

Stub Lewis and The Gold Cat

Editor's Note: The following article was published in the Sept/Oct edition of Gold Prospectors Magazine.

By Lee Farren

Gold fever did not hit Stub Lewis until after he had retired. When it did it took an unusual form.

Stub likes gold – he wears a favorite nugget on a chain around his neck, but what he likes even more is building gold recovery machines. Specifically, Stub builds Gold Cat Twin Sluice Super Highbankers. He sells them for about \$1,500 through The Dredge Shop in Sumpter, a center for recreational gold mining in Eastern Oregon.

A Gold Cat is basically two sluiceboxes attached to a hopper and a pump. The miner loads the hopper with shovelfuls of gravel. Water from a pump washes it from the hopper into the top sluice, where the coarsest material is screened out. Fine material falls into the lower sluice, and is washed with more water. Classifying screens sort the material by size. The heavier bits of gold settle into special riffle structures and are caught in a piece of ribbed carpet.

Stub's machine is called a highbanker because, unlike traditional sluiceboxes, it can work without being set directly in a stream.

The Gold Cat operates on a bank, where gold-bearing gravels are often found, and works with water pumped up from the stream.

"Old-timer miners used rocker boxes in streams," Stub says. "They'd shovel the material in, pour water over it and rock them. Where they could, they'd pipe a flume of water down and use a kind of wooden highbanker."

Evidence of sluicebox mining can still be found in the Sumpter area, where stub goes a half-dozen times each summer on outings with other recreational miners.

Stub's highbankers are unique in having the two sluiceboxes set at different pitches so that both the coarse and fine material are washed at the same time, with the water running at different rates.

Most miners sprinkle material into highbankers – Stud's hoppers are so big he loads them with a shovel. He claims a 25% higher gold recovery rate than machines with only one sluice, because he can run so much more material. In addition, his machines come apart for cleaning and go back together with easy-to-operate latches.

Stub grew up on the Imnaha River in Oregon and graduated from Freeze Out Grade School at the end of 8th grade. He attended high school in Asotin, WA and joined the US Army after graduation. From there he went into automotive front-end alignment and frame work. He moved to Heppner in 1984 and ran Les Schwab's alignment shop for about 10 years. Then he worked as a janitor for the Heppner School District.

Oh, and that nickname? Stub got it when he was a baby. "I'd wake up real early in the morning and Dave, one of my mom's relatives, would get up with me. There was a radio station that played country mu-



Stub Lewis and a Gold Cat highbanker.

sic by a singer named Stub or Stubby. He'd hold me and I'd bob up and down, so I got the nickname. I've gone by it ever since."

Stub shares his given name with his grandfather Lewis and an uncle on his mother's side. Even people who have known Stub all his life don't know his real name. So here it is, Ervin.

After retiring in 2000 Stub took to watching television. He was particularly intrigued by "Prospecting America" on The Outdoor Channel.

"I'd always been interested in prospecting, but I'd never had anyone to show me how," Stub says.

He joined the GPAA and started going on outings to the Sumpter area where the LDMA owns property on the Burnt River. At these outings members spend a weekend mining a claim with pans, sluices, dredges, metal detectors and highbankers. They have pot-lucks, share techniques and enter contests. On the last day all the gold they find is divvied up among the participants.*

"They are running highbankers," Stub says. "I thought, 'I need one of those, but I'm not going to pay that kind of money.' I'm one of those guys, if I need something I'll go home and build it."

So he did. He designed his first Gold Cat in 2002. "I just wanted a name for it, so I called it a Gold Cat," Stub says.

He had Ross Machinery in Hermiston build the sluice boxes. He made the hopper out of an old road sign.

"It worked great," Stub says. "The design hasn't really changed since. I've improved the riffle trays and added wheels so it rolls over the rocks."

Stub's Gold Cats weigh about 100 pounds. They can be lifted and moved around like a wheelbarrow and tipped up on end for storage. He's been asked to make smaller ones that would be even easier to carry around.

"I'll call it the gold kitty," he says.

