

## Martha Summerhayes

Martha Summerhayes experienced first-hand the difficulties of traveling a number of Arizona's earliest wagon roads, and she recounts conflicting emotions in her



classic book, *Vanished Arizona*. In 1874, Martha joined her husband, Jack, an army officer assigned to Arizona's frontier posts. After traveling up the Colorado River from Yuma by paddle-wheeled steamboat, they left Fort Mohave and journeyed by wagon along the Hardyville Road to Prescott, then the capital of Arizona Territory. She said, "Our route was not only dreary, it was positively hostile in its attitude towards every living thing except snakes, centipedes, and spiders." Later, she was in the first wagon train to travel on the General Crook Road from Fort Verde to Fort Apache. On this trip she said the teamsters "poured forth volley upon volley of oaths. ... [that I ] had never heard of or conceived of ...." She returned with her new baby to Fort Verde; part of this route was along the Little Colorado River on the **Beale Wagon Road**, another part was along the **Chávez Trail**.

Of the Chávez Trail, Martha said, " ... at every stage of the road we saw evidences of hard travel, exhausted cattle, anxious teamsters, hunger and thirst, despair, starvation and death." She wrote that the road near Rattlesnake Canyon "was worse than any we had yet encountered. I could not remain in the ambulance, so tried to walk a part of the way." On the Ehrenberg Road, she described a necessary stop, Tyson's Well, as "melancholy and uninviting. It reeks of everything unclean, morally and physically." The desert she saw as bare and lifeless, "like Death itself."

But as many have, Martha also appreciated the times on the trail when the weather was "fine beyond description," with "no discomforts," and she admitted to a "subtle fascination ... as we rolled along the smooth hard roads that followed the windings of the Gila River." In spite of hardships, she was captivated by Arizona's sheer beauty, and her dreary experiences were soothed as she wrote:

"We had had another rough march, and had reached the limit of endurance, or thought we had, when we emerged from a mountain pass and drew rein upon the high green mesa overlooking Stoneman's Lake, a beautiful blue sheet of water lying there away below us. It was good to our tired eyes, which had gazed upon nothing but burnt rocks and alkali plains for so many days. Our camp was beautiful beyond description, and lay near the edge of the mesa, whence we could look down upon the lovely lake. It was a complete surprise to us, as points of scenery were not much known or talked about then in Arizona .... We feasted our eyes and our very souls upon it."

Trail users of today can read Martha Summerhayes' well-written prose, and marvel, as she did, at the remoteness and the grandeur that is Arizona.