

Arizona History

AZT Passage 15-Tortilla Mountains

by Preston Sands

Much of the southern portion of this passage travels through historic, early Arizona ranches, including the Hayden, Cottonwood, and Ripsey Ranches. The high desert grasslands attracted many ranchers to Arizona during the late 19th century.

Roughly seven miles into this passage heading northbound, the Arizona Trail crosses the route of the old Florence Road, which was a wagon route connecting Dudleyville and the San Pedro River basin with the town of Florence. The Gila River, beginning in western New Mexico, is one of Arizona's major river systems, and has long been an important travel corridor. During Arizona's frontier period, the old wagon road between Florence and Globe followed the Gila River in places, through isolated desert hills. The Florence-Globe Road could be a dangerous route in those days.

On November 1, 1889, Gila County Sherriff, Globe pioneer turned deputy sheriff William "Hunkydory" Holmes and a driver by the name of Eugene Middleton left Globe on a stagecoach, escorting eight convicted Apache prisoners, including the infamous "Apache Kid" to the Yuma Territorial Prison. On the second day of their journey, in the vicinity of today's Arizona Trail route, Sherriff Reynolds had seven of the prisoners get off of the stagecoach and walk up the steep hill they had come to, in order to lighten the stagecoach's load. Reynolds and Holmes walked with the prisoners, guarding them. Distance grew between the stagecoach and the party on foot, and soon the stagecoach was out of sight, rounding a curve. The Apache prisoners suddenly turned on Reynolds and Holmes, knocking them to the ground and attacking them. Holmes was hit in the head with rocks before the prisoners shot him in the head with his own rifle. The prisoners managed to shoot Reynolds in the chest with his own pistol. One of the prisoners, Jesus Avott, quickly ran up the hill to warn Middleton, the stage driver. Middleton was shortly knocked from the coach by a bullet through his neck, and pretended to be dead as the Apaches turned their attention on him. Freed from their shackles using Sherriff Reynold's keys, the Apache prisoners made their escape. Middleton and Avott were able to make it to the safety of nearby towns, and a massive manhunt soon formed. Seven of the prisoners were soon captured, but the Apache Kid was never seen again.

On May 30, 1899, Pearl Hart and her shady boyfriend Joe Boot, in need of money, robbed a stagecoach traveling the Florence-Globe wagon road near Kane Springs, just east of the Gila River. Pearl, a young woman from Canada who had become enamored with the romance of the "Wild West" had come to Arizona a few years before. Instead of finding fortune, she turned to saloons, whiskey, morphine, prostitution, and Joe Boot – a gambler and miner who lived in Mammoth. Joe hatched the robbery plan, and their heist netted them \$400. Fleeing south along the San Pedro River, Pearl and Joe were caught only a few days later in Benson. Pearl used her charm to solicit help to escape the Tucson jail where she was being held, but was soon recaptured in New Mexico. Pearl and Joe were ultimately convicted of robbing the stagecoach and served time in the Yuma Territorial Prison. Feigning pregnancy

while in prison, Pearl managed to win an early release and left Arizona for a more honest life.

References

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