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# Archaeology and the Warriors Project: Exploring a Buffalo Soldier Campsite in the Guadalupe Mountains of Texas

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In the summer of 2004, Howard University and the National Park Service began investigating a military campsite in the Guadalupe Mountains of Texas, thought to have been occupied by the Buffalo Soldiers during the Apache Wars of the 1870s. This fieldwork was an extension of the Warriors Project, a multi-year program initiated by the Park Service in 2002 for African Americans and American Indians to discuss their mutual past on the western frontier. The project began as historical research carried out jointly by Haskell University, an American Indian institution in Kansas, and Howard University, a historically black college and university in Washington, D.C., through the National Park Service's Desert Southwest Cooperative Ecosystem Study Unit (CESU). By December 2003, this phase was completed (O'Brien 2004) and the Warriors Project turned to archaeology.

The existence of the Pine Springs Camp (41CU44) had long been known. Located on the eastern slopes of the Guadalupe Mountains, it overlooks the Pinery, one of the Butterfield Stage Trail stations (Figure 1). It is also situated near the modern road and the Guadalupe Mountains National Park visitor center. According to local historians, it was one of many army outposts that proliferated in the American West during the 19th century, with detach-

Figure 1. Aerial view of Guadalupe Mountains National Park showing the location of the Pine Springs Camp on the east slope of the mountains (photo by Bruce Moses, 2004).



ments from various forts occupying it intermittently both before and after the Civil War (Gilmore 1970; Shafer 1970). It also housed the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s (Gilmore 1970) and a goat-herding operation before becoming park land (Fred Armstrong, personal communication, 2005).

Archaeologically, the Pine Springs Camp was first explored in 1970 by the Texas Archaeological Society field school. Field school members surveyed the site, which is situated on a north–south slope between Upper and Lower Pine Springs (Figure 1). They noted regular concentrations of stone rubble, some of them burned, aligned parallel to the slope, which they tentatively identified as military campfires (Figure 2). The crew mapped these features and an adjacent wagon road that ran from the Butterfield station to Upper Pine Springs (Figure 1). They also collected a few artifacts (bottles, nails), mostly from the rubble concentrations. Historian John Wilson dated these objects to the mid-to-late 1800s, but as field director Kathleen Gilmore (1970) observed, only excavation would clarify the features' chronology. That excavation would come 34 years later, under the auspices of the Warriors Project.

Fast-forward to 1997–1998, when Charles Haecker of the National Park Service revisited the Pine Springs Camp. Haecker, a military archaeology specialist, confirmed that the rock concentrations were indeed the remains of military hearths and that a ring of rocks on top of a nearby knoll was in fact a former picket station. He found evidence for subsurface artifacts by metal detecting and identified a dump, a temporary structure, and two additional picket stations south of the hearths. Historical records suggested that the camp was primarily occupied by the 9th and then the 10th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers in the 1870s. From this brief reconnaissance he proposed further investigations at the site.

Figure 2. Rock concentration/military campfire (photo by Texas Archaeological Society Field School, 1970; courtesy of Anne Fox).

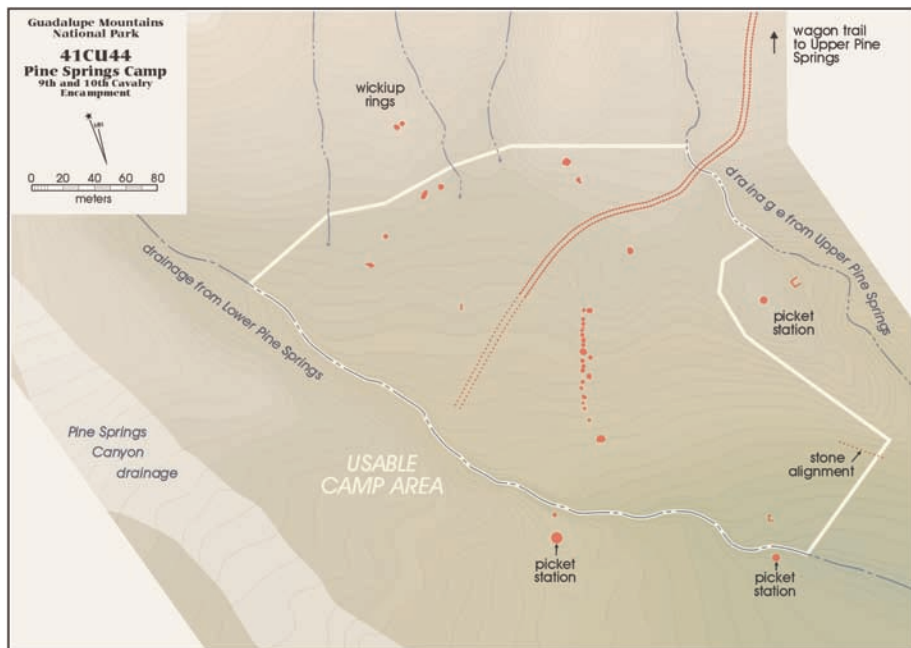


The identification of the camp with Buffalo Soldiers provided the impetus to create a unique archaeological project, sponsored by the Desert Southwest CESU. In July 2004, Haecker and the author led a team of 10 students in a two-week field school at the site. Participants comprised five college students from Howard University and five high school students, including three from the Mescalero Apache Reservation. Other participants included volunteers and staff members from the park, who came when they could. The field school, documented on film by a Howard student, proved hugely successful. The high point of the season was a visit by Mescalero Apache elders, who honored us by coming out to the site and sharing their knowledge of local resources.

