

# LITTLE RIVER CANYON

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I took charge of a party of engineers locating the Chattanooga Southern Railroad (now known as the T.A.G. Railroad) June 1, 1890. My camp was about ten miles south of where Little River emerges from Lookout Mountain. The next day being Sunday, we had several visitors. Most of them were anxious to know where the railroad would be built, that is how close to their land. I told them I had orders to build the railroad by or near Mosley's Mill, Chesterfield, and Menlo, Georgia, and I was to meet a party locating south from Chattanooga somewhere between Menlo and Pigeon Mountain. One old fellow ventured the question, "How far below the month of the Gulf are you going to cross Little River?" I asked, "What Gulf?" and he replied, "May's Gulf. Ain't you ever heard of that? ." I told him that I had not and asked him to tell me about it. He said, "It is where Little River comes out of Lookout Mountain. You can't build the bridge closer to the mouth of the Gulf than where Mr. Ratory built the road bridge. If you do it will wash away." That gave me the chance for others to tell the "Legend of May's Gulf."





**They said it started when the falls poured off the mountain and got deeper and deeper as it came toward the mouth; that no white man had ever gone through the Gulf. Several had been known to start through but were never heard from again. The Indians had a lead mine somewhere in the Gulf, but no white man had ever been able to find the way to where the Indians got the lead. Each one had something to add to the legend of this wonderful Gulf. Some said that the dogs would go no further than where the Gulf came out of the mountain.**

**We located the railroad nearly a mile nearer the Gulf than the Rattery Bridge was, despite the warning of all visitors. After finishing the location I was appointed division engineer in charge of construction from Gadsden to Menlo, Georgia and boarded with a man named Starling for four months. He was 76 then and said he was born and reared where he lived, about ten miles from the mouth of the Gulf. He was employed by the "Indian Service" when he was 12 years old as a linkister (linguist). (We use the word interpreter now). He said he**

**practically lived with the Indians for four years, during the time the arrangements were being made and the Indians being moved to Indian Territory.**

**Mr. Starling told me that all the Indians that lived in Tennessee, the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida and Mississippi, came to Lookout Mountain and bought or traded for lead mined in May's Gulf. He said there were a few of the Cherokee Indians, all living in the Gulf, who mined the lead and they did not allow others to know where the mine was. Mr. Starling said one of the old Indians told him about the mine.**

**I tried to get someone to go with me into this mysterious hole in the ground, but never could get anyone to go. Finally, I went by myself more than a mile into the Gulf from the lower end. It was rough going all the way and finally I got to a place where the river ran right up to the bluff. It was too cold for me to wade, so I had to turn back. The only living**





**things I saw in the Gulf were ravens. They did not seem to appreciate my visit. They followed me at a safe distance chattering and squawking as no other bird or anything else can do.**

**Soon after construction on the Chattanooga Southern Railroad began, I became acquainted with Uncle Josiah Leith , an 84 year old Primitive Baptist preacher who had lived less than five miles from the lower end of the Gulf for more than 60 years. He told me the following "Legend of May's Gulf", which I think is the most reasonable I have heard.**

**"When the Indians were moved to the Territory, there were some of the Cherokee Warriors (I have no idea how many) who hid in the Gulf and did not go to the territory. I think they slipped out the upper end of the Gulf some two or three years later and went to the Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina. Soon after the Indians were moved to the territory (probably five years), each winter a lone Indian would appear on a certain cliff near the lower end of the Gulf early in the morning and stand like a statue for some time but no one ever saw him walk out on the cliff or leave it. There were several years that past with no Indians being seen on the cliff, but after the A.G.S Railroad was built, one Indian got the train at Collinsville and bought some supplies disappeared in the woods. A few days later he or some other Indian has been seen every few years since then. I doubt very seriously that there was any lead mined in the Gulf, however."**

**During the winter of 1890-91, while we were building the Chattanooga Southern Railroad, a lone Indian was seen several times standing on the cliff mentioned above, but no one talked to him.**

**It seems to me that there surely must be some mistake about the young men, mentioned above, being the first white people who ever went through Little River Gorge. It is right at our door. Why go to Colorado to see Royal Gorge or Point Lookout where Buffalo Bill and his wife are buried, looking at beautiful scenery? Little River Gorge is much longer, more rugged and almost as deep as the Royal Gorge. It is far more scenic. The cliff where the**



**lone Indians have posed periodically for more than a hundred years is much higher than Point Lookout and the views from there are certainly as good as those from Point Lookout.**

