

Verde Independent

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The true story of how Bloody Basin got its name

Like us, you have probably driven back and forth to Phoenix, noticing the road sign along I-17 that says "Bloody Basin." Arizona is known for colorful place names, but this is a real winner!

How in the world did a chunk of ground earn that gory nickname?

Well, let me enlighten you. Bloody Basin is located in Yavapai County, along Bloody Basin Road, 23 miles east of Exit 259, which is south of Cordes Junction.

There are several myths that have sprung up regarding the naming of that piece of land. One of the most fanciful suggests that seven Navajo virgins were sacrificed at that spot by the Apache Geronimo to bring freedom to his own wives and children.

Geronimo was a pretty savvy tactician (he kept the U. S. military chasing after him unsuccessfully for many years) and sacrificing young girls probably was not part of his game plan.

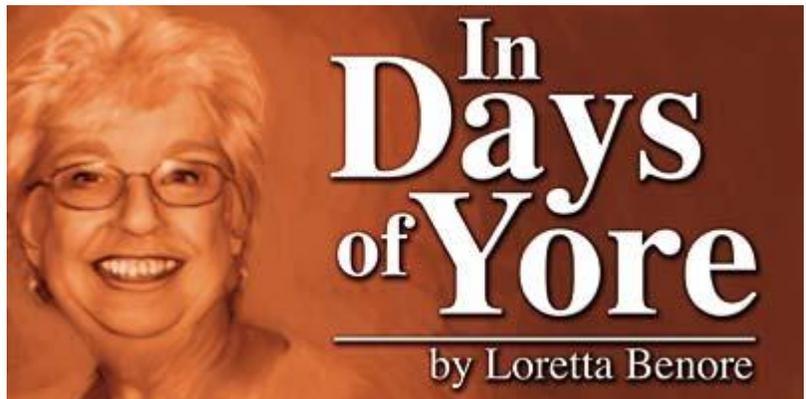
And the myth describes "Navajo" girls who were indigenous to the northern part of the Territory while the Chiricahua Apache Geronimo's bailiwick was the southern part of the Territory and Mexico. Logically, it does not compute.

A second myth that makes a little more sense suggests that this land was pretty much cattle country.

However, Basque shepherders would drive their flocks to the area to graze, rotating between the valley and the mesa from the summer to winter.

Now cattlemen did not appreciate this. Cows and horses eat foliage down to the ground so it will come back quickly, but sheep take the foliage down to the roots, which means nothing will grow back for several years.

The cattlemen had enough and so they slaughtered all the flocks grazing in the area. The blood of the sheep covered the land, and hence ... Bloody Basin.



This was more probable since the Tewksbury (sheep)/Graham (cattle) Range War was covering much of the Tonto Basin (south of Payson) at the time. Possibly ... but no cigar.

The real story, however, is a story of the battles between the military and the Tonto Apache. The Tonto were most feared by the Whites, who were looked upon as interlopers by the Indians.

The Tonto-Apache were highly mobile and unpredictable—the same tactics used by their cousins the Chiricahua under Geronimo. They were scary.

In early March, 1873, a band of Tonto-Apache attacked and killed a party of 3 Whites, killing all 3, but torturing one before he died. The atrocity spurred a punitive expedition under the specific command of Capt. George Randall, and the general command of General George Crook.

The Apache were tracked to Turret Peak, a Yavapai stronghold in central Arizona. In late March of that year, Randall and a group of soldiers and scouts crept up Turret Peak at midnight.

He had the men crawl to the crest on their hands and knees to be as stealthy as possible, not disturbing rocks or stones.

At dawn they attacked. The Natives were so taken by surprise that they panicked, many of them jumping off the mountain precipice to certain death below. Those who resisted were quickly killed or surrendered.

Estimates run between 26 and 57 Indians killed, with many more injured. No soldiers were killed. Several of them were later awarded the Medal of Honor. Two weeks after the battle many of the Indians surrendered to General Crook at Camp Verde and were removed down to the San Carlos Reservation, not to return until several decades later.