

## SAGUARO NP EAST RINCON VALLEY

The Rincon Valley Area of Saguaro National Park (East) is a relatively recent addition to the Park. In 1991, Congress authorized the purchase of a 4011-acre expansion to the park but did not provide funds for the purchase at that time. The purpose of the expansion was to preserve scenic areas of the Sonoran Desert and certain riparian corridors and to provide additional opportunities for visitor enjoyment. Subsequently, Congress allocated six million dollars to purchase land for the expansion of both the East and West units of Saguaro National Park. Land purchase to effect the expansion has been incremental. These funds were sufficient to purchase 614 acres, 102 of which were along the south border of the East Unit in the Rincon Valley area of the park. This purchase expanded the East unit and brought it to its current size of 66,947 acres. The area was formerly part of two ranches, the Rocking K and the X-9. There are two abandoned ranching line camps, the Deer Camp which was a line camp for the Rocking K Ranch and the Hope Camp which was a line camp for the X-9 Ranch are still visible along one of the trails that follows an old ranch road. The remains of these line camps serve as reminders of the “glory days” of ranching in the old “wild west”. Prior to the era of the big ranches, the area was dotted with the small farms of Hispanic and Anglo settlers and prior to that by the small villages of Native Americans (primarily the Hohokam in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries).



Deer Camp – Circa 2001



Ruins of Hope Camp – Circa 2001

Several trails have been established to provide access to the area. The Hope Camp Trail (3.6 miles long) and the Ridge View Trail (0.8 miles long) were the first trails that were developed after the area was opened to the public. Subsequently the National Park Service developed two additional trails, the Coyote Wash Trail (1.5 miles long) and the Ruiz Trail (2.2 miles long). The initial development plan for the area also addressed the possibility of establishing a trail that would start from the Hope Camp area and connect with other trails in the high country portion of Saguaro East. This effort did not come to early fruition (because of access problems involving State Trust Lands) until the Arizona Trail Association resolved the access problems. The recently developed portion (2013/2014) of the Arizona Trail enters the southeast corner of the Park near Hope Camp and then heads toward the “high Country” via the recently constructed Quilter Trail. These trails are interconnected and provide an excellent opportunity to visit a major portion of the Rincon Valley Area of the park. In an effort to allow the land to rejuvenate

from the degradation of its ranching history, no off-trail hiking is currently permitted.

There are two large development projects that encroach on the Park. The largest is the Rocking K Ranch that is located primarily to the West of Camino Lomo Alta (the road to the trailhead for the hiking trails) but does include a small area to the East of the trailhead. The development consists of about 4,800 acres on both sides of the Old Spanish Trail (2800 acres on the north side of the road). The initial development push appears to be concentrated toward the 2000 acre South Unit with plans for 3,363 housing units to be built in six phases.. The developer is Diamond Ventures.

The other development is called Coyote Creek and is located to the east of Camino Lomo Alta and north of the Old Spanish Trail. The development is immediately south of the Park and the Coyote Wash (site of the Park's Coyote Wash hiking trail) flows through the middle of the development when it exits the Park. The size of the development is about 1,000 acres and is a ranch community with lot sizes of between 1.15 to 3 acres with most being greater than 1.7 acres. Structures have a one story height limitation. The development also includes a 20-acre equestrian center and a recreation center on a 10 acre parcel.. The developer is Peter Backus.

In 2013, a bill (HR-1934 Saguaro National Park Boundary Expansion and Study Act of 2013) was introduced in Congress to authorize the expansion of Saguaro National Park with 375 acres potentially being added to the West Unit and about 2,150 acres to the East Unit with almost all of that in the Rincon Valley Area. Up to 1300 acres of that is Rocking K property. This bill was referred to the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation on 17 May 2013 and apparently died in committee.

Prepared by T. Johnson in 2001 from Arizona Daily Star articles and from the Trail Plan for the Rincon Valley Area developed by the National Park Service. Updated 23 January 2015 and April 2019 from various web sites.

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