

Arizona History

AZT Passage 18-Reavis Canyon

by Preston Sands

This passage of the AZT begins by the massive, fortress like Picketpost Mountain, which received its name from an old military camp on its northern slopes, Camp Picket Post. Around 1870, U.S. Army General George Stoneman established Camp Picket Post along Queen Creek in an attempt to protect the area from Apaches. Further east, in the Pinal Mountains at the site of today's Top of the World village, Stoneman established another military post, Camp Pinal. To connect these two posts, Stoneman had his soldiers construct a trail, which came to be known as the Stoneman Grade. While Camp Pinal faded from the scene in 1871, the Stoneman Grade continued to be an important travel route in the area.

To the east, nestled against the base of a cliff wall known as Apache Leap, is the historic mining town of Superior. Following the discovery of silver in 1875, the Silver Queen mine was born, and two small settlements, Hastings and Queen City, formed nearby. In 1897, miner and early Silver King resident George Lobb relocated to Hastings to develop a mine property there. Lobb sold his mining property to the Lake Superior and Arizona Mining Company in 1902, and the little community he had helped revive was renamed Superior after the company. Mining man Boyce Thompson and partner George Gunn purchased the old Silver Queen Mine holdings in 1910 and developed them into the Magma Mine, one of Arizona's most productive early copper mines. A narrow gauge railroad, the Magma Arizona, was constructed in 1914 from the Florence area into Superior to serve the Magma Mine. The AZT crosses this old railroad line a mile west of Boyce Thompson's legacy, Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Off in the distance to the northwest lie the rugged Superstition Mountains, steeped in history and lost mine legends. The best known of these legends is the Lost Dutchman Mine. Named not for a Dutch man, but rather a German immigrant and miner, Jacob Waltz, the Lost Dutchman Mine legend has numerous variations. The most commonly told version of the legend is that Jacob Waltz came into possession of an old Spanish gold mine hidden deep in the Superstition Mountains, and secretly retrieved gold from it periodically while living in Phoenix in the late 19th century. From Waltz's time until present, thousands of would-be treasure seekers have unsuccessfully searched for the Lost Dutchman Mine, their adventures filling scores of history books.

North of Superior, in a sloping valley below several lofty peaks, is the site of one of Arizona's great silver mines, the Silver King. One of the builders of the Stoneman Grade, a soldier by the name of John Sullivan, found some heavy black rocks in 1870 while taking a break during the grueling trail building work. Collecting a few of the rocks, he later discovered that they were pieces of rich silver ore. Sullivan left the area without developing his discovery. Five years later, a group of prospectors, having heard Sullivan's tale of the approximate location of his discovery, were able to relocate his rich silver find. Sullivan's neglected find became the fabulously wealthy Silver King Mine, which produced a fortune in silver, largely between 1875 and the early 1890's. The town of Silver King sprung to life around the mine, and boasted a population of roughly 500 at its peak. Ore mined at Silver King was hauled by wagon to stamp mills in the new town of Pinal City, along Queen Creek, which had risen on

the site of Camp Picket Post. While the mine and town of Silver King faded from history after their boom went bust, they set the stage for many more mine discoveries in the area. As this passage of the AZT leaves the desert foothills behind for the higher mountain country, it travels up Reavis Trail Canyon.

Elisha Reavis was a hermit sporting a long beard and disheveled clothing, who made his home deep in the Superstition Mountains, north of Superior, from the 1870's to the 1890's. At his ranch high in the mountains, Reavis grew fruits and vegetables that were in great demand by residents of nearby towns. Reavis would transport his produce on the backs of his burros down Reavis Trail Canyon, selling it in the towns of Silver King, Florence, and Mesa for many years.

References

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