

THE LOST ADAMS DIGGINGS

PART 2

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For El Defensor Chieftain

Summary of Part I. In 1864, an Indian scout led a party of men to a canyon full of placer gold. Before the men could leave with several weeks worth of gold, they were attacked by Indians, purportedly Nana and a band of Apaches, killing all of the men save four. Of these, two died in the 1870's, leaving only Ed Adams and John Brewer to return to New Mexico and find their canyon full of gold. In spite of numerous attempts in the 1880's, Adams was never able to find his "Lost Adams Diggings." Part II describes some of the expeditions to find it, and where it may very well be.

ADAMS RETURNS

In 1874, after laying low about ten years, Adams made his first presence in New Mexico, searching around Reserve and the Mogollon Mountains for his gold. Over the next dozen years, Adams returned to Socorro County many times, telling his story to those that would listen and invited others to join his expeditions.

He was often accompanied by a loyal friend, Captain Shaw, determined to help Adams find his gold. They never found the lost canyon, but gold fever did spread to all whom they met. By the 1880's, dozens of people were searching for the Lost Adams Diggings from the Gila to the Zuni Mountains, the first wave of treasure hunters.

In 1876, Adams befriended local rancher Richard Patterson of Horse Springs. Patterson helped Adams with his searches, looking for the gold himself for many years following Adams death. He never found the gold,

but he did write the earliest known firsthand account of the Adams story. It was printed in the Socorro Chieftain in 1897.

For the next few years, Adams used Milligan Plaza, now called Reserve, as his home base, the only area that seemed familiar to him. It was near Milligan Plaza that Adams believed he and Davidson had been rescued by the Army after their escape from the Indians in 1864.

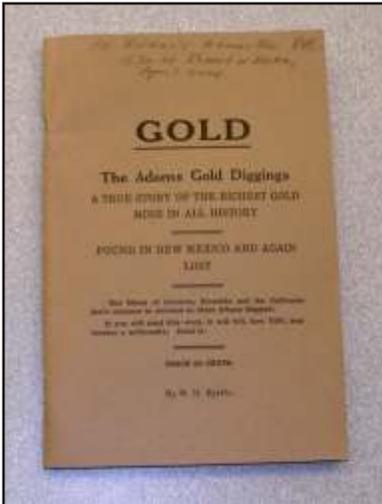
Adams and Shaw searched in every compass direction possible, never finding any of the landmarks Adams remembered. These expeditions were well known in the region, causing others to search for the gold independently.

One of those searches was by Socorro County ranchers Baxter and Adair in 1877, well recorded in McKenna's "Black Range Tales." Their expedition was successful in finding Adam's canyon, but, based on the



Photo by Paul Harden

Adams spent his life looking for the mountains that "looked like haystacks." Are D-Cross and Bell Mountains, along the Rio Salado, Adams' landmarks?



Courtesy of Robert Eveleth
Socorro merchant William Byerts published the booklet “The Adams Gold Diggings” in the 1920s. This is one of the few first hand accounts by someone who accompanied Adams during his searches.

instructions given by the surviving German, John Snively, not Adams. Attacking Apache’s cut their stay in the canyon short.

During the 1880’s, Adams and Shaw were also in Socorro, befriending two local merchants, William Byerts and W. W. Williams. These two men guided Adams on several expeditions to the west of Socorro, into the Plains of San Augustin and the Datil Mountains. Byerts and Williams also published accounts based on their

firsthand experiences with Adams and Shaw in later years.

THE STURGEON-DOWLING EXPEDITIONS

In late 1864, following the Indian attack that sent Adams and Davidson into the wilderness, they were found by Army scouts. Dr. Sturgeon was the Army doctor that nursed Adams back to health in 1864 after wandering for days in western New Mexico. Adams told Dr. Sturgeon his tale of finding a canyon full of gold, even drawing a map showing the main landmarks on how to find it. Sturgeon dismissed the story as some



Courtesy N.M. Bureau of Geology
Dr. David B. Sturgeon treated Adams in 1864. He launched an expedition from Socorro in 1881 to find his gold.

sort of post-Apache trauma disorder and gave it no further thought.

When stories of the Lost Adams Diggings spread across the country in later years, Sturgeon knew this was the man he had treated 17 years before. Sturgeon, and a party of 40 men and investors, arrived in Socorro to launch an expedition. With Adams map in hand, they took off for the

Datil Mountains from Socorro in 1881. The expedition quickly fell apart, the Ohio party finding the desert and mountains of Socorro County too hot and rough for their tastes. Most dropped out and returned to Ohio.

