In 1871, General George Crook was appointed head of the Military Department of Arizona in an attempt to bring an end to conflicts with the Apaches and confine them to reservations. After surveying central Arizona on horseback, Crook conceived the idea to build a road connecting Fort Verde on the western side of the Mogollon Rim with isolated Fort Apache on the eastern side of the Mogollon Rim. By 1874, soldiers had finished constructing the wagon road, which followed the edge of the Mogollon Rim for most of its length. Mile markers were carved into rocks or trees along the way. The “Crook Trail” or “Crook Road” was an important travel route in central Arizona for many years, before fading into obscurity due to disuse. In the 19th century, the Rim Road was constructed along the edge of the Mogollon Rim, largely following the route of the old Crook Trail. The southern end of the Blue Ridge passage of the Arizona Trail crosses the route of the old Crook Trail/Rim Road.

While traveling the route of the trail that now bears his name, General George Crook and several other Cavalry officers were suddenly attacked in a flurry of arrows from a stealthy band of Tonto Apaches. No one was killed, but subsequent searching for the Apache warriors led to the discovery of a beautiful spring fed meadow a short distance north of the attack site. Taking its name from General Crook, General Springs became a popular camping and water stop along the route. During the 20th century, a small cabin was constructed here to house Forest Service firefighters. Known as General Springs Cabin, it can still be seen along the Arizona Trail.

A short distance off of the Arizona Trail near Fred Haught Spring lays the ancient sandstone chimney of one of Fred Haught’s cabins. Fred Haught was a former Texas Ranger and an early rancher in the area, who lived in a log cabin he had built on the headwaters of the East Verde River, a short distance below the Arizona Mineral Belt Railroad tunnel.

Battleground Ridge, which this passage follows for several miles, takes its name from the last major battle between the Apaches and the Cavalry, known as the Battle of Big Dry Wash. On July 6, 1882, refusing reservation life, more than 50 Apaches under the leadership of Natiotish fled the San Carlos Reservation east of Globe after killing the San Carlos Indian Police chief, “Cibecue Charlie” Colvig. Having torn down the telegraph line linking San Carlos to Globe to sever local communications, Natiotish and his followers began rampaging their way north. Along the way, they attacked and burned ranches, murdered eight people, and outsmarted an ill-prepared vigilante group from Globe by separating them from their guns and horses. After attacking the town of McMillenville, where frightened residents took refuge in a mine tunnel, Cavalry troops from military forts throughout central Arizona were dispatched to put an end to the violence. By July 17th, troops had converged at the base of the Mogollon Rim, having discovered Natiotish’s whereabouts. With Al Sieber and his Apache scouts leading the way, Captain Chafee, Major Evans and their soldiers scaled the Mogollon Rim and headed north along Battleground Ridge in close pursuit of the renegades. Underestimating the number of troops that were in
pursuit of them, Natiotish and his followers attempted an ambush, but were discovered by Sieber and his scouts. Several hours of intense fighting soon erupted among the rugged sandstone cliffs of East Clear Creek Canyon, with Cavalry soldiers trying to outmaneuver the defensive position of the Apaches. After a hailstorm of gunfire, an intense monsoon hailstorm put an end to the battle as darkness fell. The fighting had left two soldiers and at least 14 Apaches dead. Defeated, the surviving Apaches fled in the darkness, while the Cavalry troops camped for the night in nearby Crackerbox Canyon. The route of this passage of the Arizona Trail largely follows the route that the Apaches and the Cavalry took, and crosses East Clear Creek canyon in the vicinity of the battleground.

As part of a water resource exchange deal, mining company Phelps Dodge constructed Blue Ridge Reservoir on East Clear Creek in the early 1960’s. Phelps Dodge would use water from the Black River in eastern Arizona for its Morenci Mine operation, while replenishing water into the Verde River watershed through water captured in Blue Ridge Reservoir. Possession of the lake was given to Salt River Project in 2005, and the name changed to C.C. Cragin Reservoir. The Arizona Trail crosses East Clear Creek just up canyon from the lake. Little Moqui Spring and Big Moqui Spring, near the northern end of this passage, take their name from the Hopi Tribe, once referred to as Moqui. According to early Arizona resident, historian and writer Will C. Barnes, the Hopi once hunted eagles in the Moqui Spring area. Eagles are kept in enclosures atop Hopi pueblo homes, and used in ceremonies.

References


