and on these occasions the old hermit would disappear into one of the caves and return shortly with the doctor's pay in gold coins.

General speculation was that the old man was hiding out from the law and that the gold was from a hold-up. After his death, the money (if any) has remained undiscovered in one of the many caves in the canyon. Bennie says that he has explored most of them but an experienced treasure hunter with a good metal detector might hit the jackpot if he found the right cave.

In the Bridgeport area is also a lost lead and silver mine. Supposedly, a wagontrain making its way through the country heading west had stopped on a creek south of the present town of Bridgeport and camped for the night. The men built a big cooking fire. The next morning as they were preparing to rebuild the fire to cook breakfast, they found bits of lead that apparently had melted from the rocks surrounding the fire the night before.

As lead for bullets was scarce, this caused considerable excitement and the search was on. They soon found the vein and immediately started digging it out. For several days everyone was digging and melting down the lead, and molding bullets for the trip. After making all the bullets they felt they might need, and molding some of the surplus lead into bars, they carefully re-covered the vein and headed on west.

The lead was later assayed by one of the party and found to be high in silver content. Several years later he returned with the intention of mining but was never able to locate the old campsite. So the lead and silver vein is still lost.



The stone which the Trammel brothers believe may lead to a treasure.

waiting for some lucky treasure hunter.

Another of Bennie's favorite stories is of the last Indian raid in the community. It was directed against the old fort on the Hunt Ranch and against the Waggoner Ranch, where a Negro employe was killed before the Indians could be driven off. Hunt's daughter was also killed. She was buried on the property in a steel vault and is rumored to have been interred wearing several thousands of dollars worth of jewelry. Also killed in this raid were all of the Babb and Huff families. According to some reports, gold and silver coins have been found in the area where the Huffs were massacred—supposedly money of theirs which was thrown away and scattered by the Indians at the time of the killings.

A very wealthy Dutchman who operated a furniture and wagon factory near the settlement was also killed. None of his reported wealth was ever found and the local belief is that it is still buried at the site of the old wagon factory. This should be another good spot for a hard working treasure hunter with good modern electronic equipment.

Bennie can also take you to the location of an Indian village west of town on Village Creek. He has arrowheads, tomahawks and other Indian relics taken from the site.

ANOTHER Bridgeport mystery is about two industrious brothers, early settlers, who decided to round up all the wild longhorn cattle they could find, drive them north, and sell them.

When the brothers returned from the northern market they had over \$5,000 each in gold coin. Within a week after they got home one of the brothers was kicked in the head by a mule. While dying he tried to tell where he had hidden his gold. He managed to make his family understand that he had buried it on the fence row but they could never determine which fence row he meant, so it was never found. Ben feels certain he knows on which one to look. He has the saddle and rifle of one of the brothers on display in his cafe.

The old Butterfield Stage route ran near Bridgeport, and was the scene of many robberies. One popular story is about a large shipment of gold that disappeared after a hold-up. The robbers

were followed and killed, with the exception of one who, though severely wounded, managed to make good his escape. He never returned for the treasure, but is reported to have told of his part in the robbery and made a map of the location of the hidden gold before his death.

According to local gossip it is buried just north of the spring at the first stage stop out of Bridgeport.

One Bridgeport resident, now about eighty years old, says that sometime around 1890, while seining in the creek for catfish, he found the shape of a turtle carved deep in the trunk of a large old tree. From someone he got the information that it was an early Spanish treasure sign. He was told to stand with his back to the sign and take 200 steps in the direction the turtle was pointing. This he did, and found himself at the

base of a towering rock cliff. It had the appearance of once having had a cave in its face, but a landslide had completely covered the opening with tons of rocks. He was told that this was the hiding place for some early Spanish church treasures, but he never did anything about it, so there it may still be.

The Trammel brothers are completely familiar with these and many other treasure stories and legends of their part of country, and very much enjoy telling of them.

If nothing happens, I hope to return this fall to Wise County and start my search. Bennie did not disclose the exact locations of these hidden treasures to me, but has agreed to do so if I will bring detectors and equipment and be prepared to spend the time necessary to search them out completely.

This rugged country in Wise County, Texas, contains many caves where outlaws are supposed to have buried loot.

