



The Lost Padre Mine and the Organ Mining District

T. E. Kelly

1975, pp. 163-165. <https://doi.org/10.56577/FFC-26.163>

in:

Las Cruces Country, Seager, W. R.; Clemons, R. E.; Callender, J. F.; [eds.], New Mexico Geological Society 26th Annual Fall Field Conference Guidebook, 376 p. <https://doi.org/10.56577/FFC-26>

This is one of many related papers that were included in the 1975 NMGS Fall Field Conference Guidebook.

Annual NMGS Fall Field Conference Guidebooks

Every fall since 1950, the New Mexico Geological Society (NMGS) has held an annual [Fall Field Conference](#) that explores some region of New Mexico (or surrounding states). Always well attended, these conferences provide a guidebook to participants. Besides detailed road logs, the guidebooks contain many well written, edited, and peer-reviewed geoscience papers. These books have set the national standard for geologic guidebooks and are an essential geologic reference for anyone working in or around New Mexico.

Free Downloads

NMGS has decided to make peer-reviewed papers from our Fall Field Conference guidebooks available for free download. This is in keeping with our mission of promoting interest, research, and cooperation regarding geology in New Mexico. However, guidebook sales represent a significant proportion of our operating budget. Therefore, only *research papers* are available for download. *Road logs*, *mini-papers*, and other selected content are available only in print for recent guidebooks.

Copyright Information

Publications of the New Mexico Geological Society, printed and electronic, are protected by the copyright laws of the United States. No material from the NMGS website, or printed and electronic publications, may be reprinted or redistributed without NMGS permission. Contact us for permission to reprint portions of any of our publications.

One printed copy of any materials from the NMGS website or our print and electronic publications may be made for individual use without our permission. Teachers and students may make unlimited copies for educational use. Any other use of these materials requires explicit permission.

This page is intentionally left blank to maintain order of facing pages.

THE LOST PADRE MINE AND THE ORGAN MINING DISTRICT

by

T. E. KELLY

Geohydrology Associates

Albuquerque, New Mexico

In recent years one of the most colorful characters to take his place in New Mexico history is that of Milton E. (Doc) Noss—a 10th-grade educated chiropodist, bail jumper, former "bone setter" at Carrie Tingley Hospital at Hot Springs, and subsequent murder victim, Noss was either a great discoverer or an infamous con man.

Keeping strange company with Doc Noss in the history books is the name of Padre La Rue. It is not surprising that the two names would be linked together. The Lost Padre gold mine is supposed to be located in the mountains north of El Paso, the same general area where Doc Noss claimed to have found Geronimo's gold, which historians have later attributed to Vittorio, the Apache chieftan who was killed in Mexico in 1880. Noss, however, never claimed to have found a gold mine. He recognized his find as a treasure cache that had been hidden in natural underground fissures, probably a locally cavernous limestone. Some historians believe that part of the Noss gold may have been mined at the Lost Padre diggings but that the mine itself has not been found.

Both historic and geologic evidence support the likelihood that such a mine existed.

Padre Phillippe La Rue was a French nobleman who had joined the Franciscan Order and answered the Spanish call for missionaries to the New World. La Rue reached Chihuahua in about 1797 where he attended the spiritual needs of a small farming community. One of his parishioners, a much traveled soldier, told the Padre of a rich gold deposit located about a two-day journey north of Paso del Norte. The lode was just east of El Camino Real in a lone mountain surrounded by a large basin. As originally described to Padre La Rue, the gold was in a vein on the side of a mountain and placer gold was nearby (Kottlowski, 1966, p. 22). A spring was located not far away.

According to legend, the Padre headed north after a series of crop failures which nearly wiped out his settlement. Following the directions given him by the soldier, the small band of fortune hunters traveled north from Paso del Norte for two days, crossed the Organ Mountains, and made camp at Spirit Springs. Within a short time the gold was found and mining began in earnest. Some say that the precious gold was smelted in adobe furnaces and cast into bars.

No report was received from Padre La Rue for several years, so the Franciscan authorities sent out a search party to trace the young priest. Upon receiving word of the approaching search party, the miners hid the gold and concealed the mine. When the Padre and his miners refused to reveal the whereabouts of the diggings, the Padre and possibly some of his men were killed. Thus began the stories of the "Lost Padre" mine.

