《美国版愚公：32年只身挖通穿山隧道》

Somewhere in the Mojave Desert ’ s El Paso range there is a strange tunnel that traverses 2,087 feet of solid rock up in Copper Mountain. What ’ s strange is that it doesn ’ t lead to anywhere special. It simply emerges on the high ledge, in the middle of nowhere. The only reason it exists is because an eccentric man named William Henry ‘ Burro ’ Schmidt – a.k.a. the human mole – wanted it there.

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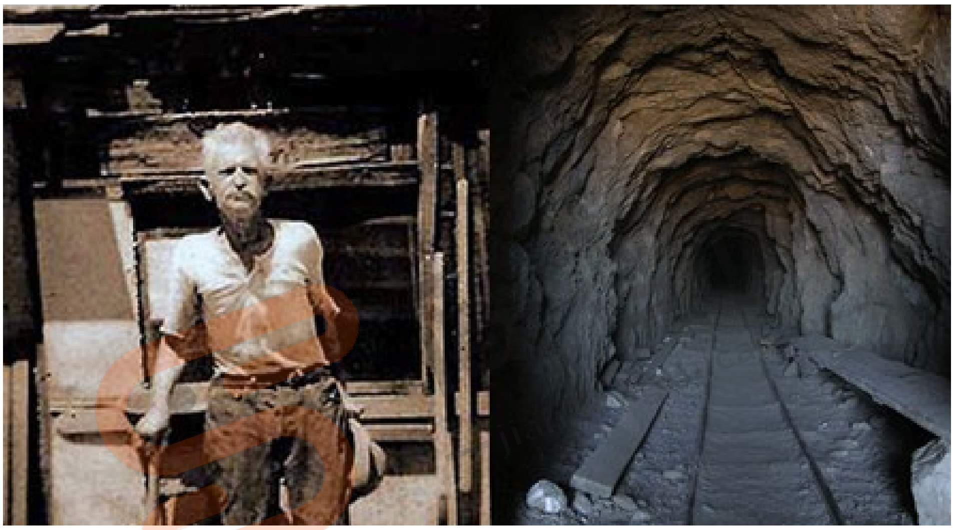

Although he spent 32 years of his life single-handedly digging a half-mile long tunnel through a solid granite mountain, he never talked much about it. When questioned about his bizarre project, he simply replied that it was a shortcut. To where, no one really knows.

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Schmidt first migrated to the California desert from Rhode Island in the late 19th century, in order to improve his health. He is believed to have started digging the tunnel in 1902. He carried out the excavation using picks, hammers, hand drills and explosives. At times, he even carried it out on his back. Eventually, he installed iron tracks and a mine car to transport debris.

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Until this day, the Burro Schmidt tunnel is still a source of great mystery and awe, and continues to rouse the curiosity of people who visit it. He had no formal training and picked up most of the skills required for the job while doing it, but the accuracy of his work is unmistakable. Still, the question remains – why would anyone want to build

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a tunnel to nowhere?

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When a man religiously sticks to a ostensibly meaningless task, he naturally gives rise to a whole lot of questions. He lived a life so simple that the theory of hidden treasure simply doesn’t check out. Several people have explored Schmidt’s land and work in an attempt to find some answers to his life’s work, but he left no records of his motivation.

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It is speculated that Schmidt needed to create the shortcut to bring his gold ore from the mine to the market. But when the construction of a new road made his effort unnecessary, he still chose to continue the gruelling, backbreaking work for several years. In the lack of conclusive evidence, people have been forced to accept that he was probably just obsessed with his strange project.

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No one knows if he ever struck gold, but when he broke through to daylight on the other side in 1938, he simply walked away from his life’s work. Stooped and gnarled from 32 years of rigorous tunneling, he packed up and left Copper Mountain to live the last part of his life in a nearby town. Later, he took on a partner named Mike Lee, and together they gave visitors tours of the tunnel. He died in 1954, taking with him all the secrets of the burrow he built.

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If you visit the tunnel today, you could walk upright through its entire length in about 30 minutes. It is structurally sound and along the walls you might be able to identify exposed mineral veins. And when you reach the ledge at the end of the tunnel, a spectacular view awaits you. Although located in a remote area, the Burro Schmidt tunnel is a huge tourist attraction.

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