At the same time, a Socorro miner named John Dowling was also looking for Adam’s canyon independently. After meeting with Dowling, Dr. Sturgeon hired him to lead his expedition. The doctor was called back to Ohio and Dowling departed Socorro with two of his men and one of Sturgeon’s. After a couple of days on the trail, Dowling began to spot the landmarks on Sturgeon’s map, eventually finding the narrow Zig-zag canyon and the burned out cabin. However, a dispute that evening amongst the men ended the expedition.

Dowling worked in mining around the state and died before he could return to the Lost Adams Diggings. His story does place the location east of the Sawtooth Mountains and north of the Datils. But, like the others claiming to find the canyon, he found no gold. The real question is: what happened to the map?

MAGDALENA BOB LEWIS

Rancher, and later Magdalena Marshall Bob Lewis, was another Socorro County man Adams befriended. First meeting in Reserve in 1889, Adams hired Lewis to escort him to old Fort Wingate. Adams had hoped to follow the trail from the old Army fort south to his gold, just as his supply wagons would have traveled before being attacked by Apaches. But, once again, Adams did not recognize any of his landmarks along the way.

The following year, Adams would run into Bob Lewis again, this time in a Magdalena tavern. After several drinks, Adams began telling his story for at least the millionth time, complaining how the Army refused to escort him to the scene of the massacre to bury the men.

It turned out, a retired officer named Capt. Sanburn was stationed at the fort Adams claimed gave him no assistance. Each man called the other a liar several times before a fight began. When Capt. Sanburn pulled out a knife to lunge toward Adams, Lewis stepped in, broke up the fight, hauled Adams out of the bar,



Photo by Paul Harden
Pat Lewis, of Magdalena, is a close likeness to his grandfather, Bob Lewis.

and safely hid him for the night. This is not difficult to believe. Author E.V. Batchler described Lewis as “a big man, well over six-feet and weighing in the vicinity of two-hundred pounds ... and has the map of Ireland printed all over his face. Big, rough and burly.”

Batchler interviewed Bob Lewis in 1936 about his experiences with Adams and his search for the Lost Adams Diggings. This interview is important to Adams followers for two reasons. First, many accounts claim Adams died in 1886. Yet, Lewis clearly identifies his involvement with Adams in 1889 and 1890. Secondly, there seems to be no certainty of Adams first name in the historical accounts. Lewis said affirmatively his name was Edward Adams.

Adams told Lewis his exploration days were over due to his age. He had given up ever finding his gold, and gave Lewis a couple of clues he claimed he had never told anyone before. The last clue was “find the bodies of my slain partners and you have found the Zig-zag Canyon.” Recall that following the 1864 Indian massacre, Adams and Davidson had placed the bodies in a crevice near the canyon entrance, covering them with pack saddles. Lewis said after leaving Magdalena, he never saw Adams again.

In a 1950’s interview, Lewis told historian Howard Bryan, “I finally located the skeletons that Adams had been talking about. They were at the mouth of a canyon about thirty five miles northwest of Magdalena. In the canyon, I also found the remains of a cabin. In fact, I found everything that Adams had described - except the gold.”

Hatcher’s 1936 interview gives more details. “Adams had told me that they had camped about fifteen miles north of three peaks that rose up from the plain and were a considerable distance from any other mountains. I got to thinkin’ and the only three peaks I knew of between Gallup and Magdalena, were the Tres Montosas, which are only about fifteen miles west of Magdalena. Figuring about fifteen or twenty miles north of there ... I found the bodies of five men, all buried in one hole. I could find no clue to any gold from anything in the vicinity. It is my belief that the bodies I found were the remains of part of Adams expedition, but of course I can’t prove this.”

Lewis had served as a Socorro Deputy Sheriff and Magdalena Marshall during much of his life. Descendants of Bob Lewis still live in Magdalena and Socorro.

ADAMS DIGGINGS, NM

One might ask, “If you want to find Adams Diggings, why not just look for it on the map?” Indeed, this is true. About 17 miles north of Pie Town, a small town called Adams Diggings is shown on most highway maps. It is not exactly a paved road. In the book “The Place Names of New Mexico,” it claims the town was placed there by a map maker in the 1930’s as a joke. This is incorrect. The true story of Adams Diggings can be learned from Socorroan Bob Magee. He should know. Not only did he grow up in the small town called Adams Diggings, it was his father who named it.

Guy and Daisy Magee homesteaded the rolling hills north of Pie Town in 1916. As a service to nearby ranchers, they opened a small general store on the ranch in the late 1920’s.

