

Apache Sign

# Apache Sign

By : GH Lafferty

Travel through the Arizona Territory in the early 1800's could be interesting when the Apache were off the reservation.

Published on  
**Booksie**

[booksie.com/GH Lafferty](http://booksie.com/GH Lafferty)

Copyright © GH Lafferty, 2015  
**Publish your writing on Booksie.com.**

# Apache Sign

## Apache Sign

I jerked and ducked as a bullet spanged off the rock face beside my head and rock chips sprayed the side of my head. That stung, that was too close for comfort, in fact, I felt the trickle of blood down the side of my neck and reached up to feel the spot where a rock chip had cut my ear. I believe one of those bucks out there is taking this serious, I thought and he is starting to get my dander up. Then another round knocked my hat off, bullet going right through the upper part of the crown. Now that makes me mad, I thought, I ain't had this here hat more than a couple of months and it was just getting my head all used to it and starting to get comfortable a sitting up there.

That tears it, I said, now you have done gone and got me riled. I ducked around the edge of that boulder, threw up my .44-.40 Winchester and let fly at that Apache's headband. I don't miss much, as a rule, and this was no exception. That buck went flying backwards with blood spraying from his head and he wasn't going to be irritating me anymore.

Now, if I could just convince his fellow warriors not to take up where he left off and go on and tend their own business everything would be just hunky-dory. Trouble is, for whatever reason, they seemed to think killing me was their business, a difference of opinion that could get a man hurt, maybe even cost him his hair, if he wasn't careful.

These here Apaches were Mimbreno bucks, I'm just right sure, or Chiricahua which are all sorta lumped together as Coyotero any which way, which run in these here parts, this being eastern Arizona Territory and they also run in western New Mexico Territory, which not so long ago was all one big New Mexico Territory, not that they care one whit what us white eyes call it no how. They pretty much figure to be boss here and try to kill any strangers, especially white ones or Mexican.

Now a few of them greenhorns back east got some silly notion of the noble red man and how he was here first and we are the ones in the wrong. Now, I won't argue they was here before we was but let me tell you a little secret, unless your opinion of noble is seeing what and how much you can steal or how many white (or Mexican) men, women and children you can murder, mutilate, torture or make into slaves, then you better keep your dumb hind-end back east, because you come out here in their idea of their territory, they will make quick work of planting you like so many seeds, but not before they scalp and hull or shuck you. By that last I mean carve or burn or jest plant you in an anthill or whatever other mischief they can dream up before they kill you deader than hell. Noble Red man my tired ass.

Now as far as us coming here and pushing them out, you bet your sweet ass we are, but I'll tell you a little secret you limp brained namby pamby, these here Apache come down here from way up in Canada, a thousand miles from here, and pushed everyone else out cause they wanted it. I hear tell they arrived in this here part of the country, or at least in what we call the Texas panhandle about 1528 and that is a sight earlier than us, but not all that long as far as eons go. All I got to say on that is, well now its our turn, so move your tired red butts over cause here we come like it or not.

Now before you go getting all indignant and het up and such, let me say a little something else. I been up in the IT (Indian Territories) and I met a few Indians up that away that was just folks, I ain't gonna sit astride

## Apache Sign

this old bronc and tell you we was chums or nothing but they was just folks. They lived mostly in cabins or houses, had some livestock even it was chickens and pigs, a horse or two and a milch cow. Most of them had some crops in the field, had them a meeting place and a town of sorts and was living and not out running around like a bunch of hooligans trying to shoot, stab or scalp everything in sight. They was just plain folks not a bothering anybody even if they was Indian, not even the few whites living in among them.

Now I grant you, I never had too much to do with no reservations and I heard some bad things about them, like most other folks, but as long as them there people are on the reservation I got no problem with them. The Redskins Iâm talking about are these cutthroats out here making up war parties, raiding into Mexico, then turning around and raiding up here in the American territories. Killing everyone they can, stealing everything in sight and terrorizing everyone else. When its your butt out here trying to make it across this here desert and theyâre after your horse, goods and scalp, lets see you try to reason with them and maybe if your lucky and I ainât got nothing better to do, Iâll stop and say a word or two over you before I throw some dirt over you and stick a homemade cross in the ground for you.