Subsequent mining in the Organ Mountains adds credence to this legend.

According to Willett (1951, p. 2), most of the middle latitudes of the northern hemisphere experienced a severe drouth beginning in about 1880 which lasted for about twenty years. Being located in an arid climate, crop failures in Chihuahua certainly would be expected during that time.

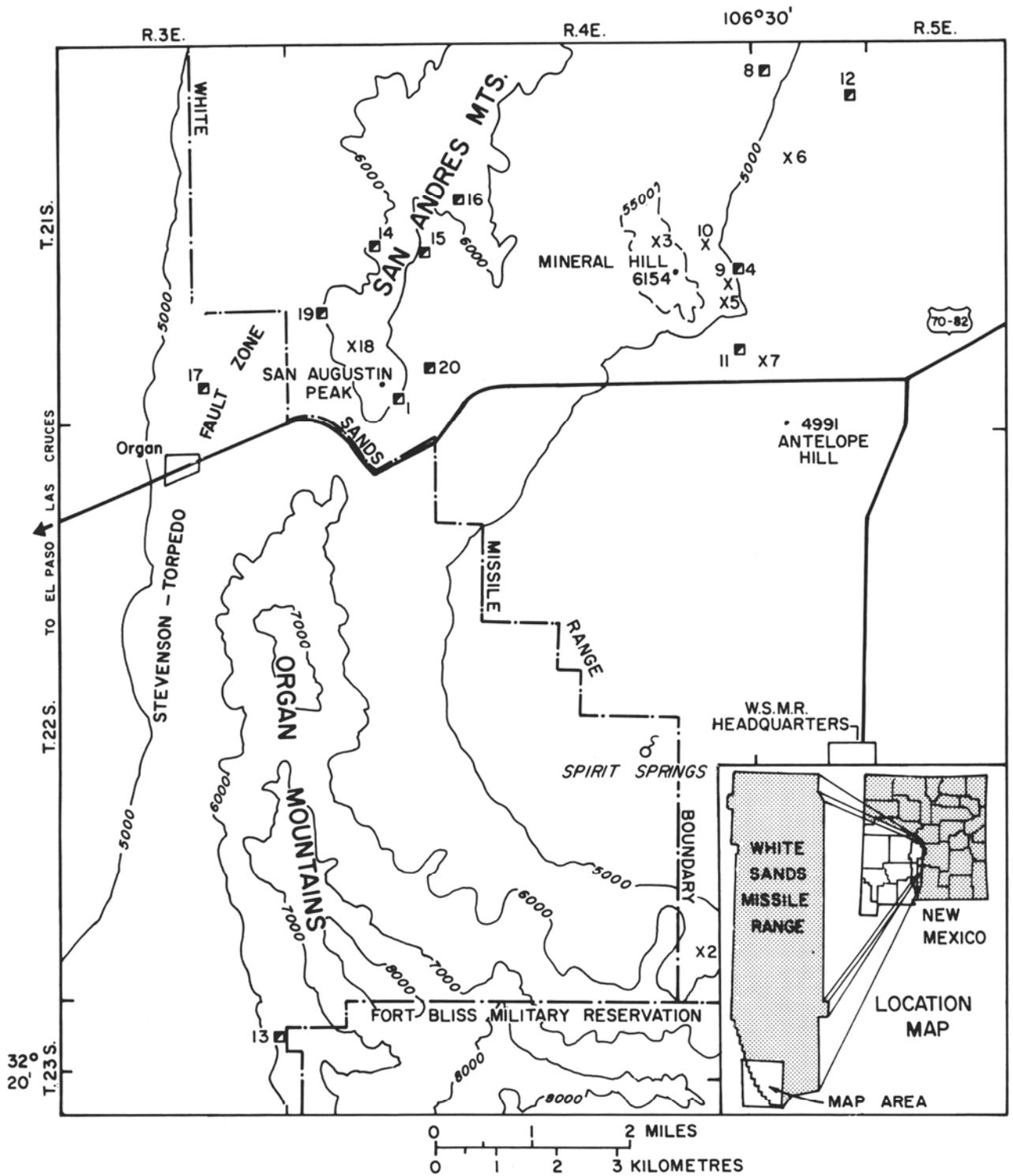
A two-day travel north of Paso del Norte along the Camino Real would have brought the Padre to the vicinity of Las Cruces, about 45 miles north of the pass. To the east the Organ Mountains and San Agustin peak would have made good landmarks. The pass between these is located on the lip of a wide basin, which is now occupied by the headquarters of White Sands Missile Range. In the middle of the basin is Mineral Hill, an erosional remnant rising a thousand feet above a granite pediment (Kelly and Hearne, 1975, in preparation). A cluster of five springs issued from the toe of an alluvial fan on the south flank of the basin near the present site of the Cox ranch. These springs flowed until about 1950.

