

# Fort Bowie

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE • ARIZONA

Fort Bowie is the story of Tom Jeffords and one-armed Gen. O. O. Howard riding into Cochise's stronghold to negotiate a lasting peace. It is the story of Lt. John Rucker trying to rescue a fellow officer from drowning in a flooded canyon and dying in the attempt. It is a determined Gen. George Crook struggling to cover a vast territory with a handful of men and an embittered Geronimo fighting against hopeless odds. Fort Bowie is the story of a band of Indians who tried to stop the soldiers of the U.S. Army—the vanguard of an alien civilization.

The Spaniards called it Puerto del Dado, the Pass of Chance. They might better have named it Puerto de la Muerte, the Pass of Death. Through the years Apache Pass and Fort Bowie were the focal point of military operations against the Chiricahua Apaches for control of the region. This bitter struggle determined the pattern of frontier development in the Far Southwest. And it was not until the defeat of Geronimo that Anglo-American settlement spread unhampered throughout the region.

Because the spring located here was an unfailing source of water, Apache Pass drew a long procession of Indians, emigrants, prospectors, and soldiers. The Chiricahua Apaches made this territory their homeland early in the 16th century—relative late-comers. Their economy combined hunting and gathering of wild foods with raiding against neighboring peoples. They had acquired horses from the Spaniards and soon developed a highly mobile guerrilla warfare to protect their homeland from outsiders.

But protection proved impossible. In the middle of the 19th century, the Anglo-American frontier moved rapidly westward, and demands for mail and transportation connections with California grew louder. In September 1857 the Postmaster-General awarded an overland mail contract to John Butterfield. The route ran from St. Louis through the Southwest to San Francisco. A reliable source of water in Apache Pass made it a logical place for a stage station, even though it was located in the heart of Chiricahua Apache country. The critical Apache Pass Station was constructed in the valley west of the spring in 1858.

For 2½ years the Apaches, led by Cochise, allowed the Butterfield stage to run through Apache Pass. The Bascom Affair brought an end to peace, however, and bloody warfare raged in the Southwest intermittently for the next 25 years.

It all began in October 1860, when a band of Apaches raided the ranch of John Ward, stole some stock, and kidnapped the son of a Mexican woman who lived with Ward. Ward believed that Cochise had led the raiders and demanded that the military authorities confront Cochise, recover his stock, and secure the return of the boy. In February 1861, 54 men led by 2d Lt. George Bascom entered Apache Pass in search of Cochise.

They stopped at the Butterfield station in Apache Pass, watered their horses, and told the station keeper that they were on a routine patrol to the Rio Grande. The troops rode on and made camp about a mile from the station. Cochise, who had seen all this from the surrounding hills, came to the station to find out what was happening.

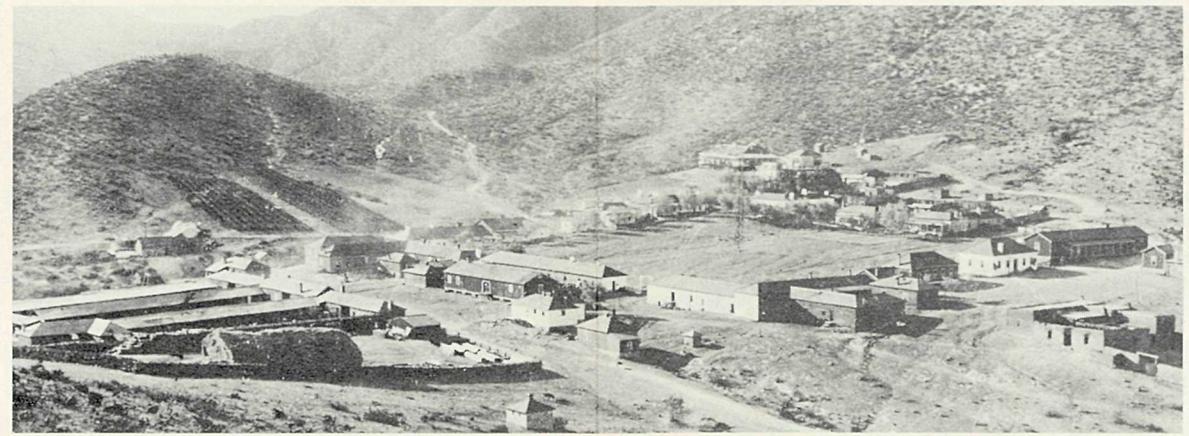
George Crook was born near Dayton, Ohio, September 23, 1829. After graduation from West Point in 1852, he was assigned to the Pacific Northwest. During the Civil War he took part in the Battles of Antietam and Chickamauga and the Siege of Petersburg. After the war ended, he returned to the frontier. In 1871 he went to Arizona to fight against Cochise. Eleven years later he returned to fight against Geronimo. An administrative dispute led to Crook's removal shortly before Geronimo's final surrender. Crook was one of the few professional military men who saw the Indians as admirable adversaries. He urged full civil rights and all the privileges of citizenship for the Indians. He died in 1890.



