

EARLY RECREATION USE

In October of 1910, H. E. Heighton and D. S. Cochran climbed to the top of Old Baldy (Mt. Wrightson) from the Gardner Canyon side. Looking down from the top, they could see only two mining camps, Littleshots and Ben Daniels, and the white adobe house. The two had been talking about the need for a summer resort to escape the heat of Tucson and how hard it was to get up to Mt. Lemon. Cochran had been in White House Canyon before and told Heighton that it was a beautiful, heavily wooded place with plenty of campsites and an ample supply of water.

Heighten told a group of interested friends. In order to get more specifics, Heighten, a builder named O. M. Anderson and the Assistant Secretary of Commerce H. G. Brown conducted a detailed survey early in 1911. Finding conditions "desirable in every way", they chose a five acre site about 300 yards above the Big Rock on the opposite side of the stream, obtained a permit from the Forest Service and formed a group of half a dozen backers. They had Anderson build six cabins and tent houses and as soon as school closed, they all went up to White House Canyon for three months' vacation. The place was named the Mountain Retreat Resort. Gradually others became interested and built cabins and from then on it rapidly grew into a very popular resort. The Heightens were still spending their summers there in 1946.

The Forest Service helped to develop utilities and improve the roads which encouraged additional development. C.R. Dusenberry built the Santa Rita Trails Resort which burned down but was rebuilt in 1929 as a year-round facility with cottages, cabins, and a general store. A post office was also established in the Lodge which operated until 1942. Eventually there were 52 cabins built on land leased from the government.

In 1972, the government decided that there was too great an environmental impact on the area and that the cabins must be removed within 10 years. Court action by the residents delayed the start of the removal action but by the fall of 1986, 29 cabins had been removed or demolished. By 1991, the remainder that were on Federal land were gone. A few homes remain on private land.

Summarized from "A Little Background on Madera Canyon" written by Harriet Smith of the Friends of Madera Canyon in January 1989