

## Needle's Eye Trip

November 1 & 2, 2003

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**Purpose:** To locate the view in Seth Eastman's 1853 "Canyon on the Gila" watercolor (right) and determine the "jumping off place" of the Boundary Survey in 1851.



On Saturday, November 1, we left the Apache Gold Casino and took Interstate 70 and Indian Route 500 (Coolidge Dam Road) toward the dam. We turned onto the wide gravel road that leads to the base of

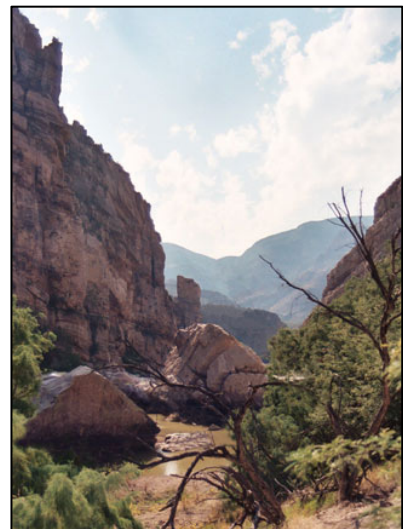


the dam and followed a dirt road to the right at the locked gate. This road eventually leads to the Gila River near the location of Whipple's October 25 campsite. My photograph that most closely matches the campsite drawing was made on the south bank of the river at N33° 9' 37" W110° 32' 52." The surveyors probably camped along the south bank of the river just west of this location.

We continued west along the north bank and forded the river just past the washed-out bridge, continuing on to the Hook-and-Line Ranch to take

pictures of the abandoned house. We then parked about a quarter mile north of the house at N33° 9' 9" W110° 33' 29" and began our hike. The river had only occasional pools since the dam releases had been shut off for months. We hiked about 3.3 miles along the river (a little more if you count our meanderings) and reached the Needle's Eye about 1:30 PM.

This was indeed the place depicted in Seth Eastman's 1853 watercolor and it has changed little in the intervening years. We took pictures of the scene from the riverbed and from a little hill against the north canyon wall, which was the vantage point for Eastman's picture (see photo at right). The coordinates for the picture vantage point are N33° 8' 12" W110° 35' 15." The major elements of the scene lined up very well with the watercolor and sketch, although some of the minor elements were a little off. This suggests that Frank Wheaton (or whoever made the field sketch) may have used a camera lucida to draw the main elements and then filled in finer details freehand.



Unlike Eastman's picture, the scene was backlit when we were there. It appears that Eastman used some artistic license in depicting the illumination of the scene as his picture apparently shows the sunlight coming from the northwest.

On our return hike we examined the canyon for possible places to exit with wagons. Three places looked possible from the river. Two of them were the valleys of Dick Spring Canyon and an unnamed creek to the east of it. Since Whipple indicates they ascended a hill rather than a creek, the only likely exit point is the one we had picked out on the map. The easiest slope began at  $N33^{\circ} 9' 0'' W110^{\circ} 33' 40''$ . We reached the car at 4:35 PM.

After driving out of the canyon we took the Coolidge Dam Road east to look for a monument Whipple placed near the mouth of the San Carlos River. We took the side road which turns north at  $N33^{\circ} 10' 26'' W110^{\circ} 22' 7''$ . We took the right fork at a windmill & corral and reached the end of the road at the river near dark. We returned to the hotel.

Jerry Mueller had some serious eye problems during our hike which we suspected were caused by a detached retina. The next morning Jerry returned to Las Cruces and the rest of us drove back out toward the dam. We took a side road east at  $N33^{\circ} 15' 37'' W110^{\circ} 27' 48''$  and drove out to the ruins of old San Carlos (right). I took a panoramic picture from the terrace at  $N33^{\circ} 12' 7'' W110^{\circ} 25' 44''$  looking west toward the mountains. The lake level at this time is so low that the lake ends about a mile west of Old San



Carlos Point. We photographed some foundations on the lower terrace and then drove back up onto the plateau to visit the vicinity of Kearny's camp 87. Emory's latitude ( $33^{\circ} 14' 37''$ ) for this camp places it at the north end of a small ridge on the west bank of the San Carlos, which he called the San Francisco River. We climbed the hill and took pictures from approximately  $N33^{\circ} 14' 30'' W110^{\circ} 26' 27''$  and then

continued back out on the dam road to look for the Whipple monument.



We took the same road as the previous night but turned left at the fork. This took us to the edge of the river terrace near the mouth of the San Carlos River. The car was parked at  $N33^{\circ} 11' 43'' W110^{\circ} 23' 23''$  and we hiked across the terrace hills to where three short fingers of land form the end of the terrace on the Gila River near the mouth of the San Carlos.

View overlooking Kearny's October 31 campsite. San Carlos River Valley in foreground and Triplet Peak in left distance. Tom Jonas photo.

All of the most likely places for placement of a monument showed signs of wave action from the full lake. We explored all three points but found no monument.

On our way back to the main highway we stopped at a hill overlooking Emory's latitude for Kearny's October 31 camp. We took photos from the top of the hill at N33° 14' 30" W110° 26' 26."

We went back to Globe and took Highway 77 south to Winkelman, stopping to photograph the upper Ranch Creek valley from N33° 14' 19", W110° 46' 59," then continuing on past Dripping Springs Wash and Ash Creek to Winkelman. We took a little side excursion to photograph Saddle Mountain and the San Pedro River. Following Highway 177 to Kelvin, we turned on to the old Florence-Kelvin Highway, which we took into Florence. We returned to Phoenix via Highways 79 and 60.

Tom Jonas

November 8, 2003