

## **Arizona History**

### **AZT Passage 31-Walnut Canyon**

by Preston Sands

The Walnut Canyon passage of the Arizona Trail begins by heading west across a pleasant mountain meadow next to Marshall Lake, on Anderson Mesa. It was on this, the northern part of Anderson Mesa, that the Flagstaff Lumber Company railroad constructed a steep, rollercoaster-like section of track known as an “incline” in 1917. This incline used a steam powered winch to pull empty railroad cars up the side of the mesa, and lower full ones back down, which were heavily laden with freshly cut logs for the company’s Flagstaff sawmill. A steam locomotive stationed on top of Anderson Mesa transported the loaded log cars from the forest to the top of the incline. This unusual logging railroad had been in operation for less than a year when its steam locomotive unexpectedly went over the edge of Anderson Mesa, onto the incline, and quickly lost control, in effect becoming a “runaway train.” The locomotive impacted at the bottom of the incline and was destroyed, but the crewmembers had jumped from the locomotive’s cab and were not injured. The Flagstaff Lumber Company quickly abandoned its Anderson Mesa incline railroad after this incident.

A few miles into this passage, the trail descends to the bed of Walnut Creek, below pale, cross-bedded walls of Coconino Sandstone. It is here that the Arizona Trail’s Flagstaff Urban Route (Passage 33) branches off to the west, and Walnut Creek enters the narrow confines of Walnut Canyon. From this trail junction, the Arizona Trail climbs to the north rim of Walnut Canyon, where a short spur hike out to Fisher Point gives a fine view of the sinuous chasm of Walnut Canyon, once home to the Sinagua people.

The Sinagua moved into central Arizona around the year 600, inhabiting the Verde Valley, Flagstaff and Mogollon Rim region. Sinagua, Spanish for “without water,” refers to some of their dwelling sites being in arid locations. The Sinagua farmed the fertile volcanic soils of the Flagstaff region, hunted plentiful animals, and collected wild, edible plants.

Archaeological evidence in the form of turquoise, seashells, and macaw feathers suggest that the Sinagua traded with a number of other cultures of the Southwest, with their trade network reaching as far south as Mexico. Their traditional pit house dwellings gave way to a building revolution during the 1100’s and 1200’s. During this time the Sinagua constructed great pueblos and cliff dwellings including Montezuma Castle in the Verde Valley, Elden Pueblo and Wupatki in the Flagstaff area, and a cliff dwelling complex in Walnut Canyon.

As the Arizona Trail works its way east from Fisher Point, it occasionally comes close to the rim of Walnut Canyon, where one can gaze into its beautiful, forested passageways. Clustered around a peninsula of layered cliffs in Walnut Canyon are a large number of Sinagua cliff dwellings, dating to the 12th and 13th centuries. Here, tucked beneath ledges of pale Kaibab Limestone, the Sinagua constructed numerous single level apartment-like dwellings within the canyon’s cliff walls. On the canyon rims above, the Sinagua farmed and constructed pithouses. Some early American visitors to the canyon stole artifacts from the dwellings and vandalized the sites, which ultimately led to the creation of Walnut Canyon National Monument in 1915 by President Woodrow Wilson. Walnut Canyon National Monument lies less than a mile south of the Arizona Trail, and is a side trip not to be missed.

Winding through rolling forest country north of Walnut Canyon, the Arizona Trail crosses the road to Walnut Canyon National Monument, where it bends north and enters pinyon-juniper woodland. The high peaks of the San Francisco Volcanic Field are in view as this segment comes to an end at Interstate 40, along one of Arizona's most important historic transportation corridors. After Lieutenant Edward Beale first established this route in 1857, the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad laid tracks through this corridor in 1881, followed by the National Old Trails Road in the 1910's. One of America's first national highways, U.S. Highway 66 or "Route 66," as it was better known, made use of the National Old Trails Road in the late 1920's. Route 66 traveled over 2,400 miles from Chicago, Illinois to Santa Monica, California, and served as the main travel artery across northern Arizona until it was replaced by Interstate 40 decades later.

## References

- Barnes, W. C. (1988). *Arizona place names*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.
- Noble, D.G. (2000). *Ancient ruins of the southwest: an archaeological guide*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Publishing Company.
- Schuppert, T. (1993). *Central Arizona railroad and the railroads of arizona's central timber region*. San Marino, CA: Golden West Books.
- Sullivan, G. (2005). *Roadside guide to indian ruins and rock art of the southwest*. Englewood, CO: Westcliffe Publishers.
- Trimble, M. (1986). *Roadside history of arizona*. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company.
- United States Geological Survey. (1908). *Arizona flagstaff quadrangle*. Retrieved from: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/topo/arizona/pclmaps-topo-az-flagstaff-1908.jpg>
- Unknown author. (n.d.). Route 66 History. Route 66 World. Retrieved from: [http://www.Route66world.com/66\\_history/](http://www.Route66world.com/66_history/)
- Weingroff, R.F. (n.d.). The National Old Trails Road. Part 1: The Quest for a National Road. U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. Retrieved from: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/trails.cfm>