

Mogollon Rim country considered one of nature's wonders

by Bert Edises

The name "Mogollon" is difficult and often amusing to present day Arizonans. It derives from an early Spanish governor of New Mexico, Juan Ignacio Flores Mogollon. His capital was in Santa Fe, and Arizona was little more than an appendage joined for reasons of administrative expediency.

Gov. Mogollon is not remembered for any outstanding acts of statesmanship and would probably be in history's dustbin but for the fact that some person unknown decided to attach the governor's name to Arizona's most spectacular escarpment.

The oddity of the name caused trouble from the start. Americans attempting the Spanish pronunciation came up with "Muegy-own," which has remained the standard Yankee rendition to this day.

What is this phenomenon which has immortalized Gov. Mogollon? It's called the Mogollon Rim and it is one of the wonders of nature. The geologic origins of the rim are vividly

described by Reg Manning in his interesting and informative book "What is Arizona Really Like?"

"Sometime back in the Mesozoic Age, Arizona almost broke in two. It was during one of the periodic upheavals of the earth's crust, and the northeastern corner of the state lifted up, right according to the geological script, but land to the south missed its cue and failed to rise."

Result: a long escarpment or cliff, rising at times 2,000 feet high, extending diagonally across Arizona from northwest to southeast for a distance of 200 miles.

This extraordinary line of cliffs can be seen from below from a number of viewpoints in the Payson area. To view it from above, the intrepid traveler can take the Rim Road.

This unpaved but driveable road intersects Highway 87 near Strawberry; you can drive east along the rim almost to Pinetop,

a route which provides spectacular views of the valleys below the rim and the distant mountains.

The trees one sees from vantage points on the Rim Road are of many different kinds, but dominating all is the ponderosa



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pine. In fact, we are surrounded by the world's largest ponderosa pine forest.

Ponderosa pine is Arizona's most important timber tree. Though not as large as Douglas fir (also found in this forest), it grows to a height of 150 feet or more and its logs produce fine, straight-grained lumber that is very much in demand.

The heavy growth of pine and other conifers is traceable to the unique weather pattern on the

rim. Wild storms in summer and winter are accompanied by precipitation that may be four times that of the desert below, leading to the growth not only of trees but of an ecology of elk and antelope, cougar and beaver, trout and pike.

a route that would connect his headquarters at Fort Apache with Prescott, then the state's capital. Crook hit upon the idea of following the Mogollon Rim some 200 miles west.

Though their path lay through an Apache stronghold, Crook and his troops succeeded in their mission and the Rim Road became a vital military highway, supplying Fort Apache and helping to defend the area's civilian population against Apache depredations. The wheelmarks of Crook's wagons are still visible at various points along the present Rim Road. The route is now a National Recreation Trail and, according to rumor, will soon be a National Historic Trail as well.

Although known as the most successful Indian fighting general in history, Crook is equally remembered for his peacemaking propensities. He was one of the few high American officers trusted by the Indians respected and trusted. At a time when official Army doctrine tended toward the view that peace with the "hostiles" could come only

through the complete extermination of the Indian population, i.e. through genocide, Crook held tenaciously to the belief that fair treatment and honest dealing could resolve the grievances of the Indians and bring an end to the strife.

Another eminent name associated with the Mogollon Rim country is that of the author, Zane Grey. He lived and wrote many of his novels in a cabin just below the rim, which he christened "Tonto Rim" in preference to the non-euphonious "Mogollon."

Grey eventually became disillusioned with Arizona, left in a huff, and swore he would never return. His disillusionment was apparently connected with a request for special hunting privileges for himself and his guests, which Game and Fish authorities denied.

Disillusioned or not, Grey's "Beneath the Tonto Rim" made millions of readers aware of the Mogollon Rim. If you haven't seen it yourself you're missing a great deal.