

**Jerry McKelvy's**  
**WAY BACK WHEN**  
**February, 2024**

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**CRATER OF DIAMONDS**

Occasionally, we hear reports of some lucky individual who finds a diamond at the Crater of Diamonds State Park in Murfreesboro, Arkansas. I keep thinking about trying my luck sometime, but so far, I haven't made the trip even though it's only about 70 miles from where we live.

It all started back in 1906 when John Wesley Huddleston, a farmer who lived near Murfreesboro in Pike County happened to find an unusual stone on his farm. Mr. Huddleston was an amateur prospector and was always keeping an eye out for different types of rocks as he went about his work. He decided to take the stone to a banker in town for his opinion about what type stone it was. As he was riding along on his mule, he noticed another stone that sparkled in the sun and collected that one also. His banker friend said they were possibly diamonds and suggested he contact a jeweler in Little Rock who confirmed that they were diamonds. Soon word leaked out about his discovery.

Huddleston's original farm was only 49 acres which he purchased in 1899 for \$100. Over the years, he added to his holdings until he had accumulated 243 acres. After his discovery of diamonds, he was approached by a mining company and eventually agreed to sell his property to them for \$36,000. By that time, he was 54 years old and decided to move his family to Arkadelphia where he lived a comfortable life for several years. He invested in real estate, but lost money on some of his investments during the Great Depression. That, along with some personal family problems, left him a relatively poor man. In his later years, he even ran a junkyard at his home for a little extra income. The man who had discovered a diamond mine ended up running a junkyard. John Huddleston died in 1941 and was buried at a cemetery about three miles from the diamond field he discovered in 1906.

I searched through some of the old newspapers and came up with the following news items concerning the diamond mine at Murfreesboro.

9-14-1906

Huddleston sold the two stones he found for \$600 and was offered \$36,000 for the plot of land where they were found, but he refused to sell.—*The DeQueen Bee*

1-18-1907

John Huddleston has found 17 more diamonds on his property. Buyers are trying to buy property west of his farm.--*Nashville News—reprinted in Nevada County Picayune*

4-15-1907

Things are very busy in Murfreesboro. Heavy machinery is being brought in to be used in mining the diamonds. Experts feel that the deeper they go, the more diamonds they will find. —*Prescott Daily News*

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5-29-1907

Mr. Beaufort of Prescott visited the diamond field. He is very familiar with diamond mining in South Africa. He said the diamond-bearing soil on the Huddleston farm was a “freak of nature” and was similar to that in South Africa. The miners have not gone deeper than 80 feet and Mr. Beaufort says they need to go 1000 feet. Many people in Pike County are forsaking their normal avocations of life for the search for diamonds. —*Prescott Daily News*)

10-8-1907

Louis Parker who has knowledge of diamond mining in South Africa visits the diamond mine and says there are no diamonds there. — *Prescott Daily News*

12-3-1907

A pump is being installed to pump water from the Little Missouri river to the diamond field. More than 175 diamonds have been found so far. —*Prescott Daily News*

12-14-1907

Over 200 diamonds have been found so far. A farmer by the name of Pepper has found one on his farm which is over two miles from the diamond field.—*Prescott Daily News*

2-27-1908

Work continues at the diamond field. The quality of diamonds found is similar to those from South Africa. The largest so far is one weighing 6.5 karats. Most are white stones of gem quality. The yellow ones have exceptional quality.—*Prescott Daily News*

1-14-1909

An average of 50 diamonds per day are being found. Price of land near the diamond fields is rising. Some owners are refusing to sell at any price.—*Prescott Daily News*

2-18-1909

Four companies are mining for diamonds—the Arkansas Diamond Company, Ozark Diamond Mining Co., the American Diamond Mining Co., and a company of Chicago investors. Experts say the diamonds have better luster than those from South Africa.—*Nevada County Picayune*

5-19-1909

The first diamond hunting excursion is announced. A round-trip ticket to the diamond mine by railroad costs fifty cents which includes a carnival in Murfreesboro. Ticket holders will be allowed to search 10 acres of the Mauney field which is next to the original Huddleston property and keep what they find.—*Prescott Daily News*

6-14-1909

The ad on the next page from the Prescott Daily News encouraged people to come to Pike County and join in the prosperity caused by the discovery of diamonds. Some predicted Murfreesboro would soon have a population of 10,000.

