

Superstition Mountain And The Lost Dutchman Mine

by
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Of all the wondrous tales of lost mines and buried treasure in the old west, the story of Jacob Walzer and the Lost Dutchman Mine has become a classic, perhaps even the greatest of American treasure stories. It has been the subject of numerous books, articles, expeditions, and movies... And that takes us to Arizona's Superstition Mountain, near Apache Junction.

Sims Ely, author of The Lost Dutchman Mine, stated in the opening chapter of this classic book that the Spanish named Superstition Mountain "Sierra de espuma," meaning a "mountain of foam." The origin of this name appears to be a forest service map drawn by L.P. Landon in 1918. Landon named a small butte southwest of Superstition Mountain Monte de Espuma.

The first European visitors to this area were Spanish. Fray Marcos de Niza was the first European to see Superstition Mountain in 1539. He observed the mountain from the Gila River during his visit to the region almost five hundred years ago. He did not, however, explore the rugged mountain range or record it in his journal.



"Sierra Supersticiones" appeared on

military field sketch maps of the region as early as May of 1866. This was during the Rancheria Campaign lead by Brevet Lt. John D. Walker's 1st Arizona Volunteers and U.S. Army Infantry from Fort McDowell under the command of Lt. Col. Clarence E. Bennett.. The first United States War Department maps of the region made reference to the Superstition Mountains as the Salt River Mountains. The first time "Superstition Mountain" actually appeared on official military maps was in 1870.

Superstition Mountain was to eventually become the setting for a myriad of mythical tales, legends, and lore, but none have matched the timeless lure of the Legend of the Lost Dutchman Mine.

The story started with Jacob Walzer, or "Waltz," an aged German immigrant who died in Phoenix, Arizona October 25, 1891. It was common knowledge that Waltz left town during the cooler winter months, but whether he went prospecting or mining was the question. For years there had been rumors by many Phoenix residents that he had some sort of secret supply of very rich gold ore. He was known occasionally to pay for goods with such ore, and others told that he sent money orders to his sister for several thousands of dollars, paid for with gold ore. Yet, he lived very modestly, almost to the point of poverty.

In February of 1891, Phoenix suffered a serious flood, and one of the homesteads flooded was that of Waltz's. Waltz, an octogenarian, was stranded for two days. After his rescue he was never to recover his health. For the next several months, he was cared for by Julia Thomas, a friend (some would say benefactor), and an associate of Julia's, Rhinehart Petrasch. During his convalescence, Waltz is reported slowly to have disclosed details about a secret gold mine that he had been quietly working in the Salt River Mountains: a mine so rich that one did not have to use a mill to extract the gold; a mine so rich that it could be worked by one man without machinery.

Repeated attempts by Julia and Rhinehart, and later Rhinehart's father and brother, Godfried and Herman respectively, failed to find the mine. Thousands have searched; but the mine (if it exists) remains undiscovered. Unfortunately, all searchers for the mine have faced the same obstacle. Jacob Waltz said he had covered the mine on his last trip to hide it. He seems to have done a good job.

There are many versions of the story. Some involve a partner named Jacob Wieser, some tell of Waltz being a killer, while others tell of him as a gentle soul; some claim he was a ne'er-do-well who invented the story, while others see him as

a wealthy miser; and still more claim that Waltz lived with the Indians, while others argue that he didn't live with the Indians, but that the Indians tried to kill him, and on and on. Is any of it true? [from Lone Star Bulletin, Jan/Apr 2001]

