

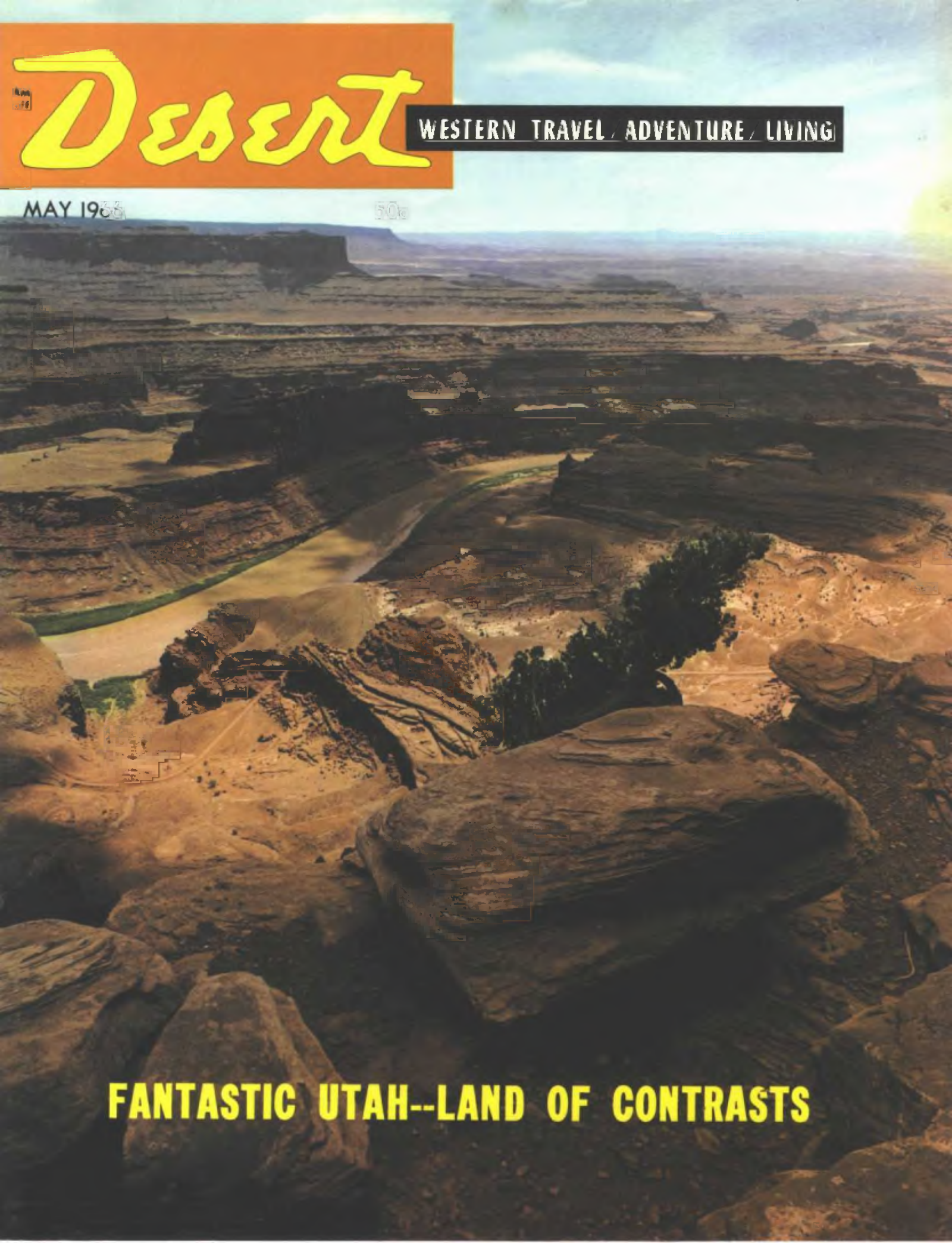
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Ghosts of Silver Reef

By Earl Spendlove

"If HE finds anything in this, we'll ride him out of town on a rail," a bristly-bearded miner said, picking up several pieces of a broken grindstone from the floor of a blacksmith shop in Pioche, Nevada.

