

Who was Mansel Carter?

Some stories are so special, that we never get tired of sharing them. And the story of the Man of the Mountain is one of those. Mansel Carter (1902 – 1987) made his home on Goldmine Mountain, where he had filed mining claims for 40 years.¹

Growing up in Ohio, he worked for a while as a mechanic and then left home for Indiana where, among other things, he flew a shuttle service with his airplane. He traveled West during the depression and worked on the Zuni Indian Reservation as a logger before going to Idaho; leaving there in 1941 to settle in Gilbert. While managing a photography business, he became friends with the man who delivered ice; a Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma named Marion Kennedy. The town soon became too crowded for them, so they moved to the San Tan Mountains in 1948 to try their hand at mining. They worked their claims for silver and copper until Marion died in 1960.

Mansel then started making his “cactus curios,” small carvings from cactus and wood. Over the years, he became a genuine celebrity; welcoming visitors from all over the world. He had a way with small birds and animals; a respect and understanding that can only come from the heart. A reporter once wrote, “Carter, who wears thick eye-glasses and has a long white beard, placed a bit of food on his finger-tips and called out, ‘come on.’ A woodpecker poked its head around a pole, landed on Carter’s fingers, and snatched the piece of food.”²

His guest book, cactus curios, and many of his personal items are on display at the San Tan Historical Society’s museum. And the gravesites of Mansel and Marion reside in San Tan Regional Park. To view the graves, drive South of Empire Road/Hunt Hwy on Wagon Wheel Road, and continue on Skyline Drive to the trail head parking lot. It’s approximately a quarter mile hike from there.

Excerpts from the following were used for this article:

¹ Chandler Heights Monthly, June 20, 1987

² Arizona Senior World, December 1986

