



Old Ft. Lowell Military Reservation

Introduction

Ft. Lowell was a U.S. Army post on the outskirts of Tucson until it was decommissioned in 1891. It was the successor to Camp Lowell. The Ft. Lowell Military Reservation extended over 10 miles east of the fort and included approximately 80 square miles of land along the Pantano, Tanque Verde, and Rillito washes (Figure 1). The southeast corner of the military reservation was within what would become Saguaro National Park (SNP). Approximately 1,823 acres of the old military reservation is now within SNP (Figure 2). Evidence of the military reservation within the park includes a large rock cairn monument that represents the reservation's southeast corner, as well as a second rock cairn and boundary stones.

A Brief History of Ft. Lowell

A military post in Tucson was initially established by the U.S. Army in 1856. This post however was not a permanent post and in 1862 the Confederate Army, for a short time, took control of Tucson. In 1866 the military post at Tucson was made permanent. The post was named Camp Lowell in honor of General Charles R. Lowell who was killed in the battle of Cedar Creek, Virginia, October 19, 1864. In March of 1873, due to sanitary concerns, the camp was moved six miles northeast of town to the confluence of the Pantano and Tanque Verde washes, where they join to become the Rillito River. The reservation extended over 10 miles east of the new fort and was approximately 80 square miles in size. The area was selected because of the abundant water, plentiful grass, and a good supply of wood. The fort provided protection during the Apache wars.

The camp was renamed Ft. Lowell in 1879. The fort was decommissioned in 1891. Over its lifetime the fort averaged 13 officers and 239 enlisted men. The fort and military reservation reverted back to the Public Domain on July 5, 1894, opening the abandoned reservation to homesteaders.

What remains of the old fort can be found at the city owned Fort Lowell Park and Museum (a branch of the Arizona Historical Society) at 2900 N. Craycroft Road, Tucson. Ft. Lowell is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

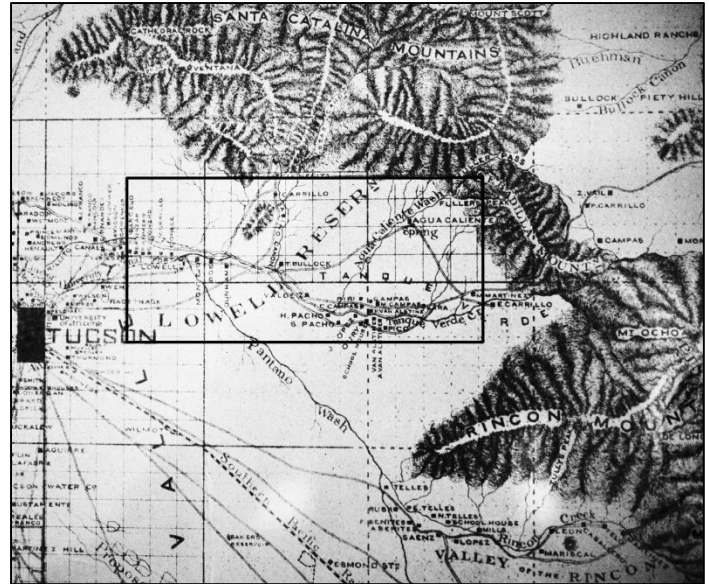


Figure 1. Detail from Official Map of Pima County, Compiled and Drawn by George J. Roskrug, dated 1893, showing the Ft. Lowell Military Reservation.

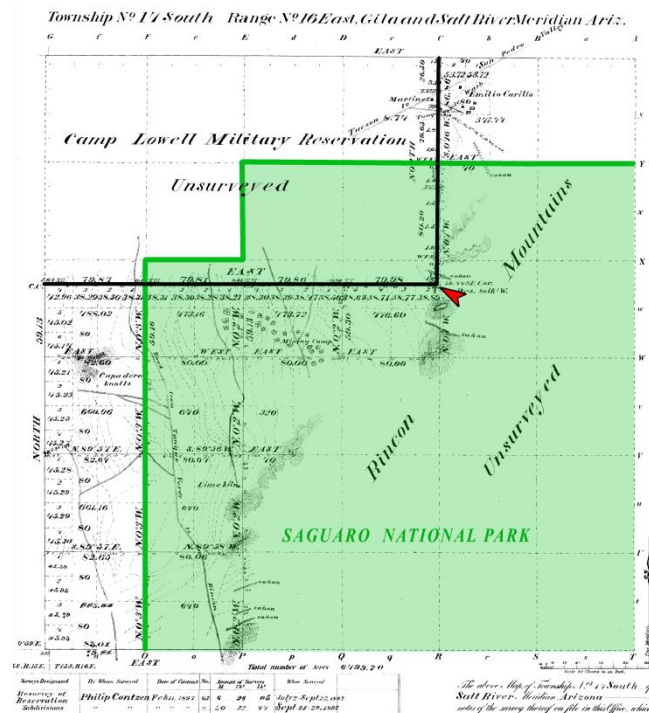


Figure 2. Old survey plat of T.14 S. R.16 E. The area was surveyed in 1897 and the plat officially filed in 1899. It shows the SE corner of the old Ft. Lowell Military Reservation (heavy black line added). Arrow points to the approximate location of rock cairn. Location of Saguaro National Park has been overlain in green.

Military Reservation Monument

From experience working at Fort Bowie National Historic Site, SNP Cultural Resource staff knew that it was a common practice of the military to mark the boundaries of their military reservations with rock cairns. With this information in mind, SNP staff, using old survey plats (see Figure 2) for reference, approximated the location of the SE corner of the military reservation. This location was plotted using the park's GIS (Geographical Information System, or GIS is the merging of cartography, statistical analysis, and database technology), resulting in UTM coordinates (Universal Transverse Mercator – a metric coordinate system somewhat analogous to latitude and longitude) that could then be entered into a handheld GPS receiver (global positioning system, a space based satellite navigation system). With the GPS coordinates the location of the reservation corner could then be verified on the ground.

At the approximate calculated GPS location a large, distinct rock cairn was located. The rock cairn is approximately 4.5 feet in diameter and over 2 feet in height (see Figure 3). During a pedestrian survey of the east-west and north-south boundary lines the cultural resource staff was also able to relocate other military boundary features.

Visiting the Reservation Monument

Remember, for both Districts there is no off trail hiking below 4500 feet! Since there are no park maintained trails in the immediate vicinity of the monuments, visiting the Ft. Lowell Military Reservation monuments is prohibited.



Figure 3. Rock cairn in SNP believed to be the boundary marker for the southeast corner of the Ft. Lowell Military Reservation.

Clemensen, A. Berle
1987 *Cattle, Copper, and Cactus: The History of Saguaro National Monument*. Resource Study, National Park Service, Denver. p.37-46.

Thiel, Homer J., M.L. Brack, and Tyler S. Theriot
1990 Cultural Resources Assessment for the Fort Lowell-Adkins Steel Property within Historic Fort Lowell, Tucson, Pima County, Arizona. *Technical Report No. 2008-08*. Desert Archeology, Inc. Tucson.

Turner, Teresa, with Edward H. and Rosamond B. Spicer
1990 *The People of Fort Lowell*. Ft. Lowell Historic District Board, Tucson.

For more information contact:

Ronald Beckwith ph: (520) 733-5160
Archeologist email: ronald_beckwith@nps.gov
Saguaro National Park
3693 S. Old Spanish Trail
Tucson, AZ 85730