



FORT BOWIE

Fort Bowie National Historic Site

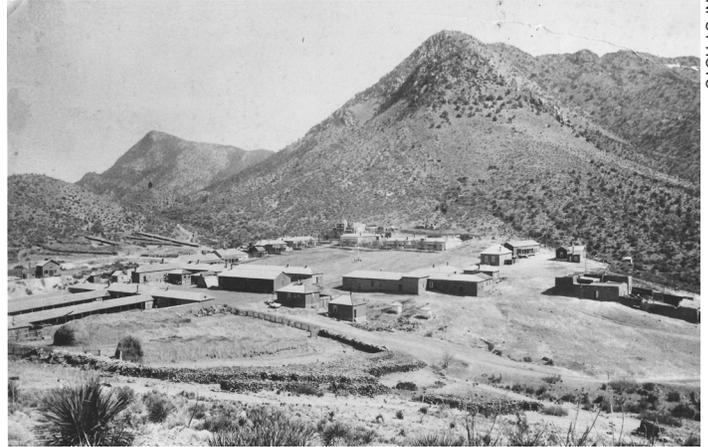
Cultural Landscape

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Mrs. Orsemus B. Boyd, traveling through southeastern Arizona with her husband in the late 1860s, spent the night in the surgeon's quarters at Fort Bowie and recorded her experience. The surgeon lived in one of the nicer structures at the fort, but the situation was still primitive. A terrific dust storm arrived that evening and dirt "blew through the crevices [between the logs] until it seemed as if we were part of the universal grit." The surgeon had attempted to improve the interior of his quarters, hanging a sheet of unbleached cotton over the mud ceiling and suspending shelves from the rafters with strips of cotton. One shelf housed "bottles of all sizes and descriptions, which contained every form of vermin and reptile life to be found in that region." During the night, Mrs. Boyd was awakened by a tremendous crash to find that the shelf had collapsed and tarantulas, snakes, and scorpions—the "liberated monstrosities"—were scattered amongst the broken glass (Greene 1980).

Mrs. Boyd's description reveals much about how the soldiers stationed at Fort Bowie tried to transform, understand, and control the local environment. The soldiers garrisoned at the fort sought to wrest control of Arizona from the land's Native American and Hispanic inhabitants. Men like Fort Bowie's surgeon looked forward to the day when the territory would be settled by Americans and divided into tracts of privately owned farms and ranches. However, the surgeon did not simply envision a duplicate of Eastern society in Arizona—he was also interested in understanding the local environment, as evidenced by his specimen collection. The soldiers at Fort Bowie utilized local materials, such as adobe, in constructing the fort even as they attempted to replicate familiar Anglo-American architectural designs and layouts. By interacting with their environment in these ways—building structures, conquering territory, collecting specimens—the soldiers at Fort Bowie created a cultural landscape. A cultural landscape, as the name implies, reflects the culture of the society or societies that created it. It comprises all significant resources, including historic structures, transportation routes, vegetation, and wildlife.



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Fort Bowie as it appeared in 1886.

The Fort Bowie cultural landscape reflects not only the Anglo-American culture that the soldiers represented but that of Native Americans, in particular the Chiricahua Apaches, who lived in the area and called it home before the U.S. conquest. The Apaches had deep cultural and spiritual ties to the landscape—connections which continue into the present day. Many sites of significance to the Chiricahua Apaches, such as Bowie Peak or the location where the Apache leader Cochise kept a stronghold, lie outside the boundaries of Fort Bowie National Historic Site. Thus, the cultural landscape of Fort Bowie is not confined to its congressionally designated borders, but extends to the larger region.

A Coveted Resource

The Dos Cabezas and Chiricahua Mountains stand to either side of Fort Bowie in southeastern Arizona. Cutting through the two mountain ranges is a natural pass, named "Apache Pass" by Anglo-Americans in the nineteenth century. The pass provided a way to traverse the mountains, and the presence of a spring at the pass, called "Apache Spring," ensured that the route would become an important thoroughfare in the high-desert grasslands where sources of water are few and far between. These environmental factors also meant that the area could easily become a source for conflict. Control of the transportation route and the water conveyed a measure of dominance over the larger region (McChristian 2005).

