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SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

Books on the Indian wars of the 1880s in Arizona and Old Mexico in about the area I was visiting a few weeks ago differ on the maps of the campaigns and the results of the skirmishes. The Santa Fe Railroad even comes in on the act later on by admitting they lost some of the original work by the Corps of Engineers.

However, a U.S. Army surgeon stationed at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., in the late 1870s made his conclusions clear at the post museum, saying: "The calvarymen are about as adapted to fighting the hostiles as they are at helping me pulling babies," and went on to say that the Chiricahua Apaches watered from secret water holes and carried little more than their weaponry, compared to the two blankets, saddlebags and sabers the soldiers loaded on their horses.

Ol' Doc wasn't the only guy with his eyes open. A 12-year-old boy recorded that when his mother saw the house she was to live in at the post, she ordered her bed set up and went town with a bad case of the vapors, which in those days was a failing of fainthearted women.

After discovering how unclear the information was on the back roads throughout the mountain passes, I became resentful that the Santa Fe had lost those old maps. Rains had washed over the road surfaces so bad they made me

homesick for the county roads leading to the ranch. All the luggage had to be secured by seat belts. No wonder the Army had so much difficulty capturing Cochise and Geronimo over that terrain.

As I wound my way over and down the mountains leading to Tombstone and Bisbee, I was driving slow enough to lead a pack mule without making him break a trot. The worst shot the Apaches had could have picked me off and had time to ride back to camp for his scalping knife before the car had rolled 50 feet on such rough ground.

Nothing was going on at Tombstone. Right outside town, the curio shop at Boothill Cemetery had saddle blanket prices gave further evidence of civil tranquillity; all the Wild West stories claim miscreants were buried in their boots using a saddle blanket for a shroud.

The museum at the courthouse offered the usual relics of frontier life. The lady at the gift shop said I looked mighty familiar. Lots of folks who stay around life-size wax figures in museums and such like lose their talent for character descriptions. I suggested she might need to take her vacation before the tourist season hits, or she might find herself talking to the line-up in the hallway of Wild Bill's and One-Eyed Pete's divisions, past the point of medical knowledge.

Not one hoof of livestock grazed along the roadways. Parks and refuges don't have brands or earmarks to register. In all of the markers and unmarked graves at Boothill, the one that I suspect caused the least mourning was one labeled simply as "Old Stinging Lizard."