
Buffalo Soldiers and Apaches in the Guadalupe Mountains: A Review of Research at Pine Springs Camp

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ABSTRACT

In 2006 Howard University finished investigating Pine Springs Camp in the Guadalupe Mountains, in cooperation with the Mescalero Apache Tribe and the National Park Service. Discovery of contemporaneous Buffalo Soldier and Apache occupations suggested that the two groups alternated their use of this area during the 1870s Apache Wars. The military presence is particularly well-marked, with activity areas, structures, and artifacts providing information on site layout and use. The Apache presence, although more ephemeral, shows great longevity. Archival and historical research has now provided additional details about the various users of the camp. This article summarizes the results of these investigations and explores the intertwined activities of the Buffalo Soldiers and the Apache on this part of the western frontier.

This article tells a dual story. Spanning over a century, it concerns both African American Buffalo Soldiers serving on the western frontier and their Apache opponents. It does not offer any special theoretical insight, but rather a practical example of a collaborative approach to the past and its results. It centers on the transient history of one particular site in western Texas, Pine Springs Camp. The following account focuses primarily on our understanding of the people and events that left their record on the ground, rather than on the archeology *per se*.

The story begins in the 1860s, after the Civil War, when the U.S. government stepped up its efforts to contain the Apache on reservations. For the next 20 years, the fighting continued, sometimes intensely, sometimes sporadically, as different Apache groups resisted confinement and attacked settlers, travelers, cattle drovers, and other intruders. Particularly prominent in the later fighting were the Warm Springs Apache, who were denied the land promised to them, an all too familiar tale. They refused to settle down in San Carlos, as mandated by the U.S. government, because endemic malaria and food shortages there made the order tantamount to a death sentence (Ball 1970). They were led by the able tactician Victorio, along with Nana, Geronimo, and Cochise's son Naiche, in a protracted guerilla war. By the late 1870s this conflict had heated up to the point that all the U.S. military units in western Texas, from Fort Concho in San Angelo to Fort

Bliss in El Paso, were involved. The majority of these troops were comprised of Buffalo Soldiers, the African American regular military regiments created after the Civil War. Two regiments in particular, the 9th and the 10th Cavalry, saw a lot of action, although the 25th Infantry was also involved. Initially, the newly formed African American regiments were dispatched to defend the Kansas Pacific Railroad and nearby settlements from enemy attack. However, in accordance with the expansionist policy of the time, it became a top priority to expel the Apache from the land and keep them confined to assigned reservations. Regiments of the 9th and 10th Cavalry were tasked with the inimical mission of pursuing the Apache, which required near constant movement. Patrols and skirmishes intensified, as the cavalry hounded Victorio and his followers. An important phase of these Apache wars ended when the Mexican Army killed Victorio along with many of his people at Tres Castillos in 1880, an event that still resonates with the Apache. The fighting, of course, continued until Geronimo surrendered in 1886, but fewer units seem to have been active then, many of them remaining in their home forts for extended periods.

One of the areas where the military activity was at its most intense was the Guadalupe Mountains of west Texas. Although only a few battles were fought there, the military regularly criss-crossed the terrain on patrol, and in the late 1870s, upon the orders of

