Famed Quarry At Bee Rock Worked Again

6-16-40

Special to the Gazette.

Judsonia, June 15.—A pay roll of $250 to $300 daily has been added by the resumption of rock quarrying on a large scale at Bee Rock, near here, which a few decades ago was the scene of one of White county's leading industries.

The rock is being used by the Arkansas Highway Department, first for use on the Seadcy-Pangburn road. Later it will be used on the Kennett-Searcy and Searcy-Rosebud roads. The rock is converted into gravel at the huge crushing and screening plant at Bee Rock, which turns out 45 yards an hour.

More than two decades ago the rock was hauled by barge, for the present operations the Highway Department built a gravel road one and a half miles in length to the site, and about 15 trucks, mostly privately owned, are used in hauling the product.

Arkansas Stone To Go Into Pillar,

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Several samples of Arkansas ore and stone will be sent to Sioux Falls, S. D., Chamber of Commerce to be incorporated in two large decorative pillars to be constructed of stone from every state in the union, officials of the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce announced yesterday. The rocks will be sent at the request of Paul K. Myers, secretary of the Sioux Falls chamber.

A portion of stone which forms the south abutment of the Rock street railroad bridge will be among the samples to be sent. Officials said the rock was called "la petite roche" by Bernard de la Harpe, an Eighteenth century explorer, and probably was the origin of the name of the city. Markers will be placed on the pillars to designate from which states the rocks were sent.

Treasure Below Ground

Enormous Supply of Vividly Marked Building Stone Is Discovered and Quarried by Hand By Van Buren County Family.

By Anna S. Faris

Photographs by Paul Faris.

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This is a story of buried treasure, of riches lying three feet below the surface of a certain Arkansas ridge two miles north of Clinton on United States Highway 65. They are owned by M. V. Shofner, who runs a fliling station and general store across the road.

On Mr. Shofner's land is layer after layer of multi-colored stone. Some of it is yellow with white veinings. "Butter'n eggs, we call it," says Mr. Shofner. Some of it is the reddish-rust of surrounding black gum trees. In some is what fashion designers currently call Indian Earth—it looks like manganese iron ore. There is other patterned in black, and snowy white stippled in black and purple. To see the rocks stacked neatly in piles or lying in unpremediated disarray awaiting stacking is to see an indigenous part of Arkansas. Riotous autumn colors of the trees and bushes of many years ago have repeated themselves in stone.

The discovery of this buried treasure came unexpectedly.

"I'd been living in Clinton, running a filling station on the edge of town for eight years," explained Mr. Shofner (who incidentally comes from a long line of German ancestors, being the sixth generation of Shofners in this country). "My wife and I decided to move out here and take a rest. When Highway 65 was being graveled, the road men had to do some grading along the ridge that runs in front of my place, so some of this pretty stone was uncovered. Folks driving along the road would see the colored rocks and stop to pick them up. The Highway Department couldn't get much done when the road was always being torn up like that. Road men finally had to put up a sign making it a $25 fine to take the rock in the road away."

Mr. Shofner glanced at the younger of his two sons, Milburn Vain, then continued. "About the time they decided to build a new courthouse in Clinton, people began to remember the road-tearing-up incident and came out here to ask me if there was any of that colored rock on my land. I told them I like that. Road men finally had to put didn't know, and didn't bother to dig right then. When I did get around to it three years ago, I found all sorts of rock. Got enough to last us 1,000 years, I guess."

"See that cow over there?" asked his son, Milburn Vain. The cow was about 150 yards away. "Well, sir, we found that the rock runs all along that ridge, where she is standing." The ridge continued more than 200 yards before the road turned.

In some of the rocks dug out from under the ridge are periwinkle shells, details of the small fans showing plainly in grooves where these univalve marine shells have left their shapes imbedded. How sea shells came to be buried in rock strata underneath an Arkansas hillside, Mr. Shofner doesn't know. Maybe once when that land was part of the Gulf of Mexico, those periwinkles lived.

Grains of petrified wood show in some of the rocks. One, dug from about three feet underground, has depressions one-half inch thick and looks like solid iron. It resembles the famous "carpet rocks" of Petit Jean mountain, which is about 30 miles away.

Since discovering the stone three years ago, Mr. Shofner and Milburn Vain have been quarrying by hand.

Milburn Vain Shofner is shown above, crossing a timber coming out of the quarry. Note the unusual markings on the piece of stone he carries. At the left M. V. Shofner looks on while his son separates a stone from its bed with wedge and hammer.

In the picture at the right Milburn Vain Shofner is standing by another type of stone also found in the quarry. Stacks of stone are shown in the picture below.