Following the 1929 stock market crash, people began showing up in the area looking for the Lost Adams Diggings. The Great Depression had begun, thousands out of work, poor and destitute. Many decided there was nothing to loose except to search for Adam’s gold. As the prospectors began to show up, many got their supplies at Magee’s store, often asking if their mail could be forwarded to the ranch.

So much mail was being delivered to the ranch, Magee applied for a post office. Surprisingly, his application was granted in 1930. He chose “Adams Diggings” as a name sake for the prospectors, and as a clever gimmick to advertise his small general store. And, it worked. Prospectors arrived at Adams Diggings to begin their searches, Magee’s store remained busy, and the mail continued to



Photo by Paul Harden
Homesteaders Guy and Daisy Magee named their small settlement “Adams Diggings” in 1930.



Photo by Paul Harden
Life long rancher Bob Magee was born in Adams Diggings, NM, and lived there until retiring from the ranch in 1997.



Photo by Paul Harden
The Magee Ranch headquarters at Adams Diggings, NM was homesteaded by Guy Magee in 1916.



Photo by Paul Harden
The old general store and Post Office at Adams Diggings, NM, as it appears today. The post office operated from 1930–1946.

flow. Of course, nearby ranchers received their mail at Adams Diggings as well.

This wave of prospectors came to an end with the onset of World War II. The Magee’s closed the post office in 1946, the mail being transferred to Pie Town.

Bob Magee remembers prospectors arriving at the ranch after the war until his retirement from the ranch a few years ago. “I don’t think there’s any gold out there to be found,” he’ll tell you, adding, “at least I never heard of anyone finding it.”

Even though the post office closed in 1946, effectively ending the existence of Adams Diggings as a town, it is still shown on present day highway maps. Perhaps it is closer to the gold than most people realize.

THE LOCATION

I was first introduced to the Lost Adams Diggings in the early 1980’s by Fred Martin, Jr. The Martin Ranch is located west of the Alamo Navajo Indian Reservation, south of the Rio Salado. Martin told me the story of Adam’s gold and how to find the area – though told me “don’t expect to find any gold” (he, and his father Fred Martin Sr., had already searched for it over many years). Several trips later, driving along the Alamocita arroyo, getting stuck, and climbing up canyons, I found the Zig-zag Canyon and most of the other landmarks in the Adams story. Everything, except the gold!

This part of the country is made up of rock outcroppings, sandstone cliffs, dozen of volcanic mesas and a maze of sandy arroyos. This is not the type of geology where gold or silver would be found.

However, my interests were historical, not hopeful of finding treasure. Although, had gold nuggets the size of acorns been laying along the stream bed, I probably would have picked up one or two! If this, indeed, is the site of the Lost Adams Diggings, it sprawls over several square miles and over two different ranches.

In preparing this article for the El Defensor Chieftain, I wanted to revisit the area after 20 years and take some photographs. Where Socorro County roads once allowed access to near the Zig-zag Canyon, these roads are now closed to the public.

I contacted the ranch owners, who are fully aware of the historical importance of what is located on their land. They agreed to escort me to the area, allowing me to take a few photographs, provided I did not identify the exact location. Their concern is very legitimate, for which I will respect. The site is located miles inside of



Photo by Paul Harden
The “pumpkin patch.” The entrance to the Zig-zag canyon is hidden behind the line of piñon trees.



Photo by Paul Harden
Looking southwest into the zig-zag canyon toward the “Pumpkin Patch” entrance.



Photo by Paul Harden
Looking southeast into the zig-zag canyon at one of the “bends,” then zig-zags again to the left in the distance.

very rough and treacherous country, north of the Gallinas Mountains, east of the Sawtooths, west of Bell Mountain, and no longer accessible by roads. They have plenty of experience over the years rescuing people buried in the sand, stuck in the disguised pools of quicksand, or a punctured oil pan - some being stranded for days before walking out.

The accompanying photographs show the Pumpkin Patch, where the Adams party camped before entering the Zig-zag Canyon. It is located in a wide mouthed canyon, flanked on both sides by the aspen trees described by Adams. Wild gourds grow here during wet years and evidence of ancient Indian occupation is nearby. A half-mile beyond the meadow of the Pumpkin Patch is a thicket of trees, behind which is a smooth, rounded hill. The trees obscure a 30-foot high sandstone wall and the narrow entrance to the Zig-zag Canyon. Neither of these Adams landmarks can be seen until passing through the trees.

