

TOTW: Gold Rush

Gold Rush is one of those really well-known bluegrass tunes. Composed by Byron Berline in around 1967 with Bill Monroe during a quick seven-month stint in the Bluegrass Boys, it was recorded later without Berline, who had been drafted. Kenny Baker popularized it with Bill Monroe who played mandolin on Kenny's album *Master Fiddler* in 1993. Though Gold Rush originally had three parts, when it got recorded only two parts were played.

Wikipedia shares that [Berline](#): "was born in [Caldwell, Kansas](#), on July 6, 1944. He started playing the fiddle at age five and quickly developed his talent. In 1965 he recorded the album *Pickin' and Fiddlin'* with the Dillards. That year he met [Bill Monroe](#) at the [Newport Folk Festival](#) and was offered a job with Monroe's Bluegrass Boys, but he turned it down to finish his education. He graduated from the [University of Oklahoma](#) in 1967 with a teaching degree in Physical Education and joined the Bluegrass Boys in March, replacing Richard Greene. He recorded three instrumentals with them, including 'Gold Rush.'"

Berline left the Bluegrass Boys in September 1967 when he was drafted into the Army. In a [Banjo Newsletter article](#) on Gold Rush, Eddie Collins wrote: "Berline says Monroe called him after he was in the service and asked if he liked the name Gold Rush for the piece. Byron could see the image of a wagon going over a rock during the quick D to A change in Part B, so yes, he thought it was a fitting title." Berline died at age 77, having been honored as an Oklahoma Music Hall of Famer, a National Fiddler Hall of Famer, a three-time National Fiddle Champion, and a three-time Grammy nominee.

A Texas fiddler and pastor named [Stafford Harris](#) played Gold Rush in a unique and sweet style. Tricia Spencer and Howard Rains learned from him and play it on their 2019 CD "[The Old Texas Fiddle, Vol. III](#)", said to be the third and final CD of a series. In this [notation](#), you can see where the minor chord accompaniment occurs, giving it quite a different feel from the original. I couldn't hit some of the nice-sounding low notes (impetus once again to think about a 6-string banjo), but used the minor chords to keep the ambiance.

There are at least three on-line banjo tutorials for the traditional Gold Rush -- one 3-finger style and two clawhammer, links posted below. They follow the Kenny Baker version. Perhaps one of these will be helpful for learning the tune, plus it's a treat to see the masterful clawhammering of Hilarie Burhans and Victor Furtado.

I thought I knew Gold Rush from listening to Monroe and Baker, but when I listened to its main composer, Byron Berline, I heard a couple of little nuances to adopt, especially the gold rush wagon going over a rock in the B part, as in the Berline story of when he approved for Bill Monroe regarding the title, so I've re-recorded my take on the tune.

My final thought here is that adapting Bill Monroe's bluegrass tunes to our clawed and picked old-time style isn't hard and it is desirable. Though we don't often picture Bill Monroe as being essential to the old timey genre, he evolved from it and though he veritably defines bluegrass,

we know his background was old-time.

[Byron Berline, interview, 3-part Gold Rush](#) starts at 1:35 (The third part appears to be an A part variation)

[Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys](#)

[Kenny Baker](#)

[California band with Byron Berline, Bill Monroe, Mark O'Conner, Jerry Douglas](#)

[Spencer and Rains](#) (Stafford Harris version)

[Chip Bach, mandolin](#) (very pretty Stafford Harris version)

[Megan Lynch tutorial](#)

[Victor Furtado tutorial](#)

[Hilarie Burhans tutorial](#)

[Traditional Tune Archive, notation included](#)