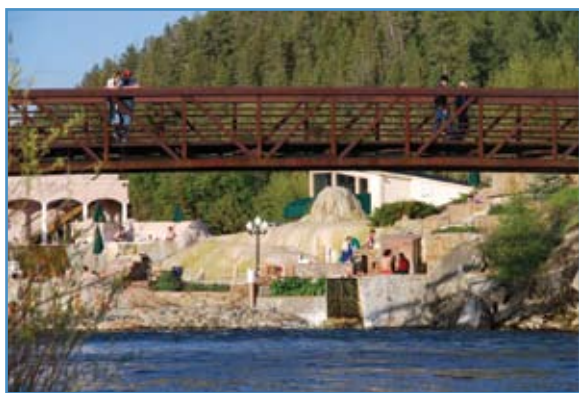


# Local Legends

*Hand-to-Hand Combat! Buried Treasure! Magic Pools!*



*Now a tourist destination, the Pagosa Hot Springs were once a great source of contention between local tribes.*

*photo by D. West Davies*

## Healing Waters

The Ute Legend of how the Great Pahgosa Hot Spring was formed. (Note: Some spell it PAHGOSA, while others spell it in PAGOSAH. Today it has evolved to PAGOSA.)

Local Utes believed that the gods were mad at them for some transgression or neglect. This brought on a great sickness which the Medicine Men had no power to cure, although each of them gathered their most potent plants. When this did no good they exchanged plants with each other, hoping someone might effect a cure. They exhausted their varieties and uses of plants but still the tribe died in great numbers.

As a last resort they gathered the whole tribe together, from the furthest canons, and when they assembled on the low ground above the river and below the hills that surrounded their campground, they selected a spot and built a huge fire.

First the Medicine Men danced, then the tribe and then the Medicine Men again. They kept this up until midnight but when they got up the next morning they found the ashes washed away and the large depression in which the fire had been built contained hot water. Upon bathing in this pool, their sickness was cured and from this effect the spring was called Pahgosa meaning healing water.

According to *this* legend, the Utes let the tribes of the Navajo and the Apache freely use it without hindrance for they thought it was a gift of the gods and all were entitled to partake of its healing power.



*Today, locals and visitors alike enjoy the famous "healing waters" along the banks of the San Juan.*

*photo by D. West Davies*

## A Fight to the Death

### *The Battle for the Springs*

Local legend tells the story of the fight for the springs.

The Utes and Navajos had long been battling each other for control of the Great Pagosa Hot Springs. The Utes finally decided that in order to resolve the conflict once and for all, a one-on-one battle was to take place.

Gathering a group of warriors, the Utes marched out to meet the Navajos a few miles from the springs. A two-man battle idea was presented to the Navajos, who agreed to pit their finest warrior against the fighter of the Utes' choosing. The Navajo brave was truly a splendid specimen, and intimidated the Ute warriors, who were generally smaller in stature.

A white man, Colonel Pfeiffer, had married into the tribe and was a great friend to the Utes. When the chiefs asked him to fight the Navajo brave, Pfeiffer agreed, stipulating that he would choose the weapons to be used: Bowie Knives. The Navajo agreed, knowing that Pfeiffer was even smaller than most of the Ute braves.

Stripped to loin cloths, the two men circled and parried. The Navajo may have had the advantage in reach, but the white man was very quick. With a sharp, fast movement, his knife left his hand and was buried in the enemy's heart.

The many fights for possession of the springs had ended. The Navajo never again laid claim to the "Great Pahgosa". When they did come to bathe in the pools or bury themselves in hot mud, it was by invitation only.

Colonel Pfeiffer's grave is in the San Luis Valley, where many of his descendants still live today.

## Buried Treasure

### *Fact or Fiction?*

According to the story about 300 French explorers wandered unintentionally into Spanish territory -- Pagosa Country. There they mined and washed gold out of the streams until they had 300 bars but by the time this was accomplished their numbers had greatly diminished. The altitude, environmental factors and unfriendly natives reduced their party to only three men.

After talking it over they decided to bury the bars and plainly mark the location so they could find it again after they returned from their base in Levanworth, Kansas. Various duties prevented the three soldiers from returning for the gold before they died, but not too long after their death, maps began to show up which supposedly located the hiding place.

More than one location was pointed out on different maps, and more than one group of people hunted for the gold. Many of these insisted that they were on the verge of locating it, even finding the rocked-over caves of which the maps told.

Many of the early settlers here also embarked on treasure-finding expeditions, and it has been hinted that at least one found it, but if that was so, he never owned up to it.

This legend is the origin of the names of both Treasure Mountain and Treasure Falls, located east of Pagosa on Highway 160.

So yes, we may have buried treasure in Pagosa Country, but we think the true treasure lies in our great climate, friendly folks and unbeatable views.

*Spectacular and Pristine, Treasure Falls is named after a local legend.*

*photo by Daniel Ligon*

