

Lillian and Ed Riggs

Importance

Lillian and Ed Riggs managed the Faraway Ranch, now part of Chiricahua National Monument, during its heyday as a guest ranch in the 1920s and 1930s. They also were instrumental in the effort to create Chiricahua National Monument and helped open the area to visitors by constructing riding and hiking trails. Faraway Ranch was the only lodging available to tourists in the vicinity and thus the ranch became an important part of many visitors' experiences at Chiricahua.

Faraway Ranch

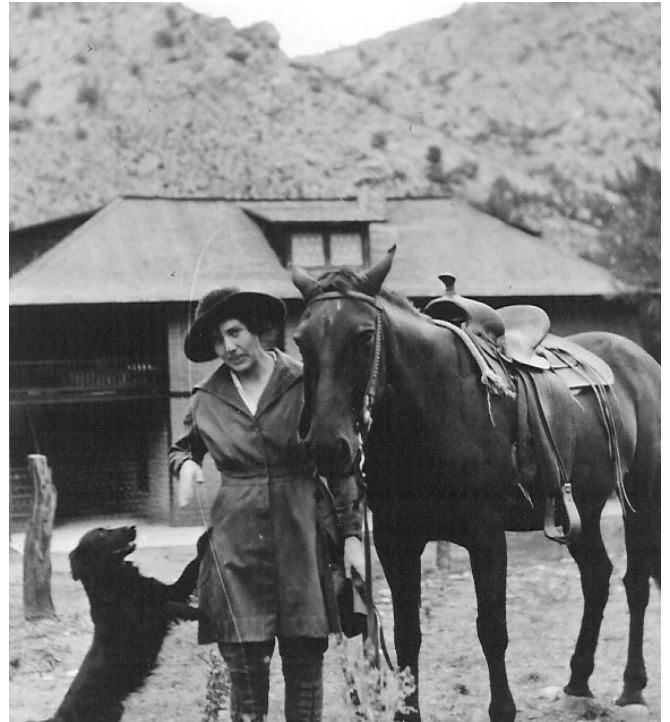
Lillian's parents, Emma and Neil Erickson, started the Faraway Ranch in the late nineteenth century. Lillian, born in 1888, grew up at the ranch. Lillian taught school for several years and attended Knox College in Illinois. In 1917 her sister, Hildegard, began boarding guests at the ranch on weekends, and Lillian soon gave up teaching to help with the business.

Ed Riggs, born in 1885, lived near the Ericksons and knew Lillian during their childhood. Ed pursued a variety of occupations and served in World War I. He married and had two children, but when his wife died, Ed became depressed and struggled with debt. He was working at a garage when he became reacquainted with Lillian. They married in 1923, and Ed and his two children moved to the Faraway Ranch.

A short distance from the Faraway Ranch was an area of spectacular rock formations, which Lillian called the "Wonderland of Rocks." Ed and Lillian explored the area and asked a photographer to take some panoramic photos. They sent the photos to a county fair and local chambers of commerce. The photos aroused interest in the area, and soon a grassroots movement developed to have it preserved as a national monument. Lillian and Ed worked to construct some trails into the rugged location in time for a planned visit by the governor of Arizona in 1923. President Calvin Coolidge signed the legislation creating Chiricahua National Monument a year later.

The Riggses also ran cattle on the ranch, but as bad economic conditions persisted in the 1920s and 1930s, their profits from tourism became increasingly important. A Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was located at Chiricahua National Monument in the 1930s, and Ed worked as a trail foreman with the CCC. He helped oversee the construction

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NPS PHOTO

Lillian Erickson Riggs

of the Echo Canyon trail at the monument during this time. Even during the Depression, many people continued to visit the national monument and stay at Faraway Ranch. Because Faraway Ranch provided the only lodging close to the national monument, the Riggses had a "virtual monopoly" on profits derived from tourism.

Lillian suffered from hearing problems and in 1942 became blind. Ed died in 1950, and Lillian kept the ranch open to guests on an intermittent basis, persevering despite her handicaps. Lillian died in 1977, and the National Park Service acquired Faraway Ranch in 1979.

References

Wegman-French, Lysa. 2006. Faraway Ranch Special History Study. National Park Service, Intermountain Cultural Resources Management Professional Paper No. 72. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/chir/special_history.pdf