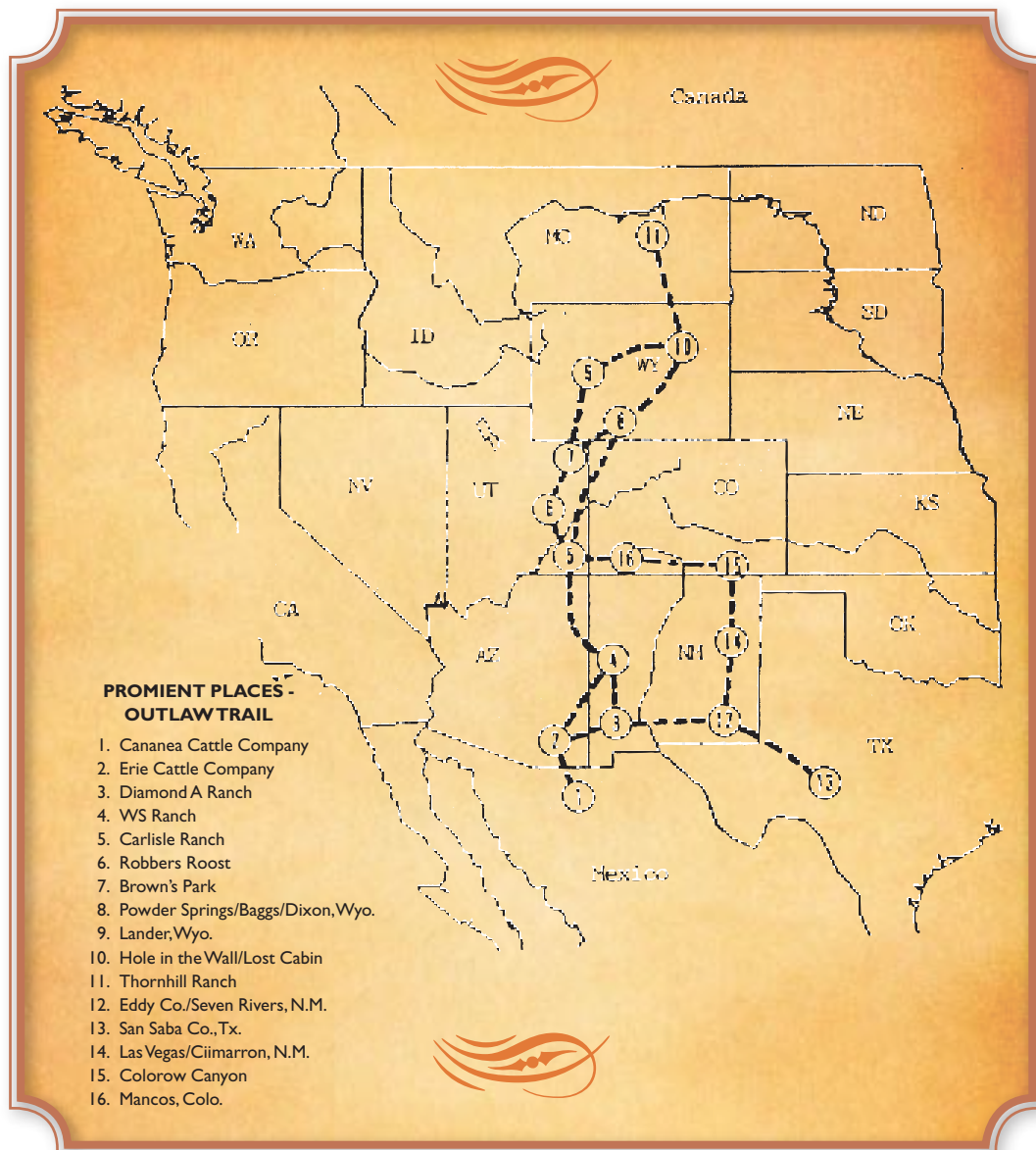


# Hideout in the Gila

*Butch Cassidy roamed incognito in southwest New Mexico.*



Butch Cassidy's presence in southwestern New Mexico is barely noted today. Notorious for his successful bank and train robberies at the turn of the 20th century, Cassidy was idealized and idolized as a "gentleman outlaw" and leader of the Wild Bunch. He and various members of the gang worked incognito at the WS Ranch — set between Arizona's Blue Range and San Carlos Apache Reservation to the west and the rugged Mogollon Mountains to the east — from February 1899 until May 1900.

Descendants of pioneers and ranchers acquainted with Cassidy tell stories about the man their ancestors knew as "Jim Lowe." Nancy Thomas grew up hearing from her grandfather Clarence Tipton and others that Cassidy was a "man of his word." Tipton was the foreman at the WS immediately before Cassidy's arrival.

