Fairbank Ghost Town Area
Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate
Fairbank Ghost Town
Little Boquillas Ranch
All of the Travel Adventure Plus trips start at the intersection of Arizona Highway 90 and 92, Sierra Vista. It is recommend you have a full fuel tank as it will not be readily available on some of the segments. Bring along water, and consider packing some snacks and a lunch, or plan to stop along the way for food. There are so many places you can stop and take a driving break and enjoy the scenery. I always like to start a day trip with a nice breakfast. There are several places to get a full breakfast or something light in Sierra Vista. (See the Dining & Lodging Guide for local restaurants. Pick up a copy at the Sierra Vista Visitor Center or find one online at VisitSierraVista.com.)
Overview

We start this journey in Sierra Vista and travel north to Interstate 10; east to Arizona Hwy 191; east AZ Hwy 82 to Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate Trail Head, then to Fairbank Ghost Town, to Tombstone, and back Sierra Vista. This journey is approximately 53 miles, all on paved roads. The driving portion is approximately one hour and 15 minutes. You can return to Sierra Vista using the route you took to Fairbank; however, returning via Tombstone is almost the same mileage and provides you other opportunities to explore. Each stop and your length of stay adds up quickly as there is a lot to see. Depart after sunrise so you can see all of the great scenery along the way.

See below for the Google Maps and imagery.
Organization

Each segment highlights driving directions (with mileage to next turn or primary designation); maps and Google Earth Imagery; sights along the way; historical references and photographs; current photographs; where you can get gas and food; and if a future Travel Adventure Plus is planned.

Driving in Arizona

Recommend picking up and reviewing the Driving in Arizona tips at the Visitor Center or at VisitSierraVista.com, before you depart.

The Trip Begins

From the start point, drive on AZ Hwy 90 Bypass and travel toward Huachuca City. The Van Deman Gate, the main entrance to Fort Huachuca, is at the intersection of Hwy 90 Bypass and Hwy 90 North. Turn right for Huachuca City.

Huachuca City

Huachuca City is a town in Cochise County, Arizona. The town started out as a stop along the Southern Pacific Railroad. The rail stretched between Tombstone and Patagonia, Arizona and is no longer in operation today. With the re-opening of Fort Huachuca in 1954, the area began to grow, and while it went through many name
changes (Campstone Station, Sunset City, and Huachuca Vista), before finally settling with the name Huachuca City. It incorporated in 1958.

Today, Huachuca City (population 1,853) is located at the north exit of Fort Huachuca, the major employer for the region. With retirees moving in and tourism a major business because of the proximity to Tombstone and Kartchner Caverns State Park, Huachuca City is a growing area.

Watch your driving speed as they take the speed limits seriously.

You can get gas, snacks, and breakfast in Huachuca City.

**Whetstone**\(^2\)

Continuing on Hwy 90 North you will come to the intersection of SR 82 and Hwy 92, and a small community called Whetstone. Whetstone is a census-designated place in Cochise County, with a population of 2,617 (2010 Census). Whetstone was often referred to as the “Y” because the intersection of SR 82 and Hwy 90 has an eastbound lane on Hwy 90 and a southbound lane on SR 82 that created a Y at the intersection. A left turn will take you to Elgin, Sonoita, Patagonia, and Nogales (look for a *Travel Adventure Plus* for these communities). A right turn on SR 82 takes you to the Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate Trailhead and the ghost town of Fairbank, then on to Tombstone (look for a *Travel Adventure Plus* for these destinations). You can get gas and snacks at the station on the right.

*Turn right onto SR 82 East and drive 8.4 miles. Turn left onto N. Balance Ranch Road (Note: Google Maps list Kellar Road; the street sign reads N. Balance Ranch Road). Destination will be on the right (1.8 miles) Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate Trailhead.*

**Spanish Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate:**\(^3\) The Presidio Santa Cruz de Terrenate is a former Spanish military presidio, or fortress, located roughly west of the town of Tombstone. The Presidio was established on a bluff overlooking the San Pedro River by an Irish-born Spanish Army Colonel, Hugo Oconór (Hugh O’Conor), in 1775. This is one of the best-preserved sites from among the chain of similar presidios that extended from Los Adaes, Louisiana, in the east to Alta, California in the west.

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Hugh O’Conor (Gaelic-Irish aristocratic O’Conor Don Family) by birth, or Hugo Oconór in Spanish, was born in 1732 in Dublin, Ireland. He was a descendant of Toirdhealbhach Mór Ua Conchobhair, King of Connacht and High King of Ireland. Because of the penal laws that restricted the political, religious, and commercial rights of Irish Catholics, O’Conor left his homeland and moved to Spain, where his cousins Alexander (Alejandro) and Dominic O’Reilly were serving as officers in the Spanish Royal Army.

In his youth he joined the regiment of Volunteers of Aragon, eventually acquiring the title of major. During his years in the military, he was sent to Cuba and Mexico City. There he distinguished himself by his ability as a military strategist and was appointed captain for the Northern Territory to exercise dominion in the region.