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# PIKE COUNTY DIAMONDS

and the diamond fields are attracting the attention of the world. The world's greatest mineralogists have declared this to be the greatest find of recent years; a discovery that will soon develop into a red hot rival to the diamond fields of South Africa.

**Murfreesboro, Arkansas,** is the embryo metropolis of the Pike County Fields. It lies between the Diamond fields, which are being developed by several large companies with an aggregate capital of \$5,000,000.00, and the great natural water power which the shrewdest business men of Arkansas are preparing to harness to supply electric lights and power to cities within radius of 100 miles.

**All Cannot Buy Diamond Mines**

**BUT**

**Murfreesboro Heights**

Offers an opportunity for investment that comes but once in a life-time. This beautiful suburb lies one-half mile north of the County Court House, between the city and the natural dam. It is one hundred feet higher than the city and is reached by a gently ascending boulevard. The purest of water abounds in wells and springs, and the air is delightful and wholesome. This suburban addition is bound to become the choice residential section of the country diamond metropolis. Real estate values have already advanced in the business section of Murfreesboro by leaps and bounds, and the price of lots in Murfreesboro Heights cannot long remain stationary. RIGHT NOW is the time to act. If you can come and see for yourself you will be better satisfied than by any other means of investigation. If you cannot come, write for prices, terms and full particulars. To delay means to let a golden opportunity slip through your grasp.

Address **J. N. RILEY, Cashier Pike County Bank, Murfreesboro, Arkansas**  
or **Bert Johnson, Manager Arkansas Orchard Planting Company, Corinth, Arkansas**

8-12-1909

Diamonds are now considered legal tender in Murfreesboro.—*Prescott Daily News*

9-14-1909

In order to carry diamond-bearing earth from the diamond fields to the washer on Prairie Creek, it is necessary to build an electric line from the field to the Gurdon and Ft. Smith railroad at Antoine. The diamond industry is growing so rapidly that necessary improvements must be made. The line, if constructed, will carry passengers as well as diamond dust — *Prescott Daily News*

2-5-1910

A new town called Kimberly is established at the mine. It has a brick bank building, a three-story hotel, and many new homes are being constructed. — *Prescott Daily News*

5-20-1910

Ben Green, a farmer living two miles east of Ozan has found seven stones like those at Murfreesboro. His farm is 20 miles south of the diamond field. — *Prescott Daily News*

11-23-1910

Arkansas Day at the Chicago Exhibition. Arkansas has five booths—1. a “grass widow” which is the figure of a woman made entirely from grass grown in Arkansas, 2. a booth

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promoting cotton. Visitors given cotton seed, 3. A booth from the Prescott & Northwestern Railroad promoting Elberta peaches, cow peas, and sweet potatoes, 4. A booth giving out information about the diamond mine, and 5. a booth from Lawrence County featuring a grape vine ten inches in diameter and a potato shaped like a hog. -*Prescott Daily News*

6-19-1911

John Key found a 12-karat diamond which was about one inch long. It is one of the largest diamonds found at the mine so far. -*Prescott Daily News*

4-18-1912

Ed Blanchard found a 5.25-karat diamond two miles from the diamond field.—*Prescott Daily News*

5-17-1912

A six-year-old boy found a 3.25-karat diamond – *Prescott Daily News*

Some of the largest diamonds found at the diamond mine include a 40.23-karat diamond found in 1924 called “Uncle Sam”, a 15.33-karat diamond called the “Star of Arkansas”, and a 34.25-karat diamond called “The Star of Murfreesboro”.

Commercial diamond mining at Murfreesboro lasted from 1906 to 1952 with over 400,000 diamonds being found. The mine was converted into a tourist attraction in 1952 with visitors being allowed to keep any diamonds they found. About 70,000 more diamonds have been found by tourists since 1952.

The state of Arkansas purchased 911 acres which included the diamond mine in 1972 and established the Crater of Diamonds State Park. Adult visitors pay a \$10 fee and are allowed to search a 37-acre field and keep any diamonds they find. The field is plowed periodically so new earth is exposed. Some say it is best to search after a heavy rain. An average of two diamonds per day are found at the park and about 75,000 have been found since the discovery in 1906. The diamonds may be white, yellow, brown, or clear. Brown is the most common color.

