

Arizona History
AZT Passage 28-Happy Jack
by Preston Sands

This area of the Mogollon Rim was an important travel corridor during the past, linking northern Arizona with its central valleys. Crossing the Mogollon Rim in the area of this passage was the Palatkwapi Trail, a prehistoric route used by the Hopi of northern Arizona when venturing west to trade with the Yavapai of the Verde Valley, on the western side of the Mogollon Rim. When Spanish explorer Antonio de Espéjo arrived in the land of the Hopi in 1583, a party of Hopis led Espéjo and his party of treasure seekers west along the Palatkwapi Trail, roughly paralleling the route of today's Arizona Trail in places. Their destination was the site of a rich copper deposit on the western side of the Verde Valley, which gave birth to the town of Jerome three centuries later. During the 1860's, the Palatkwapi Trail was developed into the Chavez Wagon Road, which became an important route used by settlers migrating to the Verde Valley.

The open country on this passage has a long history of ranching, likely beginning with Navajo sheep herders in the 18th century. Homesteaders and ranchers began to infiltrate this area during the latter half of the 19th century, leaving their mark in the form of cabins, livestock tanks, canals, and a cluster of artificial lakes which remain today. Other ranching operations utilized the Mogollon Rim's high country as a summer grazing area for their livestock.

The Mogollon Rim, which forms the southern and western margins of Arizona's Colorado Plateau highlands, is home to the world's largest stand of ponderosa pines. Many parts of the Mogollon Rim have heard the saws of historic logging, and this area is certainly one of them. A number of sawmills were located in this area, all of which are long vanished.

This passage of the Arizona Trail takes its name from an old logging camp known as Happy Jack. In the early 1940's, the Saginaw-Manistee Lumber Company, having nearly exhausted its Williams and Flagstaff logging allotments of timber, began a new logging operation south of Mormon Lake. Saginaw-Manistee constructed a sizable company town in a small valley among the pines, complete with employee homes, a company store, and a grade school. First known as Saginaw Camp, the little town with a peak population of nearly 500 was soon renamed Happy Jack, and a post office was established. Company manager J.M. Bedford signed an agreement to lease the old Central Arizona Railroad out of Flagstaff with an option to buy, and its tracks were extended to within seven miles of Happy Jack. Busy Saginaw-Manistee logging crews would load freshly cut logs onto trucks, which would then be driven to the southern end of the railroad at a location known as Allan Lake Landing.

Logs would then be transported by the railroad to a company-leased sawmill in Flagstaff. Southwest Lumber Mills bought Saginaw-Manistee in 1953 and continued the operation essentially unchanged until 1967, when trucks replaced the trains and the railroad was torn up. Today the logging camp of Happy Jack is gone, having been razed by Southwest Forest Industries in the 1970's. The Happy Jack name lives on though, in the form of a nearby lodge and a few widely scattered summer cabin neighborhoods.

North of Happy Jack, the trail wraps around Mahan Mountain, named for A.J.T. Mahan. In 1889, Mahan began a homestead and cattle ranch below the peak that would later bear his name. Mahan Mountain's summit became the location of the first Forest Service fire lookout in the area, constructed in a tree top.

Located near the northern end of this passage is Hutch Mountain, named for C.C. "Hutch" Hutchinson, an early 20th century sheep rancher and owner of the Grand Canyon Sheep Company. Hutchison ran large sheep herds in the greater Flagstaff area, including the area of Hutch Mountain, now the site of a Forest Service fire lookout tower.

References

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