

Road Trip for Book Sales—a Pilgrimage

Part Seven By Doug Boren

Folks, this concludes my "road trip" series. I hope you have enjoyed it. For those of you who haven't yet read *Beyond the Horizons*, follow the link at the bottom for ordering information. I appreciate the comments received from some of you so far, and look forward to hearing from more of you. Stay safe, stay happy, and God bless.... Doug

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.

Day Eight

I got up early, nearly dancing with excitement. I made sure my back pack had plenty of water bottles, my press kit, and several copies of my book. I knew that a three mile round trip hike in the desert mountains without water was foolish, and I knew that once I made the visitor center and museum at the fort, I need something to show the rangers there.

I started up the trail by 9:00. It was not too bad of a grade, and well worn and smooth. My eyes were constantly darting about looking for the alleged rattlesnakes, so whenever I wanted to really look at something, I'd stop for a while.

About a quarter of a mile up, I came across the ruins of the Butterfield Stage Station. *God!* I was actually seeing the outline and location of so many events. It was the place of the Bascom affair, which had started the Apache Wars in the first place. It was where George met Mace and Tom on his journeys as he rode shotgun for the stage. It was where Javier and Vittoria came into the story. I could even see the remnants of the road that the stage had traveled so routinely, over a hundred years ago. I was overwhelmed with emotion.

By now I had used up almost two discs on my digital camera. It was a good thing I brought plenty. I was going to make a photo companion book to compliment my novel.

I continued my climb, past the soldier's cemetery, where the chilling epitaphs related how many of them, some children, were "killed by Apaches". Ever higher into Apache Pass I climbed, realizing that I was walking the same ground where Cochise had fought the Union army. I could almost hear the cannon fire and war cries.

My next major landmark was the spring, where cool water had been fought over so many times. It was this spring that prompted not only the Butterfield Stage to stop here, but also the building of Fort Bowie itself. Strange how such a small thing can assume such importance.

Not far past the spring was a replica of an Apache wickiup and camp. That frail hovel of sticks and mud showed me with real clarity the living conditions of the Southwest's fiercest warriors.

Climbing another half mile, Fort Bowie came into view. I had made it! The outlines of remains of several buildings were spread over several acres. The Officer's quarters... the enlisted men's barracks... the sutler's store, the headquarters building... I felt like I was in a church. To me, this was almost hallowed ground.

Captain Rawlings, Lieutenant Leithof, Mace, Tom, Walsh and Bowen, had all lived and worked here. I could visualize in my mind's eye, their activities, and felt the chill of emotional goose bumps all over my skin.

Again, there were numerous warning signs for the rattlesnakes, and to stay on the path that wound throughout the fort. So far, I had been lucky, for there had been nary a sign of any.

I lost track of time. For hours, I inhaled the history of the place. Like a man smitten with solemn reverence, I stood at the pinnacle of my emotions. This was the main purpose of my quest. This was the climax of my "pilgrimage". Tears ran down my face as I thought not only of my fictional characters, but of the real people who had lived and died here. *This* was the place where the settling of Arizona had been made possible.

Eventually, I made my way over to the visitor's center and museum. I was not disappointed. Rich in history, I felt like I was at home. The two rangers there were quite nice and helpful. They bought all the copies of my book that I had lugged up the mountain, as well as my press kit. With the promise to buy more, and stock it in the visitor's center, I knew my mission had been a complete success. This alone had made my entire odyssey worthwhile.

I took a different route down the mountain, following the spine of the ridge. Now, I was seeing the place from the Indian's point of view. This is what they saw when they ambushed the cavalry in 1862. It also gave me a wonderful panoramic aerial view of the fort itself. A fitting final vision to complete my quest.

I managed to return to my car without encountering any rattlesnakes or mountain lions, for which I was most grateful. But it had been worth the risk. I wouldn't have traded my experience for anything in the world.

The next day, I drove back to El Paso, and my flight home. As the plane carried me from the burned over dry desert of the Southwest back to the lush green mountains of West Virginia, I mused over the last week.

Was it a success? Yes, undoubtedly. True, I was unable to sell my book at several locations, but I was also quite successful at getting it into others. It was also true that places like Fort Bowie, and Fort Craig were isolated and off the beaten path. There would not be any large numbers of sales from those places. But that didn't matter to me. My book *belongs* there. That's what is important.

The college bookstore will probably show my most successful reward, over time. It is very likely that dozens of copies will be sold there each semester. Again, I smiled at my good fortune.

But the most important thing for me wasn't the sales, or promise of them. It was the experience itself. To relive the history of the times, and immerse myself in my story. To be physically there, not just in my mind, was the fulfillment of a dream ever since I had put pen to paper.

Yes, it was a bookselling road trip. But it had been so much more than that. It had indeed, been a pilgrimage. I whispered a prayer of thanks, and a prayer for all the men and women who now live only in the winds of history.

For an in depth look into *Beyond the Horizons*, visit the website at:

www.doughboren.homestead.com/Beyond.html