



The Camp at Bonita Canyon

Primarily based on “The Camp at Bonita Canyon, A Buffalo Soldier Camp in Chiricahua National Monument, Arizona,” 1987, by M.D. Tagg, with contributions from M.F. Baumler and L.J. Pierce.

The Camp at Bonita Canyon was a tent camp used in 1885-1886 by 10th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers during the Geronimo Campaign. Over its period of use, three troops of the 10th Cavalry were stationed at the camp at various times. The Camp at Bonita Canyon (the Camp) was a typical detached frontier military post. It consisted of typical army tents for the soldiers, a cabin for the officers (where the Faraway Ranch main house is today), a kitchen tent, and a stable. A monument, referred to as the Garfield Monument, was also erected by the soldiers. The Camp is located within Chiricahua National Monument (NM), in southeastern Arizona. The Monument, established in 1924 on the western slopes of the Chiricahua Mountains to protect the natural volcanic formations occurring at the site, consists of 10,646 acres (4,308 hectares) in northeastern Cochise County, 15 miles (24.2 kilometers [km]) west of the New Mexico border and 35 miles (56.3 km) north of the Mexico border.

Within Chiricahua NM is the Faraway Ranch Historic District, on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980. Many structures comprise the historic district and have significance to architecture, agriculture, conservation, pioneering, farming and guest ranching, military history, and social history. The two main structures are the Stafford cabin, which may be the earliest building in Bonita Canyon to remain in good condition, and the Main House, which began as a late 19th century log cabin and evolved into a mid-20th century rural ranch headquarters. The Faraway Ranch (main house) was the home of Swedish immigrants, the Ericksons, who settled in the canyon in the late 1880s. The site was an operating guest ranch from 1917 to 1972, and the National Park Service (NPS) acquired the ranch in 1979.

The Faraway Ranch Historic District includes remains of the Camp. Prior to an archeological survey in 1983, the only “tangible identified remains” of the Camp were engraved stones that had been part of a monument built by the soldiers; the stones were later used to construct a fireplace at Faraway

OVERVIEW



NPS PHOTO

A scene from Chiricahua NM, showing hoodoos (rock pinnacles)

Ranch. The 1983 survey (Baumler 1984) found several features that may have been associated with the military camp. The report upon which this overview is based (Tagg et al. 1987) presented the results of further archeological investigation of the Camp that was conducted in 1986. The 1986 survey relocated and reexamined the features reported in the 1983 survey and looked for (and found) additional features or sub-features that may have been recently exposed or previously missed. The project’s main objectives were to provide further interpretation of the features within the military camp, and to plan for lessening adverse impacts to the site from increased visitor use of the nearby road.

Physical and Historical Setting

The Chiricahua Mountains comprise one of the northwest-southeast trending mountain ranges that are generally common in southeastern Arizona. The range is 4-20 miles (6.4-32.3 km) wide and about 40 miles (64.5 km) long. Elevations in the area range from about 9,795 feet (2,985 meters [m]) on the peaks, down to about 4,000 feet (1,219 m) in the San Simon and Sulphur Spring valleys (to the east and west). The Camp was located at the west end of Bonita Canyon, or lower Bonita Canyon, which is oriented due east/west for about 2 miles (3.2 km). The elevation of the canyon floor in this area ranges from 5,400 feet (1,646 m) in the east to 5,160 feet (1,573 m) in the west (at the mouth of the canyon).

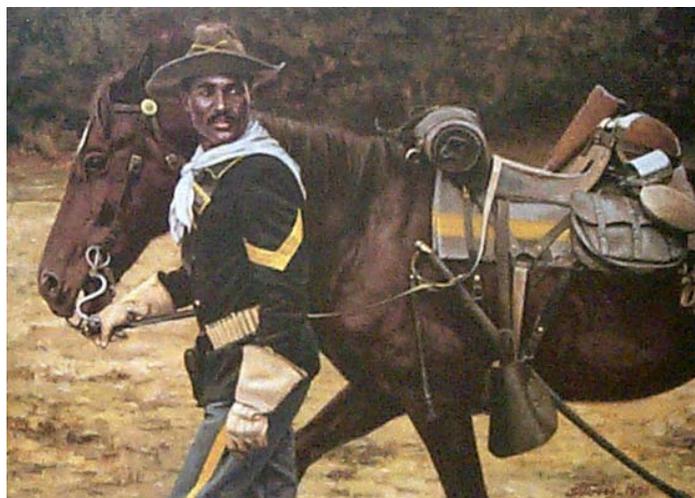
American homesteaders began to move into southeastern Arizona after it was purchased from Mexico in 1853. Already



