

MEMORANDUM

TO: Counselor/CIT Staff of the NRA WC ADVC

FROM: Kai Brennan, Counselor, NRA WC ADVC

Cody Greenland, " , "

Mark Hecker, " , "

Kelcey Martin, " , "

Tucker Barraclough, " , "

DATE: 24 July 2024

SUBJECT: Search for Van Houten's Eternal Flame (Devil's Kitchen)

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SUMMARY

Near the town of Van Houten is a natural eternal flame that burns on a supply of methane gas seepage. The flame's location is currently unknown. This memorandum seeks to accumulate all presently known information regarding this flame, including accounts of expeditions in search of it. It is hoped that with this collected knowledge, plans may be developed that allow for rediscovery of the Devil's Kitchen.

ACCOUNTS OF PREVIOUSLY UNRECORDED EXPEDITIONS

Bef. 2023 | Tucker Barraclough & Kelcey Martin (& potentially additional unknown individuals) went on a winter hike in the area West of Ghost Hill in search of areas lacking snow or other signs of

irregular geothermal activity. The scope of this expedition is unknown. No signs of irregular geothermal activity were found.

6 Jun 2023 | At 7:15, Kai Brennan was hiking on the mountain behind Star Range when he saw a vehicle arrive at the range. He began to descend onto the Coors Range by way of the riverbed in the Northwest corner of the range. Near the top of the riverbed, gas was smelled.

21 Jun 2024 | At 18:00 a brick/cinderblock was discovered in the washout north of the Coors Range that flows into the NW riverbed by a party consisting of Kai Brennan, Cody Greenland, Kelcey Martin, & Delaney Nelson. The brick's potential relation to the eternal flame or a gas well is uncertain. It was left in situ without being photographed.

29 Jun 2024 | Between the hours of 12:00 - 17:00 Kai Brennan and Mark Hecker conducted an expedition in search of the eternal flame. Their route started at the Coors Range and proceeded until the road between Coors & the thousand-yard range by way of the NW riverbed. They then returned along the Eastern face of the mountain behind Star Range along the base of the cliff face near the summit. Many rocks with a red and black exterior were found that had a white interior when broken. Additionally, a trail of flagging tape in red-orange was discovered. This trail appeared to be of the same age and color that was discovered leading to the collapsed entrance of the mine fire. Upon attempts to follow the trail in both directions, it seemed to lead to nowhere. Several older green trail flag tape markers were located but this trail was too decrepit to follow.

CURRENT ACCUMULATED INFORMATION

The devil's kitchen is a ten by thirty foot area of hard, blackened earth, which resembles charcoal¹. Activity on the surface of this area can reignite the flames in the place where the disturbance was made² ³. Alternatively, it may be that one can scuff the ground to allow the flow of gas and light it with a match, upon which it will burn for some time before self-extinguishing⁴. The source of the eternal flame is believed to be natural gas⁵ ⁶, allegedly methane⁷. At one point, a gas well may have been built on the site⁸ ⁹. Its position is said to be a half mile from Van Houten¹⁰ or one and a half miles from Van Houten¹¹. Another description of its location explains it is South of Raton ten miles on U.S. 85 (I-25), and West six miles on an unspecified company road¹². It is said to be on the side of the hill, directly above the targets at the back of a range (believed to be Coors or Star Range)¹³. Within the town of Van Houten, it is located at the outlet of Windmill (Willow) Canyon between the site of the old windmill and the Post Office, outside or shortly within the treeline of Star Mountain¹⁴. The Devil's Kitchen was used as a picnic area¹⁵, particularly by youths¹⁶ ¹⁷. The fire was most recently reported to be

¹ Pioneer: "The Devil's kitchen" Kenneth Fordyce, collector., 1936-1940, 5-5-52 28. Fray Angélico Chávez History Library.

² Ibid.

³ Sherman, James E., and Barbara H. Sherman. "Van Houten." Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of New Mexico, University of Oklahoma Press, 1975.

⁴ Barraclough, Tucker, and George "Judo" Yaksich. "Judo Tour." 4 Aug. 2022.

⁵ Fordyce, Supra.

⁶ Sherman, Supra.

⁷ Barraclough, Supra.

⁸ Fordyce, Supra.

⁹ "Van Houten (Map)." Van Houten History, NRA Whittington Center, Raton, New Mexico, p. 17.

¹⁰ Fordyce, Supra.

¹¹ Sherman, Supra.

¹² Fordyce, Supra.

¹³ Barraclough, Supra.

¹⁴ "Van Houten (Map).", Supra.

¹⁵ Barraclough, Supra.

¹⁶ Fordyce, Supra.

¹⁷ Sherman, Supra.

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actively burning in 1937¹⁸, although this does not necessarily indicate dormancy.

CURRENT SEARCH AREA

From all available information, the suggested search area is as follows (see fig. 1):

- The Coors Range road for the Southern Border.
- The Willow Creek split directly north of Star Mtn. for the Northern Border.
- A Northern Bearing of 000° intersecting the summit of Star Mtn. for the Western Border.
- Willow Creek for the Eastern Border.

The search should be conducted in these areas with particular attention to the territories directly behind the Coors and Star ranges until the slope of the hill behind them would not allow for comfortable picnicking. This area of attention includes the entirety of Ghost Hill.

FIGURES

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¹⁸ Fordyce, Supra.

Fig. 1: Map of the Current Search Area