Humans have lived in and traveled through this region for thousands of years. Prehistoric peoples hunted and gathered





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A reenactor at Apache Spring in 2011.

throughout southeastern Arizona over eleven thousand years ago. Sedentary agricultural societies developed later in the prehistoric period, and members of such groups as the Pima or Sobaupuri no doubt traveled through Apache Pass. The Apache arrived in the Southwest around 1500 C.E., migrating southwards from Canada. The Chiricahua Apache, loosely organized into three bands, controlled a territory centered on the Chiricahua Mountains that extended south into Mexico. After acquiring horses and guns from the Spanish, the Apaches intensified their raids on inhabitants of the region, driving the Sobaipuri out of the San Pedro Valley in 1762. For the Chiricahua, the environment of Apache Pass became both a home and a landscape that possessed deep spiritual significance. They called the pass “Tu-si-lsa” or “water resting.” Nearby Bowie Peak was a place where the Chiricahua could commune with their god, Ussen, using rituals and prayers (Pinto et al. 2000).

Emigration and Empire

The Spanish explored Apache Pass and founded settlements and missions elsewhere in Arizona, but they had little effect on the environment at the pass. Not until the area became part of the United States following the Gadsden Purchase of 1854 did a new culture begin to influence the landscape at Apache Pass and contest with the Chiricahuas for control of the area. American emigrants traveled through on their way to California and some stopped in Arizona, starting settlements and ranches. Surveyors and explorers also traveled through the area, documenting and mapping the United States’ newest territorial acquisition. Communication between the outposts

of the United States’ far-flung empire became critical, and in 1857 the California Stage Company provided the first mail service between San Antonio and San Diego, traveling a route that took the stagecoaches over Apache Pass. A year later, the owners of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route signed a contract with the Post Office and commenced service along a 2,700 mile route from St. Louis to San Francisco. The company constructed 141 stations along the way, including one at Apache Pass. The station, located approximately a quarter-mile from the spring, was constructed of adobe with a stone corral (McChristian 2005).

The Chiricahuas tolerated this imposition into their territory, but often raided American and Mexican settlements on both sides of the border. In late 1859 and early 1860, tension mounted as a band of Chiricahuas led by Cochise carried out several raids in Arizona. Citizens clamored for the U.S. Army to come to their aid. The army had established a presence in Arizona during the 1850s, and a network of forts already dotted the landscape. When Apaches kidnapped the son of a farmer in the Sonoita Valley, the commander at Fort Buchanan ordered Second Lieutenant George N. Bascom out in pursuit of the Apaches and their captive. Bascom traveled to the Butterfield station at Apache Pass and set up camp, sending out emissaries to Cochise, who was camped in the vicinity. Although Cochise did not have the boy, he may have known which Apaches were responsible. Bascom held several Apaches hostage in an attempt to force Cochise to return the boy. The situation degenerated into violence, and Bascom eventually hung several warriors from an oak tree west of the pass. As a result of the Bascom Affair, relations between the Chiricahuas and the United States soured and a state of endemic warfare ensued (McChristian 2005).

The Bascom Affair transformed Apache Pass from a landscape over which an uneasy peace prevailed into a place of danger and death. Mail coaches and emigrants continued to travel through the pass but now faced a constant threat from the Apaches. The topography of the area made it well suited for ambushes. Although some vantage points offered expansive views of the area, there were many narrow canyons and sharp overhangs that provided concealment (Pinto et al. 2000).

A force of volunteer troops from California, marching to intercept an invading Confederate army in 1862, discovered exactly how dangerous the terrain of Apache Pass could be. The troopers, led by Captain Thomas L. Roberts, had been sent to establish a supply depot at San Simon Station. They entered Apache Pass on July 15, eager to reach the spring. Unbeknownst to them, their movements were being carefully watched by over 150 Chiricahua and Mimbres Apaches, led by Cochise and Mangas Coloradas. The Apaches concealed themselves in the ridges surrounding the spring, and when the wagons and howitzers fell behind the infantry, the Apaches

sprang their ambush. Roberts managed to take the spring during the ensuing fight, only to abandon it during the night because he had too few men to protect it. Reinforcements arrived the next day, and the soldiers once again fought for possession of the spring. Although the army won the Battle of Apache Pass, the commanders of the California volunteers felt the Apaches posed a grave danger to their supply lines. They also did not like the thought of having to fight the Apaches for control of the spring once again. Agreeing with his subordinates, General Carleton, commander of the California volunteers, ordered the establishment of a post at Apache Pass (McChristian 2005).