I guess what Iâm trying to say is I donât hate them, I donât hate much of anybody, they are just another hard fact of life out here in the desert that you can either live with or die from and I prefer they do the dying.

Just about then another shot ricocheted off the boulder but this one wasnât near as close as before, apparently I had nipped their best shot in the bud, so to speak. Then several of them fired nearly at the same time and I moved back to the other side of the boulder. I might have been born at night but it wasnât last night and I knew they were trying to make me keep my head down while some more of them got around behind me.

Sure enough there were two of them holy terrors sneaking up and I laid my rifle down on them rocks quick, then drew my Colts and put them boys out of their misery before they could get up to some troublemaking, with me being the one right smack in the middle of that there trouble.

Apparently because of all the shooting they heard and then the sudden quiet, their Red devil pals figured out that those two had come to some mischief and while they were thinking that over, I took the time to reload and take a little breather cause I was really starting to see red, no pun intended (why they ainât no more red than I am, more of a sort of coppery bronze, musta been some drunk seeing red through his bloodshot eyes what named them redskins.)

Well, I reckon after that one old boy I shot in the head had to go and irritate me, I was sort of getting out of the mood for these here games, you know how it is and all, a body tends to get tired of being shot at after a bit, it can get to be down right worrisome.

After killing them last two, I reckon there can only be about four of them tom-tom pounders left and I suppose its time to read to them four bucks that are still out there outtân the Good Book, or maybe them being savages and all, I suspect I might have to just show them the pictures and such. (That is the Good Book according to Samuel Colt.)

I yanked my spare Colts outtân my waistband with my left hand and drew my other Colts with my right hand, as usual, then I stepped out away from that rock and said, âDa Go Te,â (which is Apache for greetings) then let fly with both Colts. Well, I only hit two out of four of them scalp huntin bucks, but that was enough to convince the other two horse stealing squaw chasers I was bad medicine and besides, they musta had important tales to tell and a mite of singing and dancing around the camp fire to do, cause they lit a shuck outtân here that would make a Jack Rabbit ashamed to be so slow moving.

## Apache Sign

That being the case, I pulled my horse out from between the two boulders where I had him tied, straddled that bronc and headed in the opposite direction like I might have been late for breakfast and that is something Big Ollie Roundtree is seldom ever accused of.

They call me Big Ollie because I am a large round man, amiable and with a humorous disposition. I am barrel chested and I ain't ever been accused of missing too many meals, so I go at about three hundred twenty pounds, which ain't really all that heavy on a big boned, heavy set frame, six foot four inches tall. Leastwise my horse ain't ever complained, well not too much anyway and yes I have been ribbed all my life over my last name but what can I say, it sort of fits, don't it.

I like to joke and josh around some but I do have a mite of a temper and if a body pushes too hard, I reckon I just automatically burr up and push back like and don't let my size fool you into thinking I'm big, dumb and slow, like it does most folks cause I always have been greased lightening with gun or knife and as I said before, I seldom ever miss, with either.

Now, if you been out in the hot sun a spell too long or are missing a few cards outta' en your deck, maybe a bale of hay short of a full load for instance and you would rather fight with what God provided us with, namely fists, feet, knees, elbows and teeth, instead of what Mr. Colts or Mr. Bowie give us and you are actually stupid enough to think you can tear down my meat house, why I would be most happy to oblige. Queens Rules, bare knuckle, no holds barred or knock down drag out, romp and stomp, take names, kick ass and collect teeth, I'm your man at the drop of a hat and I would be more than willing to drop the hat anytime you like and maybe even if you don't like it or ain't quite ready for it. In other words, before you come up to me all bad mouthed and snotty, you had better stop and ask some damn body. After all, I would hate to see you come to a mischief.

