

## FIRST DRAFT

# Searches for lost mine stirred up deadly conflicts

Missing mines, such as the famous Lost Dutchman Mine in Arizona, are part of the lore of the West. One such mine was discovered and lost in southeastern Utah or north-eastern Arizona. It's a story that includes claims of fabulous mineral wealth, murdered miners, Indian animosity and some of the most iconic scenery in the West.

In late 1879, two men set off from McElmo Canyon, east of present-day Bluff, Utah, to search for a silver mine in Navajo territory. One of the men, James Merrick or Merritt (various sources offer different versions of his name), claimed to have already been to the mine and found nearly-pure silver.

Merrick and his partner, Earnest Mitchell, were found dead in late February of 1880, the victims, it was later determined, of renegade Piute Indians. The exact location of the silver deposit disappeared with their deaths.

Thus the legend of the Merrick-Mitchell Mine was born. It tantalized prospectors well into the 20th century, even though Navajo leaders such as Hoskininni made it clear that searching for silver on their land was forbidden.

The men weren't entirely forgotten. In Monument Valley Navajo Park — the famed scenery of many John Ford Westerns — there are landmarks named Merrick Butte, Mitchell Butte and Mitchell Mesa.

Exactly who Merrick was and where he came from is part of the mystery. Some authors have suggested both he and Mitchell were among Kit

Carson's cavalry force when they attacked Navajo strongholds and set the natives on the forced "Long Walk" to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, in 1863 and 1864.

It's possible Merrick served with Carson, but Earnest Mitchell was a member of a settler family in the Four Corners region. His family, originally from Missouri, had lived near what became Cortez prior to moving to the mouth of McElmo Canyon in 1878. There they ranched and operated a trading post.

Although he traded with both Navajos and Utes, Earnest's father, Henry Mitchell, also became one of the most vocal opponents of Indian policies in the region, questioning the ability of government officials to control the Indians and threatening violence by white settlers.

Merrick wandered into the Mitchell trading post in late 1879 with his story of a silver deposit in Navajo territory. He was seeking partners, and Earnest Mitchell was quick to join him.

When the men hadn't returned after 60 days, search parties were organized, and a Navajo man led them to the bodies near the buttes later named for the two men.

One of those who joined the search was Joe Duckett, later a resident of the Grand Junction area and then Monticello, Utah. He would spend several decades and be involved in a number of expeditions searching for the Merrick-Mitchell Mine.

His most ambitious expedition came in the winter of 1890-1891. It lasted nearly six



Merrick Butte, named for prospector James Merrick after his body was found near it in 1880, stands on the left in this view of Arizona's famous Monument Valley. In late 1879, Merrick and his partner, Earnest Mitchell, set off from McElmo Canyon, east of present-day Bluff, Utah, to search for a lost silver mine in Navajo territory. When they hadn't returned after 60 days, a Navajo man led search parties to their bodies.

weeks and involved nine men, including Joe's two brothers, John and Thad from Grand Junction. They traversed difficult country from near Bluff to Navajo Mountain, north of Kayenta in today's Arizona. They had several confrontations with Navajos before they finally abandoned the search and returned to Colorado in late January.

Another man who spent years searching for the mine was Cass Hite, a friend of Joe Duckett's and the man for whom Hite, Utah, now at the head of Lake Powell, was named.

Hite had prospected across the West before arriving in the Four Corners area. His most famous attempt to find the mine was his most audacious. He re-

portedly rode into the camp of Navajo leader Hoskininni, sat down at the campfire and asked for food, knowing the Navajos wouldn't harm a guest.

He spent six months living with the Navajos and became friends with Hoskininni and his son. Eventually, they agreed to accompany Hite on scouting trips, but they never offered information about the mine's whereabouts.

One day, Hoskininni told Hite if he ever found the silver mine, the Navajos would be forced to kill him, because the site was sacred. As a consolation, he offered to show Hite places where the Spaniards had once mined gold.

Valuing his life, Hite agreed. As a result, he was shown to the Colorado River and what

became Hite Crossing. He found some gold, and started a minor gold rush to the area. He lived and prospected in the area until his death in 1914 in Ticaboo Canyon. Some say he continued to surreptitiously search for the Merrick-Mitchell Mine.

Interestingly, another mine — a uranium mine — was briefly operated on Mitchell Mesa in the mid-20th century with the approval of the Navajo tribe. It produced ore over several years. But it closed after mine operator Robert Shriver was killed in 1965 when the ore hauler he was driving went over a 400-foot cliff.

There's no indication the uranium mine was near the lost Merrick-Mitchell silver mine. The latter is believed to

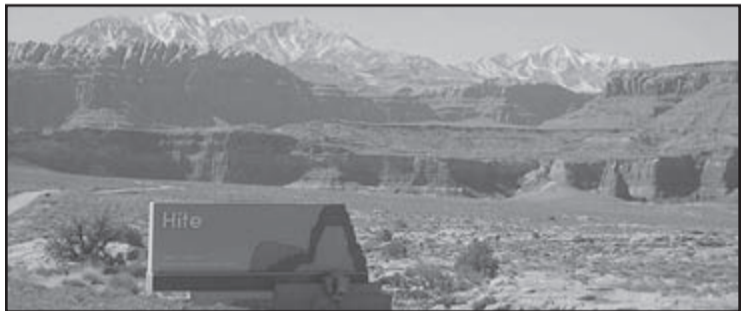
be in the rugged desert and canyons somewhere between Monument Valley and Navajo Mountain. Its precise location will probably never be known.

