

# Apache Trail – Arizona's Desert Gem

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Contributor

Tourists have been traveling along the Apache Trail since the road was opened 110 years ago, and they continue to enjoy one of the most beautiful desert highways in America. The Apache Trail today provides 41.5 miles of pure adventure, scenic vistas, history and lore. Winding through the Superstition Mountains, this classic road provides some of the most beautiful, scenic views in central Arizona.

It winds up and down steep desert mountains, lake shores, eroded canyons, and old mining towns. In addition to simply enjoying the beautiful scenery, many travelers choose to stop and explore the various historic treasures along the way. You can visit Goldfield Ghost Town, go hiking in The Lost Dutchman State Park, fishing at Canyon Lake, get lunch and shop at the old west ghost town of Tortilla Flat, travel up or down Fish Creek Hill, visit the scenic overlooks, visit Roosevelt Dam and visit other interesting sights along the road.

The Apache Trail, originally known as the Mesa-Roosevelt Road and today branded State Route 88, was constructed as a supply route by the Salt River Valley Water Users organization, the precursor to Salt River Project, to facilitate construction of Roosevelt Dam. Construction of the approximately 60 mile long road began in 1903 and was opened for use

on April 24, 1905. Construction of Roosevelt Dam began in 1906 and was completed and dedicated by former president Theodore Roosevelt. Sometime after 1915 the road became known as the Apache Trail.

Historians generally agree the origin of the name "Apache Trail" was coined by an enterprising young man named E.E. Watson, who worked as a railroad agent for the Southern Pacific. Watson was trying to promote the Southern Pacific's "Sunset Limited" as it made its way through Arizona. The Southern Pacific offered a side trip for its transcontinental passengers over the Apache Trail, originating in Globe (westbound passengers) or Phoenix (eastbound passengers). Southern Pacific had the franchise on the Apache Trail as a special side trip for their passengers at the advertised \$10; the westbound trip took 8 hours and 40 minutes, while the eastbound trip took 8 hours and 15 minutes, with time allowed for a lunch stop at the Apache Lodge near Fish Creek Hill. These motor excursions along the Apache Trail were very successful until 1927, when a portion of the road was flooded with the waters of Apache Lake. Although extremely upset by the partial flooding of the road, the Southern Pacific continued to provide the tours with barges to transport tourists around the closed section of the road. Regular vehicular travel to the Phoenix metropolitan area was not affected by the



*The Burnt Corral Campground, just off of the Apache Trail, offers stunning views and waterfront access. (Photo by Kenneth Chan Photography)*

closure, since the new highway (US 60) was completed in 1922. The Southern Pacific Railroad stopped advertising the Apache Trail as a side attraction in the late 1930s, and by early 1942 the Southern Pacific Railroad suspended all civilian travel and utilized the railroad for the war effort. This year, 2015, represents the 110th year of service for this unique motoring experience and the 100th anniversary of the road's famous name. The Apache Trail was dedicated as Arizona's first historic high-

way on Feb. 25, 1987, at Lost Dutchman State Park along the Apache Trail.

Apache Trail is a beautiful way to experience the majestic Arizona desert, and with so many places to stop along the way, there's something to do for everyone!

To learn more about the interesting lore and history of the Apache Trail, including several historic photographs, a book on the subject is available in several local businesses or can be ordered from <http://powers-books.com/order-books>.



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