

## **Arizona History**

### **AZT Passage 20-Four Peaks**

**by Preston Sands**

The Four Peaks Passage begins alongside one of Arizona's largest bodies of water, Roosevelt Lake. The construction of Roosevelt Dam during the first decade of the 20th century was part of a public works and flood control project for the Phoenix valley. The unpredictable flow of the Salt River would be regulated by constructing the world's largest masonry dam from quarried blocks of billion-year-old limestone adjacent to the dam site. This massive project entailed the construction of a new road up the scenic Salt River corridor from Phoenix, the establishment of a construction town called Roosevelt, and the harvesting of timber from the Sierra Ancha, a rugged mountain range to the east. Roosevelt Lake takes its name from noted conservationist Theodore Roosevelt, who legislatively facilitated the dam's construction and attended the dam's dedication ceremony. The original site of the town of Roosevelt, which served as the dam's construction camp, lies buried under the waters of Roosevelt Lake, near the dam site. When the lake began to fill, Roosevelt was moved to higher ground, where it remains today.

Downslope from the AZT route along State Highway 188 is a stone monument honoring Al Sieber, a legendary Arizona pioneer, Army scout and miner, who was involved with a number of mines in the Globe and Tonto Basin area. As a part of the Roosevelt Dam construction project, Sieber and his crew of Apache road builders constructed the Apache Trail, one of Arizona's first highways, linking the Phoenix valley with isolated Tonto Basin. While working on a section of road on the north side of the dam, Sieber was killed by a falling boulder. A roadside monument along Highway 188 marks the site of his passing.

In the latter half of the 19th century, Arizona was the scene of many battles between the United States Cavalry and indigenous peoples. One particularly brutal battle occurred in the rugged canyon country south of Four Peaks, at a place that came to be known as Skull Cave, or Skeleton Cave. During this time, the Cavalry attempted to pursue and subdue many groups of Apaches and Yavapais, who fiercely resisted giving up their land to be forced onto reservations. In December of 1872, during an extended mission through central Arizona in pursuit of the Apache, Major William Brown and his Cavalry troops were led to an isolated cave by an Apache scout, where a group of Apaches were inside, resting after a recent foray. Positioned below the cave, Major Brown instructed his men to fire their rifles at the angled ceiling of the cave, hoping that their bullets would ricochet into the Apaches hidden inside. Major Brown's ghoulish plan worked, and most of the Apaches succumbed to the attack. The few who survived were taken as captives. Years later, the cave and the human remains inside were rediscovered, and today the incident serves as a dark chapter in Arizona's history.

The large valley encompassing Roosevelt Lake is Tonto Basin. Tonto Basin lays on the fringe of the Hohokam, Salado, and Mogollon people's homeland. Archaeological evidence suggests that the ancestral human population of Tonto Basin was far greater than the present day population, a theory supported by the great number of pueblos, archaeological sites and artifacts found throughout the valley.

Four Peaks, a prominent area landmark and the namesake of this passage, forms the southern highpoint of the Mazatzal Mountains. The highest of these four peaks is Brown's Peak, the northernmost of the four, and a popular summit for peak baggers. The names of a number of local historical characters are etched into the billion-year-old Mazatzal Quartzite bedrock that forms the summit of Brown's Peak.

Located among the cliffs of Four Peaks themselves is a privately owned amethyst mine. Legend has it that Spanish explorers collected some of this amethyst and that it is now a part of Spain's crown jewels. The mine was officially discovered during the early 20th century, and continues to produce high quality amethyst that is hauled from the mine site by helicopter, due to its isolated location within the Four Peaks Wilderness.

Named for Lone Pine Saddle near the end of this segment, the Lone Fire erupted from an unattended campfire on April 27, 1996. The Lone Fire roared across the densely vegetated slopes of the Four Peaks Wilderness for 11 days before it was brought under control. Burning 61,000 acres, it was the largest wildfire in Arizona history at the time. More recently, the area burned again during the Bush Fire when a total of 193,455 acres was incinerated, resulting in a trail closure that lasted almost one full year.

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