Now, the reason I was out here traipsing around through this here desert in the first place is that I got this here letter, picked it up at the mercantile, at what passes for the post office, it was sent general delivery, back in old Fort Worth, that was back in Texas and I started out to Tucson to meet up with an old friend of mine name of Buck Logan. Buck's got himself a little spread out here somewhere around Tucson and runs a few head of cattle. Seems some of his cattle have been coming up missing and he don't know a lot of folks around these parts so he don't know who to trust (and who not to). Anyhow, he posted me a letter, general delivery, to Fort Worth hoping I was still hanging around in the White Elephant Saloon in Hell's Half Acre there in Old Fort Worth, which I was, asking if I didn't have anything better to do, could I come give him a hand trying to hold onto his critters.

Now me and Buck go way back together, clear back to Virginia during the war twixt the States and I reckon we pretty much each kept the other going and staying alive during that time. Ain't much old Buck could ask for that I would say no to and sure not when asking for a hand. Especially when I figure he needs that hand to have a Colts in it.

Trouble is I am seeing an awful lot of sign everywhere I look and its all Apache sign, I reckon these must be some of Geronimo's boys come back up from Mexico. Chances are some of them boys on the reservation are fixing to jump, or already have and figure to meet up with old Geronimo himself and if true, that means trouble for the whole southwest, including me, seeing as how I'm right out here in the middle of it all.

The army been chasing Geronimo for quite some time but that don't seem to mean anymore than a dog chasing low scudding clouds cause ain't neither one of them catching anything.

I once heard a feller call the Apache the tigers of the human race, well, I don't know so much about all that, but they are smart and some of the best fighters to take up arms in any man's war. And once you get that bunch a horseback, well let's just say they sure are leading the U.S. Calvary a merry chase and have

## Apache Sign

been for quite a spell. Five hundred and sometimes more cavalry troops are just a having the dickens of a time whopping those fifty or sixty Apaches.

What the hell, if it ain't one thing its another, back in Texas its the Comanche and maybe some Kiowa or Ute's sticking their hand in once in awhile, down south it's the Lipan Apache and farther south, way down Mexico way it's the Lipan Apache or the Yaquis. West of here you got some Apache but mostly it's the Yavapai, with the Mohave's sticking an iron in the fire here and there and up north you got Kiowa, Cheyenne, Sioux, Blackfeet, and Crow with the Arapaho getting into it now and then. Seems like I left out a few but most anywhere you go, seems there's Indian trouble at one time or another and any of them would be happy to kill you just as dead.

I just kept on looking at the country, mostly what I could see twixt my horse's ears and talking to my horse like the old friend he is. He seems a little skittish, don't reckon I know whether he is picking it up from me or he can catch the smell of them redskins in the air.

It wasn't but a couple of hours steady riding before I seen somewhat more than just Apache sign. There were three of them bucks shadowing me off to my right and behind me a ways. I drifted a little to my right and they shifted more to my right and gained a little bit of ground on me.

Now, I'm usually not the type of fella what goes around with a suspicious nature and all, but when it comes to Apaches I reckon it just naturally brings out the worst in me.

Now I spect I reckon if them three bucks are so bound and determined to keep me from going off to the right, that means what they are aiming to do is herd me off to my left and if that is their intention, I kind of figure that might be because they have a passel of friends over that a way, that I would take no pleasure in meeting up with.

Now normally I am an easy going sort of guy and tend to just go along with what other folks want to do except when them other folks is Apaches and I have no doubt that they just ain't looking out for my best interests, then, you know how it is and all, I reckon I just get stubborn as an old Missouri mule. This being the case, I reckon as how I come to the conclusion that I was going where I wanted to go and not where them Apache bucks wanted me to go. Onlyest trouble is, by going off to my right I am going to get a lot closer to them three Bucks, as a matter of fact I reckon we are going to get close enough to dance.

