



# Foundation Document Overview

## Fort Bowie National Historic Site

Arizona



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*FORT BOWIE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE preserves and interprets the history, landscape, and remaining structures of Fort Bowie, a US Army outpost which guarded the strategic Apache Pass and was a critical base of operations for the campaign against the Chiricahua Apache from 1862 to 1886.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Fort Bowie National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- For over 25 years Fort Bowie was central to late 19th-century US military campaign against the Chiricahua Apaches. The final surrender by Geronimo in 1886 to troops stationed at Fort Bowie brought an end to two centuries of Apache warfare with the Spanish, Mexicans, and Americans in southeast Arizona.
- Designated a national historic landmark in 1960, Fort Bowie National Historic Site preserves the remnants of the fort structures that are key to understanding the history of Apache Pass and the US military presence there, which ultimately opened the region to unrestricted settlement.
- Apache Pass offers the most direct, accessible route between the Chiricahua and Dos Cabezas ranges, with a reliable water supply available from Apache Spring. The pass has long served as an important transportation corridor as well as a strategic location for control of movement throughout the region.
- Fort Bowie National Historic Site preserves the remnants of a Butterfield Stage Station and some of the best remaining traces of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, which provided the first reliable mail service to California from 1858 until 1861.
- Generations after they were displaced from the surrounding area, Fort Bowie National Historic Site continues to be culturally significant to the Chiricahua Apaches.
- As part of the Madrean Sky Island Complex, Fort Bowie National Historic Site protects exceptional biodiversity within a relatively small area due to its location atop a high mountain pass and a rare intersection of four major biomes (Sierra Madre, Rocky Mountains, Chihuahuan Desert, and Sonoran Desert).



## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Historic Structures and Landscapes of Fort Bowie.** Fort Bowie National Historic Site protects the ruins of the first and second fort buildings, Indian Agency building, and the post cemetery. Surrounding landscape features and the associated viewscape provide important context to the cultural and historic narratives of the frontier military.
- **Historic Landscape of the Apache Wars.** The park protects the sites of historic events associated with the conflict between the US Army and the Apaches during mid-19th century Apache Wars. These fights provided incentive for the US Army to establish the first Fort Bowie in 1862 to guard and control this important travel corridor and its valuable water source.
- **Butterfield Overland Mail Route (Stage Station, Trail, and Stagecoach).** Fort Bowie National Historic Site protects the foundation of a stage station and other remnants of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, a postal route completed in 1858 to connect the eastern United States with California.
- **Apache Spring.** Apache Spring provided fresh water to prehistoric and native people as well as more recent European American and Mexican settlers. Apache Spring continues to be a source of cultural significance to Chiricahua Apache as well as a driver of the area's unique biodiversity.
- **Native Flora and Fauna of the Madrean Sky Island Ecosystem.** Fort Bowie supports very high floristic biodiversity for its size. More than 500 plant species have been documented within Fort Bowie's 999 acres—a truly remarkable level of species richness.
- **Archeological and Ethnographic Resources Associated with the Chiricahua Apache.** Cultural sites within the park include the fort, the post cemetery, Skeleton Canyon, Apache Spring, Indian Agency building ruins, mountain camping and meeting locations, and archeological sites.
- **Museum Collections.** The museum and archival collections preserve items that are central to understanding and interpreting the events of the site, including military uniforms and weapons, items of daily life for soldiers and civilians, and Apache artifacts.

## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Water Source.** Apache Spring represents the life-giving qualities of water in the harsh, arid deserts of the American West. Drawing prehistoric indigenous people and later the Chiricahua Apache people, the US Army, European Americans, Mexican settlers, and those traveling on trade routes. The spring endured as a place where cultures met and conflict frequently arose, altering lives and destinies.
- **Biodiversity.** The park's location within the Madrean Sky Island Complex, combined with a year-round water source, supports a diversity of living things including multiple human cultures that have drawn on this biodiversity to survive in a harsh climate.
- **Military History.** Fort Bowie commemorates a frontier outpost that supported diplomatic efforts of the federal government, the headquarters for US Army operations during the military campaign against the Chiricahua Apaches, and the life experiences of enlisted men who served at this isolated frontier post.
- **Apache History.** The lifeways of the Chiricahua Apaches allowed them to thrive for centuries in this severe environment, to resist subjugation, and to adapt to new circumstances after their imprisonment, dispersal, and relocation.
- **Tension and Conflict.** The protracted conflict that pervaded the US government's intent to gain control of the Chiricahua Apaches' homeland escalated at Apache Pass, continued with the capitulation of the Chiricahua Apaches in nearby Skeleton Canyon, and is echoed today in the form of multiple perspectives that paint a complex picture of these events.

# Description

Fort Bowie National Historic Site was established in 1964 to preserve the structures and associated natural and historic features of Fort Bowie, a military outpost that played a key role in the US Army campaign against the Chiricahua Apache, which lasted for more than three decades. Contained within the 999 acres of the park are the ruins of two forts, including the first, smaller fort constructed in 1862, and a much larger, permanent installation built nearby in 1868; a cemetery containing native and nonnative burials; the sites of several key historical events, including the Bascom Affair, Battle of Apache Pass, and the Wagon Train Massacre; and the remains of an Indian Agency building. Also contained within the park boundary is a well-preserved section of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route, along with remnants of the 1858 stage station.

For years, NPS management has emphasized a light touch, in which structures are preserved in a ruined state and the surroundings revert to natural conditions. Fort Bowie's remote and minimally developed setting contributes to a unique experience for visitors. Most visitors access the fort and visitor center by way of a 1.5-mile foot trail that generally follows an old wagon road built by soldiers who garrisoned the fort.

Fort Bowie National Historic Site is managed as part of the NPS Southeast Arizona Group (SEAZ), which also includes Chiricahua National Monument and Coronado National Memorial.