The ranch sits at the southern end of the Outlaw Trail, a string of accommodating ranches and Wild Bunch hideouts stretching from Montana and the Canadian border into Mexico. The country surrounding the WS Ranch is forbidding; volcanic terrain cleft with precipitously angled, crenelated canyon walls defies access. A "pretty hard layout," local old-timer Robert Bell told Lou Blachly, whose collection of interviews with pioneers — conducted between 1942 and 1953 — are housed at the University of New Mexico. What better place to dodge the law?

British investors Harold C. Wilson and Montague Stevens founded the WS Ranch in 1882. The short-lived partnership left Wilson as sole owner. The following year his guest for Christmas was William French, a captain in the British army, whose *Recollections of a Western Ranchman* is a key source of information about Cassidy's time in New Mexico. Keen to ranch in the American West, French bought 100 head of cattle from Wilson, ran them with the WS herd, and stayed. Making himself "generally useful," French wrote in his *Recollections*, he became general manager of the ranch four years later.

In February 1899, Cassidy, going by the alias Jim Lowe, appeared at the WS with Perry Tucker, foreman of the Erie Land



Left, sign for WS Land and Cattle Company in present-day Alma, New Mexico; right, Mogollon Theatre, where dances were held; photos by Nancy Coggeshall

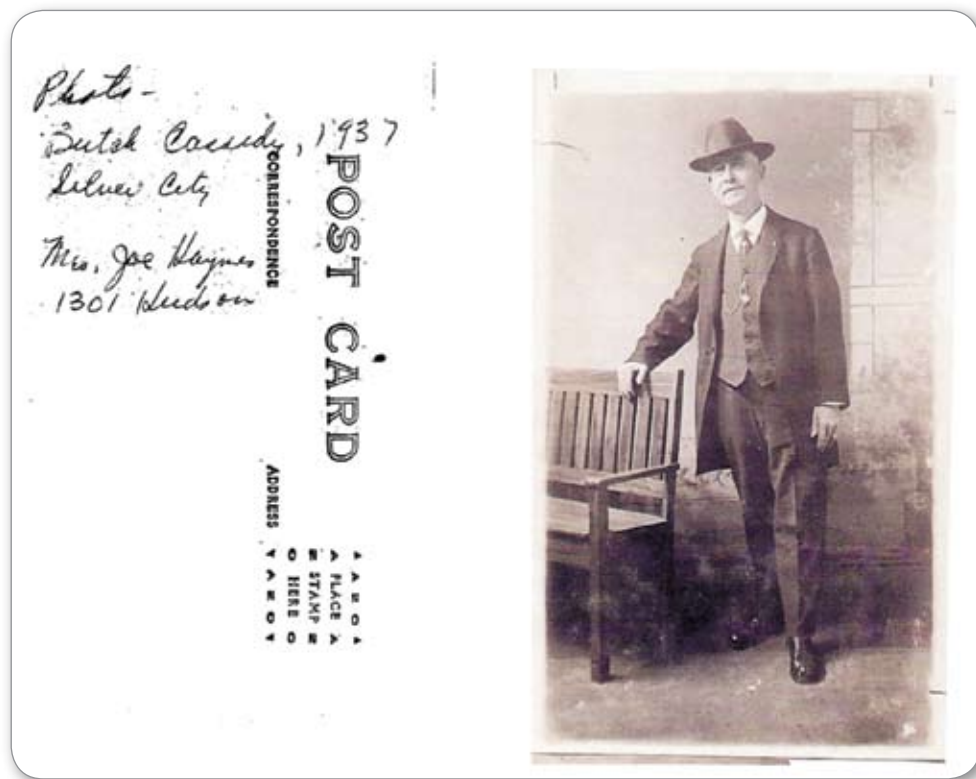
and Cattle Company in Cochise County, Arizona. French had written to Tucker, asking him to return to the WS to replace Tipton, who resigned over his inability to curb the rustling of WS cattle. Cassidy was Tucker's assistant. In Cassidy, French had a trail boss, capable of driving a mixed herd of 1,600 cows, calves, steers, and bulls. Cassidy also managed the crew of eight hands, one cook, and a horse wrangler on the 200-mile drive to the railhead in Magdalena. Before reaching the level expanse of the plains of San Agustin, the crew and herd picked their way through the Blue, Saliz, Kelly, Tularosa, and Apache mountains. French wrote in his book that Cassidy "never dropped a hoof."

Besides his estimable cow work, Cassidy and the new crew "brought about a complete change over all," French recalled. Admittedly, there was a high turnover of staff with Wild Bunch members — including Elzy Lay, Jim James, Clay McGonagill, Tom Capehart, and Bruce "Red" Weaver — coming and going, but cattle loss due to rustling noticeably declined.

