

EXPLORING 260 HISTORY

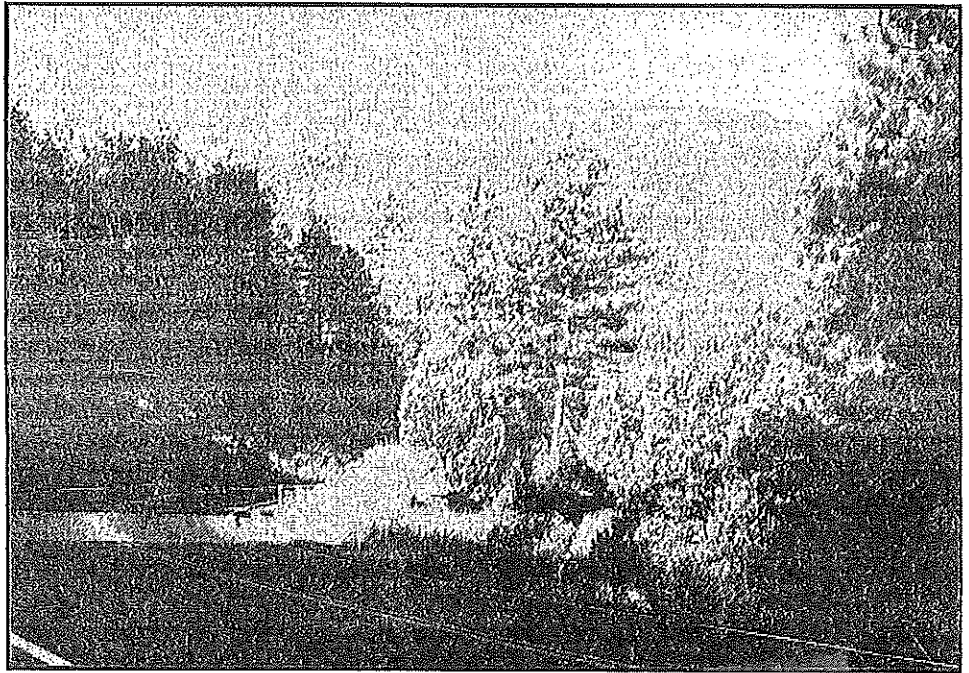
by Jacqueline Williams

Under the "mighty backbone" of Arizona, the Mogollon Rim, the Tonto Basin was finally secured against the Apaches in the late 1800s. Under the rim, a road was slowly taking shape.

From ruts and good cow trails to wagon tracks in the dirt, graded, then graveled, and finally blacktopped in the early 60s, it slowly forged its purpose--to assist an odd assortment of miners, cattle ranchers, farmers, lumber men, hunters and fishermen traveling from Payson to their homesteads, ranches, farms and businesses to the East. Some came to explore the wilderness or to escape the Phoenix inferno to fish by a rushing trout stream.

The settlers traveled first by horse, then by burro trains, next by mule or

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Highway 260 - A scenic historic highway in Arizona.

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horse and wagon "freighters," finally by old Model T Fords. (They had to back up steep hills for the gravity to maintain the gasoline flow to the carburetor.)

They went up Doubtful Canyon near the present-day Kohl's Ranch, so named because it was highly doubtful you could make it without an extra sturdy wagon and a strong team.

Originally traveling over Turkey Peak to Young, and over Colcord Mountain to Winslow they finally made a more direct route up to the rim by filling in canyons and straightening hairpin turns.

Only a few spirited adventurers and homesteaders traveled daily in 1900. In 1991 on Oxbow Hill, the average *daily bi-directional* traffic count was 20,000 vehicles. An estimated 75% of these intrepid travelers turn east on Highway 260 to reach camping spots

and second homes nestled in the pines. They hike, visit and view the unique places under the rim.

As you speed along in comfort, think of the miners whose successes can be summed up by the statement, "Payson mines are like women--they show you enough to lead you on, but never produce." (Northern Gila County Historical Society. *Rim Country History*.)

Think of the cattle ranchers. By 1890 there were cattle from Payson to Star Valley, from Little Green Valley to Christopher Creek and over to Pleasant Valley. A limited market for the abundance of cattle, along with a record drought followed by record rains, denuded the land finally forcing cattle ranchers to find other ways to make a living. Goats were removed from the range when the Tonto National Forest was formed.

Small sawmills started to flourish at the turn of the century. Logs were wrestled down from the rim in wagons on the old Gordon Canyon Road. Many of the sawmills were sold as soon as their owners had met their own lumber needs. Few remain.

Hunting and fishing followed cattle as the greatest source of income. While most of the lion were hunted by parties using dogs, Charlie Henderson, manager of Little Green Valley Ranch for 39 years, relates having killed 62 lions during his tenure.

Zane Grey, who served the area well by his hunting trips and his several books about the Rim country, left for good in 1929 after an altercation with the Arizona Game and Fish Department over a permit to hunt bear.

Read our future issues as we explore the final joining of 260 to the Rim road and the fascinating people and places along the way. ♦