

## **From mineral strike to meteor strike.**

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Some 80 to 90 people come to hear *The Amazing Story of Guffey*<sup>1</sup>  
By *Flip Boettcher* Correspondent

Last week the Guffey Exploration Team, part of the Lake George Gem and Mineral Club, came to Guffey to present the <sup>3</sup>Amazing Story of Guffey<sup>2</sup>.

The multipurpose room at the Guffey Community Charter School was packed with 80 to 90 people eager to hear the story that followed a potluck dinner.

It all started when local resident Nancy Klima, member of the Friends of the Guffey Library, asked local resident Jo Beckwith, with the Rocky Mountain Nature Association and associated with the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, if she could present a program on the geology of the Guffey area, or knew someone who could. Beckwith asked Steven Wade Veatch if he would present such a program.

Veatch is president of the Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds and a member of the Lake George Gem and Mineral Club. He got his master's of science degree in earth science from Emporia State College in Kansas and is an adjunct professor there. He teaches seminars and programs and takes driving trips to explore the history, archeology and geology of this area.

Veatch put together the Guffey Exploration Team, composed of eight people, including local residents Jo Beckwith and Chris Peterson, who all helped research and contributed to the presentation.

The program was narrated by Veatch, who also had a PowerPoint picture presentation and a display of mineral specimens.

<sup>3</sup>Guffey is about as Colorado as it gets,<sup>2</sup> said Veatch at the beginning.

The program has become a published paper to be presented to the New Mexico School of Mines later this year. At the base of volcanoes The town of Guffey and The Freshwater Mining District sit in a bowl at the base of three old volcanoes that have been deeply eroded. <sup>3</sup>The Guffey volcanic center is part of the Thirtynine Mile Volcanic area, the largest remnant of the Central Colorado Volcanic Field. The Guffey volcanic center is the largest volcanic center within the Thirtynine Mile Volcanic area,<sup>2</sup> according to the <sup>3</sup>Mineral Strike to Meteor Strike<sup>2</sup> scientific paper by Veatch.

The volcanoes erupted about 34 million years ago and spewed out three large mud flows over millions of years, damming the river below Evergreen Station ( Teller County Road #1 ) and creating Lake Florissant. The mudflows, which can travel up to 50 mph, and the ash falls from the volcanoes, petrified the old redwood trees in the area and created the fossils in Lake Florissant.

There have been people in the area for a long time. The earliest recorded evidence and artifacts date back to 5000 B.C. Spear and arrow points found are indicative of the period from 5000 BC to 1500 AD. Also from that period are culturally modified trees. The Indians harvested the sweet-smelling bark of the pine trees on their way to summer camping grounds in the Hartsel area.

The area was explored in 1844 by John C. Fremont and a few pioneers, and settlers started arriving in the late 1870s.

The gold rush era from 1895 to 1902 was short-lived. Prospectors came to the area in hopes of finding gold because of the area's similar geology to that found in Cripple Creek. Not much gold was ever found, but many other minerals, such as copper, lead, mica and feldspar, were found.

The town was first called Idaville, then Freshwater, and finally Guffey. (It seems <sup>3</sup>Idaville<sup>2</sup> was a bit too refined for a mining camp and <sup>3</sup>Freshwater<sup>2</sup> did not promote the saloon business) By the time Guffey was incorporated in 1895 and platted in 1896, it was a fairly large mining, ranching and lumbering town. There were 500 residents, 40 businesses, a post office, and three newspapers, and the Freshwater Mining District was established.

Cattle rustlers and outlaws were active in the nearby Black Mountain and Thirtynine Mile Mountain areas. Guffey was famous for its dances at the town hall and rodeos held in the area south of the school.

The Freshwater Mining District was in the general Guffey area and not a big producer. Other mining areas were the Gold Hill mines north of town, the Moonlight Gulch District west of town, and the Micanite Pegmatite District southeast of town.

The first recorded burial in the Guffey cemetery was Buford Swope who lived from April 1896 to August 1897. The tombstone reads <sup>3</sup>Like the dove to the ark, Thou hast flown to thy rest, from the world sea of strife, to the home of the blest<sup>2</sup>. The last recorded burial is that of Andrew W. Jack, 1881 - 1941.

South of Guffey are two mineral springs Iron Spring and Yellow Soda Spring. Yellow Soda Spring used to have an eight-foot-tall geyser of water from the top until some cowboys blocked the flow with some rocks. The soda spring has formed a large mound 20 feet high and over 50 feet in diameter with water bubbling out of the top. (In the 1920s and 1930s residents used to make lemonade from the water, and deer drink from it.) The water from the top of the Yellow Soda Spring was analyzed and found to have a temperature of 63 degrees Fahrenheit, a pH of 7.1 (rainwater has a pH of 7 and the 0.1 difference makes the water more basic), and a salinity of 4,000 Parts Per Million. Radiation readings in the area were highest over the pool of bubbling water at the top of the mound and thought to be radon gas.

In November 1907, two cowboys running cattle in the hills around Guffey found what they thought was a large silver nugget. What they found turned out to be a 682-pound iron meteorite.

The Guffey Meteor is classified as an ungrouped iron, meaning it does not fit well into any defined category. It represents a rare type of meteorite with high nickel content and would be worth several hundred thousand dollars today.

The meteorite was eventually purchased by the American Museum of Natural History in 1909 for \$1,500 (about \$30,000 in 2008 dollars). An article in the Fairplay Flume from Jan. 22, 1908, states that the meteorite was on display for several days in front of Tanner's Grocery (presumably in Fairplay). It was then shipped to New York for \$60. The Guffey Meteorite remains on display in the Meteorite Hall of the AMNH.

The Guffey Meteor is the largest meteorite of the 79 that have been found and documented in Colorado. Today Guffey is a quiet, unincorporated mountain town with a post office and population of about 26 people. A cat named Monster was elected mayor of Guffey in 1998.