Well, I tried heading at an angle to the right but they just sped up a little to cut me off and try to make me go back left, which I just wasn't fixin to do. I spect I reckon since them boys is hell bent to come to the dance; it is up to me and old Samuel Colt to provide the music.

Now I always refer to my pair of Colt .44's as my Colts and I've had people look at me as if I was just too stupid to know I only drew one, my other one is usually in my saddle bag except for occasions like the one I find myself in now and I've had other folks who, no doubt giving me the benefit of the doubt, asked why I use the plural when I'm only pulling one gun. Well, I'll tell you how I feel about it, Sam Colt made these here guns and I just bought a couple of them so I sort of refer to his gun, that I'm just using, see, that that means I drew Colt's pistol, see what I mean? He is the one what made it after all. Any old how, I reckon I am fixin to make some good old Colts organ music and send some real heavy lead music through these here pipe organs.

I have heard some folks say that God made the big man, like me, and he also made a whole slew of them smaller sizes, and Colt made the equalizer. Now, I don't reckon I know as to how them folks got to thinking so far wrong that a way, all I know is I have some hot news for them boys. I'm one of them big old fellas myself and I got me a pair of them Colts for my ownself, so I don't see as to how they equalized

## Apache Sign

nothing.

Well now, on second thought though, seeing as how anyone who can hit a jack rabbit on the run at fifty or even seventy-five feet with one shot, as I have many a time, why I reckon with God's good grace and a little luck, I figure to equalize them three bucks against just one of me, down to a one to one situation real quick like. Not meaning to brag, you understand, but I'll take on one Apache Buck with guns, knives or just fists, feet and elbows anywhere, anytime and any way he wants it.

Well, I wasn't riding real fast and neither were they just yet and I figure they thought they was still out of range, cause most cow pokes can't hit the broad side of a barn from a moving horse, especially shooting at a moving target, confuses them I reckon and their shots are off target. Now I'm a pretty fair shot even under these circumstances so I let fly from farther away than them boys figured I could hit anything and sort of took them by surprise, cause I knocked one right off his pony and I don't reckon he'll be much shape to get back on it, ever.

Now it is two to one and I was hoping that little demonstration of how good I can shoot might make them decide to just go on and join their friends off to the left some place, wherever they are. But you might know I either got some too dumb to know better or too brave for their own good cause now they appear to be a might on the angry side and are coming as fast as they can. Well, I reckon I just headed my bronc right at them and dug in my spurs, sending my bronc into a gallop too. I waited till I figured I had me a pretty good shot and thumbed rounds at them as fast as I could till my Colts clicked empty, worked too, I dropped another of them with two holes in his chest but that third one was no quitter.

He swung out his arm and big as I am he knocked me right outta'n my saddle and I hit the ground like a proverbial ton of brick, knocked the wind right outta'n me too. I was trying hard to catch my breath when he come running up on me afoot and jumped right on me with his toad sticker, a trying to cut my throat, I reckon. I managed to slap his arm down, but he still got that blade into me a little and I figured that was about enough of this here nonsense.

I reached down and caught his hand and wrist in my big old mitt and I decided to show this little red hellion who was boss of this here range and I aimed to be right quick about it. I just grinned at him, said "Da Go Te," and started twisting his hand around until his knife was pointed right about at his heart and then I slowly applied pressure, pushing his hand until he was sticking his own knife right into his own chest. He tried to pull away, of course, but I just grabbed his shoulder with my other big old hand and wouldn't let him move away from me. All the while I was just a grinning at him and watching his eyes get bigger and bigger as that knife went into him. Who says an Indian won't scream, whoever it was is full of it, cause this old boy sure as hell screamed until he died right then and there.

What with getting carried away with my amusement at showing that buck what being strong as an ox meant and letting him scream his last, I decided that bunch of bucks these boys had been trying to drive me towards were probably headed my way, hell bent for leather, so this probably wasn't a good place to sit around and rest up for a spell. That being the case, I walked on over to where my horse had stopped, swung up into the saddle and skedaddled the hell on outta'n there.