Geronimo, 1829-1909, was not a Chiricahua Apache by birth, but many members of the tribe turned to him for leadership when they were removed to the San Carlos Reservation in 1876. For the next 10 years, he alternately remained peacefully on the reservation and waged war against the settlers. After his final surrender in 1886, he was moved to Pensacola, Fla., then to Mount Vernon, Ala., and finally to Fort Sill, Okla. In 1903, Geronimo joined the Dutch Reformed Church, and 2 years later, he marched in the inaugural parade of President Theodore Roosevelt. He died in Oklahoma.



Nelson Appleton Miles was born in Westminster, Mass., in 1839. When the Civil War broke out he recruited a company of volunteers and set off for battle. By the end of the war, he was a major general of volunteers. For about the next 30 years of his career, he was associated with fighting Indians. He fought Crazy Horse and captured Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce and Sitting Bull of the Sioux, and was responsible for the massacre at Wounded Knee. In his campaign against Geronimo and his band of 35 warriors, women and children, Miles had 3,000 troops. In later years, Miles commanded troops which quelled the Pullman strike in 1894. He died in Washington, D. C., May 15, 1925.



Fort Bowie was abandoned the year this picture was taken. But in the 32 years since its establishment, it had grown into a substantial Army post. Even cottonwood trees had been planted to grace the officers' quarters, shown in the upper center.

The Butterfield people told him all they knew, and Cochise, unaware that Bascom was actually looking for him, approached the soldiers' camp, and voluntarily entered Bascom's tent to talk with him.

In the tent Bascom accused Cochise of stealing Ward's property and kidnapping the boy. Cochise was furious. He slashed the wall of the tent with his knife and leaped out. In the confusion of his exit Cochise fled to safety despite a cordon of soldiers around the tent. His companions were not so lucky; all of them were captured and hanged.

Sporadic fighting bloodied Apache Pass for about 2 weeks, but with the approach of mounted infantry and dragoons the Apaches disappeared. Nothing had been settled and 19 people were dead. This was the beginning of open warfare that raged between white man and Apache for the next 12 years.

The fighting between the settlers and Apaches created a nerve-racking way of life. Conditions worsened with the advent of the Civil War and the abandonment of many southwest military forts. The Confederates had a great interest in the California goldfields and their best route of invasion lay through Apache Pass. To meet the Confederate threat, Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton led 1,800 California volunteers toward the Rio Grande. On July 15, 1862, the vanguard of the California column entered Apache Pass and was ambushed by several hundred Apaches. Only the use of howitzers drove the Indians from the springs. During the night, however, they returned and the battle had to be fought over again. Carleton realized that if Apache Pass were to remain open it must be fortified.

Fort Bowie was established within the year. Life there in the early years had little to recommend it. The post was isolated, the quarters rude, the food bad, and sickness prevalent. If the Indians were seldom seen, they were nonetheless present, and vigilance was necessary.

Finally Cochise made peace in 1872 after Gen. Oliver O. Howard agreed to terms that Cochise believed to be in the best interests of his people. They were given a reservation that covered about 3,000 square miles in southeastern Arizona and included their traditional homeland. The cause of peace was further aided by the appointment of Tom Jeffords—a former army scout who had won the Apaches' confidence—as the Interior Department's agent for the Chiricahua tribe.