Furthermore, the behavior of WS hands in town reputedly was beyond reproach. The present turnoff to the WS Ranch is merely a mile from what constitutes the center of Alma today. For the hands, that meant the town's saloon, post office, general store, and dance hall were conveniently next door. Cassidy had a financial interest in the saloon and sometimes tended bar. Nine miles away, the mining boomtown of Mogollon provided more saloons, dancing opportunities, and "joy houses," or brothels. One brothel catered to Anglophones, another to those who spoke Spanish.

Agnes Meader Snider, one of Cassidy's partners at the Mogollon dances, recalled Cassidy as a "real gentleman ... wild and reckless. But aren't most young fellows?" in an interview with Betty Woods in the March 1944 issue of *The Desert Magazine*. He was the best dancer Snider had ever seen — "marvelous." She told her granddaughter Mary Agnes Snider that you could "put a glass of water on his head and he wouldn't spill it. He could glide."

While employed at the WS, Cassidy was suspected of masterminding the infamous Wilcox Train Robbery in Wyoming on



June 2, 1899; he was even accused of participating in it, though he wasn't charged with being at the scene, because the event had all the characteristics of a Cassidy heist. Stealing the gold earmarked to pay troops fighting in the Spanish-American War elevated this to the most nefarious of Wild Bunch robberies. And the killing of Converse County Sheriff Josiah Hazen during the posse's pursuit made the crime even more egregious.

Photograph of a man believed to be Butch Cassidy, taken in Silver City in 1937; courtesy Mary Agnes Snider and Randy Haymes

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## The mystery of Cassidy Spring

Plaques, statues, and roadside displays throughout the West commemorate places where Butch Cassidy and his Wild Bunch gang left verifiable traces. “Festival celebrations and robbery reenactments sustain the legend,” cultural geographer John MacIntosh Blewer notes in a University of Wyoming master’s thesis due for publication this summer. But so far, only folklore and fancy sustain the legend that the Gila Wilderness’ Cassidy Spring was named for the outlaw who worked at a nearby Catron County ranch from February 1899 until May 1900.

Cassidy Spring is cited on a 1911 U.S. Forest Service map and a U.S. Geological Survey map surveyed from 1911 to 1912 and printed in 1913. It’s found specifically at Township 11, Range 14, Section 14, Trail 25 in the Gila Wilderness. Yet the derivation of the name is not mentioned in the Geological Survey’s geographic name database or the Library of Congress name authority file for geographic names. Nor is Cassidy Spring listed in T.M. Pearce’s *New Mexico Place Names: A Geographical Dictionary* or Robert Julyan’s *The Place Names of New Mexico*.

Place names usually designate a geographical feature, an event, or a person. The 1880 New Mexico census cites a miner named George Cassidy, and an engineer named John W. Cassidy lived in Pinos Altos in 1900. But there are no accounts of early Gila Country settlers named Cassidy. Two other Cassidys appear in the 1900 census for New Mexico besides John in Pinos Altos — one in Mora and another in Taos, much farther north.

Cassidy Spring is 10 linear miles from Central — present-day Santa Clara — near Fort Bayard; Pinos Altos is eight and a half linear miles from the spring. Looming between those two mining towns is some of the Gila’s most rugged terrain: the volcanic field of the Mogollon-Datil plateau, layered with ancient lava flows; sheer, rhyolite-capped cliff walls; and mountains ranging in altitude from 6,000 to 8,000 feet. But the specific pocket of the Gila that is home to Cassidy Spring is not known for mining activity. Given the rugged distance between these men and the spring that bears the Cassidy name, it’s hard to see how it was named for either John or George Cassidy.

The spring is southeast of the Hulse Ranch on the northern border of the Gila Wilderness. Longtime Gila Country rancher Quentin Hulse, widely regarded as an oral historian, maintained that the spring was named for the outlaw. Hulse’s father, Pyeart, was a business partner of Clarence Tipton Jr., whose father, Clarence Tipton, was foreman of the WS Ranch immediately before Cassidy’s arrival. The horse camps for the WS Ranch were west of ranch headquarters in Alma, near the Arizona border. Perhaps the spring, east of the ranch, offered a neutral haven away from the WS.

Speculation based on folklore might not hold up as solid proof. For now, though, it satisfies the locals as the most likely explanation.

— N.C.

## Butch Cassidy, continued from Page 21



Cultural geographer John MacIntosh Blewer noted in a University of Wyoming master’s thesis due for publication this summer that the theft moved the state’s Gov. DeForest Richards, Sen. Francis E. Warren, Union Pacific President Horace Greeley Burt, other railway officials, and President McKinley to pronounce Cassidy a national terrorist. Cassidy made the pages of the *New York Herald*, and the Pinkerton National Detective Agency put crack detectives Charles Siringo and W.O. Sayles on the case. A bounty of \$18,000 was posted for Cassidy and his gang.