there were the Chiricahua Apaches, a highly mobile and nomadic people. Bonita Canyon was valuable to the Apaches because it contained an important water source and offered the only pass through the Chiricahua Mountains. Around 1880, J. Stafford built a log cabin along Bonita Creek in lower Bonita Canyon. Settlers like Stafford, as well as travelers, in the southwest were provided some protection from Indians by U.S. military troops stationed in the southwest in the mid to late 1880s. Several forts were established in southeastern Arizona, including Fort Bowie in Apache Pass (about 10 miles [16.1 km] north of the Monument). Years of fighting and broken treaties with the Indians marked these years. As part of the final campaign against the Apaches, the tent camp was erected in 1885 in lower Bonita Canyon. The Camp was administered out of Fort Bowie and manned by black soldiers of the 10th Cavalry. The Camp was maintained until the surrender of Geronimo in September of 1886.

The Story of the Buffalo Soldier

In 1866 Congress authorized, for the first time, African Americans to serve in the peacetime army of the United States. Outstanding service in the Civil War set the stage for creation of the all-black units. Two cavalry and four infantry regiments were created and designated the 9th and 10th U.S. Cavalry regiments and the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st U.S. Infantry regiments (which later became the 24th and 25th Infantry regiments). The all-African American regiments, commanded mostly by white officers, were composed of Civil War veterans, former slaves, and freemen. By 1867, the first “Buffalo Soldiers” were sent to the West to protect settlers, cattle herds, and railroad crews, and to campaign against Native Americans. The regiments clashed with Cheyennes, Sioux, Arapahos, Kiowas, Comanches, Utes, and Apaches in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), the Dakotas, Colorado, Montana, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. They also served



Buffalo Soldier (painting by Don Stivers)

in Wyoming, Utah, Nebraska, and Kansas. The African American units made up about 11% of the Army that served in the west throughout the frontier period. They played a significant role in the settlement and development of the American West, and they also rose above many challenges to gain a reputation for dedication and bravery.

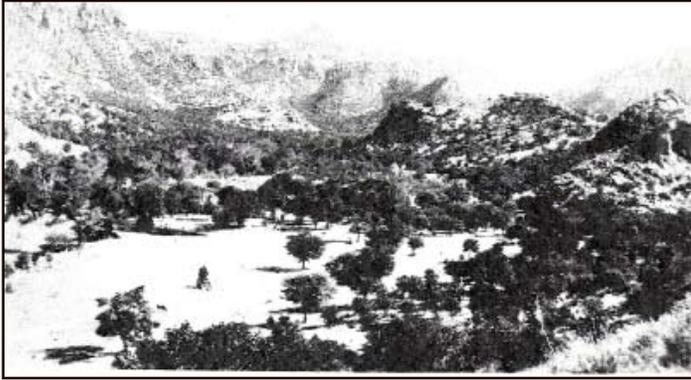
Buffalo Soldiers were known to have played a significant historical role in at least six parks in the American Southwest. These six parks are Fort Davis National Historic Site (NHS) and Guadalupe Mountains National Park (NP) in Texas, Fort Larned NHS in Kansas, and Fort Bowie NHS and Chiricahua National Monument (NM) in Arizona. Buffalo Soldiers were also stationed at Fort Huachuca, still an active military installation, near Coronado National Memorial in Arizona.

Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Bowie NHS and Chiricahua NM, and the Camp at Bonita Canyon

Located in southeastern Arizona, Fort Bowie (1862-1894) was a focal point in Army operations against the Chiricahua Apaches in the 1860s-1880s. The fort was located at the eastern entrance of Apache Pass, a highly traveled mountain crossing of strategic value due to the presence of spring water. The pass was used by the Apache people, as well as the Spanish, Mexicans, and American settlers. Thirty years of conflict between the U.S. military and the Chiricahua Apaches in the region culminated in the surrender of Geronimo in 1886. During the Geronimo Campaign, troops from three Companies of the 10th Cavalry established the long-term camp at Bonita Canyon.

Prior to arriving at what would become Camp Bonita, the 10th Cavalry had been involved in many conflicts with Native Americans, including the Victorio Campaign. The Victorio Campaign ended in October 1880 when Victorio (leader of the Warm Springs Apaches who refused removal to the San Carlos Reservation) was driven south into Mexico and killed by Mexican troops. In April 1885, the 10th Cavalry was sent to the Arizona Territory to assist with a situation developing with the Chiricahua Apaches. A group of Chiricahua Apaches being held on the San Carlos Reservation were threatening a revolt. Once all 12 troops— 38 officers and 696 enlisted men— arrived at Bowie Station, the various troops were assigned different posts. In May, the leader Geronimo and 150 Chiricahua men, women, and children fled the reservation towards Mexico. The Army’s attempt to recapture the Apaches began the Geronimo Campaign of 1885-1886.