Although treaty promises appeared to offer a secure way of life to the Chiricahuas, life on the

reservation was far from ideal. From the beginning Jeffords received little support from the Indian Bureau. Sometimes he had to buy supplies for the Indians with his own money. And he disagreed with the Bureau's plans of forcing the Indians to give up their traditional nomadic ways to become farmers. These measures kindled flames of revolt despite the hard work of Cochise and Jeffords to maintain control and peace. Many discontented Indians periodically escaped the reservation, adding to the growing distrust between the Indians and the settlers. After Cochise's death in 1874 and Jeffords' removal as agent in 1876, dissatisfaction and animosity grew rapidly. Hoping to quell a revolt, the Government abolished the Chiricahua Reservation and moved everyone to the San Carlos Reservation. But several bands led by Geronimo, Juh, and Naiche fled to the Sierra Madre Mountains of northern Mexico and began to terrorize the border region.

Fort Bowie served as the nerve center for the punishing military campaigns against the hostile Chiricahuas. Gen. George Crook, commander of the Department of Arizona, directed the pursuit of Indians, led by the wily and determined Geronimo. This small band of Apaches eluded the U.S. Army for ten years. In the end, they succumbed only when their own kindred—the Apache Scouts—were mobilized against them.

Only once during these years did Geronimo and 325 of his men return to the San Carlos Reservation. They were convinced that they were no longer safe once the Mexicans and Americans began to cooperate in their struggles against the Indians. After two years, life on the reservation began to chafe. In May 1885 Geronimo led 137 men back into Mexico. Crook, aided by the Apache scouts, followed the band, and in March 1886, Geronimo surrendered. But he quickly escaped and fled back into Mexico.

Crook then asked to be relieved, and Gen. Nelson A. Miles assumed command. He continued the grueling campaigns and forced the final surrender of the remaining Indians in September 1886. All the Chiricahuas, both scouts and hostiles, were shipped to forts in Florida and Alabama, and finally settled at Fort Sill, Okla., where their way of life withered away in an alien setting.

The Southwest Indian Wars ended with the Anglo-American in command. Fort Bowie had outlived its purpose and was officially abandoned on October 17, 1894.

## ABOUT YOUR VISIT

**Access to the Fort.** There is no road into the ruins proper. They can be reached only by a 1½-mile foot trail that begins midway in Apache Pass. The trailhead may be reached from two directions:



From the town of Willcox, located on Int. 10, drive 22 miles south on Ariz. 186 to the graded road leading east into Apache Pass; from the town of Bowie, also on Int. 10, drive southerly 12 miles on a graded dirt road that then bears westerly into Apache Pass.

The foot trail to the fort, which preserves the setting of historic abandonment and generally parallels the military wagon road, passes a number of historic features, including the Butterfield Stage Station ruins, the post cemetery, Apache spring, and the first Fort Bowie. Trail guide booklets are available just beyond the trailhead. A park ranger is normally on duty at the small ranger station-museum to assist with historical interpretation and to enforce regulations.

