

# The Lost Badger Mine

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By TOM BAILEY

SEARCHING for lost mines is not what it's cracked up to be; to put it bluntly, there are better ways of making a living. However, there's a thrill to it that compensates somewhat for the loss of weight and the lean, hungry days. In writing about lost mines it was necessary for me to do some searching myself, but that was many years after I searched for the Lost Badger in southern Oregon as a teen-ager.

Most of my searches for lost mines in recent years have been conducted from the air, and only twice have I made the long trip on foot to the region in which a lost mine was supposed to be located. In addition to these, I participated in four other expeditions on horseback.

And I didn't find a cent!

The Lost Badger wasn't really a mine because it was never worked. But the strike was made—and just as certainly as it was made it was lost. Happened this way:

IN 1878 Karl Meyer, a German immigrant to this country who had taken up prospecting in southern Oregon, camped on Miller Creek in the southwestern corner of the state in Josephine County, at a place later called Missouri Flat. My father, seventeen years later, built a house on the same spot and I grew up there. When I was about nine years old, I teamed up with my father in a search for the Lost Badger. These expeditions continued off and on until I was eighteen. But to get back to Meyer.

One night Meyer's pack mule, Maud, wandered off and struck out—so Karl said—for a huckleberry patch five miles distant. (The critter was fond of huckleberries and it was the time of year when they were getting ripe.)

Meyer followed the mule's tracks up Miller Creek for a distance he later estimated to be four and a half miles, but I am sure that if he did go that far he would have passed over the divide. Undoubtedly he was mistaken and the distance he actually walked was no more than three miles. However, he found where the mule had left the creek, striking out for the huckleberry patch which was another three miles from Miller Creek, across half a dozen small tributaries. In this particular region the country is vast and wild and monotonously similar in appearance. I hunted and trapped this area as a kid and know how difficult it is to tell one creek from another.

As Meyer trudged through the brushy hills in the direction of the huckleberry patch which he and the mule had discovered earlier that month, it began to rain. An Oregon rain is a real downpour, and Meyer sought shelter. He wasn't sure that he was headed true for the huckleberry patch, for the rain had washed out the mule's tracks and he was entirely on his own. Meyer was notoriously inaccurate when it came to directions. The Western mountains, so different from his native Germany, were confusing.

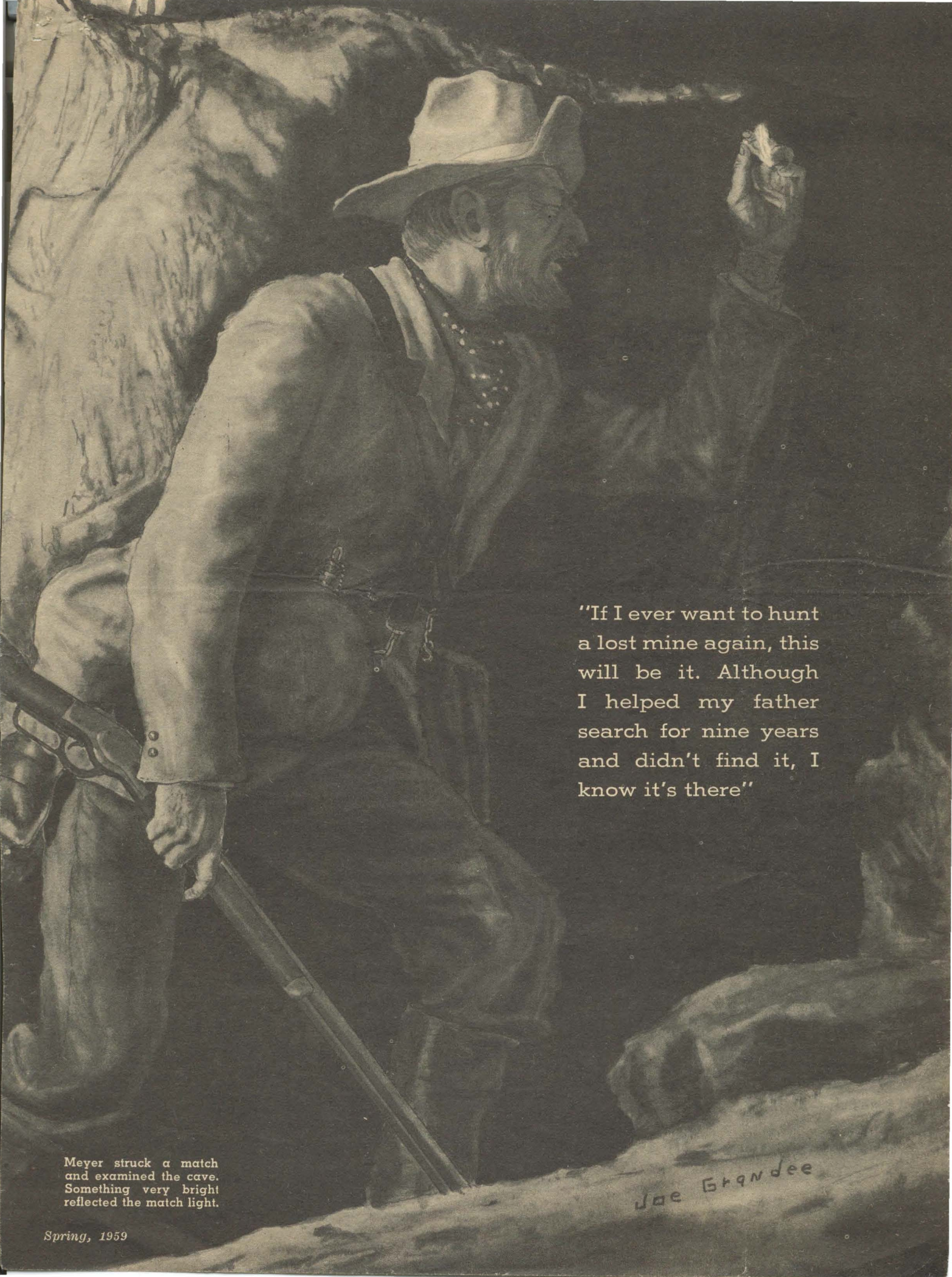
In a narrow ravine Meyer came upon a small cave under a rock overhang. It offered temporary shelter, and he sat down at the mouth of the cave to wait out the storm.

As he sat there, a badger lumbered in, apparently to escape the wetness outside. The animal passed so near him he kicked at it. Startled, the badger turned and snarled at him, but quickly disappeared within the cave's recesses.

Curious as to how it had managed to vanish so quickly, Meyer struck a match

Illustrated by Joe Grandee





"If I ever want to hunt a lost mine again, this will be it. Although I helped my father search for nine years and didn't find it, I know it's there"

Meyer struck a match and examined the cave. Something very bright reflected the match light.

Joe Grandee