After trying out his first design, Stub remodeled his woodworking shop to handle the new project. At first he made everything himself, taking about two weeks for each machine. As production has gone up (he sold nine in 2005 and 20 in the first half of 2006) he has turned to Apollo Sheet Metal in the Tri-Cities. Apollo prefabricates the aluminum sluice boxes and the hopper boxes. Stub takes over from there, producing the riffle trays, legs, classifying screens and plumbing.

Pumps are not included with the Gold Cats. Stub recommends a 6-horsepower motor with a 3" pump. The Gold Cat works

on gravity fed water and needs a flow of about 200-gallons-per-minute. He also recommends a trash pump, which can handle gravel and small sticks.

The reason for all that water, Stub explains, is that rocks from a stream are coated with a thin layer of clay. Gold powder, flakes, and the tiny nuggets called "pickers" are embedded in that clay.

"Gold settles out in the riffles because it is 19-times heavier than water," Stub says. "Wash it and it will find the low place and stop."

Stub plans to keep producing the Gold Cats. "If they sell all right, that's fine," he says. "It gives me something to do so I don't pester the wife all the time."

For more information about Stub Lewis' Gold Cats contact Stub at (541) 676-9261.

Please note that Burnt River is the property of Lost Dutchman's Mining Assoc. and as such it is restricted to LDMA members only, unless you are there at an GPAA/LDMA scheduled outing.

Sheriff's Report

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office reports handling the following business:

Sept. 21: -BPD received a call stating that a male subject was threatening the reporter's husband.

-Heppner Fire Department received a call transferred from John Day from a reporter stating he had been in a head on collision with another vehicle. Three people were involved and the reporter was unsure of the injuries sustained. HFP, EMS and MCSO responded.

Sept. 23: -MCSO and BPD received a report of water running in a residence since 1 a.m. with no sounds of people in the residence. The reporter stated that a young man with health issues lived in the residence.

-MCSO responded to a motion alarm and determined it was a false alarm.

-MCSO issued a citation to a male subject for no seatbelt.

-MCSO issued a citation to Kimberly Lynn Johnston, 31, for violation of the basic rule by going 81 mph in a 55 mph zone.

-MCSO received an animal neglect report stating that three horses were starving and eating their own waste to stay alive and that a dog next door had no food or water. The reporter would like a deputy to respond.

-MCSO received a report of two large dogs

Drake runs in Portland Marathon

The Reverend Gwen Drake, daughter of the Reverend Grace Drake of Heppner, ran the Portland Marathon on Sunday, October 7. She ran the marathon in four hours and 30 minutes.

Drake's overall place was 3,667 out of 7,724. Her division placement for Females ages 50-54 was 59 out of 399 and her gender placement was 1,437 out of 4,195. This was her first race.



Reverend Gwen Drake

Rev. Gwen Drake is the pastor of the Hillsboro United Methodist Church.

Former Heppner grad loses family in car wreck



Steve Groce, with wife Dora and children Robert and Katherine

Steve Groce, a 1982 Heppner High School graduate, lost his wife Dora and two children Robert, 8, and Katherine, 4, when their vehicle was struck by a car believed to be involved in an illegal street race in El Monte, CA, on Oct. 8.

Donations for the family can be made at the Bank of Eastern Oregon.

Steve, who was not in the car when the crash occurred, has a brother and a sister who live in Boardman.

attacking a dog. MCSO responded and the dogs were taken to pet rescue.

-MCSO was notified that OSP had arrested Jose Manuel Leyva, 37, on an IJC warrant for DWS.

-MCSO received a report of a gunshot.

-Boardman Ambulance received a report of an explosion that occurred in a shop with a male subject sustaining injuries. MCSO, Boardman Fire Department, Boardman Ambulance, and Irrigon Ambulance responded. OSP was called to assist MCSO.

-Boardman Fire Department was requested for mutual aid with a fire but had no one to send. Ione Fire Department was paged.

-Ione EMS was notified by an Ione EMT of a female that had fallen and was refusing EMS. The EMT said he would drive her home and would call if more help was needed.

-Ione Fire Department was paged out for Arlington Ambulance. There was not enough response so Heppner was paged out.

