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IN

TIN CUP, COLORADO

---Hiking---

---Hunting---

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---Restaurant---

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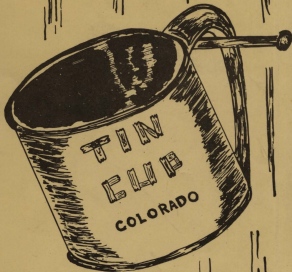
HIGH IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

OF GUNNISON NATIONAL FOREST

IN COLORFUL COLORADO

FOR INFORMATION WRITE:

TIN CUP LODGE & STORE
THE MOTHER LODE CAFE
NEWTON & SUE COLE, OWNERS
TIN CUP, COLORADO 81210



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TIN CUP

TIN CUP enjoyed the dubious distinction of being one of Colorado's three roughest towns. They once killed off seven town marshals in the short space of a few months. The Tin Cup mining district was thirty-six miles in length and twelve to fifteen miles in width. It was situated in the northeast corner of Gunnison County. In the past it had been essentially a silver mining camp, although considerable gold was found in all the ores. Near the end of the century some attention was given to prospecting for gold leads with marked success.

The town of Tin Cup lies at the south end of Taylor Park and is fourteen miles northwest of St. Elmo. By far the most colorful version of the story of Tin Cup's beginning fails to tally chronologically with the known facts and the account is reported here as legend. It has Tin Cup's story dating way back to the 1849 gold rush to California when a company of men from Georgia hired some civilized Cherokees to guide them through the Rocky Mountains. Near Tin Cup the Indians allegedly showed the white men enough gold to interest them but not to prevent their going on through to California, where they were unsuccessful in making a strike. Two years later, they camped on Willow Creek while on the way back home. Early the next morning, Charlie Gray stopped by the stream to get a drink, saw some likely-looking gravel, and rolled some of it into his tin cup and shook it. He was rewarded by getting a gold color. Excitedly he called to his companions,

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who then began working with their own cups and soon had some excellent gold-dust samples to show. Tin Cup got its present name from these circumstances, though some say it was Fred Lotts, Ben and Charlie Gray who were engaged in placer mining on West Willow Creek.

The other version of the story has it that they were hunting game when they discovered strong indications of gold in a dry wash and took some of the dirt to their camp in a tin cup such as prospectors attach to their belts. The sample proved to be quite rich and gave the name to Tin Cup Gulch, Tin Cup district, and Tin Cup camp, founded later on March 2, 1879. In their excitement over the gold, they failed to see that the buffalo had suddenly left the park. When they did notice, it developed that a winter storm was coming. The party started as fast as it could go toward Granite but found it tough climbing the hill. The blizzard caught them almost at the crest. They lost several horses and barely reached the town with their lives. Once in camp, they began making plans for a return trip but, unknown to themselves, they were being kept under strict surveillance by other men living at the camp. Every move they made was carefully noted. Gray and Taylor wanted to find another route by which they could get into the park without being followed by the mob. Four local men agreed to watch their every move. Jim Taylor caused considerable consternation when he attempted to buy horses to replace those that had been lost. Early in February, Ben and Charlie Gray moved down below town and pretended to be prospecting but knew they were being watched. They purchased several horses from men who were willing to sell at a price and moved on to Cache Creek. When packed and ready, they went back to Granite and paid excessive prices for additional horses plus a set of whipsaws to cut the lumber for their sluice boxes. They returned to camp late that night and packed all their possessions and started. They headed down the Arkansas for what

was then known as Brown's Camp. Nearby, they had been told, was a low pass to the south. After crossing and re-crossing the river in an effort to throw off any followers from their trail, they finally reached Brown's Camp in the present vicinity of Salida. Next they headed up Poncha Pass with a general idea of getting into the San Luis Valley. From the pass they went up Saguache Creek to Cochetopa Pass, where they found good feed and no snow. They wisely avoided the government agency at Los Pinos. On the western side of the pass they found many drifts of solid snow and pushed on down to Tomichl. (Again the story seems unlikely since Tomichi was not founded until some time later.) Here they began to study the mountains in an effort to locate some landmark they might have seen from the park. They started up Quartz Creek and followed it as far as the forks, where it began to snow. After two days they discovered the snow crust and from this point they could recognize the landmarks of Taylor Park. The next morning, with packs on their backs, they walked over the pass and into Tin Cup Gulch. Timber was cut and fires were built to melt the snow. When they first reached the gulch, they found six feet of snow there. By the middle of April their cabins were built and they began to whipsaw lumber for sluice boxes, but it was the fifteenth of May before the water began to flow. The camp was on the lower side of Gold Hill where the water pitches over and begins to run down Willow Creek.

