Water in the Hole

By Pete Clark

It was the summer of 1947 and the war had been over for two years. Gasoline was again available to anyone, in any quantity desired. This was manna from heaven for the traveling man, although this man did not intend to travel that far. He had heard about something he wanted to see for himself and he thought his two sons, ages six and nine, would find the experience interesting and exciting, so he loaded them into the back seat of his thirty-seven Ford Sedan and headed out of town. At the next town, he put some gasoline into the Ford's tank and turned left onto the highway out of town and traveled a ways before turning on to a graveled county road. After driving a couple of miles on the county road, he pulled the Ford off to the side of the road and cut the engine. The three of them exited the automobile, the father leading the boys through sagebrush, around ant hills and away from the ubiquitous mule-ear cactus. They were soon at their destination, the rim of a large, roughly square hole in the ground.

The father told his sons to collect some rocks and move near to the hole, but not too close. When they were in position, he told the boys to throw their stones into the hole. The boys tossed their loads into the gaping mouth of the opening into the ground and very quickly heard noises that sounded like water splashing, as the stones hit the bottoms of their trajectories.

The boys wanted to know what the noise was and stepped toward the hole's nearest lip. The father commanded them to stay away from the edge and told them there was water in the shaft and that it used to be a mine. The boys wanted to know where the water came from, so he began the unfortunate story of the Michigan Mine.

The area was known to have an abundance of iron and copper and a company had filed for rights to mine the copper. When the mining company got the green light, they drove a shaft down to the level of the copper deposit and began tunneling into the mother lode. The mine was well timbered and as safe as a country stroll. The ore was high quality and well worth the expense of getting it to the surface. Alfred Nobel's Dynamite had made hard rock mining much easier.

Having the powder crew drill in the proper places and placing the correct quantity of explosive in each hole, with timed fuses, created parades of crushed, cascading rocky debris.

The end of the Michigan Mine came after the last holes were drilled, the last explosive charges were loaded into the holes and the last timed fuses were set. When the charges were touched off, the debris did not cascade down: it flew into the tunnel, pushed by water. They had blasted into a subterranean river. There were no survivors.