-Heppner Fire Department was requested Arlington for mutual aid.

Sept. 24: -MCSO was notified that someone had pried the lock and entered the reporter's residence when she was gone for the weekend.

-MCSO was notified that a shop had been entered at an Ione residence and it was unknown if items were missing.

-MCSO issued a citation to a subject for careless driving with accident.

-MCSO arrested a male subject.

-BPD issued a citation to Sandra Lee Ferguson,

52, for failure to use a seatbelt – child.

-Irrigon Ambulance received a 911 call regarding a 74 year old female with a nose bleed that would not stop. EMS responded and transported the patient to the hospital.

-Heppner Fire Department was notified of a controlled burn that looked like it might be out of control. HFD chief responded but was unable to locate any fire.

-Boardman Ambulance was notified of a motor vehicle accident with unknown injuries. EMS responded.

Sept. 26: -MCSO was notified that a female subject had fallen and had a bloody nose, hospital personnel was present. Heppner Ambulance was notified and the patient was transported.

-MCSO issued a citation to Fidel Rios Torres Jr., 19, for failure to register a vehicle.

-MCSO received a 911 driving complaint of a vehicle all over the road on I-84 around milepost 104. The caller was transferred to OSP.

-MCSO received a report of a stolen bicycle.

-MCSO, Boardman Ambulance and BPD were notified of an unwanted subject trespassing at the reporter's home. The reporter call back to advise that the subject had assaulted him and then left.

-BPD cited a juvenile for no bicycle helmet.

-Boardman Fire Department received a 911 call of a fire along the railroad track on the right hand side of the road next to grain.

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Sept. 27: -MCSO was notified of an attempted theft of gravel. The reporter stated that the subject put the gravel back when confronted.

-MCSO received a request to have a female subject trespassed off the reporter's property. The subject was confrontational and would start a fight. The reporter's ex-husband is staying on her property in a travel trailer. The subject is the ex-husband's ex-girlfriend. The reporter stated that the ex-husband was welcome but not the female subject. A deputy made contact with the reporter who said the problem had been solved civilly.

-MCSO received a 911 hang up call from a cell phone.

-MCSO issued a citation to Peter Alex Valov, 78, for passing in a no passing zone.

-MCSO received a 911 hang up. On call back, a female advised she had misdialed.

-MCSO received a 911 call stating that the reporter's husband had hit something or thrown something at her boyfriend's car. Kevin K. Alexander, 34, was arrested for criminal mischief II.

-BPD issued a citation to Roger Bruce Steele, 48, for failure to obey a traffic control device.

-BPD issued a citation to Ralph Earl Bonham, 53, for violating the speed limit by going 42 mph in a 30 mph zone.

-BPD issued a citation to Gary Frank Weidinger, 59, for violating the basic rule by going 35 mph in a 20 mph school zone.

-MCSO was notified of an audible burglar alarm from the front door of the Boardman campus.

-MCSO received a walk-in notification of a theft.

Sept. 28: -MCSO received a 911 call regarding a railroad track that was not attached. The caller was worried the break in the track may derail the train. OSP was on the scene.

-MCSO was notified that a male subject was arrested by Medford Police Department on a warrant.

-MCSO issued a citation to a male subject for violation of the basic rule by going 75 mph in a 55 mph zone.

-MCSO issued a citation to Chantel Ann Robinson, 20, for 75 mph in a 55 mph zone.

-MCSO issued a citation to Monica Leigh Ann Van Fossen, 26, for DWS, driving uninsured, failure to carry proof of registration.

-BPD issued a citation to a male subject for violating the speed limit by going 50 mph in a 30 mph zone and driving uninsured.

-BPD arrested Gerardo Cruz Mendoza, 32, for failure to carry and present. The subject was also cited for failure to carry proof of insurance.

-BPD and Boardman Ambulance received a call from an elderly female requesting them to respond because she was not feeling well. BPD requested that EMS respond as well. EMS transported the female to Good Shepherd Hospital.

-BPD issued a citation to a male subject for no operator's license.

-BPD received an EMS call for a 16 year old male subject hurt at the football game. An ambulance transported the subject.