While we are still assessing the data from our exciting season, preliminary observations can be made about what we found. Our main goal was to survey and map the entire camp in order to situate it within its larger landscape. We completed a detailed topographic survey of nearly 60 acres, including the line of hearths, the wagon road, and the three known picket stations (Figure 3). As we expanded the map we discovered a short defensive breastwork west of the hearth line, overlooking Lower Pine Springs. The campsite was clearly far more extensive than originally thought.

Of the terrain mapped, approximately 15.25 acres (21,714 sq m) were level enough to have been used by the soldiers, and there is evidence for activity areas. Each campfire in the long hearth line probably represented a “mess unit” of four or five men who cooked and ate together, and slept in tents nearby (Charles Haecker, personal communication, 2004). The discovery of dark grey limestone slabs next to several hearths supports this idea. According to Gorden Bell, geologist for Guadalupe Mountains National Park, this limestone was quarried from an outcrop to the south of Pine Springs, across the modern road. Based on descrip-

Figure 3. Map of Pine Springs Camp showing usable camp area (photo by Bruce Moses, 2004).



tions of 19th-century Army camp construction, we think these rocks were carried onto the site for use as footings for temporary canvas and/or wood structures—either dog tents or the Sibley tents used in winter (University of Texas–Austin School of Architecture, undated; Rickey 1972:221).

There also seems to have been a designated wagon maintenance area. West of the hearth line, near the old road, we found wagon harness pieces on a rise. Nearby, dark grey limestone slabs arranged in a large, rectangular shape suggest a temporary structure with a chimney. A short distance away is another, similar outline of stones, slightly smaller. The rocks are the same as those used near the campfires and the similarity in construction suggests that these two structures date to the same period as the hearths. They might represent the remains of storage huts, or even a smithy and a surgery. Surgeons accompanied several of the later Buffalo Soldier expeditions and a blacksmith accompanied at least one of them (Bruce Moses, personal communication, 2004).

Other remains observed during the survey include a hearth located north of the campfire line and separated from it by a small knoll or rise (Figure 3). The knoll would have afforded this location some privacy and a commanding view of the entire campground. Nearby is one of the picket stations. These factors suggest the hearth was used by the commanding officer(s) of at least one of the military expeditions. Though we metal-detected around this feature, we found nothing diagnostic to tell us when it was occupied and whether officers or enlisted men used it.

Army remains were not the only ones found. On the same low rise with the wagon pieces we discovered two *wickiup* rings. Other *wickiup* rings were discovered on a ridge near the breastwork and a possible mescal roasting pit was located close to the proposed officers' quarters. Finally, stone tools and debitage were found in most parts of the site.

Additional evidence of military camp activities came from excavations of the hearths and from a careful survey of the ground near them. While most of the campfires follow roughly the same alignment, a few are off-line to the east, thereby suggesting at least two periods of occupation (Figure 3). We chose to excavate an example of each. Operation A was a shallow, 3x3-m excavation around one of the hearths in the main alignment. Like most of these features, it consisted of light grey limestone packed in a rough circle around sandstone quarried from a nearby ridge. According to Gordon Bell (personal communication, 2004), sandstone was more heat resistant than limestone and would have lasted longer in the hearths. The depth and spread of the ash here suggest long-term use.

Only a few artifacts were found near the hearth, all of them dating to the late 19th century. A button each from a suspender and a fly suggest that soldiers changed their clothes nearby—either inside or outside a tent, as the fly button came from either trousers or a tent fly. Cut nails near the hearth, probably from ration boxes, and a can lid fragment indicate the soldiers in this mess unit were preparing meals, most likely a delicious menu of hardtack and beans. Rations would have included salt bacon, dry beans, hard tack, and green coffee in the bean (Rickey 1972:220). Canned beans were also common (Charles Haecker, personal communication, 2004). An as-yet unidentified animal bone may indicate that the soldiers hunted to supplement their diet. The records of other expeditions indicate wild game was plentiful in the Guadalupe Mountains (Schreier 1976). Other items found here included a Loril-

lard tobacco pouch tag, post-1870, that suggests smoking was enjoyed. A pen nib found a little further away may also date to this period. Some of the Buffalo Soldiers were literate and the officers, of course, had to fill out reports.