In 1847, approximately 45 years after Padre La Rue and some of his followers were put to the sword, the Stevenson ore body was discovered about one and a half miles south of the present site of Organ, New Mexico, on the west side of the Organ Mountains. Lower Paleozoic carbonates have been faulted against Precambrian granite that was intruded by Tertiary quartz monzonite. The ore bodies are irregular replacements in the Montoya dolomite and are associated with faults, joints, and contacts between the monzonite porphyry and dolomite (Dunham, 1935, p. 222). An assay of ore from this mine contained 11.45 ounces per ton silver, 15.6 percent lead, and 15.2 percent zinc. The principal hypogene minerals include pyrite, argentiferous galena, and sphalerite in a gangue of quartz, green fluorite, and silicified dolomite. The oxidized ore contains cerussite, wulfenite, and small quantities of anglesite and smithsonite. It was estimated that the Stevenson ore bodies had produced more than a million dollars worth of ore by the time it was shut down in 1933. It produced no gold.

Additional claims were staked along the west flank of the Organ and San Andres Mountains with the greatest production coming from mines located on the Stevenson-Torpedo fault. Most of the abandoned workings still visible near Organ were excavated in this fault zone. The workings of the Torpedo claim are on the south side of Highway 70-82, the Memphis claim is on the north. The primary ore in all of these early mines was argentiferous galena and the supergene enrichment minerals. Some bismuth and copper minerals are present locally. Little or no gold was found in any of these mines.

In about 1880 John Dodd staked a claim on the northwest flank of Mineral Hill where an epidiorite dike cut Precambrian granite. A quartz vein following this dike contained sulphides, primarily chalcopyrite and galena, but an assay reported a trace to 0.16 ounces gold and 6.6 ounces of silver per ton of ore. Dodd's prospect led to other discoveries on Mineral Hill and eventually seven claims were staked (Fig. 1). The workings of the Rock of Ages and Maggie G mines are still visible at the foot of the mountain from Highway 70-82. Three other claims were staked on the pediment northeast of Mineral Hill. One of these was the Mormon mine, the most important of the gold producing mines.

The geology is similar in all of the mines in this area. Precambrian granite has been cut by epidiorite dikes that are



EXPLANATION

■ Mine x Prospect —8000— Contour, interval 1,000 feet

Name and number of mine or prospect:

1-Ben Nevis	6-Green Girl	11-Rock of Ages	16-Black Prince
2-Texas Canyon	7-Maggie G.	12-Sally	17-Homestake
3-Black Hawk	8-Morman	13-Orejon	18-Crested Butte
4-Dona Dora	9-Pagoda	14-Little Buck	19-Davy King
5-Dummy B.	10-Pharmacist	15-Hilltop	20-Quicksilver

Figure 1. Organ mining district showing sites where a trace or more of gold has been produced. Greatest production came from Mineral Hill, probable site of the Lost Padre Mine.

believed to be Precambrian in age. Tertiary mineralization occurred with the intrusion of quartz veins along the dikes. The milky quartz contains pyrite and chalcopyrite; gold appears to be present as inclusions in the pyrite (Dunham, p. 210). Limonite and malachite replaced the sulphides in the oxidized zone, and free gold was found associated with the limonite. Assays of ore samples from the Morman mine gave: gold, 0.84 ounces per ton; silver, 1.08 ounces per ton; and copper, 3.50 percent. Selected specimens from this mine gave 4.55 and 9.39 ounces of gold per ton.

