

WOOD WATER TROUGHS

Providing an assured water source for their cattle has always been a problem for Arizona's ranchers. Streams and washes are intermittent so some means of water retention are essential. As you roam the desert and mountain areas of southern Arizona you will frequently come across a variety of methods to retain water for use by cattle.

One of the more common methods you will see is the earthen tank. A tank is created by constructing an earthen berm across a wash or ravine to impound the water that flows down that watershed area. These tanks are fairly difficult to construct because there is a lot of dirt that has to be moved to create the berm. It generally requires heavy mechanical equipment which requires an access route for that equipment.

Another method you will commonly see is a concrete watering trough. These troughs also require a bit of effort to construct. You have to haul the materials (cement, wood or some other material for forms etc.) to the site. Figure 1 is an example of a concrete watering trough. This particular trough is located along the Huachuca Peak Trail # 127 just below Lyle Spring which provides the water for the trough



Figure 1. Concrete Water Trough

A rancher in the Huachuca Mountains, however, came up with a novel solution to the problem. Create your water trough from a material that is readily available where you want your water trough located. What is that material? A Tree. Either a deadfall or live tree will do. Cut a section to size and hollow it out a bit and you have a watering trough. Just how effective these wood water troughs were though is a matter of conjecture since the only place in southern Arizona we have ever seen them is in the Huachuca Mountains. In the Huachucas there are three of these watering troughs that we are aware of, all the work of the same rancher as far as we know. All three of these troughs are located in the vicinity of, or adjacent to, the Lyle Canyon Trail #120. The trails that are referenced in this article are as identified in the Trail Map of the Huachucas, Sixth Edition.



Figure 2. Korn Canyon Trough

The first of these wood troughs is located on the Korn Canyon Trail a short distance past the remains of Joiner Camp. The Korn Canyon trailhead is collocated with the northern trailhead of Lyle Canyon Trail #120 at the end of the Brushy Canyon Road (FR-202). This wood trough is a featured stop on the GVR Hiking Club's *Beyond Joiner Camp* hike and is depicted in Figure 2. This trough was made from a fairly large tree and although a lot of work had been performed in developing it, it appears that it was never completed and put into use.

The second of the wood water troughs that we are aware of is also one that the GVR Hiking Club visits and it is located on the Huachuca Peak Trail #127 just below Lyle Springs (about a half mile from the Lyle Canyon Trail #120). This trough is located a short distance to the left of the trail as you approach the area below the springs and is relatively difficult to see. The hiking club visited the area a number of times and was never aware of the trough until one time a sharp eyed hiker happened to spot it. At one time there was a corral in the area and this wood trough was evidently the initial attempt to provide a water source for the cattle. A photo of this trough is shown in Figure 3. It was subsequently replaced by the concrete trough that is depicted in Figure 1. The Lyle Spring area is the turnaround point for the GVR Hiking Club's *Lower Lyle Canyon* hike.



Figure 3. Lyle Springs Wood Trough

The third wood trough is located a short distance from the southern trailhead of the Lyle Canyon Trail #120 on FR-4759. The first two troughs were placed directly on the ground while this trough was slightly elevated and secured to two trees. It was built from a much smaller diameter tree than the other two troughs. This trough is in an area that is not currently visited by a GVR Hiking Club hike.



Figure 4. Trail #120 Wood Water Trough

Article prepared by T. Johnson in August 2022. Photos 1, 2 and 4 by T. Johnson. Photo 3 by Donna Martin