

THE TALE OF HACKSAW TOM

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 1977, 1998

Tales can still be heard along the Apache Trail about the adventures of the legendary desperado called "Hacksaw Tom." It was after the turn of the 20th century this highwayman burned his name into the legends and lore of Superstition Mountain region. He preyed on the travelers of the Mesa-Roosevelt Road from his remote hiding place near Fish Creek Canyon. "Hacksaw Tom" robbed several of the teamsters who traveled the tortuous route between Mesa and the Roosevelt Dam site according to many storytellers.

Hacksaw Tom's favorite spot was a large rock overlooking the narrow road at the bottom of Fish Creek Canyon immediately west of a primitive one-lane bridge. It was here teamsters had a difficult time controlling their teams and Tom took full advantage of the situation. As drivers fought hard to control their teams at the end of a steep downhill grade, the highwayman would be waiting to greet them with a double-barreled shotgun. The teamsters had little opportunity to resist Hacksaw's demands.

Hacksaw Tom, according to some reports, stood about five feet eight inches tall and weighed about 160 pounds, with blue eyes and light blonde hair. Not one teamster chose to argue with his 12-gauge double-barrel shotgun. Tom was as light-footed as any Indian and just as fast when he scampered over the rocks up Fish Creek Canyon to his mountain sanctuary.

Tom never used a horse for his getaways. He just scampered up and over the boulders of Fish Creek to safety, seldom pursued by anyone. The sheriff's posse was somewhat helpless on horseback after each robbery. Horses could not pursue Hacksaw up Fish Creek Canyon. When the robbery was phoned in from Fish Creek Livery and Lodge about a mile away it required the sheriff's posse some five to six hours to arrive at the site. Tom would be long gone by the time the posse arrived. Few men dared to challenge Hacksaw Tom in his own domain.

Elaborate plans and traps were set for him. Tom never chose to rob a stage or wagon that had a waiting posse nearby or men hiding on board. Some speculators believed Hacksaw Tom had inside information about the stages and wagons. Often, after a robbery, Tom would climb to a high point above and watch the confusion below.

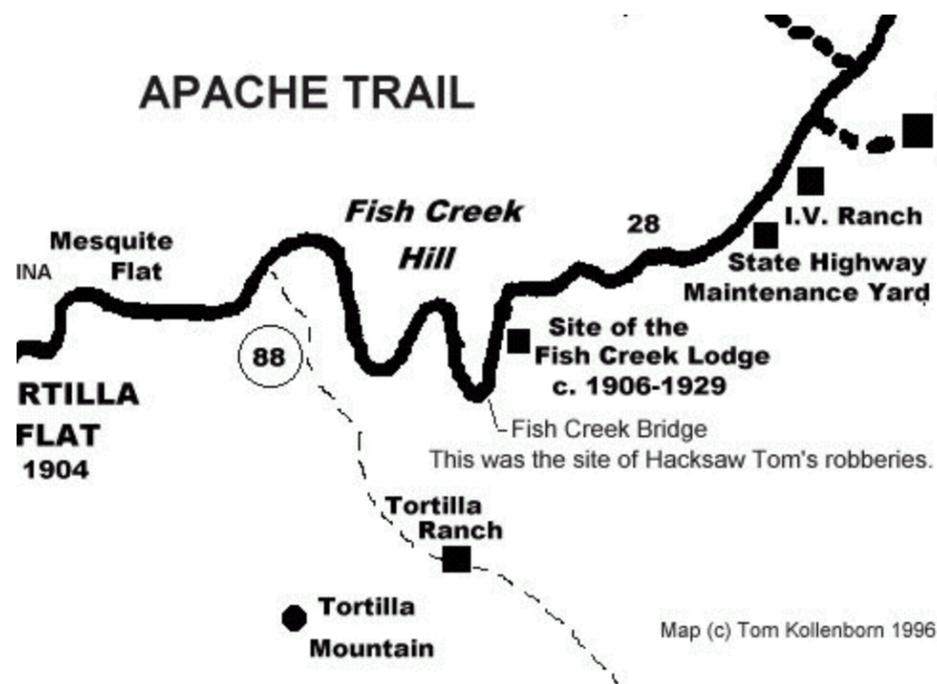
For almost a decade Hacksaw Tom relieved the many travelers along the Mesa-Roosevelt Road (Apache Trail) of their loose change and bills. Seldom did any of his robberies net him more than \$40.00. Storytellers say Hacksaw Tom became so familiar to some of his victims they often exchanged almost friendly hellos before a robbery. At one point many teamsters felt they were paying a toll charge to cross the Fish Creek Bridge. In all the years Hacksaw Tom preyed on the Apache Trail travelers not one individual was injured or killed. As a matter of fact, not one individual can remember a shot being fired.

