

# Coronado National Forest

## Heritage

The forest was named for Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, who journeyed in 1540 to the Zuni and Hopi villages through part of what is today the Coronado National Forest.

At least fourteen different shifts in government land were made before the Coronado National Forest, part of which lies in New Mexico, attained the form which it has today.

The first move was the creation on April 11, 1902, of the Santa Rita Forest Reserve, followed in July of that year by the Santa Catalina Forest Reserve, Mount Graham Forest Reserve, and the Chiricahua Forest Reserve. On November 5, 1906, the Baboquivari and Peloncillo Forest Reserves were formed, followed the next day by the Huachuca Forest Reserve, and on November 7 by the formation of the Tumacacori Forest Reserve. On May 25, 1907, the Dragoon National Forest was created.

The nine original forest reserves went through their first consolidation in 1908, on the same day. On July 2, the Baboquivari, Huachuca and Tumacacori National Forests were consolidated into the Garces National Forest. At the same time, the Santa Rita, Santa Catalina and Dragoon National Forests became the first to bear the name Coronado National Forest. The third consolidation was made when the Chiricahua and Peloncillo National Forests became the Chiricahua National Forest. Mount Graham National Forest merged with parts of the Apache, Tonto, and Pinal National Forests to create the Crook National Forest.

On the 26th of September, 1910 the Galiuro Mountains are added to the Crook National Forest. One of the first additions to the Coronado National Forest occurred on July 1, 1911, when Garces was added to it. Chiricahua National Forest joined the Coronado on June 6, 1917.

The final move took place on October 23, 1953, when 425,674 acres of the Crook National Forest were transferred to the Coronado National Forest from the Santa Teresa, Galiuro, Mount Graham, and Winchester divisions of the Crook National Forest. The Crook National Forest was abolished with the remaining parts of the Crook National Forest being consolidated with the Apache and Tonto National Forests.

### Land of the Sky Islands

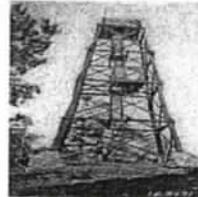
Visiting the Coronado National Forest can be a bit like taking a cruise, albeit a landlocked one, among Sky Island mountain ranges that tower in excess of 5,000 feet above the intervening seas of grass and desert. The members of this earthbound archipelago stand as destinations in an overland voyage for which your car, bicycle or hiking shoes can serve as a vessel. Catchers of clouds and cool air, the Sky Islands serve as home to a diverse array of plant and animal species, some of which can best be described as having been marooned by the last ice age. As the cloak of forests and woodlands that covered the area during the Pleistocene was pushed back by a gradual warming, remnants clung to the highlands. The lower extremities of those ice age remnants roughly form the boundaries of the various Districts of the Coronado National Forest.

### Geology

### Kentucky Camp

Historic site and Cabin Rentals.

Click on thumbnail to view a larger version



## Geology

The Sky Islands of southeastern Arizona are characteristic of a basin and range topography which spans the southwest and extends north and west into Oregon. This rugged landscape was formed by a combination of volcanic activity and a consequence of plate tectonics called block faulting. Block faulting is a process in which the earth's surface is cracked (faulted) into large blocks which then slide up or down in relation to one another as stress continues. The landscape that results is a mosaic of high ground (ranges) and broad flat valleys (basins) such as we see in southeastern Arizona today.

The forces that bent and buckled this region were most active during three dramatic geologic events. Between 75 million and 50 million years ago, as the continent of North America rode up and over the floor of the Pacific Ocean, a combination of explosive volcanism and radical uplifting known as the Laramide Orogeny was unleashed. These earth-shaping (and shaking) events created a mountain range of such magnitude that its rivers deposited silt as far away as present-day Wyoming. After 25 million years of wearing-down, two more periods of active volcanism and block faulting shaped the area. The result was, roughly, the landscape we see today. Even as volcanic cataclysms and grinding uplifts were creating the Sky Islands, erosion was tearing them down. As a result, the basins that separate them have been filling with geologic debris. As you drive across the basin and range topography, keep in mind that a significant portion of it is beneath you. What seems to be a small hill may really be a mountain buried "to its neck."

Though the mountain ranges of southeastern Arizona can trace their roots back to similar if not common events, each is unique. The Chiricahuas, for instance, contain areas where volcanic outflows pooled in depressions and the ash and dust that settled there fused into a type of rock called "welded tuff." Nature has weathered this material into a bizarre collection of pinnacles and balanced rocks that compose one of the most striking landscapes in the West. The Dragoons and Santa Catalinas have their eye-catching natural sculptures too, but these rounded boulder-scapes are made of granite, a volcanic material that oozed rather than flowed and in most cases never broke the surface. In the Huachucas, Santa Ritas, Rincons, and Patagonias, rocks of diverse origins were injected with intrusions of molten magma rich in metals that became the focus of extensive mining activity in historic times. Such mining activity, in varying degrees, was common to all ranges in the area.