The Zig-zag Canyon is impossible to scale. It is basically a “crack” through the smooth hill, 100 feet deep and about as wide. It is filled with huge rocks, though a small stream does wind through the canyon. (It was not flowing in September 2004 when I last visited the site, but did have several pools of water). Adams description that it was the roughest canyon he had ridden a horse through is accurate.

It took several miles of rough 4-wheeling to get around and atop the large hill. My guide led me through the thick pinon trees along the top of the hill until suddenly, we were standing at the edge of a deep chasm. We were looking down, into the Zig-zag Canyon. It is about a mile long and makes several sharp, 90-degree bends.

Several distinct zig-zags. One can walk within yards of the canyon and not see it. It is a literal chasm along an otherwise smooth, tree covered surface. The accompanying photos appear like a random rock field, rather than a canyon.

The other end of the Zig-zag Canyon leads into a meadow, or small valley, boxed on all sides by 300-500 foot tall hills. I wouldn't call it a broad canyon as Adams did, but it is a well defined “box.” It is here that the Adams party supposedly found the gold. My guide and myself looked around, but found no gold! There is no indication of any mineralization in this area. However, the other landmarks are there, including the D-Cross and Bell Mountains to the east and northeast - Adam's “haystacks.”

You can not see where the Zig-zag Canyon enters this small valley. It appears as a small rocky cliff with large



Photo by Paul Harden
Near the zig-zag canyon is this perfectly triangular hill. Is this the “Pyramid Mountain” described by Jason Baxter, John Adair, and Langford Johnston during their quests for Adam's gold?



Photo by Paul Harden

An Indian pictograph at the entrance to the canyon Jason Baxter and Langford Johnston described as being recently struck by an earthquake. This canyon is about a mile from the zig-zag canyon. Is this an image of a coyote or a horse? If a horse, the pictograph would have been made after the 1500s Spanish occupation.

boulders scattered about. Approaching it closer, you realize the red rocky cliff is actually the far side of the Zig-Zag Canyon.

If this is Adams Sno-Ta-Hay Canyon, you can understand why it is so difficult to find except with a guide. So many of the features described by Adams can not be recognized until you are standing directly in front of it. There are a hundred nearby hills that all look exactly alike, only one of which has a deep chasm leading into a closed valley.

Nestled in the trees, only 100 feet from the top edge of the Zig-zag Canyon, is a rock house. It is not known if this is related to the Adams story. Fred Martin said he



Photo by Paul Harden

The ranch owner points out the old rock house. The edge of the zig-zag canyon is beyond the trees.

had heard it was built by a man who mined the gold for a couple of years. According to this story, there wasn't a significant amount of gold, but small pieces embedded in a nearby rock outcropping. The gold specks have since all been mined out. None of the ranchers knew the name of this miner or who built the old rock house.

It is noteworthy to mention that one of the owners of this land contacted the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology in Socorro, now New Mexico Tech. Geologists and a mining engineer visited the canyon in the 1930s, and again in the 1950's, finding no evidence of gold. He still has the 1952 report in his possession.

The purpose of this article is to present the legend of the Lost Adams Diggings from a historical perspective, not as a treasure hunting guide. There appears to be no evidence that "gold nuggets the size of acorns" are laying around, and likely never were. However, I believe the area is very likely the location of the Lost Adams Diggings, or at least the area Adams described.

Perhaps Bob Lewis was right. From his conversations with Edward Adams, he believed the gold found in Sno-Ta-Hay Canyon was actually a stolen wagon train, carrying placer gold from California to the smelters in Denver. He believed further that the men were not killed by Indians, but rather the men with the wagon train were killed by Adams party for the gold. Instead of lucky prospectors, they were no more than cold-blooded killers on a looting raid. This could also well explain why the four survivors fled the scene in different directions, never mentioning the others in their accounts, and didn't return for years - figuring there was a bounty on their heads.

Though the ranchers escorting me to the site wish not to be identified, I do want to thank them publically for their time and effort in helping sharing what they believe is the Lost Adams Diggings.

THE FANGADO SITE

In all fairness to the accuracy in reporting, even for a history article, there is another location found by researchers that also fits most of Adams story. It is located between Duncan, Arizona and Cliff, New Mexico, found in the late 1970's by Don Fangado of Truth or Consequences. He was well known for his searches of lost treasures from the Caballo Mountains to Victorio Peak, making numerous discoveries.

