

Testimony – Terence O. Wheeler – re: Oak Flat 3/19/2013

My name is Terence O. Wheeler. I was born in Tucson, Arizona in 1935. I am a veteran of the Navy having received an Honorable Discharge from USNR for eight years service, of both active and reserve time, in January 1961.

Upon completion of my degree from the University of Arizona, in 1958 with majors in Animal Science and Range Management, I went to work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a Range Conservationist on the San Carlos Apache Reservation. During the next two years I worked very closely with many of the Apache men living and working out of cow camps on roundup with the five Livestock Association Ranches and the two Tribal Ranches.

My closest friend at the time, and still a close friend at the time of his death many years later, was Edmond Wesley, the son of Tribal Chairman Clarence Wesley. Later on he was Tribal Vice-Chairman on his own. Edmond continuously taught me about his people, the language, social customs, taboos, spiritual things regarding medicine men, and all of the gossip. I also worked and associated with many other Apache people including Spike and Sadie Kniffin, my second son's Godparents, and during these two years I never heard a thing regarding Oak Flat.

In July of 1960 I was transferred to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation at Ft. Yates North Dakota.

I transferred back to San Carlos in December of 1961 as a Range Conservationist on the Range/Soil Survey crew. I was always in contact with Apaches but still never heard anything about Oak Flats in regard to a place where Apaches went to pray, camp or pick acorns.

In September of 1963 I was selected for the job as Supervisory Range Conservationist for the Navajo Reservation, Chinle Agency where I remained until September of 1968 when I accepted a job as an Agricultural Agent with the University of Arizona, College of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, with Gila County. Once again I was stationed and living back at San Carlos working primarily with the San Carlos Apache People .

In my new role, although still primarily working with the tribal ranches, farms, herd management and marketing, I was also working with 4-H and youth programs and programs that involved family and community development as well as the agriculture programs. This gave me a much broader exposure to the community and an expanded chance to work with the women and youth of the community. As a point of interest I coached Little League baseball for a couple of years and Winsler Nosie current Tribal Councilman and former Chairman was one of my players. I left San Carlos in November of 1979 for a job with the U of A Extension Service in Coconino County (Flagstaff).

I had a close and personal and working relationship with George Stevens, Manager of the San Carlos Registered Herd at Arsenic Tubs, and the Stevens family, until his death. We traveled extensively during our time working together. He told me a story about his family moving to Superior, by mule pack train in 1911, for his father to work in the mine. The story needs to be told, but for now we will say it did not work out and they left the next day. He made no mention what-so-ever regarding the Oak Flat area, although we stopped there occasionally.

During my 11 year period with Extension at San Carlos I never heard anything mentioned regarding anything sacred about Oak Flat or Oak Flat Camp Ground or anything about the Superior Area for that matter.

I quit the UofA Ext. Service September of 1980. For a year and a half I leased and managed a gas station in Superior. Not once during this time did I hear of or see any Apaches in Superior picking acorns or camping in the area as I used to drive by that area two or more times a day. I did know several San Carlos Apache men that worked underground at Superior, some for years.

After a 3 year stint in Lesotho, Southern Africa as Range Livestock Specialist for the Ministry of Agriculture, Kingdom of Lesotho I returned to Globe and started my own company Arizona Ranch Management in December 1984. I had several clients early on, One of these was Salt River Project. One of my early job tasks was documenting the expansion and growth of the San Carlos Tribal livestock business from its inception when Apaches were forced onto the Reservation in 1871, and putting it into book form.

Even though I have much knowledge of the San Carlos Livestock Industry and its evolution, I researched all the information I could find from the earliest anthropologists (there are few), from military journals and records and from early BIA (Indian Service) files, which are hard to find now. In all of my studies and searches I found no connection between the Western Apache and the Oak Flat area. I did find a reference to the use of "Top of the World" as a place of refreshment during the hot summers by some of the Pima Indians but not as a spiritual place. There were also several references to the annual movement (migration) of various family groups. This included a reference of the Cibique Apaches' traveling from the Cibique area in the winter to the area now Miami, AZ in the summer, picking acorns before they started back. As a note the band planted corn, squash and other crops on the way down leaving caretakers to keep them watered out of the creeks and springs. On the way back they would harvest the crops and take them back to Cibique for the winter.

Nowhere in my research for this manuscript (book) or from my work with the San Carlos Apaches previous to the time of this book in 1988, nor during the many years following the book time 'till now have I heard a factual account that any area around Superior including Oak Flat was considered to be sacred or even used by the San Carlos Apache People.

Signed by Terence O. Wheeler, Mayor of Globe
March 19, 2013, Globe, Arizona