The strategy of the Army leader in the Department of Arizona, General George Crook, was to secure the trails and waterholes



Bonita Canyon, with the deteriorating Garfield Monument in the left and center (of open area) (from Tagg et al. 1987).

along the border to prevent Apache raids and to protect settlers. Three lines of defense (i.e., of troops) were established, with the 10th Cavalry serving in the second line of defense; their role was to intercept those making it through the first line of soldiers. A series of semi-permanent camps of the 10th Cavalry were established near passes and springs in the major valleys of southern Arizona. One of these camps was at the spring in Bonita Canyon, about 13 miles (21 km) south of Crook's headquarters at Fort Bowie. The Camp became known as the "Camp at Bonita Canyon" or "Camp Bonita Canyon."

Even from the official records of the Camp (e.g., dispatches, muster rolls) little is known about the appearance of the Camp or the lives of the soldiers. Orders and provisions came from Fort Bowie. The major duty of the troops while stationed at the camp was serving as couriers for the southern mail service out of Fort Bowie, then headquarters of the Department of Arizona. Points along the mail route included White's Ranch and Mud Springs, and the southern terminus was in Cloverdale (New Mexico). Additionally, parts of the detachment (especially Troop I) were sometimes sent to patrol the surrounding territory and perform escort duty.

Troop E was the first troop of Buffalo Soldiers to be stationed at Bonita Canyon in September 1885. Troops H (October 1885-April 1886) and I (April-September 1886) served later. There were some periods of time when two troops occupied the canyon at the same time, resulting in nearly 100 men in the camp in early 1886. Troop I replaced Troops E and H in May 1886, after General Crook was replaced with Brigadier General Nelson Miles as the new Commander of the Department of Arizona. The primary duties in the camp at this time consisted of carrying the mail, patrolling, and guarding the waterhole.

Eventually, the pressure exerted by U.S. Army troops and Mexican troops, along with the inability to reenter the States and obtain fresh supplies, forced Geronimo and the remain-

der of his group to surrender to General Miles in September. The 10th Cavalry, in camps like Bonita, had served a vital role in the campaign. Geronimo and his group were taken to Fort Bowie and transported by train to Fort Marion, Florida. The Camp at Bonita Canyon was abandoned on September 15, 1886.

Significant Features / Remains of the Camp

The Garfield Monument

The Garfield Monument was built by the Buffalo Soldiers at the Camp. Although it is no longer standing, it appears in several turn-of-the-century photographs. The monument was a three-tiered structure with a height of at least 10 feet (3 meters [m]). The monument was made from local rhyolitic blocks that were shaped and fitted. A number of the blocks were engraved. One particularly large block was engraved with the following, which is why the monument is so named:

IN
MEMORY OF
JAS. A.
GARFIELD

James Abram Garfield was the President of the U.S. in 1881, who was shot by an assassin and died about six months later. Garfield had been an officer in the 42nd Ohio Regiment of Volunteers in the Civil War and had commanded black troops,



Garfield Monument in the early 20th century, partially deteriorated.

and as president, he was sympathetic to the struggles of black Americans after the Civil War. On many of the monument's smaller blocks were the names or initials of some of the soldiers who were stationed at the Camp. Some blocks also included the troop letter and regimental number of the men. Another soldier not present at Camp Bonita but commemorated on the monument is Henry O. Flipper, the first black American to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and become a commissioned officer.

One of the Erickson children, Lillian Erickson Riggs, reported that in the early 1900s her father (Neil Erickson) made attempts to interest the government and the Garfield family in the restoration of the monument, but had no success. She reported that by 1920 the monument was deteriorating and people were removing the blocks. She and her husband (Edward M. Riggs) removed many of the stones and incorporated them into a guest dining room fireplace at Faraway Ranch (known locally as the "Garfield Fireplace"). They removed 60 engraved blocks, with the large Garfield memorial forming the centerpiece (see photo below). Through research done on the blocks and information on the troops, it is believed that Troops E and H built the monument, probably completing it in April 1886. The 1986 survey at Chiricahua NM revealed that the base of the monument is still relatively intact.



Fireplace in the Faraway Ranch with engraved blocks from the Garfield Monument. The Garfield block is the centerpiece above the mantle.