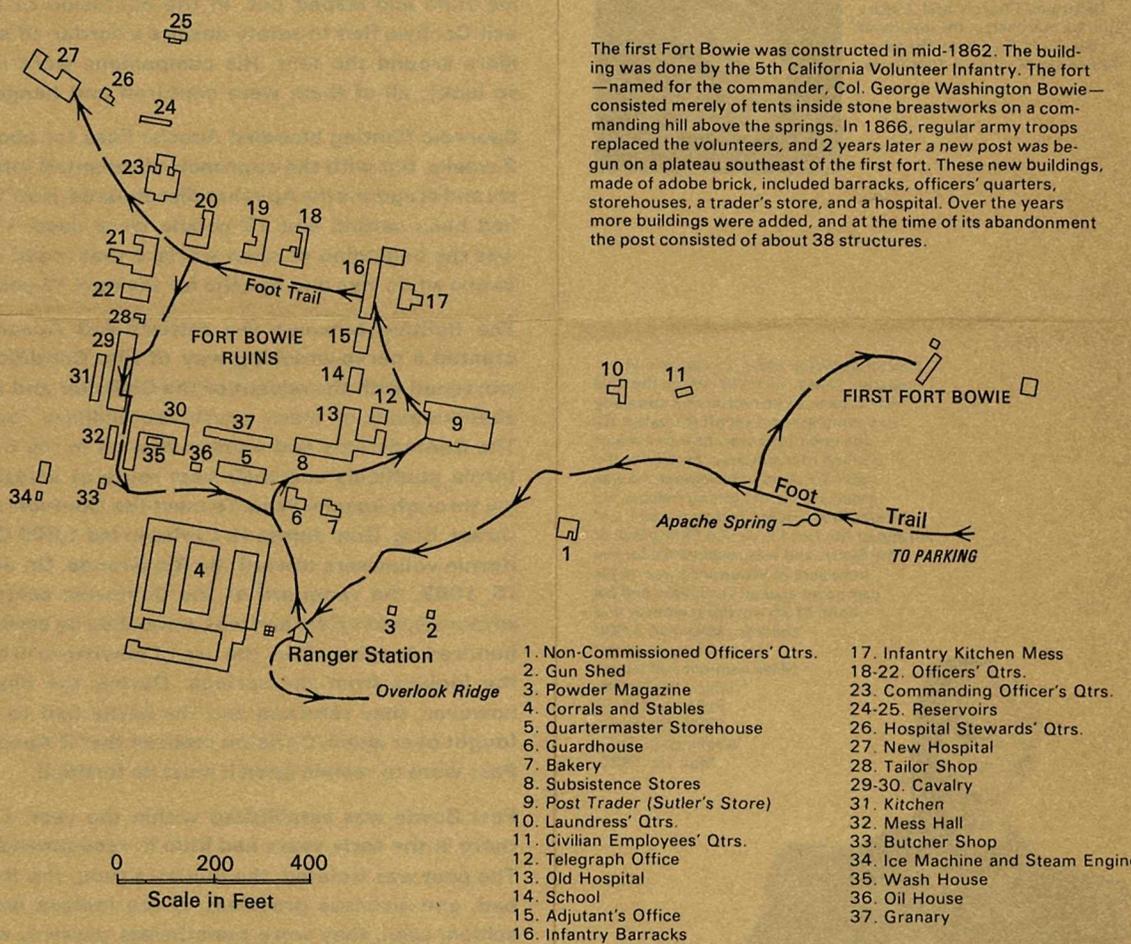
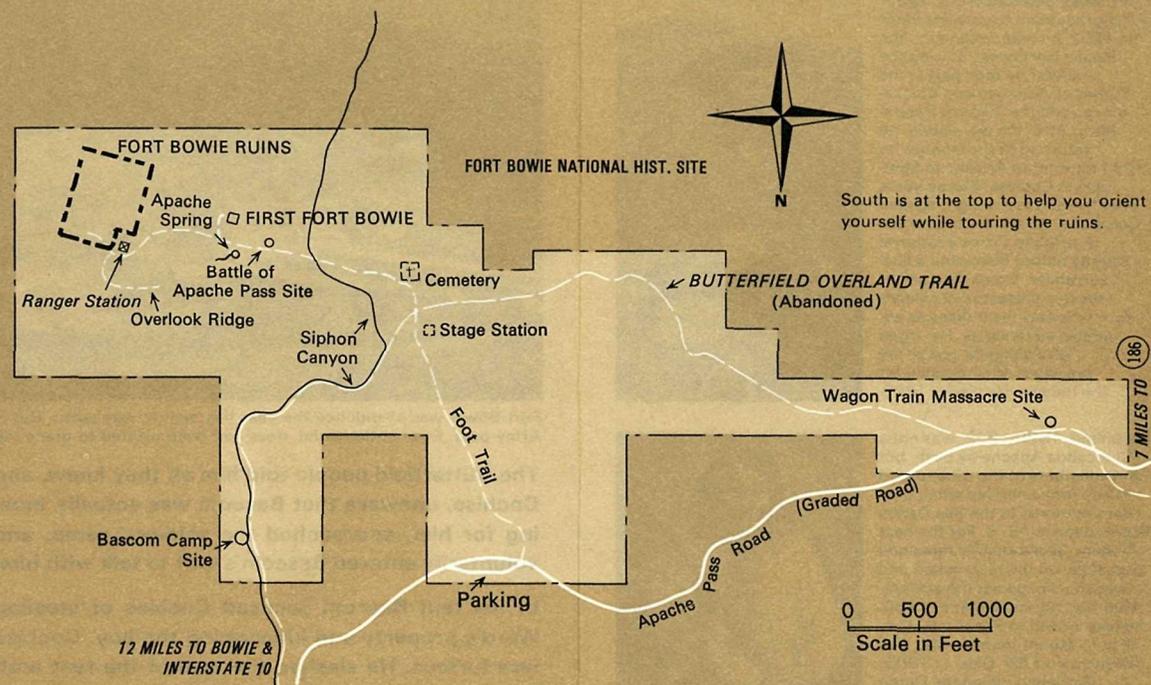
**Precautions.** Water is available at the fort. However, the summer hiker should consider a canteen since temperatures may climb above 100 degrees. Summer storms may suddenly and briefly flood the washes. Simply wait out the high water. Also, be alert for an occasional rattlesnake or Gila monster.