They've done all the work themselves, except once, they explained, they hired 40 yards cut for them. In the summer when the sun is too hot, they put up an old tent top for protection.

The Shofners do not own a truck. When the rock is cut they carry it over a heavy plank (pictured), which serves as a bridge and stack it on the right-hand side of the cut. Anyone who wants the rock must come after it, or make arrangements for its haulnig.

In demonstrating their cutting methods the Shofners also demonstrated that they are not afraid of work. Since the rock, running as it does in seams, is tightly sealed, they place iron wedges in the seams and hammer until the layers pull apart. When the layer is loosened they take a heavy iron shaft and pound on top of the loosened portion until it breaks in manageable pieces. The thickness from one side of the rock layer to another is uniform, but the layers vary from one-half inch to four or five inches. The energy required to pound in wedges, manipulate the shaft and lift out the rock is tremendous.

The quarry seems to offer limitless possibilities, since very little rock, comparatively speaking, has been cut. The main hole is on a sloping hillside and is about five feet below the surface of the ground.

"About everybody in the country has seen this place," said Mr. Shofner. "Folks stop along the highway, just to come in and look. Most everybody wants odd shapes, though. That's why we have so few square corners. Some folks likes the black ones and some the red and yellow. We started another hole about a quarter of a mile over the ridge behind those cedars there." He pointed to a clump of trees about 400 yards away. "Same kind of stone there, only a lot more of it is pure white."

"There've been several houses built out of this stone," volunteered Milburn Vain. "First one in the country belonged to Mrs. Sadie Privitt, the postmistress down at Damascus. School children come from all around to look at it."

As they talked, "Pa" and his partner Milburn Vain leaned against a pile of their unearthed treasure of multi-colored stone. They had moved out there for a rest—but they found enough work "to last them 1,000 years."

Arkansas 'Garden of Allah'

Erosion Remnants in Cleburne County Provide Unusual and Little Known Geological Formations That Rival Celebrated Western Wonders.

By Tom Shiras.

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Standing on top of the sandstone bluff on the Jordan farm, on Brock mountain, in Cleburne county, 20 miles southwest of Batesville, one glimpses the most interesting example of erosion in northern Arkansas. The Garden of Allah, some call it, comparing it with the Garden of the Gods in Colorado, and many who have seen both natural wonders say that it is not misnamed.

This bluff is from 75 to 125 feet high, running in a slight curve about one mile long. Erosion has played fantastic pranks with its upper edge. Crevices from a foot and a half to five feet wide run from the top to the bottom. Some are hardly a jump across, but to get around the wider ones is like working out a Chinese puzzle.

Gazing only at the top of the bluff and leaving out of the picture its green surroundings, there comes to mind a cinematograph of the great Sahara desert. A large herd of camels and dromedaries, moving away toward the horizon. You see nothing but the humps—single humps and double humps—and at intervals among these humps rise minarets, that remind one of the small sentry towers on French desert forts.

Leaping across narrow fissures, working your way around wider ones, sliding down sharp declines, and winding around minarets, you finally reach the edge of the bluff, breathing hard, and there stand in awe.

A dozen or more giants, some 75 feet high, seem to be stalking through the small, second-growth timber, in the little bottom at the foot of the bluff. Chimney rocks, or hoodoos, is the geological name for these peculiar formations. They are about 12 feet in diameter and are nearly round, the few feet at the top being larger than the mass below.

Your eyes fasten on one of these strange geological formations and you can't believe what you see. A perfect boot, the leg of which is about 50 feet high, with a perfect foot about half as long as the leg. This foot, curved a little on the left side, makes it a perfect left boot. It stands out there in the small, second-growth timber, all by iself. A careless hoodoo, like some indifferent husband, who has come in late and left his boots lying in the center of the bedroom for his wife to pick up in the morning. The foot of an ordinary No. 10 boot is approximately 12 inches long. Using this as a base, this hoodoo boot is about size 250. Probably the largest boot made from any material in the world, and cobbled by Nature.

Gazing at these spectacular geological formations from the top of the bluff, you have a hankering to examine them more closely, and you wangle your way back across the bluff and through the woods to your car. Driving down the rough woods road for a half mile you make a sharp turn to your right, at the end of the bluff and swing along a narrow road at its foot, driving up to the hoodoos.

The remarkable "boot rock" formation, an erosion remnant worn from stone bluff of past ages.

The problem that baffles most visitors to this Arkansas Garden of Allah, is how these hoodoos, or chimney rocks, detached themselves from the main stem of the bluff and isolated themselves in the little bottom. Some of them are 100 feet or more away from the face of the cliff.