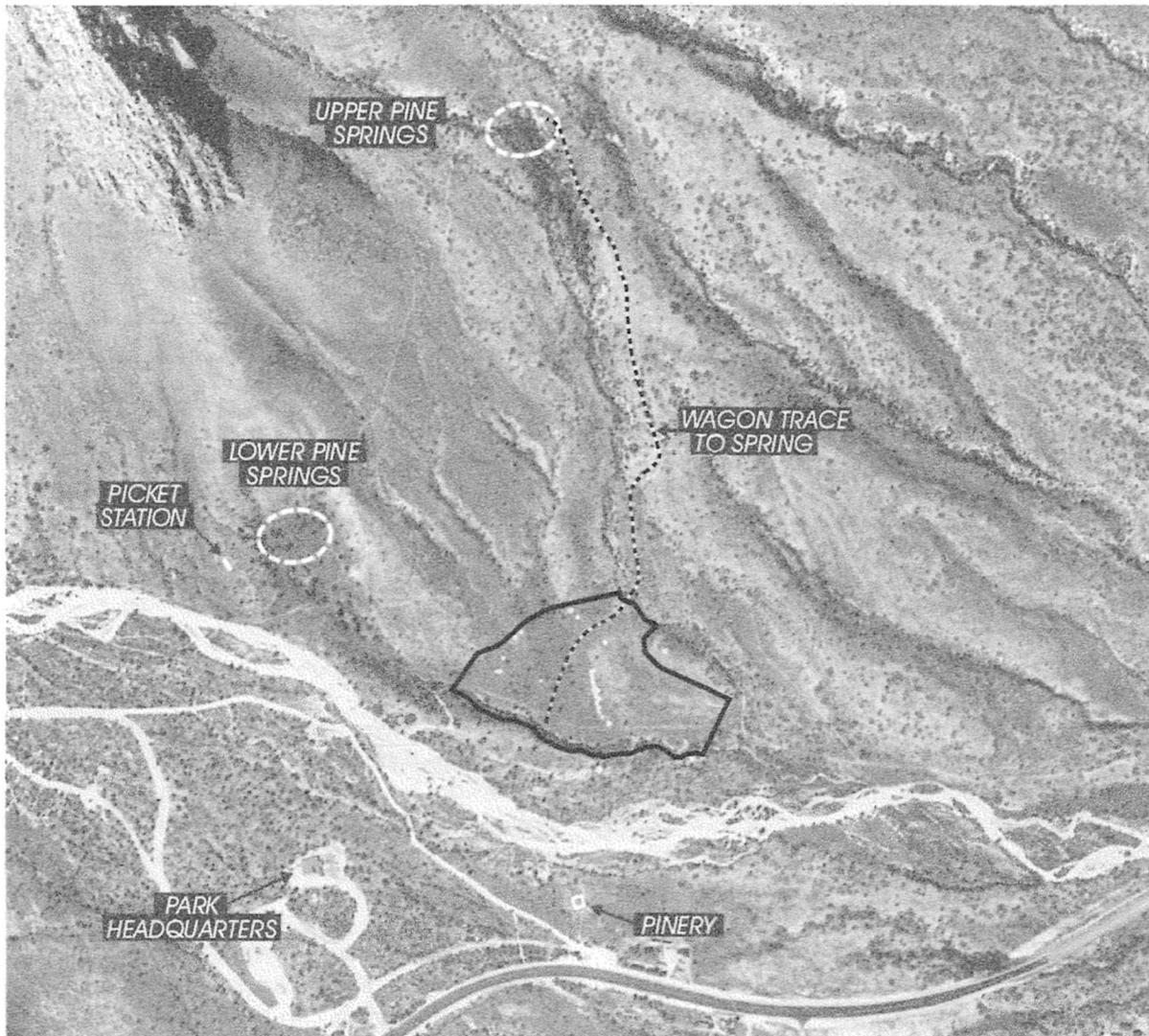


Figure 1. Aerial photograph of Pine Springs Camp, showing extent and location in relation to Guadalupe Mountains National Park headquarters.

Colonel Benjamin Grierson, commander of the 10th Cavalry, settled down to occupy all the major springs and water sources in order to prevent the Apache from re-supplying (Charles Haecker, personal communication, 2004). At that time the Guadalupe Mountains would have been especially dangerous for troops because they were largely uncharted and lay within the boundaries of the Mescalero Apache territory. One of the places the military chose to occupy was Pine Springs, a particularly desirable campsite because it featured clean, non-sulphurous water from two sources, as well as abundant grass for livestock and pine for building material (Figure 1). The springs had long been known as one of the stops (the “Pinery”) on the then-defunct Butterfield Stage Trail, which traversed the mountains via a

nearby pass, and the location was important enough to the military to be designated an official sub-post (Levy 1971:119). The camp was used sporadically in the late 1860s and early 1870s by elements of the 9th Cavalry and possibly by the European-American 3rd and 8th Cavalry as well. In the spring of 1870, for example, it served as a focal place for 9th Cavalry troops from Fort Stockton and Fort Davis to meet and re-supply during their campaign against the Mescalero (Leckie and Leckie 2003:93).

Its major period of military use, however, came during the Victorio campaign between 1878 and 1881, when it was repeatedly used by elements of the 10th Cavalry. Most prominent among these occupants were the troopers of Company K out of Fort Davis, under the command of Captain Thomas

Lebo. In 1878, they camped at Pine Springs for two months in the late fall, using it as a base camp for regular mountain patrols. Other units of the 10th Cavalry used Pine Springs more briefly. Company H under Captain Carpenter went through there in September 1875 on their way to Fort Sill from New Mexico. Company M under Captain Stevens Norvell, out of Fort Stockton, stayed twice in June 1878. Similarly, Captain William Kennedy's Company F camped there in September 1880. These are the military occupations known about so far. Hopefully ongoing archival research will yield others.

The military were not the only ones to use Pine Springs, however. Their sporadic occupation allowed the Apache to come in during the long stretches of time the Army was not in the immediate area and avail themselves of the local resources, such as mescal, as well as of the materials the soldiers left behind. Tin cans, cartridge cases, and bottles all provided raw materials for shaping into a variety of items. The activities of the Apache, interlaced with those of the soldiers, have left behind a complex archeological record at Pine Springs that we have recently begun to decipher.

Before discussing our project and what was found, however, it is important to understand a little about the people whose lives have been uncovered. The bare historical facts do not do them justice. On the military side, the Buffalo Soldiers, although relatively new units, proved to be some of the toughest fighters in the Army (Leckie and Leckie 2003). Most of their officers, like Grierson and Lebo, were Civil War veterans. The men they led were largely former slaves, although some were freedmen. Military officers enlisted many of the troops of the 9th Cavalry from the streets of New Orleans, while a number of the troops from the 10th Cavalry came from further North, including Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City (Alt and Alt 2002:54-55). They had joined the Army for the promise of regular pay and, for the Southerners, the ability to move out of a devastated region, where job opportunities were scarce, especially for the recently enslaved. Additionally, joining the military meant three hot meals a day, clothing, and sleeping quarters. It also provided some form of education as the Black regiments were assigned a permanent chaplain. Many of the new recruits had to survive hideous conditions and rampant disease in tent cities around recruiting posts, as they awaited enlistment and mobilization (Leckie and Leckie 2003:3-18). The military records, succinct to a fault, only hint at the difficult

conditions they subsequently endured. During nine months from 1878 to 1879 just four companies of the 10th rode over 8000 rugged miles chasing the Apache (Leckie and Leckie 2003:221). One can only guess at what the men went through when the terse company returns report horses that died of exhaustion. The account for one company, F, under Captain Kennedy, nicely illustrates field conditions. In the fall of 1880 the Company had to leave another camp in the Guadalupe Mountains "for sanitary reasons" and take refuge in Pine Springs Camp. There, the return continues, "Company not in good fix for appointed work by reasons of insufficiency of materials for men..." Nonetheless, they marched 491 miles that month and remained in the field for two more months before returning to Fort Stockton, having "suffered severely from the inclemency of the weather, some being frost bitten." One horse, in fact, died of the cold (Returns of the 10th Cavalry, September 1880).

On the other side of the conflict, the Apache, while used to the extremes of weather in the Southwest, fared not much better. Pursued by the Army, Victorio's group, broken into several bands, could rarely stay in one place long enough to collect the food their hunting and gathering way of life had formerly provided. The agave mescal, a portable resource prized for its durability, as once roasted it would keep for a long time, was not easily available. Roasting took several days and often the Apache had to move before the cooking could be completed. Roasting, too, was done by the women and made them vulnerable to attack. One harrowing tale by an Apache survivor tells of two 15 year old girls traveling with Nana's band who were surprised and shot in the back by soldiers as they checked their mescal pit (Ball 1970). Soldiers regularly destroyed any caches of mescal or other food they found. Bullets, too, were in short supply for the Apache warriors, as were horses, and re-provisioning required risky raids.

It is against this broad canvas that our investigation of Pine Springs Camp took place, roughly 120 years after the end of the Apache Wars. The site had already been documented by the 1970 Texas Archeological Society (TAS) field school (Shafer 1970), and subsequent research by TAS member Anne Fox, who graciously gave us her notes, has made much of our reconstruction of events possible. Further reconnaissance by Charles Haecker of the National Park Service (NPS) in the 1990s not only confirmed the military nature of the encampment but identified Apache remains in the same area. Accordingly, in

2004 a new archeological project was initiated to examine the site in greater detail. This project was itself part of the larger Warriors Project sponsored by the NPS. The aim of this ambitious program is to encourage African Americans and American Indians to discuss their mutual past on the frontier. In accordance with these goals, since 2004 Howard University has been partnering with the Mescalero Apache Tribe, with help from both the NPS and the Bureau of Land Management, to introduce students to archeology. We worked with a field school at the Pine Springs Camp for three years and are currently planning our next joint field operation. Participants in the project have included Howard University undergraduates and graduates, Mescalero Apache, and European American high school students, and international visitors. Together, we have looked at who occupied the site, how the land was used, and what happened in the larger picture on this part of the frontier.

The site itself is unique. A multi-component campsite spread out over more than 60 acres, it comprises a range of occupations, mostly from the

late 19th century (Figure 2). Prominent features include a central line of military hearths, used on at least two distinct occasions and probably more; a subsidiary line of hearths that represents a separate, single component military occupation; a wagon road; picket stations that protected both lines of hearths; the remains of semi-permanent structures, most likely tent pads; and *wickiup* rings that the Apache appear to have used several times. Military features of particular interest include hypocausts, or underground heating channels that apparently served to warm several of the tents. These were connected to campfires outside the tents, at least one of which was used for cooking as several can lids were found stashed nearby (Figures 3 and 4). Other buried stone boxes, one underneath a hearth in the main row, may also have been used for cooking. The presence of these protected fire features makes perfect sense in an area where the winds can blow up to 110 miles an hour in the cold-weather months (Gorden Bell, personal communication, 2005), and fires would have needed containment to avoid being extinguished or spreading.