## Natural History

During the time that glaciers covered much of North America, southeastern Arizona was considerably cooler and wetter than it is now. Lakes filled the valleys, and turtles and salamanders swam in their waters. Surrounding those lakes were extensive forests and savannas where mastodons, mammoths, llamas, and camels grazed and browsed. These plant eaters, in turn, provided food for predators just as exotic as their prey—jaguars, dire wolves, and short-faced bears.

As the earth warmed and the glaciers melted, southeastern Arizona became warmer and its vegetative communities began to change. The forests retreated to the north, toward the cool, moist conditions that best supported them. But they also endured on the slopes of the mountains, where the air was cooler and the rains more frequent. As the weather continued to warm, Sonoran and Chihuahuan desert vegetation invaded from the south, displacing some of the grasslands from the valleys. In the lowest areas, such as the Tucson basin, the bristly newcomers even began following their predecessors up the mountains.

As a result of this warming and retreating, the plants left over from the ice age were arranged on the mountain slopes in such a way that the species which required the coolest and most moist conditions were perched nearest the summits or clustered in cool canyons on north slopes. Those that required less moisture and could stand more heat were arranged according to temperature and moisture conditions that suited them best, at lower elevations.

C. Hart Merriam was the first to describe this loose stratification of plants and animals in his 1889 biological study of the San Francisco Peaks, the highest mountain in Arizona. He dubbed the various layers "life zones." Since that study, it has been suggested that the Sky Islands of the Coronado provide an even better example of this principle than the northern Arizona volcano where it was first observed.

The result of all these ecological comings and goings has been to enrich the area with an amazing biodiversity. A one-hour drive up one of the Coronado's taller mountain ranges, traversing the various life zones that cover its slopes, can treat the traveler to changes in plant communities roughly equivalent to a trip from the deserts of Mexico to the forests of Canada. If you're willing to add a little hiking to the end of that trip, it can take you all the way to the Hudsonian Zone (in the Chiricahuas and Pinalaños), where stands of Engelmann spruce resemble the forests of northern British Columbia.

Though the mastodons of the ice age remain only as fossils, there are plenty of fascinating animals to be found among these diverse habitats. In sheltered canyons, such as Ramsey in the Huachucas, Madera in the Santa Ritas and the South Fork of Cave Creek in the

Chiricahuas, the variety of bird species attracts birdwatchers from around the world. Sycamore Canyon in the Nogales District shares rare plants with isolated sites in Mexico and in Asia's Himalayas. The Pinalenos of the Safford District are a geologic ark that is home to a number of species that are found nowhere else on earth. And, it will surprise some to learn that this mountain surrounded by desert supports one of the densest black bear populations in North America.

### Prehistory & History

The roots of human habitation in southeastern Arizona are still being traced, but the clues that have been uncovered have much to say. Finely shaped stone points of the Clovis Culture, found in conjunction with the remains of ice-age mammoths, tell us that these intrepid hunters ranged here as much as 11,200 years ago. The simple grinding and crushing tools of a people archaeologists call the Cochise Culture indicate that they responded to the disappearance of ice-age mammals by broadening their food supply to include a wide range of plants, as well as the deer and other animals which we see in southeastern Arizona today.

Eventually, pottery-making and agricultural peoples, such as the Mogollon and Hohokam, appeared. Their cultures reflect increasingly refined adaptations to local environments, and knowledge obtained from people living to the south, in present-day Mexico. Archaeologists debate their relationship to the later Sobaipuri, Tohono O'Odham and Pima.

These latter peoples were the inhabitants of the land of the Sky Islands when two very different groups of newcomers arrived on the scene, at very nearly the same time. The Apaches were Athabascan nomads from what we now call Canada. The Spaniards were fresh from their conquest of Mexico.

### Conquistadores and Missionaries

In 1539, Fray (Friar) Marcos de Niza and a companion named Esteban became the first non-Indians of reliable record to enter what is now Arizona. They came searching for the Seven Cities of Cibola, a metropolis rumored to be richer than the gold-drenched capital of Aztec Mexico. Instead, they found the simple mud homes of pueblo Indians.

