

Arizona History
AZT Passage 9-Rincon Mountains
by Preston Sands

At the urging of Tucson newspaper publisher Frank Hitchcock, President Herbert Hoover issued a proclamation on March 1, 1933 that created Saguaro National Monument. The monument was created to protect and preserve the spectacular stands of saguaro cacti covering the foothills of the Rincon Mountains. The saguaro cactus is the largest cactus in the United States, one of the defining symbols of Arizona, and is of great importance to the Sonoran Desert biome as well as the Tohono O'odham people who maintain a strong cultural connection to the saguaro (*ha:sañ*). Over time, new acreage was added to the monument and an additional unit was added on the west side of Tucson. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed a bill that changed Saguaro National Monument into Saguaro National Park, and expanded the Park's boundaries.

Located along the Arizona Trail near the pine-covered summit of the Rincon Mountains is an old cabin known as Manning Camp, which is currently used by the National Park Service. Levi Manning moved to Tucson in 1884 as a young man looking to create a brighter future for himself. Manning rose to prominence in the area through successful business ventures, as a writer for local newspapers, and as mayor of Tucson. Manning decided to build a summer cabin for his family atop the Rincon Mountains, and filed homestead papers at a choice location there in 1904. Construction crews built a wagon road to the site, and constructed a cabin from pine logs cut in the area. When the cabin was complete, Manning even had a piano hauled in to this remote area via wagon. The Manning Family was not able to enjoy their new summer retreat for long, however, as the Rincon Mountains were incorporated into the Coronado National Forest in 1907, and their homestead plot was revoked. The Manning family continued to lease the land their cabin was on from the Forest Service for a few more years, but no longer used their mountain retreat. The Manning Camp cabin eventually passed into the hands of the Forest Service, and later the National Park Service, with both agencies using the cabin as housing for fire crews during the summer fire seasons. This historic cabin has been modified and repaired a few times over the years, and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

A mile east of Manning Camp is Spud Rock Campground, located at the site of the old Spud Rock Cabin. In 1890, a retired railroad man by the name of Bock built a cabin among the pines and began growing potatoes there. Growing potatoes in Arizona's cool high country was a call that a number of people answered in those days. Whether Bock moved on or passed on, no one seems to know, but the Forest Service began using his cabin to house fire crews in 1907, when the Rincon Mountains became National Forest land. Bock's original cabin and its 1912 replacement are long gone.

As a firefighting effort, the U.S. Forest Service fire crews that were stationed at Spud Rock Cabin and Manning Camp would patrol Spud Rock and Mica Mountain on horseback during the early 1900's. When the horseback patrols proved ineffective, Coronado National Forest constructed a 100-foot lookout tower atop Mica Mountain, the highest point in the Rincon Mountains.

During the 1886 Geronimo Campaign and again during the early 1890's, the U.S. Army operated heliograph signal mirrors atop the peaks of the Rincons. These heliograph mirrors used reflected sunlight to pass messages from mountaintop to mountaintop across Arizona.

References

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