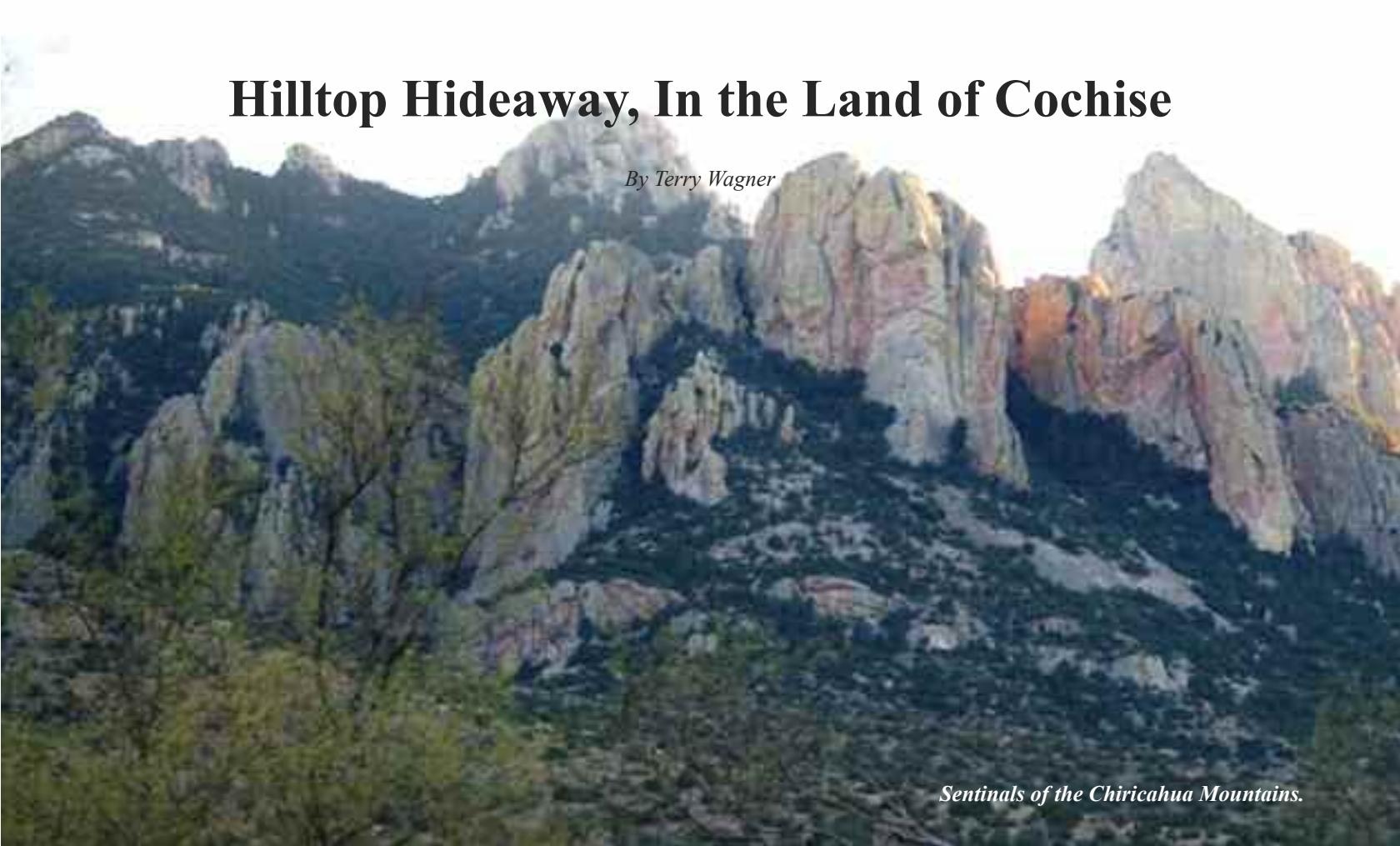


Hilltop Hideaway, In the Land of Cochise

By Terry Wagner



Sentinels of the Chiricahua Mountains.

Renegade Chiricahua Apaches were making forays into white settlements throughout the southwest, and I was right in the middle of it. Orders, directed me, Al Sieber, chief of scouts under General Crook, to brief the civilian authorities in Wilcox, Arizona Territory, on hostile activities in the area. Then, I was directed to scout the areas on the north and east sides of the Chiricahua Mountains for any signs of hostile movements in the area. The old man, General Crook, wanted my report as soon as possible. Enough blood had already been spilled in Apache pass over the last ten years to fill a boat, so I swung my big red dun mule south of the area trying to use as much natural cover as possible. General Crook had already proven the worth of these long eared critters in this dry country and we started through what looked like a way around a large outcropping of hills. However, the path quickly turned into a deep arroyo with sides going up as high as twenty feet. Not good. I kept a watchful eye on the country ahead and above, and watched my mule's ears for signs of noises I couldn't hear. An old saying goes, "If you can see 'em, they ain't Apaches."