By the time Dunham made his studies of the Organ mining district in the mid-1930's, most of the lead-silver mines were dormant or abandoned. However prospecting continued for gold. A shaft was begun in 1933 at the Sally mine located on the pediment east of the Morman diggings. In 1934 the Pagoda prospect produced a specimen assaying 35 ounces of gold per ton. According to Dunham (p. 190) the total value of mineral production through 1933 was:

c o p p e r	\$ 7 9 9 , 7 5 8
l e a d	\$ 6 9 4 , 1 5 5
s i l v e r	\$ 5 9 5 , 2 2 9
g o l d	\$ 1 2 2 , 8 7 7
z i n c	\$ 2 8 , 4 3 2

All mining operations stopped during World War II, and when White Sands Proving Grounds (Missile Range) was established in July 1945, most of the country east of the Organ-San Andres divide was included. Consequently, these gold mining operations have remained virtually untouched for about 35 years.

Although gold was produced from 20 different mines or prospect pits in the Organ district, most of the production of gold came from the 10 mines on Mineral Hill or the adjacent pediment. Most of the mines in the San Agustin peak area produced little more than a trace of gold, associated with silver or copper production. All but two of the mines were located on the north flank of the reentrant (Fig. 1).

The Spanish explorers did little actual prospecting; instead they appropriated the mines in use by the Indians. The gold and turquoise mines in the Cerrillos district in Santa Fe County predate Spanish exploration and are a good example. In fact, it was the use of Indian labor in some of these old mines that led to the Pueblo revolt of 1680 (File and Northrop, 1966, p. 39). Also, the rich deposits in the Kingston and Chloride districts in Sierra County were located only about a one-day journey west of El Camino Real, yet these were not discovered until the late 1870's. Consequently it is likely that

Padre La Rue was directed to some older diggings that would have been obvious to the Spanish soldiers in the region. Malachite was one of the more common minerals in the oxidized zone of the mines in the area. This mineral was known to be used by the Indians for decorations, and native gold was found in association with malachite near Mineral Hill.

There seems to be little doubt that the Lost Padre mine must have been located somewhere in the Organ-San Andres Mountains, and Mineral Hill fits the description of a lone mountain near the middle of the large basin. This mountain was the most likely area to find exposed mineralization and associated placer deposits on the pediment slopes because it is the site of the richest known gold mineralization.

The lack of evidence of earlier mining operations is not surprising. Not only were Padre La Rue and his followers concerned about the Apaches, they were justifiably concerned about their own countrymen as well. With their crude tools, the miners probably did little more than scratch the oxidized zone and sift the sands in adjacent arroyos since there was insufficient water for conventional placer operations. Permanent dwellings and adobe furnaces would have only made the group more obvious, and reportedly they concealed their operations upon hearing that a search party was in pursuit. Then the death of Padre La Rue was followed by half a century of drifting sand, which would have left little trace of the Spanish diggings.

Quite probably the Lost Padre Mine is no longer lost. One of the later prospectors might have unknowingly rediscovered the lode and named it the Maggie G or the Rock of Ages. Much of the gold that was spent in the saloons of Organ, New Mexico, might possibly have been claimed by the Padre.

As for Doc's buried cache, that's another story.

REFERENCES

- Dunham, K. C., 1935, The geology of the Organ Mountains, with an account of the geology and mineral resources of Dona Ana County, New Mexico: New Mex. Bur. Mines and Min. Res. Bull. 11, 272 p.
- File, Lucien, and Northrop, S. A., 1966, County, township, and range locations of New Mexico's mining districts: New Mex. Bur. Mines and Min. Res. Circ. 84, 66 p.
- Kelly, T. E., and Hearne, G. A., 1975, The affects of ground-water development on the water supply in the Post Headquarters area, White Sands Missile Range: U.S. Geol. Survey (in preparation).
- Kottlowski, F. E., 1966, The Lost Padre Mine: New Mexico Magazine, October 1966, p. 22, 23, 34, 36.
- Willett, R. W., 1951, Extrapolation of sunspot-climate relationships: Jour. Meteorology, v. 8, p. 16.