Post Hole Withdrawals

I don't mean to start another gold rush but did you know there are many fortunes in gold and silver buried in many locales in the great southwest? I'm not referring to mythical mines or undiscovered cities where the streets are paved in gold. Nor am I suggesting that you quit your job and buy a string of mules to go looking for buried treasure that both the Spaniards and the Mexicans left behind on their hasty retreats.

I am referring to the money buried in cans, chests and caves back in the days when a "bank" deposit was made by first digging a hole.

With banks and businesses going broke people might once again be bringing their money back to the safety of their own premises where, unlike Social Security or stock in Lehman Brothers, AIG, Freddy and Fannie, it may actually be there when they need it. This explains why safes are the only thing jumping off store shelves these days.

When that parched part of this country where ranches are measured in sections, not acres, was first settled there were no banks to distrust. Even if there were, the banks were usually far away and your bank deposits weren't guaranteed by the FDIC. If the James gang stole all your money in the bank it was gone.

Back then if you had to travel a long way to buy a string of cattle, you had to take your money with you. You could hide some bank notes (often printed by a bank, not the government) in your money belt, but that's the first place bandits would look, so many ranchers carried gold dust or gold and silver coins.

A jigger of gold dust was worth $100 and $1,000 dollars in silver coins weighed over 62 pounds. Such a load made you an obvious target for thieves and when ranchers sensed that robbers were on their trail, or laying in wait for them, they'd stop and hastily bury their money. Many of them never came back to get it either, and even if they did sometimes they couldn't find it because the landmarks they used were no longer there.

There are countless cases where a rancher somehow managed to make a little money and rather than risk it being stolen on the ride into town he simply buried it. A popular place to bury your life's savings was under a fence post. It was secure there; maybe even too secure. Sometimes the rancher forgot which post was his bank branch.

Even if the rancher remembered the right post the gold was often as hard to find as the smoke from yesterday's campfire because gold sinks six inches every year in sandy or light soil and the rancher gave up when it was not found at the right depth.

In some cases the ranchers left behind instructions or a map called a "derrotero" but usually the rancher's secret died with them If they met a sudden or untimely death. "Los muertos no hablan," was a popular saying. The dead do not talk. Neither do post holes, unfortunately.

If you've been unnerved by recent economic events and are considering burying your own treasure, there are a few rules that may aid your selfish kids in finding your fortune without spending their adult lives tearing down all your corrals.

First, if you are going to bury paper money put it in an airtight container with a silver dollar on top so that your stash will register on a metal detector. And if you are going to leave behind a map use landmarks that don't change.

Your fortune may be planted equal distance between a tree and a certain rock but someone may cut down that tree and move the rock. Or, a sandstorm could alter the landscape and then your kids would have to dig up the entire homeplace. (Although it would be a good way to get the seedbed tilled for your wife's garden when you're no longer around to do it!)

Alternatively, you could draw a map and send it to me for safekeeping. If you do don't set

your posts very deep and I'd prefer gold coins. No stock certificates or paper money please. That stuff is hardly worth digging for these days.