

## Mescal Warm Springs Field Research Trip

Date: Sunday, March 9, 2003

Participants: Tom Jonas, Steve Jonas

Purpose: Investigate Whipple's boundary survey route through Mescal Warm Spring to Ranch Creek.

We left Steve's house around 6:00 am towing his VW sand rail and followed Highway 60 through Globe then took US 70 toward San Carlos. Since the San Carlos Game & Fish had told me we would need special permission for a historical research trip we decided to forego the permits.

We parked the 4Runner at the casino and unhitched the sand rail. From there we took the rail down the road to the start of the old Coolidge Dam Road, which begins at the east end of the airport. A short distance brought us to the dirt road to Mescal Creek. After about 5 miles this road splits into two – one follows Ranch Creek and the other goes through the mountains west of it. We took the mountain road, which was steep in spots and a little rougher than the main road. This road passes through the hills for about 6 miles and then rejoins the Ranch Creek road. The main road proved to be wide and freshly graded its whole length.

When we reached the junction of Tulapai and Ranch Creeks about 13 miles in, we stopped to take some pictures. This is area that I suspect Whipple described as the "delta" of the arroyo they followed. I did not see anything like a river delta there – both creeks were made up of rocky beds. Whipple also described "a cool and flowing spring" here. I did not see a spring nor is there one indicated on the USGS map. Possibly Whipple was not describing this spot after all? We continued south along Tulapai Creek.

The valley provides an easy trail along the base of low hills on either side of the creek. A series of storms had passed through the state, ending about a week previous to our trip, so the mountains were covered with green grass and the creeks were flowing. We followed Tulapai Creek to the summit of the ridge and stopped to take pictures overlooking the valley of Mescal Creek (right). There is a canyon along the east side of our road which meets Mescal Creek about 2 miles below the summit. The parts of it that I can see look like an easy trail out of the valley.



The road follows the top of a ridge all the way down to the creek. At the bottom we found flowing water from upstream and probably also from a spring located near where the road reaches Mescal Creek. We continued on toward Mescal Warm Spring but we were unexpectedly

halted by a locked gate and a "no trespassing" sign. Steve stayed with the car and I walked about 1/3

mile beyond the gate to a structure we had seen from the hilltop. There were two structures—an old barn with a tin roof and a frame house behind a locked gate. The house was apparently currently or intermittently occupied but no one was home. I suspect it may have been used by a BLM ranger patrolling the nearby Needle’s Eye Wilderness Area, which begins about a mile south of here.

We left a note on the rail and decided to hike to the spring. We followed the road back to the house but beyond it the road was very indistinct. We hiked along the hillside hoping to come out around the level of the spring but had to detour a couple of times to cross steep ravines. We emerged from the last ravine at the base of the plateau where the spring is located then climbed to the top. When we reached the top we found a forest of sticker bushes that got thicker as we approached the spring. Much of the thicket was virtually impassable. There is a large Cottonwood tree at the spring and a couple of other fallen ones nearby.



Above left: Mescal Warm Spring emerges on top of this plateau below the cottonwood tree at upper left. Middle: Me in front of the spring. Right: Trees grow around the small rivulet channel as it flows toward the plateau’s edge.

The spring itself was gurgling strongly out of the ground but due to thick brush and boggy ground we could not get closer than about 6 feet. A rivulet about 1 foot wide and 6 inches deep flowed away from the spring toward the southwest. We followed it a short distance till it entered another thicket. We assumed it flowed to the edge and then dropped over the cliff in a waterfall.



Many fruit trees (possibly Walnut as described by Whipple) lived in the area around the rivulet. We lunched under these trees. Away from the water toward the southeast part of the plateau the vegetation thinned out allowing views of the mountains above and on the other side of the Gila River. Along the eastern edge of the plateau we found another creek, also flowing briskly.

We followed the creek down a short distance and then started down the south side of the plateau toward Mescal Creek. We were looking for the waterfall from the rivulet but found no water flowing over the cliff at all, or any signs of the calcified trees described by Whipple. The edge of the cliff did contain many shallow erosion grottos and it looked like water may have flowed there at times.

We continued down to Mescal Creek and followed it north toward the house. This is the preferable trail to the spring. It was a pleasant, easy walk back to the car with flowing water and a canopy of Sycamore trees (left). We passed a sign along the creek identifying the wilderness area boundary and restrictions.

Back in the rail, we took the road back up to the Tulapai watershed and followed a road east from its mouth toward Red Whiskers Spring. This is a rather bad road. We followed it about 1.7 miles east until it turned south. I took some pictures there and noted that the ridge on the opposite side of the arroyo is smooth and gentle enough to provide a nice trail for Kearny's army to follow down from the pass above.

We then followed the road up Ranch Creek to the west, stopping at Wagon Wheel Well and Van Winkle Ranch for pictures. This whole valley provides an easy trail for wagons.

On the trip back to the casino we decided to follow the road along the creek instead of taking to mountain detour. The road was much better than the detour but presented about 5 creek crossings, one of them fairly deep. This section of road is not good for a car or even an SUV unless the creek is dry. We did not see one person or vehicle on the back roads all day.

-Tom Jonas, March 17, 2003