John Melvin, geologist with the United States Engineers, who is now working on dam projects in the upper White river valley, gave the writer a very comprehensive idea of how nature carved them out.

The deep crevices that run from the top to the bottom of the bluff seem to be the key. When the geological disturbance that caused what is known as the Ozark Uplift occurred, this bluff was cracked in places from top to bottom. Many of these cracks were crisscross, making a square, with the cracks on the four sides of a solid. How large these solids were in the first place is rather hard to determine.

Wind, rain, freezes, thaws and other forces of erosion then started to work in the cracks and after centuries and centuries finally cut the solid square loose and isolated them from the main bluff. Rains from the north, rains from the south, rains from the east and west, freezes and thaws, wind from all directions, eroded the square corners, carving the hoodoos into crude circular shapes, like large, round chimneys.

But this explanation does not completely solve the problem. "Why were the hoodoos not entirely eliminated by the forces of erosion?" Examining the circular top of a hoodoo you notice that it is larger in circumference than the rest of the column, and the answer is easy. The hoodoo is wearing an erosion-proof hat. This top part is much harder, and erosion works on it more slowly than on the rest. In the boot rock, this is true of both top and bottom, and the bottom part, strange to say, happened to be in the exact shape of a human foot. This answer can be applied to hoodoos and balanced rocks all over the world.

This bluff is located at the head of Grassy creek, a small, clear water mountain stream, that runs into Salado creek, about six miles from the head; the latter stream empties into White river, near Rosie, Independence county.

From the head to the foot of Grassy creek one meets with unusual examples of erosion. About one mile from the Garden of Allah on the Jordan farm, the creek leaps off the tableland over a waterfall into a canyon some five miles long and continues down this canyon to its mouth. For five miles the canyon walls that confine the stream are sheer from top to bottom, and after one enters the canyon at he head, unless he is a cliff climber, he can't get out until he reaches the mouth. This creek is a series of small rapids and pools from the head to the mouth, and some of these pools contain prize small-mouth black bass. Immense boulders, some as large as small houses, line the banks of the creek at the foot of the canyon walls.

Several very interesting caves have been formed in the bluff below the hoodoos on the Jordan farm. One of these larger caves has been used as a goat shelter for years and is well adapted to the purpose.

Another smaller cave might be called the throne room. A harder part of the rock formation in the interior of the cave which has not been eroded rises high from the entrance and is shaped more or less like a throne.

Arrowheads and other Indian relics that have been found in and around these caves indicate that at one time they might have been used as homes by bluff dwellers, or rock shelter people, the earliest known inhabitants of the Arkansas Ozarks.

While the Garden of Allah rivals the Garden of the Gods in Colorado in its examples of erosion, few people in the state know of its existence. Rural folks who live in the vicinity have used it as a picnic ground for many years, and dozens of names have been carved on the rock formation, most of them on the boot rock. Batesville citizens, too, drive out there occasionally for an afternoon of exploration and a picnic dinner, but tourists haven't located it yet.

It is about halfway between Batesville and Heber Springs, and it can be reached from either place over state Highway 25. On top of Brock mountain you turn east on a country road, and follow it for about two miles down past the Jordan home, to the bluff and the hoodoos. From either Batesville or Heber Springs, it is one of the prettiest scenic drives in the Arkansas Ozarks.

A rock in minaret formation in the Garden of Allah, Cleburne county.

A lone hoodoo in the Garden of Allah area.

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Arkansas Has Soapstone.

After the Allies took Sardinia one of the first exports from that island was soapstone, or steatite, for use in insulating electrical equipment. Deposits of this mineral in Alabama, Virginia and North Carolina had been developed to meet immediate needs in America when Italy attacked France, but it seems that Arkansas has not furnished soapstone for this market.

Saline county, Arkansas, is said to have the largest deposit of soapstone west of the Mississippi river, and this non-metallic mineral occurs elsewhere in the state. The Saline county deposit, which is composed of massive beds beneath sandstone, is said to be easily mined. The mineral is very soft and greasy and it may be white, gray or apple-green. Arkansas soapstone has been used in lining furnaces, but it is considered suitable for other purposes.

Soapstone serves as a base for some cosmetics, as a filler for paper and an ingredient of soaps, and because of its resistance to heat and acids it is important to a number of other industries. It is but one of the minerals of Arkansas that have not been developed commercially in this state. Arkansas has approximately 50 minerals of economic importance, yet the majority of them are not being exploited. Petroleum, gas, bauxite, coal, manganese, barite, lignite, titanium, cinnabar, gypsum and a few others are being utilized, but soapstone and other minerals and rocks wait while Arkansas looks for new sources of industrial wealth.