He was appointed governor of Texas by the Spanish viceroy of New Spain in 1767. O’Conor rode well over 10,000 miles on horseback in the course of conducting his duties.

In 1771, he became commander of the Chihuahua frontier and on January 20, 1773 he was appointed commandant inspector of presidios under the office of Coronel. To strengthen the protection of Nueva Vizcaya, Coahuila, Sonora, Mexico, he decided to expel the Apaches in the region, making war against them in 1775 and 1776. Many Apaches died in the war. The Apaches who survived fled to

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4 https://www.reddit.com/r/ireland/comments/d5ukgn/this_is_hugh_hugo_oconnor_an_irishman_who_founded/
more western areas. O’Conor was called “The Red Captain” by the Apache, both for the color of his hair and his formidable military leadership.

O’Conor was the founding father of the city of Tucson, Arizona, having authorized the construction of a military fort there in 1775.

Due to failing health, O’Conor requested to be transferred to the Yucatan Peninsula in 1777, whereupon he was promoted to brigadier general and appointed Governor of Yucatan Peninsula.

He died on March 8, 1779 at Quinta de Miraflores, in Merida, Yucatan, New Spain.

A Bit of History

Who was there before the Presidio? In 1951, Charles DiPeso excavated the site and reported that he believed that the evidence found on site indicated that O’Conor had located the presidio over the abandoned Sobaipuri Indian village of Quiburi. Other historians and archaeologists did not support this assessment.

In 2007 through 2010, archaeologist Deni Seymour excavated portions of the site not initially investigated by DiPeso. She also reexamined some of the features and artifacts excavated by DiPeso and obtained chronometric dates on features to settle some of the feature-dating issues. Evidence showed that there was a Sobaipuri site present that predated the presidio but historical documents indicate it was not Quiburi. Additionally, Hohokam and Archaic occupations were also in evidence preceding the occupation of the presidio. Evidence of the prehistoric Hohokam occupation consists of sherds scattered on the surface and eroding out of the adobe walls of the later Spanish presidio. Archaic points and tools are also present on the surface, in adobe walls and in house fills, having eroded from the citadel walls. (Note: Someone was there, scholars just can’t agree on who). Please note: It is illegal to remove artifacts from public lands.

6 Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidio_Santa_Cruz_de_Terrenate
7 The Sobaipuri (soh-BY-per-ee or soh-by-poorh-ee) Indians were an Upper Piman group who occupied southern Arizona and northern Sonora (the Pimería Alta) in the 1400-1800s. They were a subgroup of the O’odham or Pima, surviving members of which include the Tohono O’odham, the Akimel O’odham, and the Wack O’odham; http://www.seymourharlan.com/My_Homepage_Files/Page1.html
8 When referencing Quiburi — or “Many Houses” in the O’odham language of the Sobaipuri — it is important to consider that the Kino period Quiburi and the Quiburi of the late eighteenth century were clearly in two different locations. This is indicated by the documentary record, which has now been affirmed by the archaeological record; http://www.seymourharlan.com/My_Homepage_Files/Page23.html
The Garrison

Terrenate was in three different locations throughout its life. Beginning in 1742 it was established near a rancho referred to as Terrenate in northern Sonora, Mexico. The Regulation of 1772 called for a realignment of the presidios. The Terrenate garrison was moved east to Las Nutrias in 1775.9

The garrison at Las Nutrias was little more than a camp. In 1775, during an inspection by Hugo O’Conor, he found the camp unacceptable. The garrison was moved was to near present-day Fairbank, Arizona, on the San Pedro River. The site was chosen on August 22, 1775 by Hugo O’Conor. He chose a spot on a bluff overlooking the San Pedro River, which seemed to provide a natural fortification on several sides. The area had pasturage, wood, and water.

In the early 1776, the garrison marched to its new location. The garrison commander was Captain Francisco Tovar with a company of 56 men, 352 horses, and 51 mules. The soldiers were “leather-jacket cavalry,” a type of heavy cavalry equipped with six horses apiece, a pair of pistols, musket, sword, and lance. Friendly Native Americans from San Xavier del Bac and San Agustin de Tucson missions helped with the construction of the buildings and the walls.

The Apaches began to harass the presidio, attacking anyone who ventured out for water or to try to plant crops in the nearby fields. The Apaches were attracted by the large number of horses kept at the presidio and ran off the herds whenever they were unguarded. As the number of horses became fewer, the soldiers were less and less able to pursue the raiders to try to reclaim them.

On July 7, 1776 Captain Francisco Tovar and 29 of his men were killed in the Battle of Las Mesitas with the Apache. Captain Francisco Ignacio de Trespalacios replaced the fallen commander and brought reinforcements, bringing the garrison up to 83 men. In mid-November, Trespalacios led 30 of them almost 100 miles south to the aid of the mission of Magdalena on the Rio San Ignacio. When they arrived, they found that 40 raiders had looted the settlement, murdered the inhabitants, and burned the church.

