

# Rim Country legends — filming 'The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams'

## ODDITIES 4: GRIZZLY ADAMS' CABIN

There is an artifact in the town of Payson that harks back to a famous television character. He was a man of the frontier who befriended a grizzly bear and thus came to be called Grizzly Adams.

The story was good enough for a television series, "The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams." It was also good for the economy of the Rim Country.

Dan Haggerty, a former animal trainer, played the part of Adams in the original series and the project was created by Sunn Classic Pictures out of Park, Utah.

While grizzly bears did roam our forests, now only black bears in assorted colors forage the Rim Country. After choosing the Payson area for filming the story, many local people became involved playing bit parts. The John Haight ranch was

the location for the first films, Christopher Creek had its day in the Sunn Film classic, and Payson's Main Street got into the act as did the old blacksmith shop in Pine where the opening scenes of the movie were filmed.

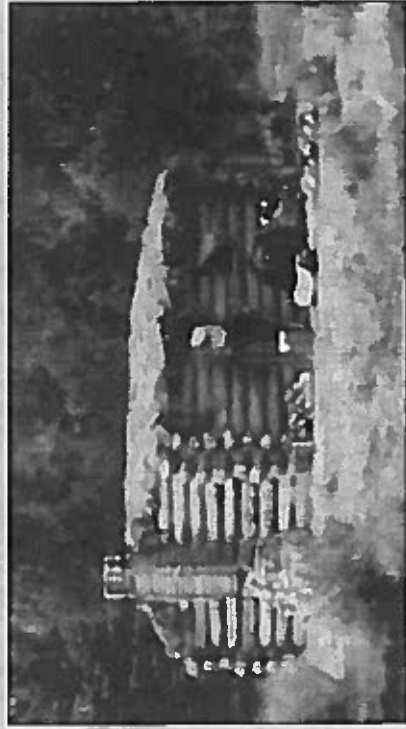
Other scenes were shot on lower Houston Creek. The animals were quartered at Bert Sprague's ranch in Star Valley, including two black and tan grizzlies and one brown bear.

Filming the series was completed early in January 1977, and it went on to earn more than \$30 million in the first six months of its release. At that time it was the fifth highest grossing, independently produced film in history. The National Broadcasting Company played the series for 10 seasons, and it was always in the 10 top ranked shows.

When the filming came to a close Bert Sprague put a sug-

gestion into the minds of the Sunn Classics managers. He was president of the newly formed Northern Gila County Historical Society, which had already negotiated with the county to lease the old Payson jail on McLane for a museum. Why not move the Grizzly Adams cabin to the same site, and make it one of the museum's attractions? Sunn Classics thought it a great idea, since the Forest Service required them to remove the cabin and put the site they were using back to its original condition.

The film company even said they would make a cash donation to have the cabin moved, though there is no record that the donation ever came through. Instead, the men of the historical society, mostly retirees, put their shoulders to the logs. They removed the cabin log by log from its original site. Heber White of Christopher Creek donated his truck, gas and driver to transport the logs to Payson. Once they were reassembled



Sunn Classic Pictures

there was much restoration to be done. The roof was absent, the windblows and door had to be replaced. Payson High School teacher Bob Walberg rallied five of his shop students, and they got good training as they put a new roof on the cabin before the rain and snow arrived that winter. Historical Society members also went to work furnishing the cabin with an antique table, bed, chairs and a fireplace. The jail and the Grizzly Adams cabin became Payson's first museum

again, making it part of the new

museum display. However, the logs had disintegrated from dry rot and when they tried to disassemble it, the cabin simply fell apart. Thus was the vain glorious demise of Grizzly Adams' cabin in Payson.

It was some years later that Globe native Ben Navarro, stunt rider and director of the Grizzly Adams series, returned to Payson looking for the old cabin. He wanted to shoot a full-length film entitled "Grizzly Adams, The Legend Lives On." Not finding the cabin, he consulted with Ira Murphy who explained the sad end of the original cabin. Undaunted, Navarro built a new cabin, moved his film cast and crew to the Swiss Village Inn for a week's filming in the area. The Rim Country scenes were completed with a golf tournament celebration hosted by the film company and the chamber of commerce.

The new "Grizzly Adams cabin" and old Payson jail can be seen along McLane north of Main Street.