

APACHE PASS

Apache Pass is located between the Dos Cabezas and Chiricahua Mountain Ranges. The pass has played a significant part in the history of Arizona, particularly because of the presence of an unfailing source of water called Apache Springs. In the beginning of the modern era (15th Century), the Apaches were the primary users of the Apache Pass area. The Apaches had moved into the Southwest under pressure from the Plains Indians and occupied the area we now call western New Mexico, eastern Arizona and northern Mexico. There were several different tribes of Apaches but those who had settled into southern Arizona and New Mexico and northern Mexico (the area south of the Gila River) were generally classified as Chiricahua Apaches although they consisted of four sub-tribes called Bedonkohe, Chokonon, Chihenen and Nehdni. The Chokonon were those who periodically established rancherias in the pass area as they moved about seasonally based on the availability of food resources. After the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February 1848 and the ratification of the Gadsden Treaty in April 1854, the area became part of the United States and contact with the Americans significantly increased. Many of these Americans were on their way to the California gold fields.



Apache Wickiup (Temporary Shelter)

1857 – Jackass Mail Route - The San Antonio – San Diego Mail Line was awarded a contract on 22 June 1857 to carry mail between those two cities and commenced service on 9 July. The service consisted of two trips per month from each city (9th and 24th). Facilities provided were rudimentary, sometimes consisting of no more than a brush corral and a mud-walled hut while the larger number were merely camping places at springs or stream crossings. The segment of the route from El Paso to Yuma passed through Apache Pass and during the period of its existence, it was pretty much left alone by the Apaches who were in open hostilities with the Mexicans and didn't want to expand their war to the Americans. The El Paso to Fort Yuma segment of the Jackass Mail was cancelled on 1 December 1858 because it duplicated the route of the newly activated Butterfield Stage Route.

1858 – Butterfield Overland Mail Route - In September 1857, the Butterfield Overland Stage Company won a contract to deliver mail from St. Louis to San Francisco. This operation was significantly more sophisticated than the Jackass mail operation and it took about a year to get it off the ground. One hundred and forty one stage stations were constructed with the one in Apache Pass being completed in June 1858. It was constructed of stone and included living and dining quarters and a corral in the rear if the building for the mules. In addition to constructing the stage stations, the company procured about a thousand horses, seven hundred mules and two hundred and fifty stagecoaches and spring wagons. The first run Left St. Louis on 18 September 1858, passed through Tucson on 2 October and arrived in San Francisco on 10 October with a total elapsed time of 23 days and 23 ½ hours. For the first couple of years, the

company's relations with the Apaches were very good. There were indications that Cochise, who had risen to leadership of the Chokonen tribe in the early 1850s, had made an agreement with the Butterfield Company to allow safe passage through the area that he controlled. In 1860, Cochise even had a contract to supply wood to the stage station at Apache Springs. These good relations came to an end in February 1861 following the "Bascom Affair" which resulted in Cochise going on a 10-year rampage against the Americans.



Butterfield Stage Station Ruins

The subsequent hostilities resulted in the stage company discontinuing the route. The last Overland Mail run through the Southwest was made on 21 March 1861. For a more complete history of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route click on the following link or post the url into your browser: <https://www.gvrhc.org/Library/ButterfieldStageStation.pdf>

1861 – The “Bascom Affair” - This incident was the cause of the 10-year war between the Chiricahua Apaches led by Cochise and the United States. On 27 January 1861, some Western Apaches (Apaches from the Aravaipa area whose principle chief was Eskiminzin) were returning from a raiding party in Sonora when they stopped at the Ward Ranch along the Sonoita Creek between Patagonia and Sonoita. The raiders split into two groups. One group rounded up about twenty head of cattle and oxen while the other group headed toward the ranch house and ended up kidnapping Felix Telles, the 12-year old Mexican stepson of Rancher John Ward. In a bit of irony, the war chief of the group that kidnapped Felix was Victor (Apache name was *Beto*), a Mexican who had been captured as a boy by Eskiminzin's raiders and raised as an Apache). Ward reported the loss at Fort Buchanan and the immediate reaction was that the raiding had been accomplished by the Chiricahua Apaches under Cochise. Lt. George Bascom and 54 men of the 7th Infantry were sent to Apache Pass to recover the Ward boy and the stock. John Ward accompanied the column as an interpreter. Lt Bascom arrived in Apache Pass on 4 February and met with Cochise and several other Apaches in an Army Sibley Tent. Lt Bascom accused Cochise of the raid and Cochise denied that any of his warriors had participated in the raid. He also offered to search for the boy and return him. When Cochise denied knowledge of the boy, Lt. Bascom did not believe him and told Cochise that he would be held hostage until the boy was returned. Enraged, Cochise pulled out a knife, slit a hole in the tent, escaped through the cordon of soldiers surrounding the tent and escaped into the hills. Lt Bascom kept six of the Apaches, including Cochise's brother Coyunturo as hostages. Cochise retaliated by also taking hostages. In his attempt to take three hostages at the stage station, one man was killed. He also took hostages from a passing wagon train. On 8 February, Cochise and 300 warriors attempted to free the Apache hostages but were only able to capture some horses and mules. Frustrated, the Apaches executed their hostages and left. Lt. Bascom then asked for assistance from Fort Buchanan. By 14 February, the military force had swelled to 125 men but patrols

were unable to locate the Apaches. At the instigation of Army Surgeon John Irwin and Lt. Isaiah Moore, Lt Bascom reluctantly agreed to execute the Apache hostages. Since three of those hanged were his close relatives, Cochise was infuriated and commenced his revenge on the Americans that lasted for the next ten years. Within 60 days, 150 whites had been killed. It is estimated that the 10-year war cost 5000 American lives and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of dollars of property. Felix Telles was never recovered and grew up as an Apache under the name of Mickey Free. He was to play a future role as a scout and interpreter under Generals Crook and Miles and was involved in the final surrender of Geronimo in 1886 although Geronimo never trusted his interpretations.

A detailed analysis of the incident titled “*A Boy Once Named Felix*” was prepared by Karen Weston Gonzales, a former National Park Ranger at the Fort Bowie National Historic Site and may be accessed by either clicking on the following link: <https://www.nps.gov/fobo/learn/historyculture/upload/A-Boy-Once-Named-Felix-3.pdf> or copying and pasting on to your web browser. Karen addresses the incident as a clash between two different cultures and this writer considers her analysis to be the most thorough and thought provoking discussion of the incident that he has read.

1862 – The Battle of Apache Pass - The outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861 resulted in the removal of the Union soldiers from New Mexico and Arizona to fight in the East. This caused a “power vacuum” that the Confederacy took advantage of. A Confederate Army force defeated a Union force in West Texas in July 1861 and its commander, Lt. Col. John Baylor subsequently declared a swath of land stretching from the Texas Plains west to the Colorado River and from the area near present day Wickenburg south to the Mexican border as the Confederate Territory of Arizona. On 1 March 1862, a Texas cavalry unit under the command of Captain Sherod Hunter raised the Confederate Flag over Tucson. The Union quickly retaliated and sent Union forces from California to retake the Southwest. On 20 May, the California column under the command of Brig. Gen. James Carleton occupied Tucson and the outnumbered Confederate unit fled back toward New Mexico. In July, General Carleton decided to press on to New Mexico. On 15 July, an advance column under the command of Captain Thomas Roberts entered Apache Pass and was heading for the spring to replenish their water supplies when they had an unpleasant surprise. Instead of Confederate soldiers, they were met by 500 Apache warriors led by Mangas Colorado and Cochise. Captain Roberts was badly outnumbered but he had one advantage, he had brought with him two 12-pounder mountain howitzers and plenty of ammunition. This was one of the first times that howitzers had been used against Native Americans and they turned the tide of the battle. The Apaches were bombarded by artillery fire for several hours before they fled and left the Union soldiers with access to the spring. An Apache who was there later stated that 63 warriors were killed by the artillery fire and only three had died from rifle fire. After the battle, General Carleton decided that it was necessary to establish a fort at the pass to control access to the spring and protect white settlers as they passed through. The fort was named Fort Bowie in honor of Colonel George Washington Bowie, commander of the 5th California Infantry. .