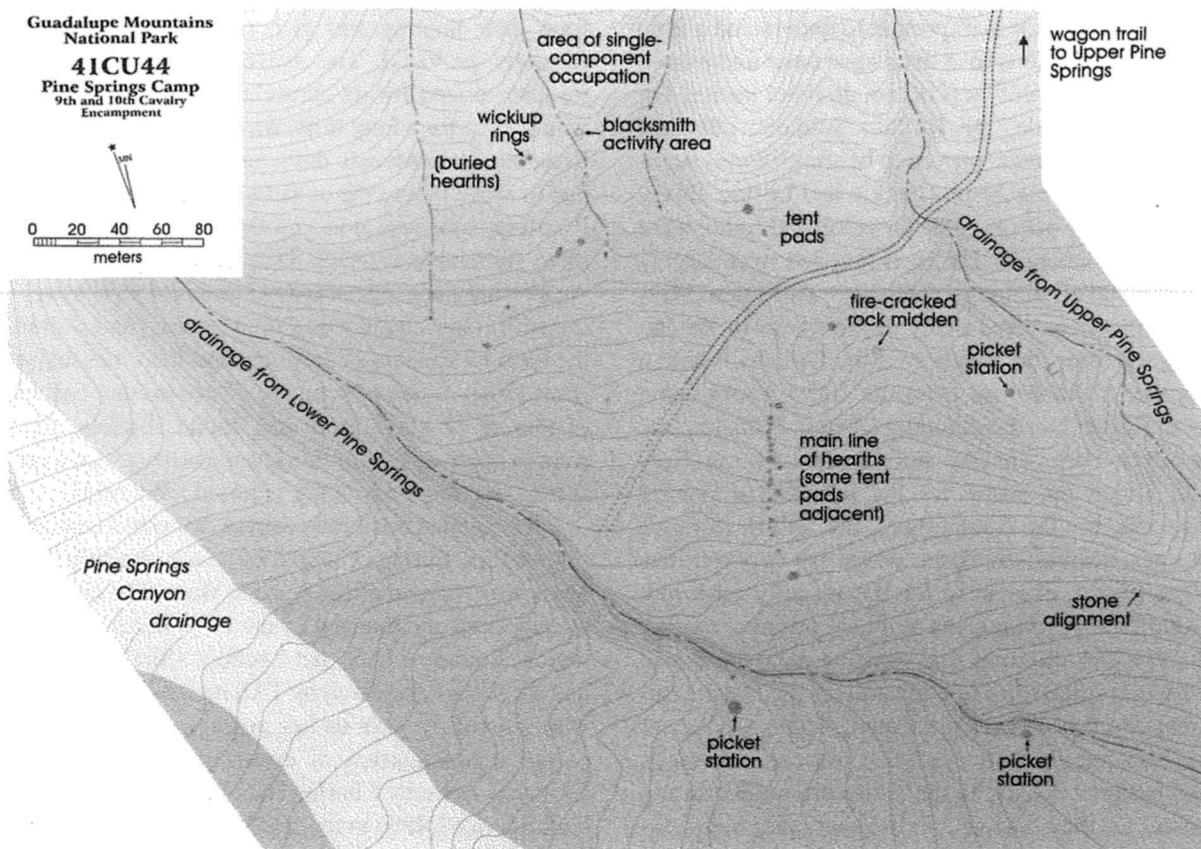


Figure 2. Map of Pine Springs Camp showing the location of various features.

Military activity areas can also be discerned at the site, based on artifact distributions. Most notable is one associated with the single component occupation, where an abundance of horseshoe nails and horseshoes, as well as chisel-cut iron bar stock, suggest a blacksmith, apparently using a portable forge, shoed horses there (see Figure 2). Long spike fragments found nearby may indicate a corral or at least a place where horses were temporarily tethered. The picket stations associated with this occupation also have an interesting artifact array. Several instances of can lid fragments and some cast iron fragments were found around two of them. As the only cast iron food vessels were cooking pots, the mess pans and camp kettles being made of bloom iron (Quartermaster General of the Army 1889), these finds suggest food preparation in the vicinity. There are no indications of hearths nearby, however, and it is unlikely the men on picket duty prepared their own food. Perhaps it was brought to them, then, in a cast iron pot on at least one occasion; perhaps at other times they ate directly from the can. A third picket station belonging to this occupation yielded several aqua and brown glass bottle fragments, suggesting drinking activity. Bottle fragments near the hearths



Figure 3. Tent pad with hypocaust during excavation. Firebox, located outside of tent, is delineated by upright stones forming a square in the lower half of the picture.



Figure 4. Can lids found stashed within the firebox from Figure 3.

and military structures in other parts of Pine Springs Camp indicate this was a widespread way of taking comfort, although some of the glass is admittedly from medicine bottles.

Overall, the debris of military life are scattered throughout the site, but are especially concentrated near the hearths. Bottles, buttons, coins, cartridges, and particularly nails are visible (Figure 5). The latter include horseshoe nails, box nails, and the longer bridge spikes. Some of the horseshoe nails were fashioned into fishing hooks, a common practice at the time (Farrow 1881:212), which confirms reports that the soldiers hunted and fished to supplement their regulation fare. One hearth in the main line had a considerable amount of spikes averaging approximately 3 inches in length. These were associated with the construction activities of the infantry and may indicate infantry use of that campfire, as well as a storage area for materials and/or a construction workshop. Near the semi-permanent structures fewer materials were found, with the notable exception of several tent posts still solidly implanted in bedrock. One of these was a wrought iron tent peg 11.3 inches long and 0.6 inches in diameter. Sixteen inch wooden pegs were used for securing common tents approximately 7 x 8 ft. in size (Quartermaster General of the Army 1889). The size of the peg may indicate a slightly smaller tent, or the sturdier iron may not have needed to be as long. It should also be noted that tent pegs were used sometimes to secure horses (Farrow 1881:62).

