

## PECK CANYON HISTORY

**PECK CANYON** – Peck Canyon was originally called Agua Fria Canyon (Cold Water Canyon). After the Peck Family massacre of 1886, Peck sold the property to Joseph Piskorski and the canyon was commonly referred to as “Polack Canyon until the name was officially changed to Peck Canyon in 1930. The Peck Canyon watershed starts in the Atascosa Mountains in the vicinity of Ruby Road and generally follows the Corral Nuevo Road (Forest Road 4109) to the Corral Nuevo area where it turns to an easterly direction and flows to the Santa Cruz River. East of Corral Nuevo it essentially forms a dividing line separating the Tumacacori Mountains from the Atascosa Mountains. There are many items of historical interest associated with Peck Canyon but the massacre of 1886 involving the Peck family is probably the most interesting. Following is a brief synopsis of the conditions leading up to the massacre.

Until the closure of the Chiricahua Reservation and forcible removal of the Apaches to San Carlos in 1876, there had been little conflict between the Americans and the Southern Apaches since the General Howard/Cochise Treaty of 1872. Although many of the Apaches complied with the relocation directive, others under the influence of Juh and Geronimo took to the hills instead. Geronimo and his followers were captured in 1877 while living at the Warm Springs Reservation and taken to San Carlos. Over the next few years Geronimo would be involved in a series of “breakouts” from San Carlos and be branded a “renegade”. Apaches “on the run” and being chased by the military obtained whatever they needed for survival from whomever they came across and generally left no survivors. Geronimo was never considered to be a Chief but he was a great warrior and held tremendous influence over the Apache Chiefs, particularly Naiche, son of Cochise. In 1884, the renegade Apache Chiefs with the exception of Juh had surrendered to General Crook and gradually returned to the reservation. Geronimo and his followers returned in February 1885. The Chiricahua Apaches wanted an area of the reservation to themselves and settled in the Turkey Creek Area near Fort Apache. There was considerable unrest on the reservation caused by conflicts between the Indian Agents and the military. On 14 May 1885 the Apaches held a big dance and celebration that included large quantities of tiswin, an alcoholic drink that was prohibited by the authorities. Rumors quickly spread as to what the reaction of the army would be. Geronimo convinced three of the Apache Chiefs (Naiche, Mangus and Chihuahua) that they were about to be arrested so they gathered their people, departed the reservation on 18 May and headed for Mexico. After having been pursued in both the United States and Mexico, the Apaches surrendered to US forces under General Crook in Northern Sonora in March of 1886. After the surrender the Apaches celebrated with liquor provided by a bootlegger named Tribolett who convinced Naiche and Geronimo that they would be hung when they returned across the border, On 28 March, Naiche, Geronimo, 20 warriors and 20 women and children snuck back to their Mexican hiding places. In April of 1886, Naiche and Geronimo led about 15 warriors back across the border into the Santa Cruz Valley on what was to be their last incursion into the United States.

Artemus A. Peck was born in New York in 1848 and moved to Kansas in his early youth. He eventually ended up in Sonora, Mexico working silver mine claims. During this period, he hired peaceful Apaches to help him work his claim and had always treated them fairly and had gotten along well with them. He was known to these Apaches as “Red Arms” due to the fact that he always wore red long johns that were very evident when he rolled up his sleeves to work. After a few years, he met and married a Mexican-Irish girl named Petra and they moved back to

Kansas. They were not very happy there and after their first-born died of yellow fever, they moved to Southern Arizona. They built a one room, dirt floor adobe house in what was then called Agua Fria Canyon. They also had a well, a garden and a small corral. Petra's 12-year-old niece, Trinidad Verdin, or "Trini" was also living with them to help with the chores since Petra was pregnant.

There is monument in Peck Canyon that was built in 1967 by Doug Cummings of the Rocking H Ranch with help from what was called the Green Valley Riding Club in memory of what happened here on April 27th, 1886 (Figure 1). Petra and Trini had prepared breakfast for Artemus Peck and Charlie Owens, a neighbor who had a ranch near Pena Blanca and was helping Artemus.. They had left the house at daybreak and went up the canyon to round up maverick cows for branding. The Apaches came down the canyon from the east after stealing six horses from Calabasas. Trini saw the Indians riding down the canyon and immediately warned her Aunt Petra who was inside the house.



