

The Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge, formed in 1984, is a wonderful opportunity to explore not only awesome examples of nature, but Nevada history as well. Along with the many powerful springs surging with blue-green water, numerous picnic spots, swimming in some of the clearest waters available, hiking, and bird watching; the Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge is home to a new attraction. The restoration of the Longstreet cabin at Ash Meadows Ranch is almost complete.

The historical landmark belonged to Andrew Jackson "Jack" Longstreet, a "charismatic" Nevada legend reputed to settle arguments with a gun, and champion those who could not protect themselves. Longstreet was born in Tennessee around 1834, and after a checkered and secretive past, came to this area in 1896 and built the cabin at the spring bearing his name.

The original structure had a unique feature. It was built to incorporate a "spring mound" on the rear wall. By digging a cave into the mound, Longstreet had effectively equipped his home with the earliest refrigeration technology. Other structures on the property included a wooden frame house and a shed. Both are long gone.

Jack and his American Indian wife Susie resided in the cabin for five years using the 80-acre property to raise horses. They named the farm Ash Meadows Ranch.

During his residence in Ash Meadows, Jack befriended the Western Shoshone and Southern Paiute Indians. He had their respect and friendship in return, and through this, the property became a meeting place for the two tribes after the fall gathering and harvest to trade goods and information as well as to celebrate.

Although he moved further north in 1891, Longstreet returned often and maintained his ownership of Ash Meadows Ranch until he sold it in 1907 for a reported sum of \$10,000.

Over the years, exposure to the elements left the site desolate. By the 1980s the cabin roof was missing many of the boards, and the walls began to deteriorate rapidly as rainwater washed away the mortar. In 1991 the roof was missing and the north side of the cabin had fallen over, the front wall was still standing, but the south side was beginning to collapse. The rear wall of the cabin built on the spring mound had cracked, and by 1996 all of the walls had toppled.

Work began to restore the cabin in 2004. The rear wall, which was originally built on top of the spring mound, was restored using concrete block to simulate the original height and dimension with the original stones placed back on the wall. The front and sidewalls had tipped over, but the stones still appeared to be in courses as they lay on the ground. It appears that 95 percent of the original stone material is still present and had not been moved. Grateful to find the stones undisturbed, they were numbered and replaced in order much like one would tear down a log house to reassemble it at another location.

USFWS archaeological historian Lou Ann Speulda is in charge of the restoration, and notes that the structure is not just a cabin. The materials are special. Experts analyzed the original mortar components and duplicated it down to the local sediment and lime. Portland cement was added as an aggregate to extend the longevity of the restoration.

The log purlins came from the Spring Mountains during thinning by the Forest Service, and the wide boards for the roof were specially milled for this project in Washington State.

Yet to be finished is the restoration of vegetation and some restoration to the spring. A boardwalk from the parking area to an informational kiosk and another boardwalk allowing for exploration of the Longstreet Spring are planned. Project completion isn't expected for over a year, and if you would like to volunteer with finishing work on the cabin or being a site steward please contact Lou Ann Speulda (775-861-6335) or Sharon McKelvey (775-372-5435).



The ruins of the legendary Jack Longstreet's stone cabin, above, were recently restored thanks to USFWS and BLM staff and volunteers. Below, the nearly restored cabin sits just as it did more than 100 years ago. *Photos by Charlene Dean.*