A few weeks ago, a visitor to the park found a 4.87-karat colorless diamond the size of a jelly bean during his first ten minutes of searching. It was said to be the largest diamond found at the park in the last three years. One report said the gem when cut will be worth more than \$100,000. Last month, an even larger diamond was found by a man from Paris, France while walking along. It was a 7.46 karat diamond and was reported to be the eighth largest diamond found since the mine became a state park.

You can find much more information on John Huddleston including pictures by reading the article online entitled John Huddleston—The Man Behind the Myth of “Diamond John” by Dean Banks at this link:

<http://o.pcahs.org/JohnHuddleston/JohnHuddleston.pdf>

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## MAN SPENDS LIFE MAKING LIST OF ANIMALS (from the 6-24-1931 issue of The Prescott Daily News)

C. Davies Sherborn is making a list of all the world's animals. It was in 1890 that Sherborn conceived the idea of preparing an exhaustive index of all the scientific names that had been applied to animals by naturalists, giving for each the exact date and place of publication. The work progressed until 1902 when the first part of his "*Index Animalium*" was published, covering names introduced between 1758 and 1800. The book contained 1,195 pages and included over 65,000 names.

The second part was published in 1922, dealing with names introduced between 1800 and 1850. Now the complete work is ready for the press and it is estimated that it will include half a million names of animals. Sherborn's books only deal with names up to 1850. Zoologists estimate that the total number of animals may be 750,000.

Oxford University has conferred an honorary degree of doctor of science on Sherborn for his 40 years of labor.

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### Small Town Poem – by Don Mathis

Cops don't ask where you're going,  
they already know.  
Everybody knows everybody,  
half of them are related.

The welcome sign just said Wel-  
"You're now entering" and  
"You're now leaving"  
are on the same sign

It only had one horse –  
and cows outnumbered people

Curfew is when the street light came  
on;  
and the street lights were so dim,  
they were outshined by starlight.

City crews don't pick up road kill,  
they just drag the carcass to the  
shoulder so the vultures don't get hit.

The grocery store stocker will tell you  
NOT to buy a product;  
"It goes on sale next week."

The population grows 20 percent  
at Friday night football.

They taught all 12 grades in one school  
And my old teacher gets me confused  
with my brother  
who graduated years before

The only stop light was one that  
blinked  
– and it only blinked once an hour.

Downtown starts shutting down at 4 pm  
The main business is the cafe  
and if you stayed there all day,  
the whole town would pass through.

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Pick-ups outnumber compact cars  
two to one.

The access road to the highway  
is two-way.

Folks still talk about  
that bus wreck in 2006.

The local library has 400 VHS tapes,  
half of them are westerns

The Post Office closes for lunch,  
but they don't need an address  
to deliver your mail.

Republican primaries  
are the only election.

The church steeple is only this tall.  
Churches outnumber bars  
and restaurants combined.

The newspaper is down to  
four days a week; twelve pages.

The prison in the next county  
is the town's biggest employer.

The funeral home  
keeps better track of families  
than the city, county, church,  
or census bureau.

You can hear coyotes call...  
and recognize their voices.

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### REMEMBER, VALENTINE'S DAY IS FEBRUARY 14

This was written by an unidentified Prescott man and published in *The Nevada County Picayune* in February, 1885.



My dearest darling, I am dying to fly to thy presence and pour out the burning eloquence of my love as a thrifty housewife pours out hot coffee. Away from you, I am melancholy as a sick rat. Sometimes I can hear the June bugs of despondence in my ears, and feel the cold lizards of despair crawling down my back. Uncouth fears, like a thousand minnows, nibble at my spirits and my soul is pierced with doubts, as an old cheese is bored with skippers. When the awakening pig ariseth from his bed and grunteth, and goeth forth for his morning refreshments, I think of thee; and like a gum elastic, my heart seems stretched clear across my bosom. Your hair is like the mane of a sorrell horse, powdered with gold. Your laugh rings in my ears like the bleat of a stray lamb on a bleak hillside. Since the light of your face fell upon my life, I sometimes feel as if I could lift myself up by my bootstraps to the top of the church steeple and pull the bell-rope for singing school. Well, I must draw my letter to a close. Goodbye.