Figure 1. Peck Memorial

Petra was not concerned since it had been over 10 years since there had been any problem with Apaches in the Santa Cruz Valley so she picked up her 2 year old and went to the door. She was immediately shot by one of the Indians and the baby was picked up by the heels and smashed against the stone fireplace. The warriors then ransacked the cabin and found Trini hiding under the bed and were about to kill her when Geronimo stopped them. He put Trini on a horse behind his son Chappo and the raiders then continued up the canyon for about 2 miles when they spotted Peck and Charlie Owens.

Peck was on horseback and had just roped a maverick bull and had his end of the rope wound around his saddle horn. Charlie Owens was trying to topple the animal so he could wrap the legs when he saw the Apaches. He yelled to Peck and took off across the stream. Owens only rode a hundred feet or so and was shot through the leg with the bullet also passing through his horse. In about a hundred yards, the horse fell and the Apaches killed Owens. Peck tried to free his rope from the saddle horn but the Indians were upon him quickly and knocked him to the ground. They then began to beat him and strip off his clothes. He was wearing red long johns. When they saw his long johns, one of the Apaches shouted something to the others and a short conversation ensued. They took Peck to a knoll where they introduced him to Geronimo who addressed him as Mangus Coloradus (red sleeves), called him a "good man" and for a reason known only to Geronimo decided to spare his life.. Peck saw Trini sitting on a horse behind Geronimo's son and asked her where his family was. When she told him they were all dead, Peck fell to his knees in shock as the Indians rode off. The Apaches departed with all of Peck's clothes (he had ben striped to his underwear) and with Owens's spurs, boots, gun belt and one chap.

As a side interest item, when the Apaches left, they rode up the canyon and over to the area of Yank's Spring where the next day they killed a cowboy and stole 50 horses before heading back into Mexico via the Pajarito Mountains. (The club has three hikes that start from Yank's Spring). Peck, in his underwear, made his way the 8 or 9 miles to Calabasas where he came across

George Wise and George Atkinson who gave him some clothing and took him to Nogales for medical attention. The remains of the three dead were retrieved and buried in Nogales. Trini lived with the Apaches until late June 1886, when she was rescued by Mexican Militiamen and subsequently reunited with her parents. Doug Cumming's grandfather, Douglas Wallace Cumming, served on the Coroners jury involving both the Peck's killing and the Cowboy at Yank's Spring

Peck sold his ranch to a Polish immigrant named Joe Piskonski for 500 Mexican Pesos. Peck put the money in the only safe in Nogales, in a saloon. The next day, both the bartender and the money vanished. Peck ended up in Tombstone where he remarried in 1887 to a girl named Carmen Canez and they moved to Nogales. He made enough money mining silver in Tombstone to buy a livery stable in Nogales where he became a prominent businessman. Peck died in 1941 at the age of 93, never having returned again to the canyon where the massacre occurred.

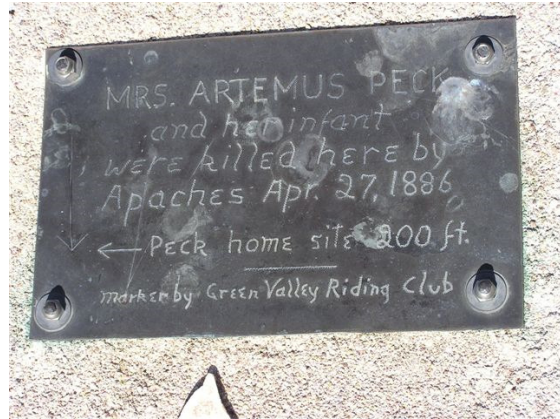


Figure 2. Peck Memorial Plaque

The memorial Plaque (Figure 2) provides directions as to the location where the Peck cabin stood. There are two arrows, one original and one subsequently inscribed, that show that the cabin was located on the flood plain below the bluff where the monument stands and 200 feet downstream from the monument. The Rio Rico Historical Society has confirmed this location. There are virtually no remnants left of the cabin due to the numerous floods that have occurred in the canyon. The Peck Home site is depicted in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Peck Home Site

### ADDITIONAL ITEMS OF INTEREST

**RUBY CONNECTION** - In addition to being the main trail from the Santa Cruz Valley to Ruby and Arivaca, Peck Canyon was the route for the water pipeline which provided water for the town of Ruby. The water source was a well near the Santa Cruz River and the water was pumped through a large pipe uphill all the way to the town of Ruby. Figures 4 and 5 show some remaining segments of the pipe.