When the Taylor party left Granite, its absence was not noticed for two days. The four men who had determined to watch them immediately packed up and followed their trail to Chalk Creek where they were uncertain until they met a trapper who had been curious about Taylor's party and knew they had gone to the San Luis Valley. They pushed on and overtook Taylor on the Parlin Flats and had to hide until he pushed on. The Granite men followed the party up Quartz Creek and then up Gold Creek to

the place where the first party had laid down blankets to get the horses across the ice. At Dutch Flats they made camp to wait and watch. They were caught in the same storm that had hit the first group and suffered severely. The following day they broke the snow crust into Union Park and, having gold pans with them, began prospecting and were rewarded with good color in the first pan. They took this back with them over the hills. The next year the town had its boom with several hundred miners, gamblers, and hangers-on gathering there. It became one of the richest gold camps in western Colorado. For a time it was called Virginia City, after a similarly named camp in Nevada. It was incorporated August 12, 1880, as Virginia City; but townsmen didn't like the name and on July 24, 1882, they changed the name back to Tin Cup. Out of one hundred votes polled, only three were cast against the change.

A man named Hillerton proposed to build a town and a smelter a mile north of the present site of Tin Cup. Later, sawmills were set up as they hoped to get some logs and keep sawing part of the winter.

When word of the discovery hit Gunnison, thirty-five miles to the southwest, the rush was on. By 1879, several hundred people were here and had hacked out cabins. There were plenty of saloons. The main street was called Grand Avenue. Washington Street crosses Grand and leads up to Mirror Lake. Most of the saloons were on this latter road. Peak population was about six hundred, all engaged in mining either directly or indirectly. There were twelve stores and shops of all kinds. Tin Cup had several hotels, chief among which were the Pacific and the Eagle. There were many saloons and billiard parlors as well. The most outstanding was Peroult and Company, better known as Frenchy's. After the summer of 1879, Tin Cup was rated as the largest town in Gunnison County, next to Gunnison itself.

The years 1880-81 marked the continuation of the boom.

One of the leading merchants, C. A. Freeman, carried a full line of groceries and kept a large burro train ready to deliver supplies on short notice. Delivery charge was 10 cents if it could be made in one day. One of his burros was the favorite of all the children in town because it could be ridden double or triple. After they were mounted, the burro would go from one tin can pile to another about the town regardless of the wishes of his youthful riders. He was called Old Croppy because at some time in the past his ears had frozen and they drooped mournfully from one side of his head.

There were three physicians in the town. One of them was Dr. McGowan, who always wore a full beard which resulted in his death while he was smoking in bed.

It was customary for the mines to close between Christmas and New Year's for the annual Christmas dance which was the main social event of the year. The men appeared in stiff shirts and tails. There was always a shortage of women partners since single women were not numerous.

With six feet of snow on the ground, the children always went to school on their skis, which stood outside the school in pairs. It was easy to count the school attendance in that way.

By the spring of 1882, the Denver and South Park hoped to reach Tin Cup with railroad service, but it failed to achieve its objective and St. Elmo was the nearest railroad point. No railroad ever served Tin Cup. In the summer-time you rode the stagecoach and in the winter you skied. A railroad tunnel was started at one time under Tin Cup Pass but was not completed. Its remains are still visible above timberline, near the top of the pass on the St. Elmo side.

In the old days, Tin Cup was entered mainly from St. Elmo, over the old Tin Cup Pass, and frequently by way of Pitkin, Cottonwood, and Aspen. It was a rough trip from Tin Cup over the divide to St. Elmo in the early days. In the few warm months of the winter when snow was

only four feet deep in Tin Cup and twenty feet deep on the pass, the way to get to St. Elmo was on skis. Each man was equipped with two large sacks strapped to his back as he climbed slowly over the seven miles, followed by the swift descent for the same distance on the other side. The trip was worthwhile in the winter because you could sell flour for \$15 per one hundred pounds and eggs at \$1 a dozen.

On the afternoon of August 15, 1906, the town of Tin Cup was razed by fire, typical enemy of every early mining camp. The town made an effort to rebuild itself but was never quite the same again. The fishermen who now tread the dirt streets of Tin Cup in their mishapen boots are not the lusty kind who killed the nights in Frenchy's in the days when men fought for what they got.

Tin Cup is located at the south end of Taylor Park, pleasantly situated at the foot of the continental range in one of the prettiest spots in the Rocky Mountains. Some of the loftiest peaks of the Saguache Range stand guard over the little hamlet. Four possible roads will take you there. Take State Highway 135 north from Gunnison. At Almont, turn right and follow the Gunnison River around past the Taylor Park Reservoir, where the road turns south to Tin Cup. A second road may be followed north from Parlin, through Ohio City and Pitkin, over 12,015-foot-high Cumberland Pass to Tin Cup, just barely beyond the foot of the pass. A third, and much shorter, but far more thrilling ride is the Jeep road across the ridge from St. Elmo. Up until just a few years ago, this was a real hair-raiser. Today it has been bladed out from St. Elmo to the top and is passable for any vehicle. However, from the top down into Tin Cup it is still a Jeep road, quite steep in places, paved with sizeable rock outcroppings in others, while a few streams and swampy places make the trail just difficult enough to be interesting.

Tin Cup Pass crosses the Continental Divide at an altitude slightly greater than twelve thousand feet and has

been closed to normal highway traffic for more than a decade. Today, during July and August, Tin Cup has a local population of around two hundred persons, mostly tourists, fishermen, and a few semipermanent residents.*

* In this same area see also Hancock, Quartz, Romley, St. Elmo, and Woodstock.

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*Tin Cup, the town with the picturesque name, at the foot of
Tin Cup Pass in Taylor Park.*