**What we ask of you.** All historic and natural features—horseshoes, nails, rocks, everything—are strictly protected. No metal detectors, digging tools, guns or wheeled vehicles are permitted. Hunting is also prohibited. Please do not climb on the fort's fragile walls and mounds. A foot trail leads through the ruins.

**Accommodations.** There are no camping or picnicking facilities within the park. Motels, stores, trailer parks, and campgrounds can be found in the nearby towns of Willcox and Bowie. Another campground is at Chiricahua National Monument, 25 miles southwest of Fort Bowie.

## THE NATURAL SETTING

Apache Pass separates the Chiricahua Mountains to the south from the Dos Cabezas range to the north. The more massive Chiricahuas rise to 9,796 feet in forests of spruce and fir. The adjacent Dos Cabezas climb abruptly to 8,363 feet, terminating with two stone summits; hence the Spanish name, Dos Cabezas, meaning "two heads." The vegetation of these foothills provides a study



The first Fort Bowie was constructed in mid-1862. The building was done by the 5th California Volunteer Infantry. The fort—named for the commander, Col. George Washington Bowie—consisted merely of tents inside stone breastworks on a commanding hill above the springs. In 1866, regular army troops replaced the volunteers, and 2 years later a new post was begun on a plateau southeast of the first fort. These new buildings, made of adobe brick, included barracks, officers' quarters, storehouses, a trader's store, and a hospital. Over the years more buildings were added, and at the time of its abandonment the post consisted of about 38 structures.

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## ADMINISTRATION

Fort Bowie National Historic Site was authorized by Congress on August 30, 1964, and formally established July 28, 1972. The site contains 970 acres dedicated to preserving the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, the Apache Pass Stage Station, Apache Spring, and the Fort Bowie complex. The park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A park ranger, whose address is P.O. Box 158, Bowie, AZ 85605, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

National Park Service  
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in the communities and transitions of plant life. The hills lie within the Upper Sonoran life zone and contain four biotic communities.

Desert grasslands dominate the lower slopes. This community of many grass types also has a variety of shrubs. The chaparral is characterized by tough evergreens, which sometimes form dense thickets of manzanita, mountain mahogany, and silk tassel but here only scattered plants are found. The oak-woodland community is represented on the higher slopes by a scattering of such trees as oaks, juniper, and pinyon pine. The

riparian community follows a shoestring pattern along the sandy drainages. Large trees such as willow, walnut, and cottonwood are typical here.

After good winter rains, many spring and summer wildflowers brighten the hillsides. Typical are bladder pod, desert baileyaa, alonia, and desert mallow.

An exciting array of animals, such as the gray fox, coyote, mountain lion, bobcat, coati, peccary, snakes, lizards, and birds of many kinds, enriches the area's natural scene.