The First Fort

Although the California volunteers represented the United States, the first Fort Bowie developed more from a local, regional impulse than a formal, national initiative. Congress, embroiled in the Civil War, had little time to attend to the needs of a post in the wilds of Arizona. The absence of a controlling state made itself evident in the development of the Fort Bowie landscape. Structures were put up in a haphazard manner and used whatever local materials were available. Apache Pass was quite isolated, located far from any substantial settlements, and travel over the rough terrain was time-consuming. The California volunteers were staking a claim to the landscape, but as yet, they had little power to transform that landscape. Instead, they had to find ways to survive as best they could on a frontier outpost.

At the end of July 1862, General Carleton ordered Company G, Fifth California Infantry, commanded by Captain Hugh L. Hind, to establish a post at Apache Pass. The new post was called Fort Bowie after Colonel George W. Bowie, who commanded the Fifth California Infantry. Hind and his men immediately began scouting the location but faced a daunting task. The ground was rugged and hilly, and no funds existed for constructing the post. Hind finally settled on a hill south of the spring as the best location to protect both the water and travelers on the road. The men initially lived in tents and set to work building breastworks around the hill. Upon their arrival they had found evidence that the Apaches' hostility had not abated—the bodies of nine miners, burned to death after being ambushed in the open flat north of Apache Pass (McChristian 2005).

As winter approached, living conditions at Fort Bowie remained primitive. There was little useable timber in the immediate vicinity, and the garrison had its hands full protecting the cattle herd and travelers from the Apaches, who continued attacking and resisting these impositions on their territory. The soldiers finally dug pits in the southeast side of the hill, lined the walls with stone, and made roofs of brush and earth. These rude accommodations provided a



The post hospital at the second Fort Bowie.

slightly more effective shelter against the wind than a canvas tent. Eventually, the soldiers constructed some above-ground structures as well. Adobe brick officers' quarters, a log building that housed the hospital, and the post trader's store were some of the other buildings at the first Fort Bowie. The top of the hill served as the parade ground, but although the soldiers made some attempt to follow army regulations, which stipulated that fort buildings should be arranged in a neat square around the parade ground, the structures at Fort Bowie were situated wherever the terrain allowed. Indeed, the dugout shelters occupied by the enlisted men clearly took advantage of the local terrain (McChristian 2005; Pinto et al. 2000).

The first Fort Bowie, with its adobe buildings and makeshift shelters, inspired universal opprobrium in observers. In 1866, Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Whittier inspected the post and recorded that "the men live in excavations in the hill side, which are dark, confining, and at some seasons very damp. . . . The quarters are as clean and comfortable as quarters can be which resemble an Indian rancheria or dog-holes rather than the habitation of civilized beings" (Greene 1980). Whittier's comment reveals that the structures of Fort Bowie were more than simply places of shelter and defense. They were also symbols of the United States' power and the triumph of civilization in what most nineteenth-century Americans viewed as an uncouth wilderness. Anglo-Americans stereotyped the Apaches as uncivilized and often pointed to what they viewed as the Apaches' lack of mastery over nature as proof. Apaches used local materials such as brush and adobe, lived a nomadic lifestyle, and their habitations blended into their surroundings. By also using adobe and living in structures that resembled Indian dwellings, the first Fort Bowie appeared as a tenuous marker of superiority to Anglo observers, the soldiers only a few steps removed from the same barbarity of which they accused the Apaches.



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Cottonwood trees and a fancy lamppost decorate the second fort.

