

Road Trip for Book Sales—a Pilgrimage

Part Six By Doug Boren

About a month after *Beyond the Horizons* was released, I decided to make an extensive road trip to the locales where the story took place. I thought that my chances of getting it into some of the tourist shops and bookstores in the area were good because of the “local” significance. But more than that, it was a pilgrimage of sorts for me. I had lived in years past at or near many of the locations, and the story came to mean so much to me, that I felt I owed it to my characters to walk the same ground they had. To live vicariously a small part of their lives, even if for a short time.

Days six and seven

As I drove from Colorado into Arizona, I passed through the 4-corners, which is the only place in the country where four states connect. Leaving the cool green mountains for the hot arid desert, this was to be the longest drive of all. A full 12 hours of driving were in store for me. In the distance I saw Shiprock, that huge stone mountain rising like a monolith out of the desert, revered by the Navajos as the place where life began.

The hours drug on in a monotonous drone. After spending an hour at the meteor crater, I finally passed through Phoenix just after sundown. It had been a hellish long day. That I had returned to the Sonoran Desert was evidenced by the copious profundity of Saguaro Cactus filling the landscape.

The next day promised the excitement of the trip’s climax. This was the day I was going to Fort Bowie. That was the nexus of Mace’s activities in his fight against Chactoke and the Snake Dancers.

About 50 miles north of Tucson, I saw Picacho Peak. This is an isolated mountain in the middle of the desert where history tells us was the westernmost battle of the Civil War. Sure enough, there was a visitor’s center, so I pulled off to see if I could get them to feature my book, since this place is mentioned in it, after all.

But the fates of the Dept. of the Interior thwarted me again. No one was there, and the place was locked up. Another opportunity to sell my book at a location where it takes place was lost. This could get real discouraging.

Another few hours brought me to Wilcox, Arizona, where the turn off to Fort Bowie was. To my surprise, there was a visitor’s center there, along with a museum. What the heck, I thought. It’s worth a try.

It was a nice place, a lot of exhibits featuring the Apaches, and the cavalry of a hundred years ago. There were lots of books on the subject, too, and I felt this was a good place for mine to be featured.

The lady who was there was very nice. She was quite impressed with the story line of the book, and bought one for her personal use. She also took a press kit and promised to plead my case before her supervisor later that day. I told her of my intent to go up in the mountains to see the fort, and she had some words of warning for me.

“Be sure you stay on the trail, and keep a sharp lookout.”

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"There is a chance you could run into a rattlesnake or even a mountain lion," she said seriously.

"Naw! Really?"

"It's not too unusual to see a snake, but if you stay on the trail, you'll be safer."

"And the mountain lion"? What do I do if I come across one of them?" I asked with just a bit of concern.

She smiled, "just hope you don't. You'll probably be ok at this time of year."

I thanked her for her advice and for her help with my book and drove into the Chiricahua Mountains. My excitement was growing by the mile. As I looked around the landscape, I realized that I was actually seeing the area where George had fought the Apaches from the stagecoach. I was seeing the locale where the cavalry troops pursued the Chiricahuas for all those years.

The paved road gave way to a gravel road at the little hamlet of Dos Cabezas. Again, my blood was pumping with excitement! This was the town where Mordecai took Mace after his ordeal on the bluff! It's not much more than a ghost town these days, although I did see a few houses that looked inhabited. I took a few pictures and headed on.

Shortly outside of town I saw a direction sign proclaiming Fort Bowie 20 miles to the southeast, high in the mountains. Only 20 miles? Hmm... I realized I had made a gaffe in my story, since I had described the town as being much, much farther from the fort. Committing historical inaccuracy bothered me, but there was nothing I could do about it now. After all, it didn't really *hurt* the story any.

The road got steadily worse as I made my way to the summit of Apache Pass and the trail head that led to Fort Bowie. My teeth rattled from the washboard road, and I was damn glad that it wasn't raining, or else I'd never navigate the road. Along the way, I saw a few more historic sites related to the Apache wars, also featured in my story. The camera flashed several more times.

At the summit, there was a good sized parking lot at the trail head, along with restrooms and informational signs. It was a mile and a half walk up into the mountain pass to reach the fort... minimum estimated time to complete was proclaimed at three hours. I checked my watch... 3:00 already. I'd have to come back and do it tomorrow.

Just like the lady at the information center said, there was a sign warning of the danger of rattlesnakes and mountain lions. Admonished to stay on the trail, I was a bit apprehensive, but determined to see it through. This was, after all, the main reason for my "pilgrimage". This is the very location of the climax of the book.

After taking a few more pictures, I continued on down the road back to the main highway. I was pleasantly surprised to see that the road on this side of the pass was paved nearly the whole distance. The going was much easier.

In the motel room that night, I re-read several sections of my book, basking in the atmosphere of where I was. To think that I was actually going lay my eyes on the same things my characters did, and walk the same ground, moved me deeply. Never, had my characters seemed so *alive*... so real!

In my sleep, I dreamed about *Beyond the Horizons*.

To be continued...