The real mystery of Hacksaw Tom was his identity. Some old timers claimed he lived at the Silver King Mine or Superior and hiked across the mountains to make his periodical robberies at Fish Creek. Others thought maybe he was a local cowboy who supplemented his meager salary with robbery. An elderly retired lawman that was a friend of Jeff Adams thought Hacksaw Tom had a well hidden camp deep in the Superstition Mountains, probably in Lost Dutch Canyon. This canyon is a small tributary of Fish Creek that flows in above the Fish Creek Box.

Whatever the case, Hacksaw Tom was never apprehended by the law. His camp, if he had one, still remains lost somewhere in the mountains. Maybe someday a lucky hiker or horsemen will stumble across Hacksaw Tom's camp and discover his cache of loot taken from the many travelers of the Apache Trail. That is, provided he did not spend it all before his death.

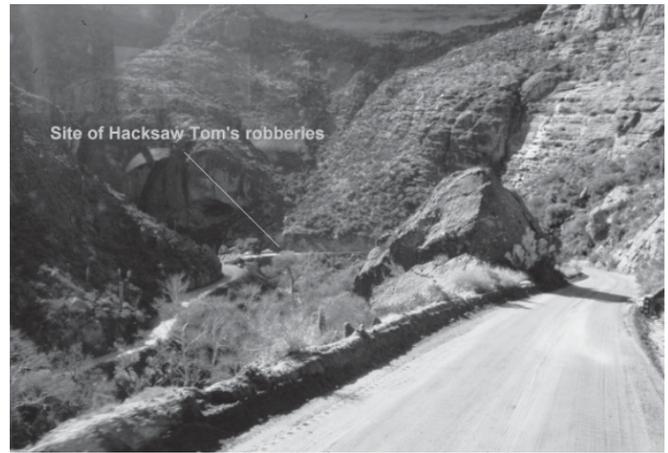
There is not much documentation to support this tale, however there were a couple of robberies along the Apache Trail that were unsolved. The locations of the robberies have long since been forgotten. Research has produced no reports of armed robberies along the Apache Trail at the site of Fish Creek Canyon. The tales of Hacksaw Tom continue to fascinate those interested in stories of the West. Several years ago a fine article appeared in the Arizona Highways about the legendary Hacksaw Tom and his Fish Creek Canyon domain. This article appeared in January of 1998.

Author's note: I researched this story quite thoroughly and have not found any mention of Hacksaw Tom or robberies along Fish Creek in court or newspaper records. There is one robbery mentioned, but the robber was arrested. The story about Hacksaw Tom is the fabric from which legends are woven.





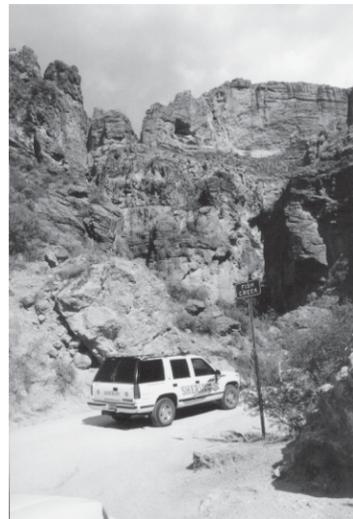
A teamster along the Apache Trail during the era of Hacksaw Tom's robberies around 1900.