Operation B revealed a similar range of materials plus a few surprises. It comprised a 4x3-m unit placed around a crescent-shaped, sandstone hearth east of the main alignment. Next to the campfire was some of the dark grey, “imported” limestone. This hearth had a complex stratigraphy. Underneath we found what appears to be a small, box-shaped oven made of slabs, roughly 25x50 cm (Figure 4). At first we thought this oven might be prehistoric, as one of our Apache visitors told us that the Lipan Apache, who once lived hereabouts, had adopted this kind of slab-style oven from the Pueblos (Zelda Yazza, personal communication, 2004). As we excavated, however, we found long, cut nails mixed into the ashes and soil within the oven, and a tin can lid from the late 1800s lay at the bottom. Either the soldiers re-used an Apache oven or they constructed it themselves. In either case, the existence of the oven implies that soldiers also baked. This idea is supported by the unusual can lid found at the bottom. It was smaller than a regular food tin lid, and made to be re-closeable, suggesting something like a baking powder container. The quantities of ash and charcoal found associated both with the hearth and the oven suggest they were used for a long time. The fact that the two were stratigraphically juxtaposed further indicates at least two periods of occupation, both substantial.

Other finds around the Operation B hearth included numerous framing nails and spikes. Framing nails would have been used to build temporary wood structures. Spikes were made for heavier duty such as bridge and road building—activities generally reserved for the infantry (Charles Haecker, personal communication, 2004). It is unclear why such a

Figure 4. Operation B “oven” during excavation (photo by Eleanor King, 2004).



large number of these nail types were found around this particular hearth. Possibly, infantrymen used the campfire. They often accompanied the cavalry on mission, especially on expeditions to the Guadalupe Mountains, whose abundant pine trees supplied lumber to the forts (Charles Haecker, personal communication, 2004).

Haecker ran systematic metal detection transects across the dump south of the hearth line and found that it dated to the 20th century. Other transects and an intensive survey near the hearths produced more nails and a steel box strap, a testament to the importance of boxes in camp life for munitions as well as rations. More rare were finds of military buttons and cartridges of various calibers, including one from 1878 and two Minié bullets. A Dutch oven fragment, found east of Operation B, might indicate that soldiers supplemented their government-issue frying pans with equipment they preferred—a common occurrence (Rickey 1972:220). Glass bottle fragments from the same area indicate that the soldiers washed their hardtack down with something stronger than water. Finally, horseshoes and nails scattered lightly everywhere support a cavalry presence.

Our initial assumption was that the campsite was used for short periods of time, principally by the 9th Cavalry, during the early 1870s. Thanks to the generosity of Anne Fox, a participant in the original 1970 project, we had records tracking which Army units were there. Company K of the 10th Cavalry from Fort Davis, Texas, under the command of Captain Thomas Lebo, occupied the site the longest, for several months in both 1878 and 1879. From this base, Lebo would lead 10-day forays into the mountains, hunting for the elusive Mescalero Apache and then returning to Pine Springs to re-supply. Significantly, in 1878 he was accompanied by a 25th Infantry detachment (Lebo 1979). These longer occupations fit well with what we found. The amount of labor invested in the campfires and associated, semi-permanent structures and the quantities of ash suggest a group that stayed awhile. The two-period stratigraphy in Operation B's hearth may even indicate re-use of a favorite spot, perhaps at one time by infantry members. Certainly, the artifacts found around the site are consonant with a late 1870s military presence.

Both records and finds further show, however, that this locale has been repeatedly and intensively used since prehistoric times. Stone tools attest to pre-contact usage, and during historic times many people passed through. The Butterfield Stage stopped close by, of course, and the two Civil-War era Minié bullets as well as other records suggest that the Union Army's "California Column" came through as well (Schreier 1976). The campsite's attraction became clear when park staff told us that Lower Pine Springs was the major water source before a 1930 earthquake closed it off (Figure 1). To this day, a sizeable streambed still channels deep floodwaters during rain (Janice Wobbenhorst, personal communication, 2004). Captain Lebo himself notes in his dispatches that there was enough water for four or five cavalry companies and that the grass was abundant and nourishing (Lebo 1879)—a far cry from today's desert environment. Situated between two flowing springs in exceptionally dry country, the area would have been a magnet for prehistoric and historic human occupation. Indeed, finds at the site even suggest that groups hostile to each other took turns occupying it. A cut brass cartridge and the bottom of an 1870s glass bottle, apparently retouched as a scraper, indicate the Apache came back at least to forage for useful items in between mil-

itary occupations. One might even say that the site represents an early example of a time-share system.

Much remains to be learned from the Pine Springs Camp. Additional archival research has already yielded promising information on the Buffalo Soldiers who were there. Further archaeological research in summer 2005 will help refine the chronology and clarify the multiple uses of this intriguing site.

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