



## Garwood Ranch\*

### Introduction

One of the most ambitious private building projects in the Rincon Mountain District of Saguaro National Park (SNP) was Garwood Ranch. The ranch was the home of Nelson and Josephine Garwood. The Garwoods purchased the property in 1945 and lived on it until 1959. They named their homestead the Bar G Ranch, although there was never the intention to enter the ranching business. The structures were destroyed by fire in the early 1970s, and all that remains today is the dam and the foundations of the residence and associated structures. The Garwood Dam is accessible by Carillo Trail.

### History

Tucson residents Nelson and Josephine Garwood purchased 450 acres of vacant, unimproved land in what is now the northwest corner of the Rincon Mountain District. The parcel was bounded on three sides by Saguaro National Monument (made a National Park in 1994), the fourth side bordering private holdings to the west (the western boundary being today's Kennedy Trail). The land was purchased in July of 1945 from two sisters who were the original homesteaders. The Garwoods purchased the land for a residence.

Initially, access to the property was difficult so Nelson constructed an access road to Speedway to the north.<sup>1</sup> With mostly hand tools and dynamite he constructed a passable road, suitable for the trucks that would be



Garwood Ranch.

required to haul building materials to the property. Dynamite drill holes are still visible along the very narrow portion of the road near the remnants of the residence.

Nelson began construction of the first house, a small, one-room affair with a half-bath in 1948. Shortly after completing the house the Garwoods moved to Ohio to develop a family farm, then returned to Tucson in 1950. At that time they began construction of the main and larger house (see photograph above). This larger house was above and behind the smaller original structure. A one-cylinder diesel generator provided electricity, heat was provided by a fireplace (some smaller rooms were heated with electric space heaters), and water was provided by the dam. There was no telephone or mail service.

Work was begun on the dam in 1948, the same year as the original house. The Garwoods had noticed that water was always present in Wildhorse Canyon behind the house (although it did not run year-round), so Nelson decided to dam the drainage to provide domestic water. The dam was built in several stages. At first the dam was little more than concrete and stone masonry. That was followed with steel and masonry walls filled with poured concrete, to be followed with more poured concrete using plywood forms and metal (the texture of the plywood forms can be seen today) (see photograph at left). Two 20,000-gallon stone masonry and concrete holding tanks were constructed for storage, one a short distance below the dam the other further north near the house. Both were gravity fed and always provided an adequate water supply. An 8-inch pipe with filters at the ends was placed in the

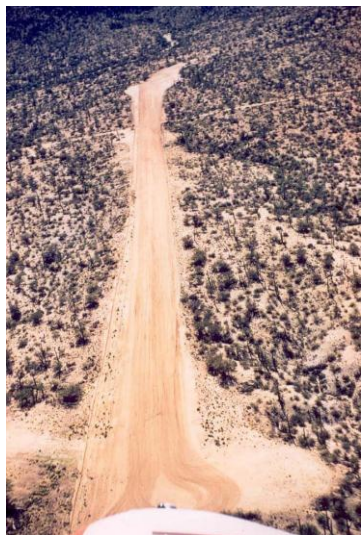


Garwood dam

sandy area behind the dam, providing filtered water to the tanks. When completed the dam held considerable water in the reservoir although eventually sediment would completely fill the reservoir to the top of the dam.

Garwood dam is only about two miles east of the Broadway and Speedway trailheads, along Carillo Trail and is, therefore, frequented by hikers and horse riders.

Nelson worked at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in the early 1940s (he serviced variable pitch propellers) and at that time decided to learn to fly. He obtained his pilot's license and bought a small plane (Aercoupe). He personally surveyed a landing strip, approximately 1,300 feet long and oriented east-west, near his north property boundary.<sup>2</sup> He hired some folks with heavy equipment to do the initial surface grading after which he maintained the strip himself (see photograph below). The landing



The Garwood airstrip; looking east.

strip was originally designed with a cross runway on the west end but the cross strip was never completed.<sup>3</sup> Nelson built a simple covered hangar at the east end of the strip and continued to fly until he was 82.

Shortly after the Garwood's purchased the 450 acres they were approached by SNP which offered to buy a portion of the land. Garwood agreed to sell approximately 75 acres on

the south end of their holding, starting just south of the dam. In 1955 Garwood sold another 100 acres to the west including the aircraft landing strip built by Nelson (the sales agreement allowed Nelson the use of the strip for life). Sometime later another 10 or 20 acres was sold and eventually, in March of 1959, Garwood sold what remained of the property (which by this time included buildings and a dam).

The new owner rarely occupied the property allowing instead a caretaker to maintain the structures. Eventually the property and structures were abandoned, succumbing to vandalism in the mid-1960s. Fire, no doubt set by vandals, finally destroyed the structures in the early 1970s. It is at this time that the Park Service acquired the property by Eminent Domain after properly compensating the owners.

\*Most all of the Garwood history has been extracted from an interview conducted by Madelon Rubens on 1 August 1997 with Frank Over, son of Josephine and step-son of Nelson.

This resource Brief has been adapted from Garwood Dam, in *A History of the Structures and Artifacts of Saguaro National Park* by Bruce "Chuck" Perger. n.d. MS on file at Saguaro National Park.

<sup>1</sup> Today the Garwood Trail follows, in part, what was the access road.

<sup>2</sup> The landing strip was located between today's Kennedy and Wildhorse Trails.

<sup>3</sup> Winds permitting, takeoff was to the west and landing (slightly uphill) was to the east. Care was required due to the possibility of a missed approach and the rapidly rising terrain off the east end of the strip.

### Visiting Garwood Dam and Vicinity

Remember, for both Districts there is no off trail hiking below 4500 feet! Visiting Garwood Dam can be dangerous. One should never attempt to climb the bedrock and never climb on the dam. Standing on top of the dam is unwise as the downslope face of the dam is a sheer drop. Much of this portion of the Carillo Trail ascends the northeast slope of a steep drainage. Loose rocks and steep slopes are hazardous; the visitor should remain on trail at all times.

The Garwood Dam and associated features are an important part of our local history and as such are significant cultural resources. Please be respectful and act accordingly.

---

For more information contact:

Ronald Beckwith  
Archeologist  
Saguaro National Park  
3693 S. Old Spanish Trail  
Tucson, AZ 85730

ph: (520) 733-5160  
email: ronald\_beckwith@nps.gov