9 http://www.seymourharlan.com/My_Homepage_Files/Page72.html
In February 1778, the Apaches made a successful raid on the fort’s horse herd. Between June and September 1778, Captain Francisco Ignacio de Trespalacios and 19 other soldiers and settlers died in another battle with the Apache. Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Fages brought additional reinforcements to the presidio.

In 1779, when Inspector Roque de Medina came to Santa Cruz de Terrenate, he found 46 soldiers, 98 horses and 23 mules. Only 26 of the leather-jacket cavalry survived, and only 16 of the reinforcements were still alive. Four Native American scouts remained and 20 others had deserted. On inspection, 19 of the muskets in the armory were useless and 38 of the lances were of such inferior workmanship they were unserviceable. Eight of the men did not even have uniforms.

After examining the situation at Santa Cruz de Terrenate, Medina strongly recommended that the garrison be moved back to its former position, citing poor communications, the isolation of the presidio and the extreme difficulties of getting supplies to the present location.

The San Bernardino fort, Terrenate’s nearest neighbor, had already been abandoned during the previous year because of similar problems: strong opposition by the Apaches, difficulties with communications, and the impossibility of secure supply lines. Worsening attacks prevented the settlers from either receiving outside help or harvesting their own crops; they were literally starving to death. In 1780, the decision was made to move the troop back to Las Nutrias, near the former site of the Terrenate garrison. Teodoro de la Croix summarized the reason:

“The terror instilled in the troops and settlers of the presidio of Santa Cruz that had seen two captains and more than eighty men perish at the hands of the enemies in the open rolling ground at a short distance from the post, and the incessant attacks which they suffered from the numerous bands of Apache, who do not permit the cultivation of the crops, who surprise the mule trains carrying effects and supplies, who rob the horse herds and put the troops in the situation of not being able to attend their own defense, making them useless for the defense of the province.”

Today, there are only faint remains of the fort. Traces of numerous buildings and adobe walls stand, including the gate and fortified wall, the chapel, the soldiers’ barracks, and the commandant’s
quarters. The traditional Spanish fort warfare was ineffective against the lightning raids and guerrilla tactics of the Apache. The presidio was abandoned in 1780.

In 1878, the presidio was briefly occupied by the United States Army but abandoned later that same year.

The main entrance of the presidio was guarded by a gatehouse. Most agree the bottom section served as guardhouse, soldiers’ quarters, and weapon storage. The walls of the Terrenate were never completed.

Social life in a presidio community revolved around the Church. Two Franciscan priests were assigned to Terrenate. The first was killed by Native Americans before reaching the post. The next priest assigned requested retirement soon after arriving. His request was granted in 1780.
Jacals were the quarters for the settlers living inside the fort. The jacals were normally 12 feet square.

The bastion walls were never completed. The basic configuration was a bastion 12 feet high with four small bronze cannons with a powder magazine in the center.
The commandant’s quarters were luxurious compared to the soldiers’ quarters. During the five years of Spanish occupation four commandants served at the Terrenate. The first commandant, Captain Francisco Tovar, spent less than eight months at the post. He and 29 of his men died during a battle with the Apache.

Captain Don Francisco Ignacio de Trespalacios replaced Tovar for a little more than two years until his death during a fight with the Apache in September 1778.

Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Fages brought Catalanian volunteers to replace the fallen. In January 1780 he left to recruit more volunteers.

Don Jose Antonio de Vildosola was the final comandante at Terrenate. He served for less than three months before Don Teodoro de Croix, commander of the northern frontier of New Spain ordered a retreat from the presidio.

Don Geronimo de Rocha y Figueroa took charge of the evacuation. By March 1780 no one remained at the presidio. More than 80 people lost their lives at Terrenate.
During the hike back to the trailhead enjoy walking on the former railbed.

Old railbed used during the 1800s
From the presidio trailhead, turn left on N. Balance Ranch Road toward Hwy 82. Turn left on Hwy 82 and drive 1.5 miles. There is parking on both sides of road. Recommend turning left into the Fairbank parking lot. The parking on the right side of road has the trailhead for the little Boquillas Ranch, another hike. There are signs for the trails.

Your options are to take the trail to the Fairbank Cemetery and on to Grand Central Mill or go to the Fairbank Town site first. There is a loop trail that you can hike for all of the attractions. Note: You can hike to Contention (another ghost town) from the Fairbank trails. It will take much longer.

Fairbank is a ghost town located within the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. Fairbank was a frontier town located on the banks of the San Pedro River 10 miles west of Tombstone. Initially, the area was first part of an old Mexican land grant called the “San Juan de las Boquillas y Nogales.” It was first settled in the 1870s as a stagecoach stop on the way to Tombstone called “Junction
City.” Then, it was named “Kendall” before officially becoming a town with the name “Fairbank” in 1881 when the New Mexico and Arizona (NM&A) railroad established a train station, naming the town for a Chicago investor, Nathaniel Kellogg Fairbank.