Figure 4. Ruby Water Pipe



**WISE MESA** – Wise Mesa is the mesa to the south of Peck Canyon and to the east of Ramanote Canyon. Wise Mesa is named for George Wise. George was one of the men who befriended Al Peck after the massacre by giving him some clothing and taking him to Nogales for medical attention. The Club’s “B” hike to the Peck Memorial starts on Wise Mesa.

**ROCKING H RANCH** - The ranch near the beginning of Peck Canyon is called the Rocking H Ranch. It has been in the Cummings family for three generations and the late Douglas Cummings was the third generation of Cummings to own the ranch. Doug’s father and grandfather were friends of Al Peck. As of 2013, Douglas’s wife was still living on the ranch. An interesting sidelight on the history of the Rocking H occurred in 1923. A severe drought that significantly decreased the amount of forage in the early 1920s resulted in increased cattle mortality. John Cummings had borrowed money from a Nogales bank to tide him over and when he couldn’t pay off the note, the bank sent crews to roundup whatever livestock they could to settle the debt. John’s superior knowledge of the area allowed him to remain in the ranching business. He was able to hide four of his best horses in Pine Canyon, a remote canyon on the opposite side of Peck from Beehive Canyon and near Hell’s Gate. His wife also had twenty heifers that were marked with a different brand so the roundup crews weren’t aware that they belonged to Cummings. The ranch then was comprised of “four illegitimate horses and twenty of Mother’s cows” as noted by John’s son Douglas.

**PECK CANYON WINDOW** – There is a unique rock formation on the southeast corner of the confluence of Ramanote and Peck Canyons that includes a window. See Figure 6.

**NEGRO FLATS** – There is a relatively flat area on the north side of Peck Canyon just to the west of the “Narrows” and between the canyon floor and Forest Road 4149. This area contains the remains of numerous structures. Little is known



Figure 5. Ruby Water Pipe



Figure 6. Peck Canyon Window



Figure 7. Negro Flats Structure.

about the former village but discussions with local ranchers indicate that it was called “Negro Flats and that it was once occupied by Black Americans who worked in the area. Two of the ruins are shown in Figures 7 and 8. There is credence to the name since topographic maps of the area show nearby features to the north identified as Negro Canyon and Negro Tank.



Figure 8. Negro Flats Structure

**STREAMBED HOUSE** - In the early 1940s, a treasure hunter came to the canyon and built a house with a boat shaped foundation in the middle of the streambed. Wise and Cummings advised against building in the streambed but the man thought the ship shaped foundation would deflect the water and protect the house. He wanted the house situated near where he thought Father Kino’s buried treasure was so he could control the area while he searched for the treasure. He hunted for the treasure until his death in 1955 without success. His search was financed by the royalties from a patent on the three prong grounded electrical plug that we use today. Although no one seems to know the name of the treasure hunter (the ranchers referred to him as a “squatter”) the first U.S. Patent for a 3-pin electrical plug was issued to Philip F. Labre in June 1928. The house was able to withstand the periodic floods that surged through the canyon. After the treasure hunter’s death the home was abandoned. Mrs. Douglas Cummings told this author in an interview that the house was blown up in the 1960s by local ranchers because it had become a magnet for hippies. Subsequent floods gradually washed away the fragments from the house. The streambed house was located just a short distance upstream from the Peck memorial site. Remnants (pieces of the concrete foundation) could still be found in 1999 and 2000 that identified the location but recent visits (2012) could no longer locate the site.

**Additional Material:** GVHC Library File # 43

Summary prepared April 2003 by T. Johnson using material developed by Wally Morrell and from a few other sources, some of which were contradictory. Updated by T. Johnson July 2014 and July 2018. Photographs by T. Johnson. The Cummings Ranch “survival story” was derived from the Tumacacori Historic Research Study Chapter 8 and the Peck massacre sequence was from the book “*From Cochise to Geronimo*” by Edwin R. Sweeney.