



Republic Photo by Paul Dean

Lee Hammons displays stone maps of the famed Lost Dutchman mine



Paul Dean

*Rock scratches may solve
Superstitions' mystery*

ONE LOOKS like an idiot puzzle from a manual dexterity testing center. Its mate could be an engraved, sandstone belt buckle for Mighty Joe Young. The third hunk of rock comes on as a doorstep from a maiden aunt who didn't like you too well.

But together these tablets comprise a trio of treasure; stone maps that hundreds have claimed and thousands believe to be rock-hard proof of the existence and location of the Superstition Mountains' most vibrant superstitions — the 18 gold mines picked out by the Peralta brothers and the big hole hacked by Lost Dutchman Jacob Walzer.

And on Sunday, at the Dons Club base camp, probably only a mule ride and a rifle shot from where the mines are rumored to be, the stones will undergo their first public eyeballing at the Superstition Mountain Mineral Festival.

It will be the second break in the stony secrecy surrounding the rocks. The first was in the late fifties when Clarence O. Mitchell, then of Apache Junction, made winking, whispered announcements of the existence of the maps.

Mitchell's story, later duplicated in great detail by Travis Marlowe in the book "Superstition Treasures," was that the maps were found by a man-and-wife team hiking the Superstitions in 1949.

The first, 16 inches long and 2½ inches thick, carries the chiseled legend, "Esta Bereda Es Peligrosa," translated into "This trail is dangerous." It also shows a witch-hatted priest using a cross to hammer at a heart shape and a crucifix in a square. Etched on the reverse side is a mule. With "Pedro" branded on its flank.

In translating the signs and symbols, researchers presumed the priest's pointed lid was actually the shape of Weaver's Needle ("El Sombrero") viewed from certain angles. The mule was obviously a burro belonging to Pedro Peralta.

The boxed crucifix and the heart posed a few questions.

Until the original finder dug deeper into the wilderness and shoveled up two more tablets — one displaying a carved crucifix; the other an inlaid, removable heart.

And both were scratched with dates, distances and worm-squirring hieroglyphics. Maybe trails and canyons. And maybe the precise locations of the mountains of golden wealth; secrets that died with the Peraltas (massacred by Apaches in 1848) and with Jacob Walzer (dead of pneumonia in 1891).

On the finder's death from a heart attack, continues the story, his widow dumped the stones on Mitchell.

In 1960, with funds from 125 investors, Mitchell formed Moel Inc. And with a sufficient sense of security to record the corporation's purpose "to explore for and discover mineral deposits, oil and gases."

So a mini gold rush was launched.

And will continue, even though a stockholder in Moel Inc., Boyd Cochrane, 9412 S. 10th Ave., has donated the tablets to the Arizona Mineral Museum for permanent display.

Now under the lock and key of museum curator Lee Hammons, the massive maps have top-secret symbols blocked out by black tape.

"I have pictures of the maps, so we're not losing anything by displaying them," said Cochrane yesterday. "After more than 30 trips into the Superstitions I have located many of the landmarks on the tablets. It certainly seems as though something is there."

Equally as certain is that public display of the maps will ginger thousands of new prospectors into them thar hills around Weaver's Needle.

But don't whetstone your pickax yet. Don't trade your wife in on a Jeep.

Certainly not until you've read tomorrow's column.



Paul Dean

*On one thing all agree --
the Lost Dutchman is lost*

THE LOST DUTCHMAN Mine, to paraphrase unromantic Texas author and historian J. Frank Dobie, is a shadowy naught in the Valley of Fanciful Thought.

Not so, yoo-hoo ghosts of the lost and legions of the living who for 79 years have excavated the west end of the Superstitions more thoroughly and more often than the intersection of Central and Van Buren.

Dobie was dopey, yells a company of Arizonans who for almost a decade hoarded and hefted three stone maps and put money on their beliefs that these rocky Rand-McNallys point a route to 18 gold mines worked by the Peralta Brothers and that grandpappy of all loaded lodes, the Lost Dutchman Mine of Jacob Walzer.

And that same gold fever will perspire men's shirts anew next Sunday when these map tablets go on public display at the Superstition Mountain Mineral Festival at the Dons Club base camp.

Except the chiselings are probably a \$3 bill chisel and not worth the stone they're printed on.

So let's mine a myhtery.

— According to author Travis Marlowe, writing in his 1965 book "Superstition Treasures," the tablets were originally found by a husband and wife tiptoeing through the two-lipped canyons of the Superstitions. And the stones and their hieroglyphics were supposedly authenticated.

Fine. Except Marlowe's book reads like the memoirs of Captain Billy Whizzbang. From mind-stoppers like "the blood in his veins subsided" to "just when it was my heart stopped beating, or I breathed again, I do not know or care." The man who found the stones, according to Marlowe, was identified no further than "a friend of mine, we will call him Jack."

And that authentication? Marlowe kissed it off as coming from "a professor-of-geology" at "a well known university."

—But wasn't Marlowe a respect-

ed writer and historian? No, sir. According to Boyd Cochrane, 9412 S. 10th Ave., one-time investor in the future of the stones, "Travis Marlowe" was the nom de put-on of Clarence O. Mitchell of Apache Junction.

—Who, in turn, popped up as president of Moel, Inc., a 10-cent-a-share company which owned the maps and ultimately attracted 125 investors with golden glints in their eyes.

—But Mitchell and Moel, Inc., were dynamited in 1964 by state and federal injunctions hogtiewing the firm against further sales of unregistered stock. A Securities and Exchange Commission excavation of company records showed that more than 588,000 shares of unregistered capital stock were sold for \$60,000 to persons in six states. Moel, claimed the commission, would soon slide into bankruptcy unless additional financing were obtained.

—Which wasn't obtained. So in 1965, Moel, Inc., mosied into bankruptcy. Mitchell is missing. Those three stone maps went to 30 die-hard investors as part of the bankruptcy settlement.

And that group, presumably several pennies and pounds wiser, has now donated the tablets to Lee Hammons of the Arizona Mineral Museum.

"I've taped out certain sections to keep the maps exactly as they were photographed in 'Superstition Treasures,'" acknowledged Hammons yesterday. "I don't know if these stones are authentic or not. But they're certainly a great novelty item for the museum."

And not even investor Cochrane is prepared to erode Arizona's longest, richest legend by biased personal opinion.

"It is possible that these maps are genuine," he said. "Mitchell may well have been simply a misguided, bad businessman."

Which leaves us right back where we were in 1891 when Walzer gasped his last and nobody understood. Because his nurse didn't speak Dutch.