Suddenly from under a pile of brush, a renegade Apache warrior rose up at forty feet in front of me bringing his rifle to his shoulder. I slipped my sidearm from my waist belt and fired a single shot sending the renegade to his knees. Hearing a yell from above, I looked up in time to see a second warrior in mid-air, knife in hand, falling toward me. The big red mule heard it too and side stepped in an effort

to avoid the falling attacker. We met each other's grip and fell to the ground. I rolled clear and as I saw the attacker coming hard, I reached back over my shoulder and drew my razor sharp, Arkansas toothpick from its rawhide scabbard..... and sat straight up in bed!

Sandy woke up and asked, "Have you been dreaming again?"

"Just a little, I replied."

She said something to the effect that I had been in the land of Cochise and the Hilltop country long enough, and if you don't get that article written and off to Ben and Neta, we're never going to get any sleep around here. You've been a pancake at night here for a week now. We were staying at the Hilltop Hideaway Equestrian Camp, deep in the Chiricahua Mountains in Cochise County, located in southeastern Arizona.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, members of the various Apache tribes of the Southwest conducted raids on various settlements throughout the Southwest, and in 1850, a shaky truce was signed by the warring parties that lasted till about 1860. At that time, miners raided an Apache village near the current Silver City, New Mexico, killing several



Cochise.



Cochise stronghold.

Apaches and taking a number of women and children as prisoners. At this, Mangas Coloradas, and his son in law, Cochise, each the chief of different bands of Chiricahua Apaches, formed an alliance in an effort to drive the white intruders from the land. The great Apache chief, Geronimo, would later join them.

Mangas Coloradas and Cochise ambushed white settlers and fought the U.S. Army for three years when Mangas Coloradas was asked to a meeting with Brigadier General Joseph West, at Fort McLane in southwestern New Mexico,

under a flag of truce. That night, West had Mangas Coloradas taken into custody, and executed. Furious at the betrayal of Mangas Coloradas by the army and already a seasoned warrior and narrowly escaping death himself in battles with the army, Cochise went on an all out effort to eliminate settlers from his land in southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona.

Thus began the Indian Wars depicted in novel, history books, and movies. The rugged and unforgiving Chiricahua, Dragoon, and Pelencillo mountain ranges

would be Cochise's ally and his pursuer's worst nightmare.

For over a decade, Cochise used the mountains, and a special "stronghold" in the Dragoon Mountains, from which to launch his deadly attacks. Fighting, not only American cavalry soldiers, but units of the Mexican army as well, Cochise held off an army of 5,000 men. Fighting occurred throughout southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, and no one within a hundred miles of the stronghold was safe from attack. Toward the end, Cochise, with only about forty fol-



Signs of wild times in the Chiricahua Mountains.

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lowers, took a continued heavy toll on the U.S. Army, from his stronghold position.

Finally General George Crook took command of the army and convinced Cochise to surrender in 1871. After all of his raiding and fighting, Cochise would die of natural causes in 1874 and is believed to be buried somewhere in the stronghold. Geronimo, another story all together, would continue on for more than another decade.

Smack dab in the middle of this historical battleground, you will find Hilltop Hideaway Equestrian Camp. Owned by Lynne and George May, you could wear out a good truck and trailer trying to find a more unique riding camp. Named after nearby silver mine, Hilltop mine, discovered in 1881, Hilltop Hideaway nestles in Whitetail Canyon, an area that once boasted a population as high as 1,500 people. Now only a few hardy souls live in the area. With only four RV pads, Hilltop Hideaway is certainly not the large, country music entertainer type camp that a lot have come to be in recent years, but it has riding that will make a good mule get down into low four wheel drive.

Not only is the area filled with southwestern Indian history and battles but it also has a general history of frontier men settling their differences with hot lead.

Mining was a big reason for white settlers staying in the area, as well as being on a route to California. The rugged Chiricahua Mountains cut through the area like a Gothic sentinel of the high desert. Sandy and I made two different trips there last fall and found the riding challenging to say the least.

Most trails in the area have had little to no maintenance from the U.S. Forest Service, which manages the area as the Coronado National Forest. You can find occasional cow trails into the canyons, but a large part of the riding gives you the

feeling no one has been there before you. Traversing these mountains and canyons, one can easily see how Cochise outwitted the army for so many years.

As an area of gigantic, rough-hewn rock outcroppings, cat claw, mesquite brush and mesquite trees, coupled with rough, rocky footing, I found this to be a mule riders dream come true. Traversing the area requires that you negotiate flats and canyon sides alike and dry stream beds, like the first people in history did, look for land marks and go forward. The area is littered in some places with the remains of mining activity as well as the marked graves of those who didn't survive the once perilous frontier.

As an avid scavenger, Sandy couldn't resist poking around in an old mining camp we found deep in a rugged canyon. She found an old shovel, parts of a wood



Coati found in a tree.



