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Lost Gold Mine of Felix Pedro

Inside Outside series

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Tom Duncan is the moderator. The 1972 Golden Days marks the 70th anniversary of Felix Pedro's gold discovery. Many people think Pedro struck it rich immediately. He actually spent quite a bit of time prospecting around Alaska. He began looking for gold in the Tanana Valley on the recommendation of Jack McQuesten. McQuesten from Circle City, Alaska was considered an expert on gold mining. He had arrived in Fort Yukon by way of Canada in 1873. McQuesten told Pedro about the discovery of gold in 1878 by Arthur Harper and Al Mayo. McQuesten, Harper and Mayo were partners. They discovered gold on a gravel bar on the Tanana River near the mouth of the Chena River. He also told Pedro about gold discoveries in 1875 by Mayo and his partner Bates. Bates and Harper had been floating down the Tanana River from a point near its source. It was the first recorded exploration of the Tanana River by white men. They saw some color on the gravel bars but they spent more time dodging Indians than prospecting. Bates had employed Mayo to accompany him on the trip. People thought Bates was actually a scout looking for a site for a trading company on the Tanana River. It was reported that he took copious notes and mapped the entire river while on the trip. His findings were never made public.

Several years later in 1885 a series of map errors were made which played a most important part in the search for certain lost mines including one claimed by Felix Pedro. Felix Pedro spoke to Judge Wickersham about the lost mine. Judge Wickersham said Pedro told him about his long search for gold on the Tanana Slope. Pedro had found gold on the Goodpaster drainage. He went to Circle for food, but was not able to find his mine when he returned. Pedro's inability to find the mine was due to map errors. The errors came about when a party of five led by Lt. Henry T. Allen floated down the Tanana River after they crossed over from the Copper River. While floating down the Tanana they mapped it and named tributaries including the Goodpaster. The map that was created was criticized in later years as some of the tributaries were misplaced. The map and report was printed in 1886. Until 1900 it was the only map for the area available to the public. Only two copies were known to exist in the Yukon area. One of the maps was owned by Jack McQuesten. It was from this map that Felix Pedro made sketches for his prospecting trips. In 1886 there were a series of prospecting expeditions which continued for several years. Many of the prospectors made their own maps and the errors of the Allen map came to light. No large gold strikes were made in the area. In 1888 Jim Bender and Frank Dinsmore reported colors and flour gold on the bars of the Tanana River. Dinsmore first confirmed the exact location of a mountain mass named Denali by the Natives. It was named Dinsmore's Peak in his honor. More than a decade later it was "officially discovered" and renamed Mt. McKinley.

There was a mix-up in names between which was the Volkmar River named by Lt. Allen in 1885 and which was the Goodpaster River. It is hard to say which river Pedro was referring to when he told Wickersham about the lost mine. In 1899 when Pedro outfitted at Jack McQuesten's store at Circle McQuesten told Pedro of all the gold discoveries made in the Tanana. All of the gold except on the Big Delta River came from the mountains northeast of the Tanana. These mountains separated the Tanana River from the Yukon River. McQuesten knew about some gold finds located in the Goodpaster area. He knew about the gold discoveries at Tenderfoot and at the mouth of the Chena River. Felix Pedro using Lt. Allen's map made a sketch of the country. In 1899 he crossed over to the Goodpaster according to the map he had. Exactly where he found his gold is still not known. Felix Pedro by himself and with his partner Frank Costa found gold on the Goodpaster, Fish Creek, Fairbanks Creek and several other creeks before he made his discovery on Pedro Creek a few miles northeast of present-day Fairbanks. At two places did he say he hit pay dirt. First he found gold on a creek flowing into the Tanana up Goodpaster way and then on Pedro Creek. Modern seekers of Pedro's lost mine might take note of the term creek. The Goodpaster River is the largest tributary of the eastern drainage of the Tanana. The Volkmar River is rather small and could more likely be described a creek. Pettyjohn concludes that Pedro didn't find gold on the Goodpaster, but on the Volkmar. Countless individuals have searched the Goodpaster for Pedro's lost mine. Years ago John Hajdukovich found gold midway up the Goodpaster and moved in mining equipment. He earned only a few thousand dollars. It was obvious that he had hit a pocket. Outside of that one occurrence and flecks of gold found on sandbars in 1889 nothing resembling real pay has been located in that area. The search for Pedro's lost mine began in 1902 when Alfred Brook's map published by the USGS showed the Goodpaster in its present location. The Volkmar River and the vicinity have received little attention from prospectors. It may have never been searched for Pedro's lost mine. Pedro filed on his discovery in Eagle in 1902.

Another part of this story ties closely with Pedro's lost mine. Mr. Prindle was a geologist hired by the US Geological Survey. In 1902 Prindle reported asbestos in the Yukon Tanana Region 100 miles southeast of Fairbanks and twenty miles north of the Tanana River. It was described as occurring in a basic dike composed of mostly serpentine with stringers of asbestos up to six inches in width. He also reported that the deposit was several hundred feet wide and of considerable extent. It was found on the Volkmar River. This description would describe several of the richest asbestos mines in Canada before they were developed. Many searches have been made for Prindle's discovery, but it remains lost. The map that Mr. Prindle used was the one made by Lt. Allen. Prindle's description places the location within an area with a radius of ten miles between Central Creek and the south fork of the Goodpaster. Nowhere in his writings about the asbestos does Mr. Prindle even mention the Goodpaster. He said it was on a ridge which had been burned off by a fire. Pettyjohn concluded that Felix Pedro's Goodpaster is actually the Volkmar and Mr. Prindle's Volkmar is the Goodpaster. Even though countless numbers have searched for the lost gold and the asbestos deposit the mineral riches remain hidden away. With increases in gold values there may be others looking for the lost mine. Would be prospectors would be wise to consider the map errors.