Nathaniel Kellogg Fairbank

Kellogg was also one of the main organizers of the Central Mining Company in Tombstone. A “wye” for turning locomotives was installed in town, bringing at least three railroad lines to establish depots. A short NM&A line connected the Southern Pacific track in Benson southwest through Fairbank and on to Nogales, Arizona and Nogales and Guaymas, Mexico. The depots were important for shipping cattle as well as ore coming from Tombstone.

Freighters hauled ore from the Tombstone mines to mills at Contention City and Charleston. Fairbank was not connected to Tombstone by railway until 1903. Until then, travelers continued the last 10 miles to Tombstone by stagecoach on the Butterfield Overland Mail line, which opened in 1885.

The railway line to Tombstone started out as a two-mile graded right-of-way heading east out of the town of Fairbank. The grading was done by the NM&A from a connection with their Benson-Nogales mainline, constructed in 1882. However, the NM&A’s parent, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, decided not to pursue a line to Tombstone, leaving a trackless, graded rail bed.

In 1902, the El Paso and Southwestern Railway (EP&SW) constructed a line between Benson and Bisbee, which also traveled through Fairbank (paralleling the nearby NM&A line for some of its length).

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20 https://www.geni.com/people/Nathaniel-Fairbank/6000000017532405142
21 Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org; In railroad structures and rail terminology, a wye or triangular junction is a triangular joining arrangement of three rail lines with a railroad switch at each corner connecting to each incoming line. A turning wye is a specific case.
22 https://www.abandonedrails.com/tombstone-branch
The EP&SW constructed a branch line from Fairbank (utilizing the prior right-of-way graded by the NM&A from 1882) into Tombstone, completing it in 1903.

Let’s Start Hiking

Starting from the parking lot take the Loop Trail to the Fairbank Cemetery and Grand Central Mill and on to the town of Fairbank.

Start of the Loop Trail to Fairbank Cemetery, Grand Central Mill, and Fairbank

Fairbank Cemetery contains an estimated 60 gravesites, with causes of death ranging from illness to building fires to even murder. See the Fairbank Cemetery roster (http://www.apcrp.org/FAIRBANK/FAIRBANK_CEM_MAST.htm) for causes of death and demographics.

24 http://www.apcrp.org/FAIRBANK/Fairbank_Master_Doc.htm
Grand Central Mill\textsuperscript{25} was completed in December 1880 to process ore from the Grand Central Mine, Tombstone. The size of the building was 200 feet by 130 feet. Built on a hillside to utilize gravity to feed ore, the building was 90 feet from the upper level to the bottom level. The mill had 30 stamps and was the largest and most efficient mill to be built along the San Pedro River.

A stamp was a rod of steel about 14 feet long and about 3 inches in diameter with an iron shoe (8.5 inches in diameter by 7 inches tall and weighing 800 pounds) attached to the lower end. The total weight of each stamp was between 2,500 and 3,000 pounds. At the top of the stamp there was a collar that was engaged by a pawl connected to a drive shaft. The drive shaft was turned by a belt driven by a steam engine. This drive shaft lifted and dropped each stamp approximately 50 times per minute. This crushed the ore to a powder. To see this in person, visit the Tucson museum of the Arizona Historical Society, where stamp mill equipment is on display. Some mining equipment is also on view at the Bisbee Mining Museum.

The resulting powder was mixed with water and quicksilver (mercury) to form a paste. The silver and other metals in the powder would adhere to the mercury. After settling and straining, the

amalgam of mercury and metals was heated to boil off the water and mercury leaving silver and traces of other metals (gold, copper, zinc, and lead) to be transported more easily, usually 180-pound bars. The bars were taken to a smelter to separate the various metal elements.

Grand Central Mill was in operation from 1880 to 1889. All the San Pedro River mills were closed when water became available in Tombstone. The Grand Central Mill was demolished in 1889. Some of the equipment (five railcar loads) was sold to the Oso Negro Mine in Sonora, Mexico. In the summer of 1905, 20 of the remaining stamps were moved to the Girard Mill in Tombstone during a renovation to that mill. This made the Girard Mill a 40-stamp mill. Today all that remains of the Grand Central Mill are the massive foundations stacked up the hillside.

![Grand Central Mill](image)

One of the men responsible for the Grand Central Mill was Eliphalet Butler (E.B.) Gage. Gage was born October 2, 1839 in Pelham, New Hampshire. Gage was a businessman and mining executive. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1858. In 1877 he came to Arizona to pursue mining and a year later, reached the town of Tombstone where he took control of the Grand Central Mines and the Grand Central Mill. In 1901 he founded and became president of the Tombstone Consolidated Mines Company and began acquiring and reopening many of the other mines located around the town. In addition, he also served as Arizona Prison Commissioner and President of the Arizona Capitol Building Commission.

To Old West historians, E. B. Gage is probably best known as a partisan on the side of the Earp faction in Tombstone during the troubles between the Earps and the Clantons.