1862 – Establishment of Fort Bowie – After the battle of Apache Pass in July 1862 between the Apaches and the California Volunteers, it was decided that a permanent fort should be built in the pass to control access to the spring and protect settlers as they passed through the area. Construction of the fort began on 28 July 1862 on a hill

overlooking the spring and was completed in less than three weeks. This first fort consisted primarily of tents surrounded by stone breastworks that were soon replaced by a collection of crude stone and adobe huts. The fort was named Fort Bowie in honor of Colonel George Washington Bowie, commander of the 5th California Infantry. In 1868, the fort was relocated to the relatively flat plateau to the southeast of the first fort site. This new location developed into a major military facility with over 38 structures. There were barracks, officer's quarters, storehouses, corrals, a post trader's store and a hospital. To accommodate dependents, there was even a school. Fort Bowie served as the nerve center in the campaign against the Chiricahua Apaches under Cochise until 1872 and then again against Geronimo after the closing of the Chiricahua Reservation in 1876. After Geronimo surrendered for the last time to General Miles in September 1886, Fort Bowie remained as an active fort for another 8 years until it was finally closed on 17 October 1894.



Site of the Second Fort Bowie

1871 – Establishment of the Chiricahua Reservation - Cochise had been on the warpath against the Americans for over 10 years following the “Bascom Affair “ when General Oliver Otis Howard was sent by President Ulysses S. Grant on a mission to make peace with the Chiricahua Apaches. The big problem was trying to set up a meeting with Cochise. General Howard understood that there was only one man who had a chance of setting up that meeting and that was Thomas Jefferson Jeffords, the one American that Cochise trusted and respected. Jeffords agreed to take General Howard to Cochise if he would go without escort and unarmed. There were three meetings with Cochise, two at Council rocks near the West Stronghold and the final meeting at Dragoon Springs. Howard's direction from Washington was to convince Cochise to relocate his people from their historic homeland to the San Carlos Reservation. Cochise would have nothing to do with this proposal and instead proposed that a reservation be established in their homeland and that Jeffords be appointed as agent. Howard eventually agreed, much to the dismay of Washington. The reservation was established by executive order in December 1872 and included portions of the Dragoon and Chiricahua Mountains, the intervening Sulphur Springs Valley and the San Simon Valley on the east side of the Chiricahua Mountains (over 3,000 square miles). The reservation agency site that Jeffords first established was in a tiny adobe hut in the Sulphur Springs Valley. In September 1873, Jeffords moved the reservation agency headquarters to San Simon and then in November moved again to Pinery Canyon in the Chiricahua Mountains... Cochise kept his braves under control until his death in June



Ruins of the Reservation Agency

1874. The agency headquarters was moved one last time in May 1875, this time to Apache Pass near Fort Bowie. The Agency ruins shown in the picture above are those located in Apache Pass. In April 1876, some braves killed a stagecoach attendant over a disagreement and Washington used this incident to take action against the Chiricahuans. Jeffords was removed as Indian Agent and John Clum appointed as his replacement with instructions to close the reservation and move the Apaches to San Carlos. The closing of the reservation led to the rise in prominence of Geronimo.

Summarized by T. Johnson from various sources. References to Victor, the abductor of Felix were from *Victor of Old San Carlos* by Paul R. & Kathleen M. Nickens
Photographs by T. Johnson