The Second Fort

When the Civil War ended, the U.S. Army turned its attention to the situation in the western territories, determined to settle the unfinished conquest and bring all those who resisted, including the Apaches, under control. In 1866 the regular army took over at Fort Bowie from the California volunteers, recognizing that the fort was an integral part of “the defense network in southeastern Arizona that was intended to control the Apaches through constant military presence in their homeland” (McChristian 2005). Arizona citizens also wanted the fort to remain—not only because of the ongoing conflict with the Apaches but because army forts offered one of the few economic opportunities available in Arizona. The army needed grain, livestock, and other merchandise, all of which local settlers were happy to supply. Recognizing that Fort Bowie would be a permanent fixture for the foreseeable future, the army approved plans to relocate the fort to a better location and supplied the funding to build sturdier structures (McChristian 2005).

The second Fort Bowie was located on an open area approximately five hundred yards east of the first fort. Although the ground sloped downwards, it allowed for a layout that followed army regulations—a parade ground surrounded on four sides by structures. All of the officers’ quarters lined the south side in the traditional “Officers’ Row.” Construction on the new fort began in 1868 and continued through 1870. A pinery, located twenty-five miles south of the fort provided timber, and by July 1869 a steam-powered sawmill had been installed at the pinery. Few of the buildings at the second fort were made entirely of lumber, though. Adobe remained an important construction material. A typical building had walls of adobe bricks, a timber floor, and a flat, mud roof. The roofs constantly leaked, but it was not until 1879 that hipped and shingled roofs were installed (Greene 1980; McChristian 2005).

In its layout and design, the second fort was a more obvious representation of Anglo-American culture than the first. The

commanding officers’ quarters were perhaps the most blatant form of architectural imperialism. Constructed in 1884, the building “exemplified a Victorian architectural ideal,” with truncated mansard towers, dormer and bay windows, and a large porch. It was originally painted either a dark red or green. Major Eugene B. Beaumont, who assumed command at the fort in 1884, wrote that the house had “a large amount of useless and unnecessary ornamentation.” The fussy design almost turned the structure into a caricature, but it was also a symbol of the success of the United States’ territorial and cultural conquest placed prominently within the cultural landscape of Fort Bowie (Greene 1980).



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The commanding officers’ quarters in 1886.

In an attempt to ward off scurvy and improve the soldiers’ diets, many western forts established post gardens. Fort Bowie attempted to do the same, but was defeated by the environment—the soil was too poor to support crops. Soldiers relied on imported foods, although in 1867 the post surgeon added traditional Apache mescal to the soldiers’ diet. Mescal was prepared by baking the root of the agave plant in a covered pit. It is not known if mescal became a regular part of the soldiers’ diet or if the surgeon’s experiment was met with disdain. In 1880 the Southern Pacific Railroad arrived and the fort’s supply problems eased. Bowie Station, thirteen miles to the north, provided a place for supplies to be unloaded. Timber could be transported by railroad, and the soldiers no longer had to toil in the pinery and haul boards by wagon over the rough terrain. In 1877 the fort was connected to a telegraph line. These transportation and communication systems also became part of the cultural landscape. They tethered the isolated post to the power of an expanding, industrializing nation (McChristian 2005).

Yet even as Fort Bowie became integrated into a regional network and new technologies helped the soldiers overcome environmental limitations, the local environment continued to influence life at the fort. Water remained a critical factor in the post’s survival. The fort initially relied on water from Apache

Spring, and a water wagon, drawn by eight mules, transported water to the fort. The garrison faced continual problems with contaminated water due to the location of privies near a gulch that drained into the spring. In 1884 Major Beaumont decided to install a piped water system at the fort. The system drew water from Bear Spring, located three-quarters of a mile to the east, and employed a steam powered pump that sent water to stone reservoirs located above the post. Gravity then allowed the water to flow through pipes to the various buildings (Greene 1980).

The garrison not only altered the landscape by building barracks and water pipes; they also transformed the vegetation of the site. Timber cutting for construction and firewood reduced tree cover, particularly juniper, on the surrounding hills. Grazing altered the species composition of the grasslands in the area, and native grass species declined while mesquite proliferated. The soldiers also introduced plants in an attempt to create an aesthetically pleasing and familiar landscape in the high-desert grasslands. They planted cottonwoods by the officers' quarters and sowed Bermuda grass on the parade ground (Pinto et al. 2000).