He settled in Tombstone where he pursued a career as a mining engineer and investor. He also became acquainted with the Earps after Wyatt Earp, a former Kansas lawman, arrived in Tombstone in late 1879.

Following the infamous shootout at the O.K. Corral, the Cowboys, a band of outlaws, retaliated against the Earps. On March 18, 1882 Morgan Earp was shot in the back and killed while playing billiards. This began the infamous Vendetta Ride, during which Wyatt and a group of adherents would hunt down and kill many of his brother’s suspected assailants.

E. B. Gage would, for all intents, bankroll Wyatt Earp’s ride of vengeance. On March 23, Wyatt dispatched Charlie Smith and Dan Tipton back to Tombstone to seek out Gage and secure a $1,000 cash loan, which would enable them to continue their pursuit of the Cowboys. Both Smith and Tipton ended up getting arrested and thrown in jail by Johnny Behan but made bond, and Smith was able to get the required cash from Gage. It is uncertain if Wyatt ever repaid the loan.

In 1901, newly re-elected President William McKinley was making a trip around the country and decided to tour the Congress Gold Mine, one of E. B. Gage’s many holdings in Arizona. During the visit, Gage served as the president’s personal tour guide. The president was quite impressed and the first lady was presented a small ribbon-bound gold bar by Gage and other company representatives.
Gage died March 12, 1913 in San Francisco, California and was buried in Colma, California. His old friend, Wyatt Earp, was also buried in Colma when he died in 1929.

*Continue on the loop trail until you see the sign below:*

*If you chose to hike to Contention City and Mill it is another 2 miles.*

The trail is at times difficult to follow. There are few ruins at the site.

*If you chose to hike to the Presidio, it is not far. However, it is on the other side of the San Pedro River and with very steep banks.*

*If you chose to hike via the River Loop Trail to Fairbank it is only 2.1 miles. The terrain and views are different than your hike to this point.*

28 Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contention_City,_Arizona. Contention City or Contention is ghost mining town in Cochise County. It was occupied from the early-1880s through the late-1880s in what was then known as the Arizona Territory. Only a few foundations now remain of this boomtown, which was settled and abandoned with the rise and fall of silver mining in and around the area of Tombstone.
The hike is easy. You will see a railroad bridge and you may start thinking that you are close to Fairbank and the bridge is across highway 82. It’s not. You have about 20 to 25 more minutes of hiking before you reach Fairbank.

Fairbank

There are several buildings at the town site. During its peak, Fairbank featured four stores, a butcher shop, the Montezuma House (a hotel) with a restaurant (established in 1889), two other restaurants, five saloons, a Wells Fargo office, the railroad depot, a stage coach station, a jail, post office, and a school. It also had the Grand Central Mill.

Both historic and present-day photos follow.

Railroad Depot. Fairbank’s importance as a railroad town grew and it soon boasted three different railroad lines and depots, becoming the central point of entry and exit for miners, prospectors, materials, and ore, primarily headed to and from Tombstone, which wasn’t connected to the railway until 1903. During this time, the stage continued to do a brisk business to carry travelers those last ten miles to Tombstone.

29 Wikipedia, Abandoned railroad bridge near Fairbank, Arizona by Old Pueblo
30 http://www.apcrp.org/FAIRBANK/Fairbank_Master_Doc.htm
Schoolhouse. The gypsum block schoolhouse, built in 1920 to replace the old one that burned down in 1917, was opened as a museum and information center for Fairbank in March 2007. The Fairbank Schoolhouse has been restored to include a classroom, as well as multiple exhibits on the history and prehistory of the area. The BLM manages the site with valuable assistance from the Friends of the San Pedro River, which operates a gift shop in a portion of the schoolhouse.  

![Fairbank Depot, ca. 1900](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fairbank_Railroad_Depot_Arizona_Circa_1900.jpg)

![Schoolhouse](https://www.blm.gov/blog/2020-12-08/restored-fairbank-mercantile-beckons-visitors)

![Schoolhouse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairbank,_Arizona)

31 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fairbank_Railroad_Depot_Arizona_Circa_1900.jpg

32 https://www.blm.gov/blog/2020-12-08/restored-fairbank-mercantile-beckons-visitors

Mercantile (adobe commercial building).³⁴ The Mercantile housed a general store, post office, and a saloon. The post office was established on May 16, 1883. The post office finally closed in the 1970s. The General Store remained open for a number of years. The building was restored by the Bureau of Land Management.

³⁴ https://www.blm.gov/blog/2020-12-08/restored-fairbank-mercantile-beckons-visitors
³⁵ Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS ARIZ.2-FAIRB.2–1
Montezuma House (hotel). Montezuma Hotel was constructed in 1889 just south of the Mercantile Building. The building was torn down when Hwy 82 was built. Only a few foundations remain. The Montezuma House offered draft beer, foreign and domestic liquors, and dining. It was managed by Leon Larrieu.  

Larrieu was born in Saint-Gaudens, France in October 1837. He was best known as “Mine Host” at the Montezuma House. He died at his home in Fairbank on August 16, 1904 at the age of 68.

