



# The Legend of Rupe and Prunes

Tales and legends of the Southwest are littered with unique characters, but perhaps none as unique and touching as the story of Prunes and his prospecting partner, Rupe.

Rupe Sherwood, a tough, independent man, spent his entire adult life looking for and mining the precious metals (mostly gold and silver) of Colorado near the Fairplay-Alma area. Rupe didn't care to work the hardrock mines. Instead he prefer to pan for gold. Rupe's life would have been a lonely one, since he spent much of his time in solitude in the wilderness. Luckily, Rupe wasn't alone. He had the best friend a man could have — his faithful burro, Prunes.

Prunes, so named because his coat was about the same color as a dried prune, was born in 1867. Shortly thereafter, he became Rupe's partner and life-long friend. Heavily loaded with food, mining equipment, cooking supplies, bedding and more, year after year Prunes followed Rupe into the mountains. When Rupe was panning for gold in the cold mountain streams, Prunes would graze the fertile river meadows nearby. When Rupe dug into the mountain sides, Prunes pulled the pick like a plow to loosen the soil and rock. Prunes also helped drag away large boulders and drag sledges loaded with gravel, dirt or ore down to the stream so Rupe could wash away the dirt and get to the gold. Unfortunately, Rupe didn't always find gold. When that happened, he and

Prunes would work the hardrock mines for a while until Rupe saved up enough for another trip into the wilderness. By the end of their career, Rupe and Prunes had worked every mine in the area. Burros were an indispensable part of the hardrock mining. They hauled ore carts up from the depths of the mine and made up the burro pack trains that carried the ore down to the mill. The miners affectionately referred to the burros as Rocky Mountain Canaries because of their loud and unmusical hee-haws!

Prunes was a very important part of these hardrock camps. According to stories, the miners would send Prunes alone down the mountain with a shopping list attached to his harness. The shopkeepers would fill the order and send Prunes back up the mountain, again all by himself, and he faithfully returned each time with the badly needed supplies.

Rupe and Prunes prospected for 50 years, before both grew too old. Rupe had earned enough from his diggings to retire in comfort. He spent the summers in Fairplay, and the winters in Denver. While he was gone, the townsfolk looked after Prunes. By burro standards, Prunes was pretty spoiled in his old age. The whole town loved him. He apparently panhandled at doorways and the good wives of the town would feed him flapjacks when he came calling.

One winter, a terrible blizzard hit the

area. Prunes was caught out in the storm. He took shelter in an abandoned shed and the door blew shut, trapping poor Prunes inside. When the children of Fairplay finally found him, Prunes was in bad shape; weak, ill, starving and dehydrated. The whole town carefully nursed him and Prunes managed to hang on until Spring when Rupe returned. Sadly, Prunes was still in very poor health and the townsfolk and a very sad Rupe decided the kindest thing would be to shoot him.

It wasn't just Rupe who missed his old partner. The whole town had fallen in love with Prunes' tricks and charm. They took up a collection and put up a monument to mark the burial site of their faithful friend. Less than a year later, Rupe fell gravely ill. His dying wish was to be cremated and buried beside his old friend Prunes.

Today, the monument to Prunes (and Rupe) still stands in the town of Fairplay, Colorado. The epitaph reads...

**Prunes I A Burro  
1867 1930  
Fairplay I Alma  
All Mine In This District**

Who knows, maybe Rupe and Prunes are still together and still looking for the mother lode that eluded them through their long and happy lives on earth. Wherever, you are, Rupe and Prunes, know that your memory lives on.