Life at Fort Bowie

The cultural landscape at Fort Bowie also reflected the class and gender distinctions among the inhabitants of the post. Strict class divisions existed between the officers and the enlisted men. The officers, particularly those whose families lived with them at the post, attempted to recreate a refined atmosphere at the fort. A tennis court was installed on the grounds, the officers' wives made social calls and hosted balls, and picnics and riding expeditions were popular. At the post trader's store, a separate clubroom and billiard room was set aside specifically for the officers, separate from the bar for enlisted men. In 1891 the officers began conducting lyceums, often held on a front porch to catch a refreshing breeze while they discussed topics such as tactics or military law (McChristian 2005).

The army also tried to inculcate a desire for learning in the enlisted men. A school was established at Fort Bowie in 1879 in one of the officers' quarters, serving both enlisted men and the children who lived at the fort. One of the troopers received thirty-five cents a day in extra pay to work as the teacher. The first school lasted less than two years. In 1881 the school was reconvened, with sporadic attendance as it usually closed whenever there were no children at the fort. In 1888, however, a schoolroom was constructed on the west side of the parade ground. The building probably served a variety of functions, including providing space for courts-martial and religious services (McChristian 2005).



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Playing tennis at Fort Bowie, c. 1880s or 1890s.

For the enlisted men, the post trader's store was the social center of the fort. Besides perusing the merchandise for sale, the soldiers could spend their paychecks on liquor and play cards at the enlisted men's bar. Whether in the segregated rooms of the post trader's store or the sight of an officer and his family playing tennis, the class divisions at the fort were evident in the cultural landscape.

Soldiers could also find liquor and entertainment in the vicinity of Fort Bowie. The nearest community of any substantial size was the town of Willcox, which boasted a dance hall and saloon. Establishments known as "whiskey ranches" also appeared closer to Fort Bowie. These establishments sold liquor, and prostitutes often worked there as well. Despite attempts by the commanders at Fort Bowie to get rid of the whiskey ranches, they remained a part of the larger Fort Bowie landscape, their proprietors drawn to the area by the presence of the bored soldiers at the fort, anxious to find ways to fill their off-duty hours (McChristian 2005).

Other civilians lived closer to the fort, occupying buildings at the site of the first Fort Bowie, which became known as Camp Merijildo. Located close, but not within the fort, Camp Merijildo provided accommodations for those who had connections to the garrison but whose class and/or gender prohibited them from actually residing within government quarters. Most women, although they were a critical part of army life, were kept on the outskirts of the fort. Only officers' wives and occasionally the wives of senior noncoms were given a permanent home at the center of the fort landscape. Laundresses, for example, had to find quarters wherever they could. At Fort Bowie in the 1870s they occupied the vacant mail station below the first fort—their quarters were usually termed "Soapsuds Row." Many laundresses were the wives of enlisted men, but could also be single women or the wives of civilians. Besides prostitution, laundering was one of the few occupations open to women in the environs of the fort. Class and gender lines revealed themselves in the landscape—prostitutes and laundresses lived at whiskey ranches or vacant buildings while officers' wives lived in government quarters



The ruins of the second Fort Bowie as they appear today.

on the sides of the parade ground. All of these women were part of garrison life, but their allotted places in the landscape denoted their respective cultural roles (McChristian 2005; Pinto et al. 2000).

Resistance and Abandonment

The garish commanding officers' quarters, the buildings arranged in a precise square around the parade ground, the network of roads and telegraph lines—all of these formed the cultural landscape at Fort Bowie. But the creation of this cultural landscape did not proceed without contention. Beyond the boundaries of the fort was another, older landscape created by the Apaches—a landscape of sacred sites, favored hunting places, and seasonal encampments. As the army fought for the ascendancy of one vision of the landscape, the Chiricahua Apaches resisted.

Several characteristics of the region were important to the conflict. The Apaches, intimately familiar with the terrain of southeastern Arizona, could easily disappear into the mountains and canyons after raiding settlements. Another crucial factor was the international border between the U.S. and Mexico. U.S. soldiers could not pursue the Apaches over the border, and the Apaches used this to their advantage, although they also faced pursuit from the Mexican army.