W.J. “Bill” Betenson, in *Butch Cassidy, My Uncle: A Family Portrait*, writes, “If Butch was in Wyoming or present at [the] Wyoming robbery, he soon returned to the WS Ranch.” Betenson, Cassidy’s great-grandnephew, mentions that Cassidy’s frequent stretches at the WS horse camp, some 20 miles from headquarters, might have made it possible for him to slip away.

In early spring of 1900, Pinkerton detective Frank Murray arrived in Alma looking for Cassidy. The future assistant superintendent of Pinkerton’s Denver office talked to French, who discussed the interview with Cassidy. The outlaw had seen the detective, perceived his purpose, and bought him a drink at the Alma saloon.

Murray’s appearance was ominous. Soon after, Cassidy and gang member Weaver left the area with all the saddle horses of a rancher next door who was long suspected of rustling WS stock. Cassidy reunited with the gang that summer. They robbed the First National Bank in Winnemucca, Nevada, in September. On Nov. 21, 1900, Cassidy and gang members Harry Longabaugh (“the Sundance Kid”), Ben Kilpatrick, Will Carver, and Harvey Logan were photographed in big-city finery in Fort Worth, Texas; this misguided fancy ultimately informed the law of their whereabouts.

Having contemplated a move to South America for some time, Cassidy sailed to Argentina in 1901. Along the way he enjoyed a whirlwind February visit to New York City with Sundance and Sundance’s companion Etta Place. In Argentina the partners ranched until 1905, when they robbed a bank in Mercedes, 400 miles west of Buenos Aires. From there they moved to Chile, then Bolivia, where they worked as stock handlers. After robbing a payroll in



Huaca Huañusca on Nov. 4, 1908, their banditry culminated in the Nov. 6 gun battle in San Vicente, blazingly portrayed at the end of 1969's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

Anne Meadows and Dan Buck, authors of *Digging Up Butch and Sundance*, researched extensively in South America and concur with most Wild Bunch historians that Cassidy and Sundance died in San Vicente. Their deaths were "beyond all sustainable doubt," asserts Jeffrey Burton in *Deadliest Outlaws: The Ketchum Gang and the Wild Bunch*.

But doubt springs eternal. Betenson marshals interviews with relatives and commendable research to support his belief that Cassidy survived the San Vicente gunfight. Biographer Richard Patterson, author of *Butch Cassidy: A Biography*, argues that Cassidy died there but allows that "there seems to be some evidence from reliable witnesses that Butch lived long after he was supposedly killed in Bolivia."

Two reliable witnesses have stated that Cassidy was in New Mexico after his reported death. Mary Agnes Snider, the granddaughter of Cassidy's dancing partner Agnes Meader Snider, maintains that Cassidy visited his old friend in 1937, at her Silver City home. During the encounter, described in an article in *New Mexico Magazine* in 1972, a photograph was taken. When Agnes Meader Snider introduced her visitor to her granddaughter and her granddaughter's playmate, Quentin Hulse, as "Butch Cassidy," the visitor replied, "That's a name I want to forget." Hulse corroborates the story. (At the turn of the 21st century, the two elders hadn't seen each other for decades but recounted Cassidy's comments word for word independent of each other for the author of the magazine article.)

Given the box-office success of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, it's surprising there aren't roadside plaques citing Cassidy's stint at the WS Ranch in Alma. In the more recent film *Blackthorn*, Sam Shepard's portrayal of an older, grizzled Cassidy as having fictionally survived on Bolivia's altiplano rekindles interest and debate, reviving the legend.

"Must names like Alma be kept alive only because there have been names like Butch Cassidy?" the Rev. Stanley Francis Louis Crocchiola asks in his book *The Alma (New Mexico) Story*, written under his pen name F. Stanley. He needn't have worried. A spring in the Gila Wilderness is said to be named for Cassidy. But you can't even buy a postcard of the famous Wild Bunch's Fort Worth photograph in any of the nearby towns. ◀

Nancy Coggeshall is a freelance writer who lives in Reserve, New Mexico. She gives a talk, "Butch Cassidy in New Mexico: His Winning Ways, His Dancing Feet, and Postmortem Return," as part of a session on "Famous Western Characters in New Mexico" at the Historical Society of New Mexico conference at the Santa Fe Community Convention Center from 10:30 a.m. to noon Friday, May 4. See [www.hsnm.org](http://www.hsnm.org) for the convention's full schedule of events.



Sam Shepard as Butch Cassidy in the 2011 film *Blackthorn*; courtesy Magnet Releasing

Opposite page, top: the Wild Bunch in a photo taken Nov. 21, 1900; from left, Harry Longabaugh (aka the Sundance Kid), Will Carver, Ben Kilpatrick, Kid Curry, and Butch Cassidy; below, Ettta Place with the Sundance Kid