37 https://www.newspapers.com/image/40684088/?terms=Leon%20Larrieu&match=1
The Fairbank Train Robbery

This reads like an old Hollywood western movie. On February 21, 1900, the express car of a Benson-to-Nogales train was held up by six gunmen when it arrived at the Fairbank railroad station. Two of the robbers, Billy Stiles and Burt Alvord, were former deputy sheriffs. They mingled with the crowd, milling about the station and pretended to be drunken cowboys. Suddenly they attacked the baggage car.

A lawman, Jeff D. Milton, who was working for Wells Fargo as an express messenger on the Southern Pacific run from Benson, Arizona to Guaymas, Mexico, was inside the express car guarding the Wells Fargo box and its payroll (many of the cargos were often comprised of gold and silver bullion).

38 Montezuma House, Fairbank ad - Tombstone Prospector, Thurs. Feb. 12, 1891, pg. 3
39 Arizona Historical Society
41 http://www.arizonaghosttowntrails.com/fairbank.html
As he was hit by gunfire, Milton threw the key to the box into a corner so the gang couldn’t open it. He fought the men with a shotgun even though his left arm was shattered by bullets from their Winchesters. Milton slammed the car door shut and collapsed unconscious between two large boxes. This saved his life when the outlaws riddled the car with bullets. The robbers opened the door of the baggage car but were unable to find the keys, so they mounted their horses and rode away.

One outlaw who was left behind, Jeff Dunlap, alias Three-fingered Jack, was a well-known horse thief. He died a day later of buckshot wounds to the chest from Milton’s shotgun. Before he died on February 22, 1900, he confessed who the gang members were, with Burt Alvord named as the leader. Dunlap was buried at Boot Hill, in Tombstone. The robbers were eventually hunted down and imprisoned. One had fled to Mexico. The penalty for train robbery was hanging. Leniency was exercised for the attempted robbery, and all the outlaws ended up with lesser sentences.

Who was Burton Alvord? Albert “Burt” Alvord was born September 11, 1867 in Plumas County, California. Alvord was an American lawman and later outlaw. He began his career in law enforcement in 1886 as a deputy under Sheriff John Slaughter in Cochise County, Arizona.

Alvord’s education was informal. He spent time working at the O.K. Corral, where he got to know the townspeople very well, and claimed to have witnessed the infamous gunfight at the O.K. Corral in 1881. This claim was unsubstantiated.

Despite Alvord’s reputation for frequenting saloons and his participation in several bar altercations, Cochise County Sheriff John Slaughter recruited Alvord as a deputy in 1886. Alvord served
primarily as the muscle behind Slaughter's operations. He was reportedly “not noble, temperate, far seeing, or unselfish.” He did assist Slaughter in capturing or killing several rustlers and other outlaws between 1886 and 1889, but his reputation suffered when his alcoholism became increasingly apparent. Alvord continued to frequent saloons and eventually began to associate with gamblers and suspected outlaws. When Slaughter reprimanded Alvord, he quit.

Alvord next worked as a lawman in several towns in the 1890s, including Fairbank and Pearce. He turned in his badge, left his wife, and turned to crime. He formed a gang comprised of outlaws he had pursued as a law officer: Billy Stiles, Bill Downing, and “Three Fingered Jack” Dunlop. Alvord’s gang committed several armed robberies in Cochise County, where he and Stiles were both captured but managed to escape. On February 15, 1900, Dunlop and Bravo Juan Yoas were wounded by Jeff Milton during Fairbank train robbery. Later that year, Alvord was again captured and taken to Tombstone. Billy Stiles rode to Tombstone and wounded the deputy on duty, allowing Alvord and 24 other prisoners to escape.

In 1902, Alvord assisted Arizona Rangers Captain Burton C. Mossman in capturing the notorious Mexican bandit Augustine Chacon, in exchange for a share of the reward money and a reduced sentence. When Chacon was convicted of murder and hanged at Solomonville, Arizona, Alvord and Stiles returned to crime, now pursued by the Arizona Rangers. They were captured in December 1903, but again managed to escape.

The Arizona Rangers finally pursued the outlaws across the international border into Mexico, trapping them near Naco in February 1904. The outlaws resisted, but surrendered after both were wounded. Alvord spent two years in the Yuma Territorial Prison. Following his release, he announced he was going by ship to start anew in Central America. He was last seen in 1910 working as a Panama Canal employee. Following this, Alvord’s fate is unknown.
Who was Jefferson Davis Milton? Milton was born November 7, 1861 in Marianna, Florida. Milton was lawman and a descendant of the English poet, John Milton (1608–1674).

At age 15 or 16, Jeff Milton joined his sister in Texas where he worked at her husband’s mercantile stores and later as a cowboy. On July 27, 1880, he appeared at the Texas Rangers headquarters in Austin, armed with a couple of letters of recommendation from prominent citizens. By adding three years to his real age, he became the requisite 21 and was sworn in as a Ranger private. After serving with the Rangers for four years, he moved through west Texas and into New Mexico, where he became a Deputy U.S. Marshal in 1884.