Now, whether my thinking had been wrong or that other bunch decided to stop and give them last three boys a fine heathen funeral or whatever, I never did see hide nor hair of that there bunch and sort of drifted right on in to Tombstone without further ado, you might say.

I figured it was high time I had me a night in a real bed, a meal at a real table I can put my feet under and a drink at an honest to goodness saloon, I might even see the town Doc about that hole in my side, where that Buck had cut me. It wasn't really bothering me much but I figured it wouldn't hurt to slap a little

## Apache Sign

tincture of Iodine on it just the same, so I dropped in to see the Doc. He wasnâ€™t exactly wearing himself out seeing patients so I got that little chore took care of pretty quick, then I went on down to the local hotel and got me a room for the night.

I had me a decent meal for the price at the dining parlor in the hotel, then drifted on down to the saloon for a little taste of whiskey, good whiskey would be nice but I wasnâ€™t fixin to cause no stink about it and I figured to suffer through whatever they had on hand. I got me a pleasant surprise when the bartender reached under the counter for a bottle instead of what was on the back bar. I had mentioned I was an old Kentucky boy what drifted west and danged if he didnâ€™t have a jug of sour mash. Real stuff too, and it went down mighty fine while I was just looking the bar and the folks in it over and keeping my ears open.

Once a body figures out that he donâ€™t learn much while listening to his own voice and that he can find out more if he keeps his mouth shut and his ears open, why youâ€™d be surprised what a body might hear about.

A saloon ainâ€™t just a place to get drunk or gamble, it is also a sort of menâ€™s club, a place to socialize and even maybe do some business. Folks tend to talk about whatever interests them, whether it is the weather, the Apache being out, the price of livestock, where to find a good horse, should you happen to be in the market, a horse race or what ever, even town or county politics or both.

Once some of the folk get enough whiskey in them, they seem to loosen up and you can hear some dandy, if far fetched, tales of fights, battles with the Indians, and usually any gunplay anyone has ever heard about. It can be plumb entertaining if you fancy that sort of thing and I got to admit I get a kick out of tall tales and such like.

I still have about sixty miles or so to go to Tucson and then probably another fifteen to eighteen miles to old Benâ€™s ranch, so I wasnâ€™t expecting to hear anything that would concern me personally, or Ben either, nor did I hear anything, but I try to keep my ears open all the time, just the same.

I did learn that I was right about them Apaches, a bunch of them had jumped the reservation and were aiming to join up with Chatoâ€™s bunch and raise as much hell as possible before heading back down into Mexico. Other than that, I learned the local livestock prices, heard who won the local horse race again this year, a tall tale about some fella racing a mule against quarter horses and a story I hadnâ€™t heard about a notorious gunfighter name of John Wesley Hardin.

By the time the fella telling the story about Hardin drug it out to get the maximum appreciation out of all those listening, I had had more of that sour mash than I usually allow myself, so I drifted on back to the hotel to get some sleep.

I was of a mind to get a fairly early start the next morning so I could spend tomorrow night at Ben Loganâ€™s place, but they were determined to see the town marshal and his deputies earned their keep last night, because some cowpoke decided he just had to ride up and down Front Street as fast as he could go and shooting off his six-shooter and yelling and yahooping half the night, hooraying the town till dawn, or at least it seemed that long before the town marshal got around to arresting him and throwing him in jail to sober up. As it turned out I slept late, unusual for me, Iâ€™m most always up at the crack of dawn or even earlier.

So much for making Benâ€™s ranch today, I suppose it is probably for the best, big as I am it would have been a long hard day for my horse and I reckon it wonâ€™t kill me to spend one more night out alongside the trail and make a two day trip of it. Wouldnâ€™t want to get in the habit of sleeping in real beds anyhow, tempt a man to settle down and there is still way too much country for me to see out there.

## Apache Sign

I was saddling up to head out, after a good meal in the hotel dining room, when the town marshal come walking up and asked where I thought I was going.

â Time to hit the trail for Tucson, I reckon,â I said.