The man referred to was an ambitious young assayer who had gained the name of "Metaliferous Murphy," because he found metal of some sort in every rock he examined. The citizens of this booming mining camp, skeptical of his optimistic reports, had decided to give him one last chance to redeem himself, so they sent him the pieces of broken grindstone.

"Silver," the report read, when it came back, "837 ounces to the ton!"

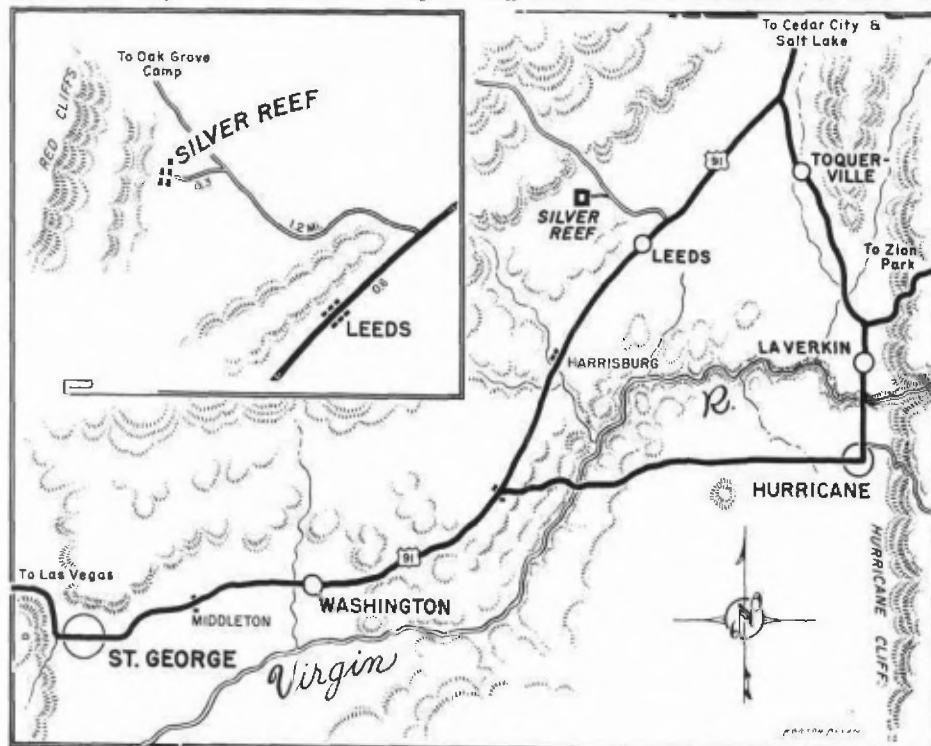
"Impossible," the local mining authority said, "silver simply does not exist in sandstone." Murphy's doom was sealed. They carried him to the edge of town on a rail, dumped him onto the ground, and warned him he'd be tarred and feathered if he returned.

"Metaliferous" hung around just long enough to learn that the grindstone had been brought to Pioche by a Mormon peddler from Leeds, Utah, 30 miles south of Cedar City, Utah. Then he high-

tailed it to that tiny southern Utah community where he learned that Alma T. Angell and Isaac Duffin made grindstones from slabs of sandstone picked up in the nearby hills. Carefully he prospected three sandstone upthrusts running through the country in a northeasterly direction. Early in the 1870s, on what was known locally as the White Reef, he staked the first claim in one of the most fabulous silver producing areas ever discovered.

What happened to Murphy after he staked his claim, no one knows. But, in spite of what the experts said, silver *was* found in the standstones of the White, Buckeye, and Leeds Reefs. Evidently Mother Nature had not read an "expert's" book for, in this area, she had done many things to challenge the wits of mining men. In some places she forced silver-bearing solutions into porous sandstone and formed lenses of black silver sulphides, worth from five to 50 thousand dollars. Where the sandstone fractured, the solutions entered the cracks and fissures and the metal was precipitated out and plastered onto the rocks. When the veins were opened, horn silver could be rolled, like great sheets of leather, from the sandstone walls.