Milton worked under Sheriff John Slaughter in Cochise County, during which time the two were involved in several manhunts and shootouts with outlaws. One of their most well-known accomplishments was their pursuit of the Jack Taylor Gang in late 1886 to the middle of 1887.

Milton joined the U.S. Customs Service in 1887 and was appointed a Customs Mounted Inspector headquartered in Tucson, in the Customs Collection District of El Paso. Milton spent two years with Customs, riding the line from Nogales westward to the Colorado River. As a political appointee, Milton found himself out of a job in 1889, when a new party took over.

On June 21, 1895, Milton, who was at that time chief of police in El Paso, Texas, was accompanying his partner, Deputy U.S. Marshal George Scarborough, when Scarborough shot and killed Martin M’Rose, a notorious Texas rustler.

In July 1898, working again with Scarborough, the pair tracked down, shot, and captured “Bronco Bill” Walters near Solomonville, and scattered the Walters gang from their hideout, killing another gang member in the process.

Milton was employed for a period of years with the Southern Pacific Railroad and/or Wells Fargo. On February 15, 1900, Milton substituted on a train for another express agent who was sick. In Fairbank, he was handing packages to the station agent when former lawman-turned-outlaw Burt Alvord and five others attempted to rob the express car of its cash. Milton shot outlaw “Three Fingered Jack” Dunlop, badly wounding him. He died days later. Milton also shot and wounded Bravo Juan Yoas. Milton was seriously wounded in his left arm, fracturing it and severing an artery, for which he improvised a tourniquet. Before Alvord and his men boarded the car, Milton threw the keys to the express car’s safe into a pile of packages at the far end of the car.

The gang was about to shoot Milton again when the train engineer intervened, saying he was already dead. The robbers were unable to open the safe and escaped with only a few dollars.

The railroad dispatched a special engine and boxcar to transport Milton from Benson to Tucson for treatment. Dr. H. W. Fenner tied the shattered bone together with piano wire. When the wound wouldn’t heal, he sent Milton to San Francisco where he could be seen by experts at the Southern Pacific Hospital. They wanted to amputate his arm at the elbow, but he refused and got a ride to his friend Dr. George E. Goodfellow’s office. Goodfellow cleaned and treated Milton’s wound but told him he would never regain use of the arm. As predicted, Milton’s left arm was permanently disabled and shorter than his right.

Milton joined the Bureau of Immigration in 1904 as a “mounted Chinese inspector” charged with enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act. At 62, he became the first officer appointed to the U.S. Immigration Service Border Patrol in 1924, and for the next eight years he pursued border patrol work “with unbridled enthusiasm.”

The Economy Act of 1932 forced the still-active Milton into retirement at age 70. Milton retired to Tombstone and then to Tucson where he lived the remainder of his life. Louis L’Amour wrote in his book Education of a Wandering Man that he met Milton, who bought him breakfast and gave him a ride to Tucson.
On August 15, 1936, the Immigration Service dedicated the “Jeff D. Milton,” a new patrol boat in San Francisco harbor. In 1937, Milton received his commission and the rank of “colonel” from Gov. B.B. Mouer, who made him the lifetime military aid of the governor of Arizona. Milton is also recognized as the father of the United States Border Patrol.

Milton died on May 7, 1947 at the age of 85 in Tucson, Arizona.

The Decline of Fairbank

Fairbank began its decline starting with a drought that impacted farmers who traded there. The Tombstone mines closed in 1887 from flooding, thus depriving the stamp mills of ore. This forced the mills to shut down.

Fairbank sustained moderate to heavy damage during the Sonora Earthquake of 1887, which shifted the railroad tracks out of place.44

Flooding of the San Pedro River in September 1890 caused significant property damage, thinning down the population further.45

In 1901, the Mexican land grant on which the town was situated was purchased by the Boquillas Land and Cattle Company. The owners extended leases only on the commercial buildings and several residences into the 1970s. Any remaining residents left the town when the buildings were declared unsafe. The former land grant was acquired by the Bureau of Land Management in 1986, and the town site and cemetery were incorporated into the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

Fairbank, Arizona in 1890

44 https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eventpage/ushis262/impact
Little Boquillas Ranch\textsuperscript{46} is an historic ranch property near the Fairbank Historic Townsite. The Little Boquillas Ranch gets its name from the San Juan de las Boquillas y Nogales (Saint John of the Little Springs and Walnut Trees) land grant, which was granted to the family of Rafael Elias Gonzales by the Mexican government in 1833. The grant ran from a point near what is now the ghost town of Charleston, Arizona, north to a point just to the south of Fairbank, along the San Pedro River.

The San Rafael del Valle grant, owned by Rafael's cousin, Captain Ignacio Elias Gonzales, was immediately to the south of the Boquillas grant and ran from what is now the community of Hereford north to Charleston. Both were roughly four sitios, or approximately 18,000 acres, in size.

