

## CLIFF DWELLINGS AT ANGEL SPRINGS

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2000

One afternoon a few years ago, a man inquired about a mud house in the Superstition Mountains. We talked for a few minutes and I couldn't imagine what he was talking about. He had read about a mud house located in a rugged canyon in the Superstition Wilderness Area. He said prospectors had used this mud house to hide gold. After I heard more of his story I realized what he was talking about.

He was talking about Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwelling located near Angel Springs. This ancient structure was not a gold cache repository but one of the finest preserved Salado structures in the central mountains of Arizona. This two-room cliff dwelling is in excellent condition and has suffered most of its damage from contemporary visitors. When I first examined the ruin in 1948 with my father, it was in extraordinarily good condition. At that time the roof was in almost perfect condition. It was as if the people who had lived in it had just moved away.

There are several recorded accounts about this cliff dwelling in Arizona periodicals. The first article mentioned was in a periodical dated 1895.

The Southern Pacific Railroad was interested in the site as a tourist destination in 1927. They wanted to develop a hike or horseback trip from the Apache Trail to the ruin for customers of the Southern Pacific "Sunset Limited". The railroad even speculated about building a trail from Fish Creek Lodge to the cliff dwelling in Roger's Canyon. This idea never became reality, but was reported in local newspapers of the period.

The *Arizona Highways Magazine* featured the Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwellings in 1946. Up until this time the ruins had remained quite obscure from the public. I recall my father saying we would have to take a hike up to Roger's Canyon and check it out. We were living in Christmas, Arizona at the time.

My father and I visited the ruin in 1948. We drove up from Christmas, Arizona. It was an over night hike from near the JF Ranch to Angel Springs. Father and I visited the ruin and found many interesting things still in tact. Inside the main structure there was still pieces of plant fiber used for sandals and mats. There was a large maetate. There were many charred corn cobs and other items that indicated somebody had lived here hundreds of years ago. It was also easy the recognized the work of pot hunters and treasure hunters who had dug holes here and there searching for artifacts.

William N. Smith II, an archaeology student at the University of Arizona, reported on the ruin as part of his undergraduate work. Smith studied Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwelling and other related ruins in the area, and wrote a paper on Roger's Canyon and surrounding ruins in 1941. He did his research on horseback while working for the Cleman's Cattle Company.



Gary Hunnington, Dr. Bill Wright, Tom Kollenborn, Jay Drazinski, Bud Lane and Allen Blackman

The *Arizona Highways Magazine* featured the Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwellings near Angel Springs Basin in 1946. Up until this time the ruins had remained quite obscure from the public.

I recall several trips into Angel Basin between 1946-1999. One interesting trip occurred in December of 1975. I accompanied a group of adventurers that included Dr. William F. "Bill" Wright, the Superintendent of Schools for Apache Junction, Nyle Leatham, a photographer for the Arizona Republic, and our guide, Bud Lane.

On our return trip from Angel Basin back to Tortilla Trailhead, Bud Lane decided to take a short cut through Goat Canyon. That was a mistake. We ended up a day late and overdue. This trip was followed by another interesting trip to Angel Basin in the late 1980's with a National Geographic Magazine photographer.

I have not visited the ruin since I made the trip on March 17, 1999 with Don Donnelly and the Crow Canyon Institute. Donnelly had asked me to go along and tell the story of the cliff dwelling in Roger's Canyon. The roof of the ruin was still in good condition, except for a gaping hole caused by careless explorers of the site. The walls were all solid and still standing. Most of the debris had been removed from the ruin, and the most noticeable damage was the collecting of samples of material from the ruin. The fingerprints of the ancient people who built the walls of this ruin were still very visible in the dried mud.

Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwelling stands as one of the finest original structures of Salado work in the entire Southwest. The structure has never been reconstructed or repaired by contemporary man.

The future survival of this ruin is in doubt. Measures must be taken to prevent visitors from climbing on the walls and the roof and collecting insignificant artifacts from the ruin. Wilderness regulations prevent the forest service from building an iron grate over the entrance of the cave to protect the ruin from the public.

Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwelling is one of the unique wonders of the Superstition Wilderness Area. If each of us would respect the architectural value and work of these early inhabitants of this structure, it would stand forever for others to enjoy. It has stood for almost a millennium, but we are capable of destroying it in a couple of decades through ignorance. The search for gold and treasure has also destroyed many valuable archaeological sites over the centuries.

The mud house in Rogers Canyon should not be a symbol of our throwaway society. It has stood for over a thousand years. Let's hope it stands for another thousand.



The main structure at Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwelling.



l-r, Alfred Hasty, Dr. Wm. F. Wright, Jay Drazinski, Tom Johnson, Bud Lane and Allen Blackman, Dec 1975 in Angel Basin.



Fingerprints of the people who built the structure more than 1000 years ago.



Another view of the Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwelling showing the roof.



Looking across the ramada of the Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwellings