

NATURAL GAS IN COLORADO

by

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By Arthur Lakes

THE WHITE RIVER GAS FIELD.

A few summers ago I had occasion to visit The White River District about 20 miles west of Meeker, in northwest Colorado. * * * * * At a point near the mouth of Piceance Creek, on the border of White River, we came to a spot where the usual horizontal strata had been crumpled up into a broad arch or dome, the center of which had been hollowed out into a rather deep basin, covering a few square miles. Here was a likely condition for oil or gas, as we have explained in the arched up character of the rocky strata. Nor were we disappointed, for along a nearly dry watercourse or arroya, within this fold, we found two powerful gas springs about 500 feet apart. Both of them were bubbling up through a pond of dark alkaline water emitting a strong smell of sulphurated hydrogen. In one pond a great number of little springs were bubbling up fiercely at different points. In the other pond which was about 12 feet in diameter, the water was in a violent state of commotion, caused by a constant rising and surging upward of great bubbles of gas from the central orifice, which raised the surface of the pond nearly two feet above its level, and kept the surrounding water churning like a cauldron. The spring sent off at the same time a strong smell of petroleum, though none of that substance could be seen floating on the water issuing from it. From a safe distance we applied a light to the surface of the water, and instantly the whole pond was covered by a sheet of flame rising six feet above it, and giving out an intense heat. Satisfied with the experiment, we left this spring, still burning, which when not on fire, reminded us of some the phases of a geyser.

These springs were discovered by a cowboy nearly two years before my visit. While riding by the side of the arroya his horse shied at something at the bottom and at the same time he heard a low hissing sound. Thinking it was a rattlesnake, he returned to the spot to investigate and there in the little shallow rivulet at the bottom of the arroya, he saw that the sound came from a little spring bubbling up fiercely. Guessing what it might be, he lit a match and applied it to the bubble which immediately flashed fire and continued burning for a few seconds. Staking the ground out as a claim he got a company to undertake the boring and two wells were put down, one at each point to a depth of about 500 feet. A large cattle round-up happening to be in the neighborhood, the operator told them he would give them an illumination and incautiously set fire to the well. The result was more than he anticipated. A column of fire 12 feet in diameter and 80 feet in height rushed up with a roar into the midnight sky. The operator was seriously burned and all the machinery destroyed, while for many nights in succession this improvised volcano illuminated the region for miles around, to such a degree that a man told me he could see to read small print by the light of it at his home nearly three miles away, and how long it took to subside I did not learn, but eventually it was overcome by water. The company and the operators appear to have had enough from their experience and the wells were left idle, but had continued ever since to pour out the same volumes of gas that I found at my visit.