â Ainâ t you heard, them soldier boys outtâ n Fort Huachuca is telling everyone out and about to skedaddle in to town here, cause them Apache is running wild again,â the marshal said.

â Heard that last night,â I said, â but I reckon I got business elsewhere.â

â Your funeral, I reckon,â the marshal grimaced, â but I reckon I got to tell you I donâ t think you got a chance in hell out there. I donâ t mean to insult you partner, but I have to wonder if you are playing this game with a full deck, so to speak.â

Now I might not be the smartest or most educated man in this part of the country, but it riles me some, that just because a man is big, some folks think he just rightly must be stupid.

â I donâ t take that kindly marshal,â I said, â I had me my share of schooling, I can read, write, and do my sums and such. I know the west, been around and through what you might call the school of hard knocks too. I have been around most of the tribes of Indians, one way or another, half my life. I ainâ t no greenhorn, I ainâ t no tenderfoot and I ainâ t stupid. I also ainâ t letting no damned redskins tell me where I can and canâ t go if I take a notion. Now, Iâ ll either make it where I am going or theyâ ll kill me, my decision, my problem and my business.â

â Suit yourself then,â said the marshal, â but if you donâ t mind, Iâ ll reserve judgment on just how savvy you are.â

â Do as you please, marshal, I sure aim to.â

With my dire warning in my hatband, so to speak and leaving a somewhat less than sterling impression of my powers of reasoning or my ability to heed to common sense with the town marshal, I rode on out of Tombstone, heading for Tucson and the Apaches be damned.

That first day I didnâ t see a single thing to cause me to worry and that liked to scared me plumb out of my wits. When you know there are Apache on the loose and everything is too quiet, sonny me boy, you had best damned better start getting scared because you may as well call that Apache sign. A, none too sure sign, but a sign just the same, that they are around somewhere close and probably watching you, or even worse setting up to take your hair home to the little squaw back at camp and without you still being attached to it. Why it is enough to make that self same hair stand up on end and chills of sheer fear to run up and back down your back, gives me that itch right between my shoulder blades. You know, that spot that is real hard for you to reach for your ownself and the one some Apache would dearly love to put a bullet or an arrow into.

I stopped early, while it was still light enough to see, made as small a fire as I could and I built it under a Joshua Tree so as to disperse the smoke as it went up through the limbs, just enough to make me some of Arbuckleâ s coffee and then I sliced me off several thick pieces of bacon to fry, then I doused it out. I ate that little dab pretty quick, then moved on another couple of miles before I found me an out of the way sorta place to bed down, without a fire.

I was traveling a well used road so I sorta doubted any Apache was gonna try and sort out and follow any of them tracks, I figured they would have to catch sight of me or I was gonna have to do something to give my self away. If I know their about, mind you I use the best I can do, which is blend in to the scenery. I



## Apache Sign

always ride a brown or spotted horse, never a white one or a coal black one because they stand out too much. I most always wear clothes that blend into the scenery as well; brownish or brown plaid shirts and brown home spuns are my favorites. I try to dull any shiny finishes on my metal gear and I ain't got no shiny do-dads on my hat neither and I wear a brown hat. That way I don't stand out so much against the background and if I have any suspicion they are close, I just freeze stock-still.

The eye will pass right over things mostly all the same color and what they expect to see, but they will be drawn to any motion like a hawk. Of course, I try my best not to highlight myself atop a hill or any other such thing and when in territory I think is dangerous, I will most often dismount, and walk, then get down and crawl to the top of a ridge or hill so I can see what's on the other side first, before I go over the hill and it has saved my hind end a time or two.

Now, I've heard tell an Apache can track a fish in water, but I wouldn't know too much about that. I do know that I have used what little I know about tracking to leave as little of a trail as I can and all I have to say about that is sometimes it works and sometimes it don't. I reckon if they are on to you and set their minds to it, they are gonna track you down, but if they are just riding and don't know your there they don't go to a whole lot of trouble. I can't say as I ever had a sit down and gab awhile session with any of them, so I have no idea what they think about that theory, but so far it works for me, I'm still around to think about it anyway.

