

THE FOURR RANCH

The Fourr Ranch is located in the northwest corner of the Dragoon Mountains at the entrance to Fourr Canyon. It was established by William I. Fourr in 1878, two years after the Apache Reservation in the Dragoon Mountains was closed. The ranch is accessed by Ranch Road, which originates in the town of Dragoon.

Background: William Fourr was born at Prairie Home, Cooper County, Missouri on July 11, 1843. His parents died when he was a child and he was taken to St. Joseph, Missouri where he was raised. In 1861, he helped drive a herd of cattle belonging to Charles Ilfeld from Missouri to New Mexico and continued to work for him for about two years.

Having heard of the gold excitement in northern Arizona, Fourr and two others went to Prescott in 1864. There he engaged in prospecting and mining, principally along the Hassayampa River. He moved to Yuma in 1865 and carried mail to Stanwix Station, a distance of nearly 100 miles. When stagecoaches were restored to the southern mail route in 1866, he quit carrying mail and bought Kenyon Station. The next year, he sold Kenyon Station and purchased Burkes Station where he sold flour and groceries and acquired a dairy herd. He married Lucinda Jane Nunn on May 28, 1868 and they had nine children.

In 1869, William sold the Burkes Station and purchased the Oatman Flat Stage Station. He fixed up a more direct road to this station and made it a toll road. He had charter from the legislature to collect tolls but stated that the best charter was a double-barreled shotgun. After the Apaches continued to raid his farm, he sold the Oatman Flat Station and moved to the San Joaquin Valley in California about 1877, but wasn't happy there.

Fourr Ranch: In 1878, Fourr went to the Dragoon Mountains and searched for a place where there was a permanent water supply so he could start a cattle ranch. He brought about eighty head from Yuma and found a place with lots of sycamore trees on the west slope of the Dragoon Mountains about five miles from the Dragoon Stage Station. The Cochise County records show that on 7 October 1879 he recorded a homestead claim for 160 acres 4 miles south of Dragoon pass, but did not actually obtain a United States patent to the land until October 8, 1914. Billy initially called the homestead the Buena Vista Ranch but later called it the Four F Ranch after his brand. The Fourr family initially lived in tents and gradually improved the accommodations at the ranch as their financial status improved. In September 1898 he completed one of the finest ranch houses in Cochise County using wood from the abandoned Whitehouse that had been the headquarters of the Tweed Ranch near the West Stronghold. The Dragoon Division of the Coronado National Forest was established by a presidential proclamation in 1907 and he promptly denied the right of the U. S. Forest Service to limit the number



Entrance to the Fourr Ranch

of his cattle who could graze on the part of his range that had been included within the National Forest. In one of the hearings, some Washington official asked Mr. Fourr on what basis he figured he had acquired title to the land and the reply was, "I took it away from the Indians and by God I aim to keep it". With him, it was always "my land, my canyon, my mountains and my home". His land controlled the entrance to Fourr Canyon and in spite of Forest Service permits authorizing the securing of wood in that canyon, he held the wood gatherers off with a Winchester.



Main Ranch House – Fourr Ranch

An obituary in the Tucson Citizen read: “Billy Fourr had watched Arizona grow from a barren waste of desert and cacti to a flourishing progressive young State through years that have not always been peaceful. Billy Fourr was one of a few who dared to battle with the odds against him in an effort to carve a commonwealth from the wastelands and he succeeded”.

In 1878, the same year that Ed Schleglein discovered silver bearing rock in the hills where Tombstone is today, Billy Fourr, despite roaming Apache bands, dared to start his ranch in the rugged Dragoon Mountains. Up to the time of his death on January 9, 1935, that ranch was still his home. Besides a large run of cattle, the ranch supplied most of the apples, pears and peaches used in southern Arizona. He is buried in the cemetery in Benson, Arizona.

Recent History: In the 1990’s an heir of the Coca-Cola bottling company, who held ownership until 2004, purchased the ranch. The Fourr Ranch consists of 1,280 acres of private land and grazing rights on 11,600 acres of State Trust land and 4,000 acres of National Forest land. Buildings on the ranch include a 3 bedroom, 3600 Sq. Ft. residence (built in 1898), guest house, pool house, bunk house, cowboy house, labor house, horse barn, shop and an equipment storage barn. As of October 2011 the ranch was listed for sale for 2 1/2 million dollars, a significant reduction from the 2005 asking price of 5 million.

Summary in 2006 by M. Lesko. Updated in 2011 by T. Johnson

Additional Material: GVHC Library File 28