Other Artifacts of the Camp

In addition to the Garfield Monument base, a number of archaeological features have been associated with the Camp. Features on the south side of Highway 181 and a few features on the north side of the road (but not immediately near Faraway Ranch) are relatively undisturbed remains of the Camp. These include:

- A fireplace or chimney, similar to the monument in construction, that was probably associated with a military tent at the Camp. [A 4th Cavalry camp in Guadalupe Canyon in 1885-1886 was known to have stone chimneys abutting the tents].
- A 98.4-foot by 45.9-foot (30-m by 14-m) concentration of artifacts located about 49.2 feet (15 m) from the fireplace; it contained about 325 metal and glass artifacts, and a few pieces of bone.
- A 75.4-foot by 39.4-foot (23-m by 12-m) concentration of artifacts 16.4 feet (5 m) from the last feature. Two hundred and seventeen metal and glass artifacts were recovered from the surface or below the surface, with the majority being tin cans or glass fragments.
- A rock-walled "structure" consisting of a subrectangular dry-laid rock-walled enclosure abutting a large rhyolite boulder. This is thought to have been a storage or smokehouse. Seventy-seven percent of the associated artifacts were bones, and this accounted for 68% of the bones found in the military camp. Most of the bone was from large (cow-sized) mammals.
- A hearth area, 16.4 feet (5 m) from the second feature in the list, with metal and glass artifacts.
- A 59-foot by 26.2-foot (18-m by 8-m) light scatter of artifacts, 13.1 feet (4 m) from the rock-walled "structure" noted above.
- A 108.2-foot by 59-foot (33-m by 18-m) scatter of metal and glass artifacts.

A total of 2,883 artifacts were recovered during the archaeological investigations at the Camp at Bonita Canyon. The artifacts fell into the following categories: metal (48.8%), glass (46.6%), ceramics, rubber, leather, paint, and bone. The majority of the artifacts were from the late 19th century occupation of lower Bonita Canyon, and were probably related to the military camp. However, there probably was some "contamination" from later occupations, because the camp area overlaps considerably with Faraway Ranch. This was especially the case to the north of Highway 181, compared to the area

south of the highway. The majority of the metal artifacts were nails and tin can fragments. Bottles and bottle fragments made up the majority of the glass artifacts.

Physical Description of the Camp

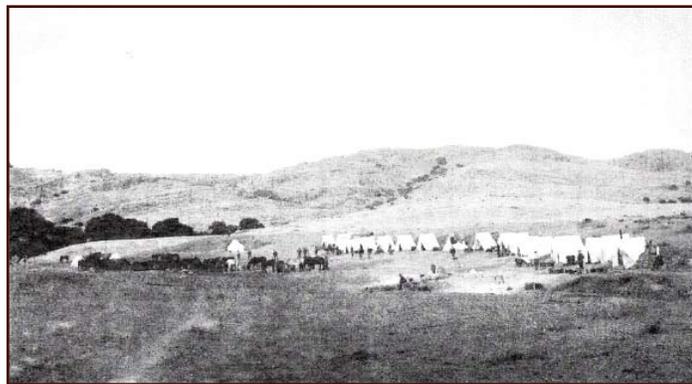
Little documentation of the layout of the camp exists. A description was provided by Hooker (1924) of: a roadway past the troop tents, nestled among live oak trees; a log stable near the tents; the officers' cabin east of the tents; and a fully-equipped kitchen tent. From all of the evidence and information available, the following can be concluded about the Camp:

- a row of troop tents was at the center of the camp;
- the fireplace/chimney was attached to an east-facing tent, and it was probably not in a tent row;
- the officers lived in a cabin that became part of the Faraway Ranch main house;
- the Garfield Monument was reported to have a flag pole flying the troop flag;
- the road into the canyon ran past the troop tents; and
- 40 to 100 men occupied the camp for 1 year, and 2 troops were sometimes there simultaneously.



The Garfield Fireplace, with engraved blocks visible, from the outside of the main house.

PHOTO : FARAWAY RANCH COLLECTION-WACC



Example of a typical calvary camp in 1885-1886 (from Tagg et al. 1987).

PHOTO : FARAWAY RANCH COLLECTION-WACC

Visitor Interpretation of the Camp

Visitors to Chiricahua NM have a variety of opportunities to learn about the interesting history of the Camp and the 10th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers. Interpreters leading Faraway Ranch house tours discuss Buffalo Soldiers when showing the guest dining room of the house and the Garfield fireplace. Occasional guided walks and interpretation are also offered in the Camp area.

References

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