*Information for this article came from the Museum of Western Colorado, as well as "Navajos, Mormons, and Henry L. Mitchell: Cauldron of Conflict on the San Juan," by Robert S. McPherson; "Joe Duckett, the Hermit of Montezuma Canyon," by James H. Knipmeyer; "King of the Colorado, the Story of Cass Hite," by Tom McCourt; and "Geology and Production History of the Mitchell Butte Uranium-Vanadium Mine," by William Chenoweth.*

Email Bob Silbernagel at [bobsilbernagel@gmail.com](mailto:bobsilbernagel@gmail.com).



BOB SILBERNAGEL



THE NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE/Special to the Sentinel

A National Parks Service sign identifies Hite, Utah, at the northeastern edge of Lake Powell.

## Fire lantern festival coming to Utah despite concerns

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — A traveling fire lantern festival is coming to Utah next month despite concerns from residents and some apprehension from the state fire marshal.

The Lantern Fest is scheduled for Sept. 11-12 at the Bonneville Seabase about 40 miles west of Salt Lake City. The organization, which holds events around the country, uses the slogan, "Get ready to let your light shine."

"The reasons people go are always very personal — like someone passed away," said Amy Gessel, a representative with the Lantern Fest, according to the Deseret News.

Utah amended its fire code in 2013 to allow local city and county governments to prohibit fire lanterns — but stopped short

*"There's not a lot of vegetation (in Grantsville), so there's not a lot that can burn there."*

**BRENT MARSHALL**  
Mayor of Grantsville, Utah

of passing a blanket ban across the state, Utah Fire Marshal Coy Porter told The Associated Press. Officials and legislators decided it was best for local government officials to assess their own geography and situation.

The city of Grantsville, where this festival is happening, has chosen not to enact the ban.

Grantsville Mayor Brent Marshall said he has received phone calls from residents worried about the lanterns causing a fire, but he said the city did testing before approving the festival

that found the lanterns usually go only about 1,500 feet. If winds are strong, the lanterns don't fly at all, said Marshall, who is a firefighter.

"There's not a lot of vegetation there, so there's not a lot that can burn there," Marshall told the Deseret News. "We've run multiple tests out there lighting lanterns at different times."

The land where the festival will take place is barren. It is the same place where a Utah event called "Element 11," similar to

the Nevada countercultural festival Burning Man, takes place each year

Though the fire lanterns have caused fires, including one this summer on a mountain near Provo, organizers of the festival downplay the concern. The lanterns that will be launched by people who pay \$30 to participate are fire-resistant and biodegradable, Gessel said. The fuel cells burn out before they land, she said.

"So far, we've launched over 30,000 lanterns in the U.S. and haven't had an incident," Gessel said.

The popularity of fire lanterns has surged in recent years. They are sometimes set off by the hundreds at weddings and funerals. Fire chiefs around the country have issued warnings about the danger of the lanterns.

## BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

### More bogus cash reports

Grand Junction police were called Thursday after staff at Taco Bell, 850 North Ave., found two counterfeit \$5 bills that had been passed, according to a report. An officer noted the texture of the paper was different than standard U.S. currency and the bills were missing the standard watermark. Police were unable to establish when the transaction occurred. Authorities investigated another report on Aug. 18 of approximately \$90 in fake bills, involving denominations of \$5, \$20 and \$50, which were passed at three local C&F Foods stores.

According to the Grand Junction Po-

### lice Department:

■ Tiffany Smalley, 26, was arrested Wednesday on suspicion of third-degree assault and violation of a protection order in the 2800 block of Elm Drive.

■ Jesus Banuelos, 35, and Misty Banuelos, 33, were arrested Tuesday on suspicion of possession of a drug paraphernalia, when contacted at the Riverfront Trail and the Fifth Street bridge. Jesus Banuelos was also booked on suspicion of criminal impersonation.

■ Todd Menchey, 51, was cited Friday on suspicion of shoplifting at Walmart, 2881 North Ave.

■ Jesse Bass, 40, was cited Friday on suspicion of being an intoxicated person in the roadway at 600 Serenade St.

■ Cameron Sizemore, 24, was arrested on suspicion of assault on Friday.

■ A window was reportedly shattered after being punched by a juvenile Thursday in the 1200 block of Bunting Avenue.

■ Andrew Zakszewski, 34, was cited Thursday on suspicion of shoplifting at City Market, 200 Rood Ave.

■ Jay Luther, 37, was arrested Thursday on suspicion of violation of a protection order.

■ Gene Gana, 47, was arrested Tuesday on suspicion of possession of a controlled substance after being contacted at 2808 North Ave.

**The Mesa County Sheriff's Office on Sunday did not release jail booking or activity reports.**

**Pick 3** Sunday: 7-4-9  
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The Daily Sentinel's advertising deadlines will be moving up to accommodate the **Labor Day Holiday!**

This early deadline schedule is designed to help you plan your advertising around the holiday.

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9/8, Tuesday	9/2, Wednesday	4 PM
9/9, Wednesday	9/4, Friday	12 Noon
9/9, <i>Sentinel Weekly</i>	9/1, Tuesday	12 Noon
9/10, Thursday	9/4, Friday	5 PM
9/11, <i>Out &amp; About</i>	9/4, Friday	3 PM
<b>Classified Liner Ads</b> (Private Party & Commercial)		
9/6, Sunday	9/4, Friday	3 PM
9/7, Monday	9/4, Friday	4 PM
9/8, Tuesday	9/4, Friday	5 PM
<b>Legals</b>		
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9/7, Monday	9/1, Tuesday	12 Noon
9/8, Tuesday	9/1, Tuesday	3 PM
9/9, Wednesday	9/1, Tuesday	4 PM

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