

LEGACY OF ADOLPH RUTH

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2001

The death of Adolph Ruth in 1931, a Washington D.C. veterinarian and treasure hunter, opened one of the most intriguing chapters of history of the Superstition Wilderness Area. The discovery of Ruth's skull near the three Red Hills on December 10, 1931, by an archaeological expedition sponsored by the *Arizona Republic* created a national news story.

The Ruth story probably would have been insignificant had it occurred during any other decade, but the press at the time found reporting the circumstances of Ruth's death far more appealing to the news-reading public than stories of the "Great American Depression" of the early 1930's.

The sensationalism attached to Ruth's death, the reward offered by the family, and the sudden dreams of the reading public to find a rich gold mine provided the atmosphere known to generate legends.

Ruth, like many treasure hunters of the era, was following his dream. He had acquired a treasure map that dated back to the period of the Mexican Revolution 1909-1923. It was Adolph Ruth's son, Erwin Cleve Ruth, who actually provided this map to his father. The map had been acquired as a generous donation, given to Erwin for saving the life of a Mexican officer.

Adolph Ruth's search for lost gold did not begin with the Lost Dutchman Mine or even the Superstition Mountains of Arizona. Ruth's search began in California in the Anza-Borrego Desert near Warner's Hot Springs and Borrego Mountain. It was here in the desert of southern California that Adolph broke his hip and almost lost his life on December 22, 1919. Ruth spent several hours lying in a desert arroyo before being discovered by a search party organized by his son.

Ironic as it may sound, Ruth's son organized another search party some twelve years later to search for his father in the Superstition Mountains. The results of this search eventually ended in tragedy.

While spending time recuperating in a San Diego hospital in 1919, Adolph Ruth, a Washington D.C. veterinarian and treasure hunter, began to study the other maps he had received from his son. There, within the assortment of old papers and maps from Mexico, Ruth found what later became known as the Peralta-Ruth map. This map guided Adolph Ruth to Arizona in the late Spring of 1931.

Adolph Ruth now planned to search for the Peralta Mines or the Lost Dutchman. He arrived in Arizona in mid May of 1931 and finally convinced a couple of cowboy-prospectors working at the Barkley Ranch (Quarter Circle U Ranch), against the best judgement of the ranch's owner, to pack him into the mountains. Leroy Purnell and Jack Keenan packed Ruth into a place called Willow Springs in West Boulder Canyon around June 14, 1931. Shortly afterwards Ruth disappeared.

Tex Barkley, owner of the Quarter Circle U Ranch, rode into Ruth's camp on June 20, 1931, and, after examining the site, concluded Ruth had not occupied the camp for at least twenty-four hours. Barkley immediately alerted the authorities to Ruth's disappearance. The search for Adolph Ruth continued for forty-five days. Jeff Adams and Barkley tracked Ruth from Willow Springs to a point on the east slope of Black Top Mesa.

Ruth's skull was found on December 10, 1931, and was soon verified as his remains. Deputy Sheriff Jeff Adams and William A. Barkley found the remainder of Ruth's skeletal remains in January of 1932 in a small tributary on the east slope of Black Top Mesa. The so-called Ruth-Peralta map was found in Ruth's Camp and was later published in the *Arizona Republic*.

Despite all the claims, Ruth was not murdered for his map. Both the Maricopa and Pinal County Sheriff's Offices concluded Ruth died of natural causes, probably due to dehydration and starvation. The theory that he was decapitated has long since been accredited to predatory animals such as coyotes. The fact that there is still an unsigned and unverified copy of Dr. Alex Hrlicka report about Ruth's skull continues to confuse the issue. This report indicates Ruth died of a gunshot wound to the head, however, the report has never been accepted by Arizona authorities.

Ruth left a legacy in Arizona by tragically dying in the Superstition Mountains in summer of 1931 while searching for a lost mine.

This legacy remains a part Arizona's history.



Skull Flats, north of Bluff Springs Mtn., south of the Red Hills. Circle indicates where the skull of Adolph Ruth was found. Photo E. D. Newcomer, Az Rep



Smithsonian Institute



Blacktop Mesa



photo E. D. Newcomer, Az Rep.