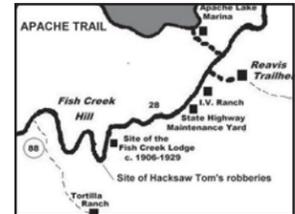
Apache Trail at Fish Creek Hill. Hacksaw Tom would lie in wait near the bridge at the bottom of Fish Creek Hill.



Looking South up Fish Creek Canyon at the site of Hacksaw Tom's robberies.



Modern law enforcement.



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Stories can still be heard along the Apache Trail about the adventures of the legendary desperado "Hacksaw Tom." It was after the turn of the century this highwayman burned his name into the legends and lore of Superstition Mountain forever.

From remote hiding places near Fish Creek Canyon he preyed on the travelers of the Mesa-Roosevelt Road (Apache Trail). "Hacksaw Tom" robbed several of the teamsters who traveled the tortuous route between Mesa and the Roosevelt Dam site according to legend.

Hacksaw Tom's favorite spot was a large rock overlooking the narrow road at the bottom of Fish Creek Canyon immediately west of the bridge. It was here teamsters had a difficult time controlling their teams and Tom took full advantage of the situation. As drivers fought hard to control their teams at the end of a steep downhill grade, the highwayman would be waiting to greet them with a double-barreled shotgun. The teamsters had little opportunity to resist Hacksaw's demands.

Hacksaw Tom stood about five feet eight inches tall and weighed about 160 pounds with blue eyes and light blonde hair. His hands were covered with buckskin gloves. Not one teamster chose to argue with his 12-gauge double-barrel shotgun. Tom was as light-footed as any Indian and just as fast when he scampered over the rocks up Fish Creek Canyon to his mountain sanctuary.

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Elaborate plans and traps were set for him. Tom never chose to rob a stage or wagon that had a waiting posse nearby or men concealed on board. Some speculators believed Hacksaw Tom had inside information about the stages and wagons. Often, after a robbery, Tom would climb to a high point above and watch the confusion below.

For almost a decade Hacksaw Tom relieved the many travelers along the Mesa-Roosevelt Road (Apache Trail) of their loose change and bills. Seldom did any his robberies net him more than \$40. Storytellers say Hacksaw Tom became so familiar to some of his victims they often exchanged almost friendly hellos before a robbery.

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At one point many teamsters felt they were paying a toll charge to cross the Fish Creek Bridge. Now, of course this is just legend, not fact. In all the years Hacksaw Tom preyed on the Apache Trail travelers not one individual was injured or killed. As a matter of fact, not one individual can remember a shot being fired.

The real mystery of Hacksaw Tom was his identity. Some old timers claim he lived at the Silver King Mine or Superior and hiked across the mountains to make his periodical robberies at Fish Creek. Others thought maybe he was a local cowboy who supplemented his meager income with robbery.

An elderly retired lawman that was a friend of Jeff Adams thought Tom had a hidden camp deep in the Superstition Mountains, probably in Lost Dutch Canyon. This canyon is a small tributary of Fish Creek that flows in above the Fish Creek Box. Several years ago two men explored a site in this canyon that appeared to be an old camp with metal detectors, but discovered nothing significant.

Whatever the case, Hacksaw Tom was never apprehended by the law. His camp, if he had one, still remains lost somewhere in the mountains. It is possible someday a lucky hiker or horsemen will stumble across Hacksaw Tom's camp and discover his cache of loot taken from the many travelers of the Apache Trail. That is, provided he did not spend it all before his death.

There is not much documentation that supports this tale, however there were a couple of robberies along the Apache Trail that were unsolved that were noted in the Arizona Republican. The locations of the robberies have long since been forgotten. It is apparent these old robberies may have given premise to the story of Hacksaw Tom.

Several years ago an Apache Junction resident discovered a cache along the Apache Trail that contained a hooded mask, saw-off shot gun, and other items. This discovery lead some people to believe Hacksaw Tom's camp had been found and therefore documented his existence and exploits. These items are on display at the Superstition Mountain-Lost Dutchman Museum at Goldfield.

The tales of Hacksaw Tom continue to fascinate those interested in stories of the West. Several years ago a fine article appeared in the Arizona Highways about the legendary Hacksaw Tom. The story of Hacksaw Tom is what legends are made of. They are tales that lie on that thin gray