

Arizona History

AZT Passage 2-Canelo Hills East

by Preston Sands

Passage 2 of the Arizona Trail begins where the Huachuca Mountains transition into the Canelo Hills near Parker Canyon Lake. William Parker from Tennessee first laid eyes on this scenic area while bound for the California goldfields. This gold-seeking trip proved a financial boon to Parker, so he brought his family west to settle in Phoenix. The ever growing crowds of Phoenix did not appeal to the Parker family, however, so they moved south to settle along the creek that is now named for them.

In the early 1930's, Jim Hathaway, a tough, well-known area rancher and former deputy sheriff, began constructing a ranch house in a small valley in upper Parker Canyon. Hathaway lived here off and on with his family over the years, while tending to his ranching interests. During a roundup in 1954, Hathaway was gored and severely injured at his Parker Canyon ranch while attempting to stop an aggressive cow from escaping the corral. Hathaway passed away from his injuries the following day. In 1966, the Arizona Game and Fish Department built a dam below Hathaway's old ranch, and today the waters of Parker Canyon Lake cover the site.

The Spanish named the hills in this area "Canela," or cinnamon, for their reddish-brown soil. During the Spanish era, what is now southern Arizona was the northern frontier of New Spain, and referred to as "Pimeria Alta", after the Pima and O'odham natives who inhabited the area. Spanish colonists had a dangerous existence in the mountainous areas east of the Santa Cruz River, due to ongoing Apache efforts to drive them out. Despite this unrest, the Spanish, and later the Mexicans, established a number of mines and ranches in the greater Canelo Hills area. When the United States came into possession of southern Arizona following the 1853 Gadsden Purchase, the American government recognized a number of old Spanish and Mexican land grants in the area. This passage of the Arizona Trail travels between two of these old land grants, the San Rafael de la Zanja to the south, and the San Ignacio del Babocomari on the north.

The San Rafael de la Zanja land grant, located along today's U.S.-Mexico border, was prime ranch land in 1822 when it was purchased by a group of thirty Mexican *parcioneros*, or shareholders. These shareholders ran cattle and lived on their land grant with great success until a disastrous Apache raid in 1843. This raid claimed the lives of many of the shareholders and drove off their cattle. The survivors fled to the presidio, or fort, of Santa Cruz to the south, never to return to their land. After a lengthy period of turmoil in the American legal system, the San Rafael land grant passed into the hands of American ranchers. Unfortunately for the new owners, due to the proximity of the international border, the new ranches of the San Rafael were a target for cattle rustlers, including legendary Mexican revolutionary figure Pancho Villa. The San Rafael de la Zanja is currently owned by the Nature Conservancy and Arizona State Parks and Trails, both of whom are preserving this largely untarnished native grassland area.

The San Ignacio del Babocomari land grant was given to Don Ignacio Elias Gonzales and his

wife Dona Eulalia in 1827 by the Mexican government. This family grazed thousands of cattle on this beautiful grassland ranch through the 1840's. Despite a large defensive wall surrounding the ranch headquarters, Apache attacks claimed the lives of two of the brothers, and the family abandoned their Babocomari Ranch during the 1840's. The old ranch headquarters and surrounding fort walls were used by the U.S. Cavalry in 1864 as a staging point for campaigns against Apache chief Cochise and the Chiricahua Apaches, during the height of the Apache Wars.

Named for the colorful hills surrounding it, the little settlement of Canelo began to grow in the 1880's. A post office and a general store served Canelo's residents and local ranchers during the early 20th century. Canelo's 1912 adobe schoolhouse and a historic Forest Service building are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Canelo remains a quiet, scenic ranching community as it has been for over a century.

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