

# FIRST FIFTY YEARS of STATEHOOD in the WESTERN DESERT of ARIZONA

After 100 years of Arizona state history the western desert continues to be an area where most people are still just passing through.

In early historic time, ancient trails became routes as hunters then miners explored southern Arizona. Claims that were developed into mines created the need for two-track roads, farms, and ranches. Successful mines created instant towns. Near Wickenburg, the Vulture gold mine, helped form a farming community that became Phoenix and pioneers gave birth to Arizonans.

The evidence of mining exploration still dots the terrain. But most mines like 'Palo Verde Copper' near Saddle Mountain or the 'Armargosa' along Eagle Eye Road only lasted a few years.

By Statehood in 1912 the Phoenix to Salome Road crossed the western desert and you could reach Ehrenberg and cross the Colorado River on a cable ferry. In the *Arizona Road Map & Tour Book* (1913) Winters Well is illustrated as a source for 'water' near Salome Road and the map notes the "Cliffs" of present day Saddle Mountain.

Notable for the 1920's is the Smithsonian solar observatory. By foot and by burros all the parts for the now historic Harquahala Peak Observatory were carried from a base camp up to the 5,681 foot mountain top - a 3,800 foot ascent. The remote, five-year, facility began a field of solar and weather research that continues today.

The 1920's included the development of the Tonopah Belmont Mine just west of the Hassayampa River. The silver mine dropped a shaft over 600 feet inside the mountain to reach multiple levels, employed and housed over 50, and was operated by the Tonopah Belmont Development Mining Company of Tonopah, Nevada.

On Winters Well ranch the Wintersburg Post Office was founded in 1930 adjacent to the 'Tonopah' railway base for the mine's equipment. In 1934, competition for the Tonopah Belmont miners prompted a general store six miles west of Wintersburg. There, the post office applicant was granted 'Tonopah' as the location name (411th Ave & Indian School) that replaced the area's name of Lone Peak.

During the 1930's, road improvements included bridges and pavement. The newly constructed US 80 Highway connected 2,400 miles, ocean to ocean, from Savanna Georgia to San Diego via Phoenix, Hassayampa, and Gila Bend.

While homesteading had been a key part of settling Arizona since the 1870's, it was between the 1912 and 1930 that the Dry Farming Homestead Act resulted in a significant population increase in the western desert.

Post World War II, Arizonans great climate was recognized by many. By the 1950's innovations in air conditioning and ranch style homes increased the state's attractiveness. Plus, rural electricity and improved water pumps expanded farming by allowed deeper pumping in the Tonopah and Harquahala groundwater basins. During the 1950's the modern era arrived in western desert of The Great State of Arizona!

Early historic period of Western Desert comprised from: *Road Map & Tour Book* by Arizona Good Road Association, *X Mark the Place* by Byrd Howell Grange, *The Old US 80* by Eric J. Finley, *Homesteading in Arizona 1870-1942* by Pat H. Stein, and *Buckeye Valley News 4-11-85* by Don Besack.