Apache occupations of the Pine Springs Camp left a lighter signature, although a number of distinctive items have been found. Several *wickiup* rings and a possible burned rock midden suggest repeated and sustained use of the site. A glass bottom scraper, a cut cartridge, and several cut can rims testify to their re-cycling of military materials. Of particular interest was the discovery within one *wickiup* ring of a buried hearth, cut through three previous hearths, which had a large cut tin can lid in situ beside it (Figure 6). The location of this



Figure 5. Military artifacts, Pine Springs Camp; clockwise from top: button, cartridge, quarter, tobacco pouch tab, pen nib (later date), square cut nail.

find was unusual, however. Significantly, Apache artifacts tend to concentrate in the vicinity of the military features, a distribution that supports the idea that they periodically “mined” the soldiers’ camp for useful materials. A small amount of stone tools attest to prehistoric as well as historic use of this location.

The total number of occupations at the site is hard to determine, as many left few traces. At a minimum we can identify three military occupations, two associated with the main line of hearths, one associated with the subsidiary line. The only one we can pinpoint with any accuracy, however, is the two month stay by Company K of the 10th Cavalry in 1878. Their commander, Lebo, left a detailed description of where they camped, including measurements that place them firmly within the main line of hearths. Significantly, Company K was accompanied on that occasion by a detachment of infantrymen from the 25th regiment. They may well have been the ones responsible for the concentration of spikes that were found. As for other occupations, there are at least five Apache and possibly pre-Apache uses of the site as indicated

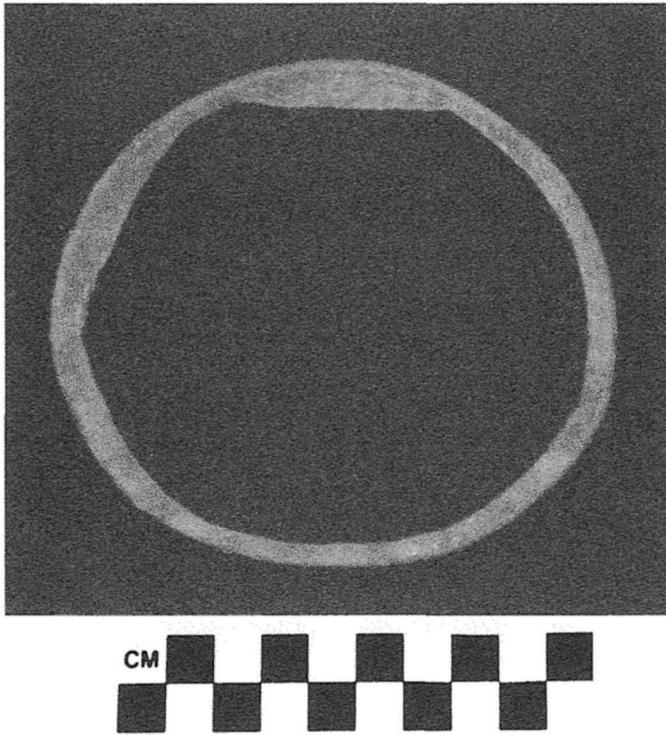


Figure 6. Tin can lid cut by the Apache, probably for jingles; found next to buried hearth.

by the surface *wickiups*, the four buried hearths, and the stone tools. The distribution of the historic artifacts suggests that the latest Apache occupations were contemporaneous with the main military use of the site in the 1870s. Beyond that, we cannot be certain, but we suspect there were many more ephemeral occupations of the site, by Apache and military alike.

The field phase of this particular archeological project is now over, but we are continuing with the joint venture that has involved this rediscovery of the past. Besides further analyzing the Pine Springs Camp materials, we are looking for more information about the people who used it. We have been privileged to talk with Apache elders and others over the years, and learn their point of view. We have also been working with chapters of the Ninth and Tenth (Horse) Cavalry Association to find out about the African Americans who occupied the site. We now have their names from the archives and are looking for their service records. Eventually, we hope to be able to connect with their descendants, if we can find them. In the meantime, as we plan our next joint venture we hope to attract more people to engage with us in multicultural research from a multicultural perspective.

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