Facing hostility from both the U.S. and Mexico, Cochise agreed to move his people to a reservation in the Chiricahua Mountains in 1872. In 1875 the headquarters for the agency was moved to Fort Bowie. It was probably housed in the old Butterfield stage station. In 1876 the Chiricahuas were moved to the San Carlos agency to the north, and their reservation in the Chiricahua Mountains was dissolved. In the 1880s Geronimo and other Apaches broke away from the reservation and began raiding in Arizona and Mexico once again. The garrison at Fort Bowie played a substantial role in the

subsequent campaign. After Geronimo surrendered in 1886, he and the other captives were brought briefly to Fort Bowie before being taken to Fort Marion in Florida (McChristian 2005).

With Geronimo's surrender, Fort Bowie's purpose evaporated. Although local citizens, anxious to continue profiting from the army's presence, wanted Fort Bowie to be a permanent fixture on the landscape, it was only a matter of time before the army decided to decommission the post. The cost of upkeep and continual problems with the water supply made Fort Bowie a liability for the army, and in 1894 the fort was abandoned. Most of the other posts in Arizona also were decommissioned (McChristian 2005).

Locals immediately scavenged the buildings at Fort Bowie for useable timber after the soldiers vacated the premises. The structures decayed until only a few adobe walls, roofless and worn down by the elements, remained. The cottonwood trees died due to a lack of water, but a patch of Bermuda grass stubbornly clung to the parade ground. Grazing continued around the fort, and mesquite and other weedy species overtook many grassland areas (Pinto et al. 2000).

In 1911 the land was put up for sale at public auction and was purchased by local ranchers for livestock grazing. The old fort became a national historic site in 1964, and the National Park Service began adding a new layer to the cultural landscape. The Park Service constructed a visitor center in the 1970s, installed power lines, and built a residential area in the early 1990s. Interpretive trails now criss-cross the landscape, merging with and paralleling the historic roads that the soldiers and Apaches traversed (Pinto et al. 2000).

Current and Recent Preservation Projects

In 1996 all livestock grazing was stopped on the Fort Bowie National Historic Site. The Park Service removed miles of fences which had been installed, leaving only a fence surrounding the perimeter. An ongoing effort involves the reduction of mesquite, a native, invasive plant. Currently, it has been removed from forty acres, including the Bascom Affair site and the old stage station. In 2009 researchers accurately mapped the initial location of Fort Bowie for the first time, using GPS and laser technology. In 2010 the vegetation which had overgrown the foundations still visible at the first fort was cleared away.

Maintaining the adobe walls that remain at the site of the second fort is an ongoing preservation project. Each year the ruin walls are stabilized by covering them with lime plaster. After the winter, the walls are evaluated and plaster reapplied where needed. Another important preservation project involves the impacts from illegal immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico



A reenactor at Fort Bowie National Historic Site.

border and traveling through the site. In 2010 three parks—Fort Bowie National Historic Site, Chiricahua National Monument, and Coronado National Memorial—received funding for a two-year documentation and treatment project of archaeological sites. The project will provide baseline data and condition assessments for archaeological sites which will serve as the foundation for future border impacts monitoring and preservation treatments. At Fort Bowie, archaeologists have completed condition assessments and updated maps and site forms for sixteen of seventy-three previously recorded sites.

Conclusion

Although today, all that remains of Fort Bowie are a few adobe walls and stone foundations, the very absence of the structures testifies to the success of the soldiers' mission. Built as an outpost of conquest, the fort itself was no longer needed when that conquest was achieved. Today, visitors can see the shadows of the cultural landscape created by the soldiers in the ruins, road traces, and the changes in vegetation patterns at the site. The Fort Bowie landscape was not simply the product of one culture, however. The Chiricahua Apaches played a part in its creation, and the landscape that harbored spiritual and cultural importance to their people did not disappear. It is still a part of the land today. The Fort Bowie cultural landscape also developed as it did due to the local environment. The location of water, the absence of substantial tree cover, the rough terrain—these were all important in how and why the cultural landscape developed as it did. Fort Bowie National Historic Site preserves the story of how different cultures, meeting in an environment strange to one group and familiar to another, transformed the landscape around them.

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