

LUBKIN'S TRIP TO WEAVER'S NEEDLE

By Tom Kollenborn © 2003

Walter J. Lubkin, photographer for the United States Reclamation Service, made a trip into the region near Weaver's Needle to study the drainage of the region and how it would impact the Salt River below Roosevelt Dam. His photographs of the area provided clues about the topography of the area and how it might impact the future construction of dams along the Salt River. Lubkin was assigned this project in the late spring of 1908. Three men accompanied him on his trip of photographic exploration.

Most of the men rode burros while Lubkin rode a horse. Walter was a young man during this period and had endless amounts of energy. He needed this energy to pack around a large stationary glass plate camera and tripod. He also had to carry glass photographic plates to make his images on. The undertaking of such a task was almost impossible in such rugged terrain as the Superstition Mountains.

Lubkin and his party started out at Government Well on the Apache Trail. His first photographs were of native Americans road workers camped in their brush shelters across the Apache Trail from Government Well. The women would try to sell baskets, bowls, and arrowheads or just about anything that travelers might want along the Apache Trail. The photographic party moved eastward toward First Water Creek and a place called Frog Tanks. They arrived here about noon and spent time exploring this large drainage system of the area. After photographs were taken at Frog Tanks the party moved on southeastward along the old military trail (First Water-Black Mountain Pack Trail). This trail was known as the First Water-Charlebois Trail in the 1950's. Some two miles south of Frog Tanks the group stopped and photographs towering rock formations along First Water Creek. The first night camp was set in a small flat near what we called County Line Divide today. Travel was very slow for group because it took several hours sometime to setup and expose glass photographic plates. There was constant worry about breaking or cracking the photographic glass plates. The care and protection of his photographic glass plates were of highest priority. It is difficult to imagine a man and such a large stationary camera taking photographs in this rugged mountain terrain.

The next morning the photographic expedition moved on to Parker's Pass on the old First Water-Charlebois Trail. At Parker's Pass, Lubkin photographed one of the riding burros with Weaver's Needle in the background. One of the horses appeared in one photograph. Lubkin's USRS packer appears in another photograph taken from Parker's Pass. The group moved on southeast from Parker's Pass and eventually down into Boulder Basin (Brush Corral area). Lubkin exposed several photographic plates here but they were severely damaged on the trip out and the plates were never used.

Lubkin and his party spent two additional days in the area exploring the drainage of West Boulder, East Boulder and La Barge Canyon. The expedition ended on the fifth day and the group returned to Government Well.

Lubkin's 1908 photographic expedition into this region in 1908 was one of the earliest known photographic ventures into the western portion of the Superstition Mountains. His work has provided a very unique view of what the Superstition area looked like in 1908, actually not much different then it does today.

Walter J. Lubken recorded on glass negatives some of the most compelling photographs of the American Southwest at the turn of the century. Mr. Lubken took thousands of photographs documenting the Reclamation Service's irrigation projects in the West. He recorded the progress of construction projects such as Roosevelt Dam. He also recorded farms, ranches, and nearby towns. He spent time photographing the Apache workmen at home and at work near Roosevelt, Government Well and other sites. Lubken's work captured both engineering feats and everyday life in the American Southwest during the early 20th century. He was twenty-four years old when he started working for the USRS. He passed away in 1960.



Apache encampment at Government Wells, approx. 6 miles NE of Apache Junction on the Apache Trail, circa 1908. Photo Walter J. Lubkin, USRS, King/Pritchard collection.



At Parker's Pass with the photo crew, circa 1908.

