

# **Land of Pioneers, Tales of the Past**

**Photo credits of cabin rescue operations courtesy of Navopache Electric**

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They came for the adventure; they came to raise sheep or cattle and grow dryland wheat. They came to experience life in the White Mountains and they came to start anew. They hunted for deer, turkey and elk and dealt with predators including black and grizzly bears, coyotes, lions and wolves. There were many reasons that pioneers came to the Vernon area in the late 1800's and many reasons that they either stayed to build larger communities or left to make their ways elsewhere.

The story of the three Arab sisters is one story that has been retold over the decades and one that can be experienced while riding or hiking the Land of Pioneers Trail. This interpretation is gleaned from reading various versions of the tale and, of course, nobody knows what actually happened in the end except for the characters, now long gone. Three intrepid women made the decision to homestead an area southwest of present-day Vernon, AZ. That these three women were actually Arabs, really sisters or just friends or business partners is unclear but regardless, it took courage and dedication to homestead in the White Mountains in the 1890's, especially three women alone. The women built a log cabin nestled between a hillside and a then semi-perennial creek. They built rock surrounds for their animals and rock storage buildings. They planted an apple orchard and also created a lilac bordered front yard with a sitting bench embedded into the oak trees near the house. They had neighbors within easy walking distance to the north, east and west and there was a delivery wagon stop nearby. They raised sheep and created a sheep dipping area by damming off part of the creek near their cabin. Rumors began to spread that they were panning gold in the dammed off area instead of just using it to dip their sheep. One terrible night, some criminals came to collect this rumored treasure which, of course, did not exist. The three women were murdered and their cabin ransacked and destroyed in the search for the treasure. Today, all that remains are the foundations of the cabin and outbuildings, a long stone wall, some apple trees, and -- most poignant of all -- the lilacs they planted to beautify their new home. The Land of Pioneers Trail winds through some of the most picturesque forest in the Vernon area and takes you on a historical voyage through the early 1900's. You will only directly pass by the three sisters' cabin but, with a little exploration, you will be able to find remains of numerous other cabins, walls, corrals, pioneer farm machinery, "trash" -- including old buckets and cans -- as well as still thriving apple trees. There is also ample evidence of the pre-settlement native populations including pottery shards and rock flakes. Please leave any historic findings alone for future generations to appreciate.

The Vernon cabin -- just North of the Land of Pioneers System -- is the last whole-standing pioneer cabin in the Vernon area. It is easily found by traveling north on the two-track road passing in front of the three sisters' cabin. As you move from one cabin to the other, imagine the way it probably was back then. Neighbors visiting each other across a wide meadow filled either with wild grasses or wheat fields. Imagine one of the three sisters bringing a bouquet of wildflowers and lilacs or a basket of apples to an ailing neighbor or a group of pioneers working together to harvest the wheat. This spring, one of the ancient pines backing the cabin began to topple, threatening the cabin with destruction. After being contacted by local citizens concerned for the cabin's safety, the United States Forest Service requested and received assistance from a

Navopache Electric Cooperative crew which went out to the cabin and saved it from the falling tree with the expert use of a boom truck. We all appreciate the above and beyond effort put into this rescue operation. Thank you, Navopache Electric Cooperative!

Take the time to make a trip back into history through the Land of Pioneers. Bring a lunch and explore the multiple cabins. This is a great trail for dogs as there are several functioning cattle tanks and springs along the way. Learn more about Vernon and White Mountain history by visiting either the Springerville or Show Low Historical Societies. Learn more about local White Mountain trails by visiting [www.trackswitemountains.org](http://www.trackswitemountains.org)