The Lost Adams Diggings was a quest he worked on for years. After finding what he believed was Adam's Zig-zag Canyon and the closed canyon of gold, he

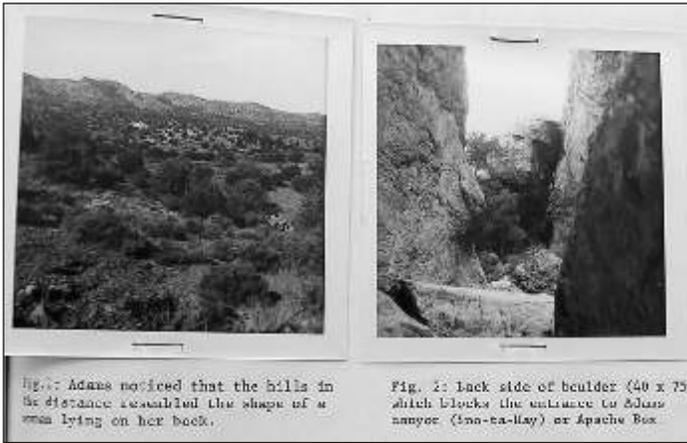


Fig. 1: Adams noticed that the hills in the distance resembled the shape of a woman lying on her back.

Fig. 2: Back side of boulder (40 x 75) which blocks the entrance to Adams nanycoc (Ino-na-Hay) or Apache Box

Courtesy of Department of Geology, New Mexico Tech
Don Fangado identified an area between Cliff, NM and Duncan, AZ believed to be the Lost Adams Diggings in the 1970s. His research manuscripts, photos, and field maps were given to the Department of Geology at New Mexico Tech in Socorro for historical archiving.

published an article with photographs in a treasure hunting magazine. Prior to his death in 2002, he gave the original manuscripts, photos and field maps to the New Mexico Bureau of Geology for archiving. A couple of Fangado’s photographs are included with this article for comparison. It has all the landmarks of the Adams story, including being in a highly mineralized area with many nearby gold and silver mines of the Steeple Rock mining district.



Courtesy of Department of Geology, New Mexico Tech
A closer view of the entrance to the zig-zag canyon near Virden, NM, discovered by Don Fangado in the 1970s. It is near the Steeple Rock mining district that produced several million dollars of gold from the 1880s onward.

What doesn’t fit is the well known description of Adam’s party traveling along the Gila River, then northeast for the rest of the trip, the lack of a nearby “fort on the malpais,” how Adams and Davidson traveled in a southerly direction towards Reserve, and a few other details. Still, the complete photo set is very convincing. And, it does contain placer gold in small quantities.

EPITAPH

The true story of the Lost Adams Diggings will probably never be known. As Bob Eveleth, Senior Mining Engineer at the New Mexico Bureau of Geology once told me, “The more you look into the Lost Adams Diggings, the more it will drive you crazy.”

Whatever happened in 1864 likely occurred in a remote part of New Mexico, near the Socorro-Catron County line, based on most accounts. The legend of the Lost Adams Diggings will remain a part of the rich history of Socorro County, and if you look for it, guaranteed to drive you crazy!

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REFERENCES

“Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver” by J. Frank Dobie; “Black Range Tales” by James McKenna; “The Lost Adams Diggings” by Jack Purcell; “Four Days from Fort Wingate” by Richard and Lois French; “Old Magdalena Cow Town” by Langford Johnston; “True Tales of the American Southwest” by Howard Bryan; The Patterson and Williams accounts, “Socorro Chieftain” 1897 and 1899 issues; “The Adams Gold Diggings,” by W.H. Byerts; and New Mexico Tech Bureau of Geology, Adams archives.

Interviews with Bob Eveleth, Pat Lewis, Bob Magee, Bob Lee, Robert Weber, Fred Martin Jr., the ranch owners of the area, and field work by the author.

Bob Magee, providing much historical background and photographs on Adams Diggings, passed away in 2005, shortly after this article was first published.

Other photographs by Paul Harden not published in the original article:



A view of the "Pyramid Mountain" from near the zig-zag canyon, looking south into the Plains of San Augustin. View shows the land of two privately owned ranches.



Approaching the pyramid mountain, and approaches to the zig-zag and Baxter's rocky, earthquake damaged canyon, from the south. This is private ranch land.



Looking north from the zig-zag canyon area with D-Cross and Bell Mountains in the distance - identified by some as Adam's "Haystack Mountains" or the *piloncillos*.



A closer view of one of the "Haystack Mountains" - unfortunately on an unusual overcast, drizzly day. The Rio Salado is between the ridge and Bell Mountain.



Another section of the zig-zag canyon. Note all the moss on the rocks, possibly suggesting a more constant water flow in historic times than today.



Closer view of the old rock house.