

The History of the La Posta Quemada Ranch, Vail, Arizona

by Sharon E. Hunt

INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the foothills of the Rincon Mountains adjacent to Colossal Cave, the La Posta Quemada Ranch has a history that includes train robbers and stagecoaches, squatters and cattle-empire builders, cave explorers and Civilian Conservation Corps workers, ranchers and easterners dreaming of being cowboys, and finally developers and conservationists.

The ranch has been known as Mountain Springs Ranch, Shaw's Ranch, part of the Empire Ranch, Day's Ranch, and the La Posta Quemada Ranch. The name Posta Quemada (burnt station) comes from a nearby 1858 Butterfield Stage Station that burned in the early 1860s and was later rebuilt, only to burn again.

Throughout its history, the ranch has been tied to the nearby Colossal Cave, a major tourist attraction. Today, the ranch is combined with the cave to form Colossal Cave Mountain Park, a Pima County park.

MOUNTAIN SPRINGS RANCH

The Mountain Springs Ranch (sometimes called Mountain Spring Ranch) appears in written documentation and on maps starting in the late 1870s. The ranch included the Mountain Springs Hotel and the Mountain Springs Station, a stagecoach stop. The hotel and station were located along the creek in the ranch's riparian area.

E.H. "Hank" Bridwell (1878)

The proprietor of the Mountain Springs Hotel in 1878 was Mr. E.H. Bridwell. The hotel is believed to have been located in the riparian area near the road between Tres Alamos and Tucson. A newspaper article written by a traveler who stopped at the hotel in 1878 describes the area:

Our Trip

WHAT WE SAW, ADMIRED AND APPRECIATED – MOUNTAIN SPRINGS RANCH – TRES ALAMOS – IMPROVEMENT IN PROSPECT AT THE LATTER PLACE – THE CROPS, ETC.

ON THE GO;
March 19, 1878

Leaving Tucson Sunday morning, at about 10 o'clock, we passed through a country (new to me) very pleasant to ride over, together with excellent roads and the best of company by the person of Reuben Woods Esq. made the trip one continual pleasure from beginning to end. We arrived at the

Mountain Springs Ranch

at about one o'clock in the afternoon and of course were amply prepared for the repast spread before us. The proprietor, Mr. E.H. Bridwell, has a valuable property in the Mountain Springs Ranch, which is bound to speak for itself before any great lapse of time

passes by. The valley of ravine above sparkles with an abundance of running water, which can be so utilized as to be of great value to the land about the ranch. The house is not sufficiently large to accommodate the guests who travel on the road, and Mr. Bridwell is now making adobes on the premises for the purpose of putting up an addition, or rather the new structure will be the main building, which will afford ample accommodations for the traveling public. As "Reub" says, "bet your life, it'll be nice!" There have been several mines located in this valley, and there is one within a hundred yards of the house, of which an assay has been made showing \$97 in silver. Few prospectors have visited this section, and not until recently has there been any particular talk made of the locality I have mentioned. If good mines can be discovered in any great numbers in the vicinity, (where there is water in abundance), why, Bridwell's fortune will yet gladden the eyes of his friends in his old home in the East! There are probably few so close to Tucson that have the advantages of the business of carrying on a diary [*sic*] as the Mountain Springs. Grass is plenty and the water is the very best. Leaving the ranch at about four o'clock in the afternoon, we traveled more of the same kind of smooth level road, and the time consumed in traveling to TRES ALAMOS ...

[*Arizona Star, Sunday, March 28, 1878*]

An Edward H. Bridwell, aged 40, is listed in the Arizona 1890 Great Registers as being a resident of Tucson at that time, but no further information on him has been located.

Eliza Close Lewis (1878)

In 1878-1879, Eliza Close Lewis traveled by stagecoach between Ohio and California. Under the pen name of "Anita Rose," she wrote a series of articles to send back home to the Nevada, Ohio *Enterprise*, one of which included a description of Mountain Springs.

Glimpses of Overland Travel. Letter from Arizona.
For the *Enterprise*.
Sansamone, Ariz., Ter.,
October 16, 1878

...

The next interesting point was the pretty little stream, San Padre [*sic*], upon which lies Tres Alamos (Three Trees), a deserted place with but two or three families remaining there. We had been a day and night getting there for Points of mountains. It is only forty-two miles from Tucson. With smiling faces and cheerful hearts, for we then began to laugh in our sleeves ... we left there in the evening, we trotted along for Mountain Springs ... We reached Mountain Springs about dark. It is another wild ranch imbedded [*sic*] in the mountains, and is supplied with water from a cool spring gurgling through.