Lured by de Niza's tales of treasure (though he in fact had found none), Don Francisco Vázquez de Coronado mounted a second expedition one year later. The entry of the Conquistadores into what is now the United States is marked by the Coronado National Memorial at the southern end of the Sierra Vista Ranger District. Evidence indicates that Coronado proceeded along a course roughly duplicated by the Montezuma Pass to Sonoita scenic drive through the San Rafael Valley. He continued north and east via the San Pedro and Gila River valleys, on a trek that eventually took him and his army all the way to modern-day Kansas. The expedition, however, was considered a total failure. The land through which it passed held so little of value to the Spaniards that they went back to Mexico and didn't return for nearly a century.

In the late 1600's the lure of another type of reward, souls for the saving, brought Father Eusebio Kino to the Santa Cruz Valley. Kino, along with other Jesuits and Franciscans, built a system of missions across the Southwest where the padres vied for the faith of the native Sobaipuris, Pimas and Tohono O'Odham, as well as the Apaches. On the heels of the missionaries came silver miners armed with tools for extracting from the land what their predecessors had failed to find for the taking among its residents.

### Native Resistance

Though faced with an aggressive and better-armed society, indigenous peoples kept to their traditions and periodically rose up to force the newcomers to withdraw. Most defiant were the Apaches, who roamed the region's mountains in relatively small bands and proved nearly unconquerable. This clash of cultures sent waves of conflict washing across the Southwest for nearly 300 years. Some of the most violent of those waves swept the region free of Europeans for a time, but those times were never long.

### Wars and Peace

The end of the Mexican-American War in 1848 changed this scenario drastically. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded most of what is today New Mexico and Arizona to the United States, and the direction of expansion shifted abruptly from north-south to east-west. Railroad and stage routes were scouted to provide a route west across the mountains and deserts to California. In 1857, the first stage line to cross Arizona, the Jackass Mail, opened for business.

These routes brought a flood of immigrants from prospectors to storekeepers, as the Apaches fought desperately to stem the tide.

Striking from refuges, such as Stronghold Canyon in the Dragoon Mountains and hideouts in the Chiricahua Range, Apache bands were a constant threat to such outposts as Butterfield Stage Stop and Fort Bowie. Efforts to find a peaceful accommodation, by men such as Indian agent Tom Jeffords and the Chiricahua Apache chief Cochise, were swept aside. Isolated homesteads, such as the Hank and Yank Ranch at Sycamore Canyon, became battlegrounds in this fight to the finish. With Geronimo's surrender in 1886, in Skeleton Canyon of the Peloncillo Mountains, and his deportation to a prison in Florida, all but a few stragglers of the once-feared Chiricahua were removed from their homeland.

#### **Boomtowns and Cattle Ranches**

Even before the Apache Wars ended, yet another mining rush was sweeping the region. Boomtowns such as Greaterville in the Santa Ritas, Washington Camp and Harshaw in the Patagonias, Reef in the Huachucas, and Ruby in the Oro Blancos became the site of feverish fortune hunting. Swindles and speculation probably produced greater returns than mining, but whatever the source of a miner's stake it was equally well-received in the gambling halls and bawdy houses of Tombstone and Bisbee.

Such intense activity required a huge amount of resources. The towns needed building materials, fuel, water and sustenance. The Indians who now lived on reservations had to be fed, as did the military garrisons that guarded them. The same mountains that supplied ore for the mines provided wood and water for the towns. The grasslands that separated the mountains fattened herds of beef cattle.

Cattle had been brought to the area by Father Kino as early as the mid-1600's. With the beginning of full-scale economic development, livestock grazing in the American Southwest entered its golden age in the late 1800's. Fortunes were made in beef just as they were in silver, copper and tungsten. But there were hard times, too, as droughts, a fickle market and the depletion of the range through overgrazing knocked many a cattle baron off his high horse.

#### **The National Forest**

After the turn of the century, attention turned to southeastern Arizona's Sky Islands for yet another resource, recreation. As early as the mid-1800's, areas such as Hospital Flat in the Pinaleño Mountains and the town of Oracle in the foothills of the Santa Catalinas were being used as refuges from the heat and malaria of lowland forts. At about the same time that 15 upland areas were designated U. S. Forest Reserves (between 1902 and 1907), residents of burgeoning desert communities began trekking to the mountains to escape the summer heat. Areas such as White House (Madera) Canyon in the Santa Ritas, Columbine in the Pinaleños, and Summerhaven in the Santa Catalinas were among the most popular of these forest retreats.

Roads such as the Swift Trail out of Safford and the Control Road and Catalina Highway from Tucson were built to provide access to the new recreation areas. Campgrounds, picnic areas and trails were added by the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's. Today, the cool forests and magnificent scenery of the Coronado National Forest's five Ranger Districts continue to attract visitors in numbers that have grown to the point that they threaten to overcrowd some of the very attractions that drew them. The history of this exceptional area is, of course, still unfolding. With such an illustrious and colorful past it seems assured that its future will be notable as well.