I rode into Tucson the next day and I took time for some coffee and a meal at a little hole in the wall café, after which I stopped in at the saloon, as is my custom, but this time I had things to do and places to go, so I didn't have but one drink while I listened to see if there was any fresh saloon talk that might interest me. Might have heard something eventually, if I'd stayed longer but I didn't hear anything earth shattering in the short time I was there.

I figured I only had about fifteen to eighteen miles to go and I was getting a might anxious to see my old friend Ben, so I said adios to Tucson and headed for Ben's ranch.

There was some signaling going on up high in the hills, smoke and once I caught sight of some bright flashes from two widely separated lines of hills or low mountains, which ever it suits your fancy to call them. Now I reckon as how the flashes might just possibly have been U.S. Calvary but somehow I doubted it and I'm just pretty danged sure the smoke wasn't. So I'll just come right out with it, I got that scalp itching feeling there are Apache about. I decided that just because I was getting close to Ben's ranch, it didn't mean I wasn't riding in some dangerous territory.

Kind of cutting cross-country, as I was in this last stretch on the way to Ben's ranch, I saw some smoke rising and meandered over that way to see what was up, That was how I come across what must have been Ben's nearest neighbor. The place didn't seem to amount to much, more of a nester's cabin with maybe a house garden and probably some crops out somewhere, but I didn't see any sign of any. Wasn't much left there to see anyway, because they had had some red visitors and the smoldering ruins of a cabin and one small outbuilding and a still standing outhouse was about all that was left.

Though I wasn't happy about the delay, I took time to bury the two adults and the little boy I found. I ain't much of a religious man but I said a few words over them before I took off and headed on towards Ben's place. I won't even discuss what kind of shape those bodies were in when I found them; just suffice it to say they weren't a pretty sight. At least the little one wasn't mutilated, looked like they had just swung him around by the heels and smashed his head against the house. Must have been a pretty bad bunch or they were in one heap big hurry, cause they would usually have kept the boy as a slave or a hostage.

## Apache Sign

Ben was a little jumpy and met me with a .44-.40 when I rode up to his place, but as soon as he saw who it was he was happy as a prospector with his first nugget. After we greeted each other and set down in Ben's parlor with a drink of whiskey, I told him about his neighbors. Of course he was sorry to hear they'd been killed, especially the boy, but it saved him the trouble of having the sheriff come out to evict them, they were on his deeded property and he had only been putting off making them move because of the young'un.

Ben's not a hard man but those folks had camped right on his trail to take his cows to water, of course, because they needed water if they were going to raise any crops at all and scarce as water is in the Arizona Territory, he just couldn't let them stay there, he had to have the water for his stock and after all, Ben owned the land with deed and title.

Ben told me he had one brief skirmish with some Apache but that was before his hands had decided to take the Army's warning serious and head on into town until things settled down some, after all it was worth a man's life to try and do any ranch work away from the safety of the ranch house anyway and they had tried their level best to get Ben to ride into town with them, but it is a little different when it is your ranch and not just the boss's place.

With the hands still there, they had way too many guns to suit them Apache and they hadn't been bothered much since. Ben said even adversity had some benefits though, as them rustlers hadn't been around that he knew of anyway. He hadn't really been able to get out and around much, especially after the hands rode off, but from what he had seen there weren't a lot of cow critters missing.

"Makes sense to me," I said, "they would either do one of two things. Either they would take advantage of there being a lot less people out on the range to see them and make off with as many cattle as they could, or they would hole up in town too, to try and keep their hair and worry about stealing cows later."

"From what the hands said before they left, it was the latter," Ben said, "cause the boys couldn't find any trace of them or any more of my steers missing."