In 1880, San Francisco businessman George Hearst and his partner, George Hill Howard, purchased the Boquillas land grant from the Elias family in Sonora. Hearst, who eventually became the sole owner of the property, began selling off parcels of land for townsites, mills, ranches, farms, and a railroad soon after, making him responsible for much of the early development of the region.

In 1891, the U. S. government established the Court of Private Land Claims to validate land grant claims and attempt to sort out the problems caused by the surveyor office, which had previously validated claims. The same year George Hearst died and his son, William Randolph Hearst, and his widow, Phoebe Hearst, filed papers to have their exclusive claim to the Boquillas land grant recognized.

In 1899, the Land Claim Court ruled that only the Hearst family had valid title to the land grant, but not everyone was in agreement. A group of some thirty residents of the land grant soon filed a lawsuit to dispute the ruling, and although the case eventually made it to the highest court in the nation, the Supreme Court affirmed the decision of the Land Claims Court in 1906.

In 1901, while their case was still pending in the Supreme Court, the Hearst family sold the Boquillas land grant to the Kern County Land and Cattle Company, which was a large mining and ranching conglomerate based in California. Kern formed the Boquillas Land and Cattle Company in 1901 and began raising cattle from a new headquarters, established two miles south of Fairbank, called the Little Boquillas Ranch.

\textsuperscript{46} Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Boquillas_Ranch
The Boquillas Land and Cattle Company also moved to clear out the rangeland for cattle by evicting all of the “squatting” homesteaders. The Supreme Court’s ruling in 1906 further served to depopulate the San Pedro Valley by triggering an exodus from the area. Boquillas allowed only a handful of favored families and their businesses to remain in Fairbank, along with a few other families living on land that had been sold previously by George Hearst.

The Little Boquillas Ranch continued to raise livestock along the San Pedro River until 1971, when the Tenneco Oil Company gained title to the Del Valle and Boquillas land grants through the acquisition of the parent Kern County Land and Cattle Company. In 1986, the Boquillas and Del Valle grants were acquired by the Bureau of Land Management in a land exchange to form what is now the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area.

This was one of the filming locations for the 1948 western Red River with John Wayne, Montgomery Clift, Tess Dru, and Walter Brennan.47

You can reach the Ranch by starting from the trailhead located in the parking lot across the parking lot for Fairbank by following the Old North Fairbank Road for approximately 2.3 miles. You may want to consider hiking back on the railbed that parallels the road. There are several places where the railbed may not be safe, such as crossing streambeds, so use caution. You can hike back to the road, get across the streambed and continue. If there is water in the streambeds or if it is rainy season, it is recommend that you stay out of the streambeds.

The following historic buildings and structures are currently maintained by the BLM, which believes that most of the ranch development was in place by 1910.48

47 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0040724/
Little Boquillas Ranch

Little Boquillas Ranch House

Foreman House

Barn

Blacksmith's shop

Smokehouse
The Return to Sierra Vista

You have two options. Return to the starting point in Sierra Vista by backtracking along the route you took. The other option is to return via Tombstone. (Tombstone will have its own Adventure Travel Plus.) You will pass Charleston on your return. See the Adventure Travel Plus booklet, 9000 BCE to 2021 AD in Four Easy Trails.

*From the Fairbank parking lot, head east on Hwy 82 East (5.9 miles); turn right onto Hwy 80 East (3.1 miles); turn right onto N. 4th Street (Tombstone); head south on S. 4th Street toward E. Toughnut Street; turn right at the first cross street onto E. Toughnut Street, then turn left onto S. Sumner Street. Continue onto S. Charleston Road (16.0 miles). Use the left two lanes to turn left onto Hwy 90 South to return to the start point in Sierra Vista.*
Doc moved to Sierra Vista is the mid-1970s and started exploring the area—and hasn’t stopped yet. He worked as a member of the U.S. military, civil service, and defense contractor to Fort Huachuca and after retirement chose to stay in the area, dividing his time between exploring and volunteering for the Red Cross, the Arizona Rangers, Sierra Vista Tourism Commission, and contributing data as an Advanced Arizona Weather Watcher.

With a deep passion and respect for the desert, Doc is a champion of the local environment, terrain, and history. By viewing the area simultaneously through these lenses, he can explain the “why” behind the “what.”

Sierra Vista’s Sky Islands, abundant wildlife, and visible history dating back to 9,000 BCE offer endless discovery. And Doc's *Travel Adventure Plus* series weaves all three into memorable journeys.
Take a drive with Carry “Doc” Morgan, a Sierra Vista local who puts exploring at the top of his “to-do” list.

About this Journey

Welcome to Sierra Vista Arizona! This is another installment of Travel Adventure Plus. This provides you a travel event with history, maps, photographs, imagery, and good to know information for your knowledge, enjoyment, and safety. There are also options and notices for additional or follow-on trips.

Buckle up and enjoy the ride!