Bobcat.



Portal post office and library to the left in the background.



Found treasures.



The remains of old mines are everywhere in the Hilltop area.



Lynne May on the left riding Kane and Sandy Wagner on the right riding Andy.



One of the camp spaces at Hilltop Hideaway.

burning stove, a broken purple colored glass bottle and large pieces of rose quartz crystal. This type of find is a genuine reward for a dyed-in-the wool scavenger, and Sandy thought it more than justified the rough ride into the area.

Wildlife is abundant in the area and our first morning out, we were treated to a Coatimundi running across the trail in front of us. This playful little critter, weighing about ten pounds, inhabits southeastern Arizona, southwestern New Mexico, and ranges as far south as Central America. A member of the raccoon family, with a long monkey like tail, they are



Covered pens surround the combined shower, laundry and hay barn at Hilltop Hideaway.

most commonly seen as a single or two to three at a time. However, groups as large as 10 to 30 at one time have been reported. Before the week was out we would see several Coues whitetail deer, and a bobcat.

George May is a self-taught encyclopedia on the history of the area and he is also a wealth of information on how to get into the areas in that part of the Chiricahua Mountains. Lynne May has three mules in her barn and at about five feet tall, rides a good looking black 16 hand high mule,



Left to right, Sandy Wagner, George May and Lynne May, in a high saddle behind Hilltop Hideaway.

Kane, by Magic's Joe, as her primary mount. Lynne and George's mule ownership goes back almost eighteen years.

George is a retired Tucson, Arizona, fire fighter and mules and retirement led him and Lynne to the Whitetail Canyon area a number of years ago. Not exactly a metropolis, the nearest town is Portal, Arizona, about a half hour's drive on a dirt



Along Cave Creek.

road. The post office, combined café and store, and library, pretty much makes up the whole town.

I asked George how they came to build the equestrian camp and he said it was due to a mule breaking a leg. In Lynne's barn is a dark brown mule, named Scooter, again by Magic's Joe that has had some obviously serious problems with his left front leg. A little over two years ago, Scooter broke his leg and it was decided he would have to be put down. The vet however asked how the mule was doing otherwise. Lynne told him the mule seemed almost normal. In the meantime, George had borrowed a backhoe and dug a deep hole to accommodate the mule after the vet did his thing. Following a careful last minute conference, it was decided to give the young mule a chance to recover.

In the meantime George was staring at a deep hole in the ground from the seat of the backhoe. Lynne had been talking for some time about building an equestrian camp, so as George said, "Not wanting to waste a good hole in the ground, it was decided it would make a good place for a septic tank." The tank was installed and the camp was built.

Facilities include a shower and laundry facility, covered and uncovered pens, and a round pen. There are four concrete RV pads, three of which have sewer, water and electricity, while the fourth one only has water and electricity. Hay is available to campers as well, for the going market price. I have to add, that prices are very reasonable at Hilltop. You can ride out in any one of three directions right into the Coronado National Forest.

Some folks may find the access a little bit of an issue, as it requires traversing about fourteen miles of dirt road. Once you get on the dirt road, a lot of 21st Century conveniences come to a halt, cell phones being one of them. We didn't find the road difficult and the relative remoteness of the area gives one a chance to relax, enjoy your mules, observe God's handiwork in creation, and ride where Cochise rode.

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A Blonde's Year in Review

- January:** Took new scarf back to store it was too tight.
February: Fired from pharmacy job for failing to print labels...Hellloooo!!!...bottles won't fit in printer!!!
March: Got really excited...finished jigsaw puzzle in 6 months...box said "2-4 years!"
April: Trapped on escalator for hours...power went out!!!
May: Tried to make Koal-Aid...wrong instructions...8 cups of water won't fit into those little packets!!!
June: Tried to go water skiing...couldn't find a lake with a slope.
July: Last breast stroke swimming competition...learned later the other swimmers cheated, they used their arms!!!
August: Got locked out of my car in rain storm...car swamped because soft-top was open.
September: The capital of California is "C"...isn't it???
October: Hate M&M's...they are so hard to peel.
November: Baked turkey for 4 ½ days...instructions said 1 hour per pound and I weigh 108!!
December: Couldn't call 911. "Duh"...there's no "eleven" button on the stupid phone!!!

THE BEST BLONDE JOKE OF THE YEAR- SO FAR!

A man was in his front yard mowing grass when his blonde female neighbor came out of the house and went straight to the mail box.

She opened it then slammed it shut and stormed back in the house.

A little later she came out of her house again went to the mail box and again, opened it, slammed it shut again. Angry, back into the house she went.

As the man was getting ready to edge the lawn, here she came out again, marched to the mail box, opened it and then slammed it closed harder than ever.

Puzzled by her actions the man asked her, "Is something wrong?"

To which she replied, There certainly is!"

(Are you ready? This is a beauty...)

" My stupid computer keeps saying,
"YOU'VE GOT MAIL!"