Even though I felt like I was taking my life in my own hands every time, I rode out every morning for near a full week and I never seen hide nor hair of any rustlers or from the count Ben gave me, any loss of stock, oh there might have been one or two missing but for all I knew they were resting pleasantly in some Apache bellies. I saw what I figured to be more than enough Apache sign, but I had known that would be the case.

About mid morning of the sixth day, I seen a troop of Calvary pretty far off and riding for one of those hills the smokes had been coming from, which I personally considered a waste of time, no wonder them boys was having such a hell of a time catching them red devils. Hell, there probably weren't more than two or three of them, five or six at the most and long before the Calvary got there they would have dissipated like the early morning mist. Meanwhile, with the Calvary out chasing smoke, that would leave the rest free to hit some more ranches.

I rode as fast as I could back to the ranch and told Ben what I had seen and what I figured was about to happen. We divided up, Ben took one front and two side windows and I took the other side of the house. We set up all our spare guns, fully loaded, which was a spare rifle for Ben, a spare Colts for Ben and the same for me, then Ben broke out a really sweet pair of matching double barrel .10 gauge greeners, one for him and one for me, for close in work. We each still had our regular rifles and Colts, which we carried with us or kept close by and with a supply of extra ammo, we were ready to lay down as much fire as we could.

## Apache Sign

Since we hadnât seen anything yet, we set us up a two man fire line and Ben would fill buckets at the well, turn and hand them to me and I would run up and throw them on the house. We switched off when I started wearing out from running back and forth and pretty well soaked all the wood in that house down pretty danged wet. Then we filled six buckets, all Ben had, and carried them in to the house to try and douse any fire arrows that acted like they was going to catch on in spite of how wet the wood was.

We started a nice big fire in the fireplace and put a couple of irons in the fire to get good and hot. Ainât nothing stops a wound from bleeding faster than cauterizing it, hurts like hell, but it works.

We made up some sandwiches from what Ben had on hand and put some drinking water where we could get to it easy and we were as ready as we were gonna get.

It couldnât have been more than a couple of hours before we got our unwanted company and the battle was on. It didnât take much to convince them that coming up hard to the house wasnât working out real well for them, so they stayed back for awhile and tried potting at us with both guns and arrows. Well, their arrows werenât catching anything on fire or getting through the windows good enough to hit us and they werenât having a lot of luck with their rifles either.

The shooting kind of died down for awhile and I reckon they were trying to think up some way to pry us outtân that house when that troop of Calvary I had seen earlier was attracted by all the gunfire and came a riding our way. Of course them Apache knew about the Calvary long before we did and there was nobody around but Ben and me by the time the Calvary rode in.

We got to talking with Lt. Farney, who was a might upset because we were still holding out on the ranch, instead of riding into town like we, or at least Ben, had been told to do. After we sort of calmed him down a mite, he told us they had found the bodies of four white men who had been camped out near those hills I had seen them riding towards.

â Might want to come outside and take a look at what they had on them,â Lt. Farney said.

When we got outside, he had one of his troopers show us their gear and mixed in among all their other junk was a set of three running irons that would neatly rebrand Benâs cow critters with a new brand all their own.

â Well, Iâll be a crusty old horneytoad,â I said, â looks like them Apache done solved your rustling problem Ben.â

â I reckon so,â Ben grinned, â couldnât have happened to a nicer bunch of fellas, if I do say so myself.â

I stayed on there at the ranch with Ben for nearly a month before his hands come a riding back in, with hangovers and empty pockets, but with the news that the Calvary had pretty well rounded up them Apache and forced them back onto the reservation, all except Chato and a few of his warriors, who had made it back down to Mexico. So it looked like there would be some peace on the desert for a while, or at least this part of it, anyway.

Once Benâs hands had the situation back under control, I headed on back to Texas and about two days out of Tombstone, on the way back, I discovered that maybe Chato wasnât as easy to run off as the Calvary thought, cause I sure was seeing plenty of Apache sign.

Apache Sign

â The Endâ

Ó DEC 2007, George H. Lafferty

## Apache Sign

Created from Booksie.com

Generated: 2015-01-25 15:55:07