This unusual occurrence amazed mining men. In a letter dated February 7,





1876, William Tecumseh Barbee, a self-styled mining expert wrote, ". . . This is the most unfavorable looking country for mines that I have ever seen in all of my varied mining experiences, but, as the mines are here, what are the rock sharps going to do about it?"

Some of the best ore was found in fossil plants discovered in some of the sandstone layers. This vegetative matter, which included branches and trunks of trees, was deposited along with the sand on the bottom of an ancient sea, long before the dawn of history. As time went on it was replaced, a cell at a time, by silver sulphides, creating veritable "Money Trees." One of these, discovered in the Buckeye Reef in the late 1870s by Patsy Cassidy and Barney Ross, netted the two lucky Irishmen \$14,000.00!

News of the rich discovery spread like wildfire and, in one wild rush, prospectors, promoters, miners, merchants, and ladies of pleasure all with dreams of easy wealth, flocked to the new diggings in the heart of Brigham Young's Cotton Mission.

Barbee, a high-pressure promoter if there ever was one, subdivided a sandy flat just north of the Buckeye Reef, named it Bonanza City, and tried to sell lots in what he described as the "Metropolis-to-be" of southern Utah. His development was not successful. The miners and merchants simply moved a couple of miles to the north where the land was free and established a new camp called Silver Reef.

The Post Office was established in February 1877, and by 1879 almost 3000 people lived in the rip-roarin' camp. Father Lawrence Scanlan, doughty priest who had looked after the souls of the Irish-Catholics at Pioche, followed his flock to the "Reef" and built a church,

Mormon and Protestant preachers, in their efforts to save souls, occasionally "borrowed" the Catholic church, but it is doubtful if the religious influence offered much competition to the eight saloons and two or three dance halls strategically located along the mile-long main street.

The miners worked hard and played harder and death and violence were common. Hardly a week went by when someone failed to die an unnatural death. In one shoot-out, John Diamond, a deputy U.S. Marshal and Jack Truby, a mine foreman, killed each other. When the sheriff investigated, both men were carrying .41 caliber revolvers, both had been shot several times—with both .41 and .45 caliber bullets! Evidently friends, or enemies, had joined in the fun.

Henry Clark, a young man from New York, achieved distinction in death: He has the fanciest grave in the fast disap-



Grave of Henry Clark guards the trail through Buckeye Reef.



pearing cemetery at Silver Reef. Clark was killed one night when he accused a faro dealer named Saxey of cheating. Both men went for their guns, both fired, and both dropped dead. Saxey's grave was marked by a rough lumber slab, but Clark's father enclosed his son's grave in a beautiful iron filigree rectangle, shipped from Russia, and erected a handsome monument.

At times justice was as swift and as brutal as the crime. In the fall of 1880, Mike Carbis, foreman at the Buckeye mine, fired Tom Forrest, whom he suspected of stirring up trouble among the Irish miners. A couple of days later, on the morning of October 3, Forrest slit Carbis' stomach open. The killer was apprehended and lodged in the county jail in St. George, Utah. That night a mob of 40 men rode into town, overpowered the sheriff, and hanged Tom Forrest to a cottonwood tree. Forrest's grave can no longer be identified, but Mike Carbis sleeps beneath a tall marble slab, half hidden in a tangle of brush and trees in the south end of Bonanza Flat.

Today, there is little left of the bustling mining camp of the 1880s. A few tombstones stand in Bonanza Flat, and Henry Clark, protected by his fancy fence, guards the trail that leads through Buckeye Reef. On the brushy slope, where the town once stood, are a few rock ruins and under a huge mulberry tree is the old Wells-Fargo bank, the only building to resist the ravages of time.

The town is gone, but on hot summer evenings when shadows crawl from beneath the big mulberry and stretch themselves across the cactus-covered flat, the ghosts of Tom Forrest, Mike Carbis, and all the other citizens of this rip-roarin' town parade silently up and down the long-gone board walks of old Silver Reef. □