

Snake Gulch Geocache

The Snake Gulch Geocache is located in Nail Canyon where, in 1907, Zane Grey and Buffalo Jones began tracking a famous wild mustang. Their adventure continued into a remote canyon called Snake Gulch. Since most of Snake Gulch is located in a national wilderness area, Zane Grey's West Society received approval from the Kaibab National Forest to locate this geocache in the less restricted Nail Canyon. Here are Zane Grey's own words about this adventure as published in Chapters 6 and 7 of his non-fiction works, The Last of the Plainsmen. Before moving to this amazing story, let me help your enjoyment by outlining the cast of characters:

Zane Grey: A young dentist, soon to become the world's most celebrated author chronicling adventures of the Old West.

Buffalo Jones: The peer of Buffalo Bill Cody who had been a player in decimating the American bison, now working tirelessly to preserve the dwindling species.

Jimmy Owens: The ranger appointed by Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot to manage what was then called the Grand Canyon Forest Preserve; once an associate of Billy the Kid.

Frank Onstott: The cowboy from the Goodnight Ranch of "Lonesome Dove" fame who drove buffalo to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon and became Jones' foreman in his "catallo" experiment crossbreeding the bison with Galloway cattle.

Grant Wallace: A freelance newspaper writer for periodicals such as the San Francisco Examiner.

Wes Lawson and the Stewart brothers: Experienced wild horse hunters familiar with the canyons and plateaus along the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.





“For thirty miles down Nail Canyon we marked, in every dusty trail and sandy wash, the small, oval, sharply defined tracks of the White Mustang and his band.

The canyon had been well named. It was long, straight and square sided; its bare walls glared steel-gray in the sun, smooth, glistening surfaces that had been polished by wind and water. No weathered heaps of shale, no crumbled piles of stone obstructed its level floor. And, softly toning its drab austerity, here grew the white sage, waving in the breeze, the Indian Paint Brush, with vivid vermilion flower, and patches of fresh, green grass.

"The White King, as we Arizona wild-hoss wranglers calls this mustang, is mighty pertickler about his feed, an' he ranged along here last night, easy like, browsin' on this white sage," said Stewart. Inflected by our intense interest in the famous mustang, and ruffled slightly by Jones's manifest surprise and contempt that no one had captured him, Stewart had volunteered to guide us. "Never knowed him to run in this way fer water; fact is, never knowed Nail Canyon had a fork. It splits down here, but you'd think it was only a crack in the wall. An' thet cunnin' mustang hes been foolin' us fer years about this water-hole."

The fork of Nail Canyon, which Stewart had decided we were in, had been accidentally discovered by Frank, who, in search of our horses one morning had crossed a ridge, to come suddenly upon the blind, box-like head of the canyon. Stewart knew the lay of the ridges and run of the canyons as well as any man could know a country where, seemingly, every rod was ridged and bisected, and he was of the opinion that we had stumbled upon one of the White Mustang's secret passages, by which he had so often eluded his pursuers.

Hard riding had been the order of the day, but still we covered ten more miles by sundown. The canyon apparently closed in on us, so camp was made for the night. The horses were staked out, and supper made ready while the shadows were dropping; and when darkness settled thick over us, we lay under our blankets.

Morning disclosed the White Mustang's secret passage. It was a narrow cleft, splitting the canyon wall, rough, uneven, tortuous and choked with fallen rocks--no more than a wonderful crack in solid stone, opening into another canyon. Above us the sky seemed a winding, flowing stream of blue. The walls were so close in places that a horse with pack would have been blocked, and a rider had to pull his legs up over the saddle. On the far side, the passage fell very suddenly for several hundred feet to the floor of the other canyon. No hunter could have seen it, or suspected it from that side.

"This is Grand Canyon country, an' nobody knows what he's goin' to find," was Frank's comment.

"Now we're in Nail Canyon proper," said Stewart; "An' I know my bearin's. I can climb out a mile below an' cut across to Kanab Canyon, an' slip up into Nail Canyon agin, ahead of the mustangs, an' drive 'em up. I can't miss 'em, fer Kanab Canyon is impassable down a little ways. The mustangs will hev to run this way. So all you need do is go below the break, where I climb out, an' wait. You're sure goin' to get a look at the White Mustang. But wait. Don't expect him before noon, an' after that, any time till he comes. Mebbe it'll be a couple of days, so keep a good watch."

Then taking our man Lawson, with blankets and a knapsack of food, Stewart rode off down the canyon.

We were early on the march. As we proceeded the canyon lost its regularity and smoothness; it became crooked as a rail fence, narrower, higher, rugged and broken. Pinnacled cliffs, cracked and leaning, menaced us from above. Mountains of ruined wall had tumbled into fragments.

It seemed that Jones, after much survey of different corners, angles and points in the canyon floor, chose his position with much greater care than appeared necessary for the ultimate success of our venture--which was simply to see the White Mustang, and if good fortune attended us, to snap some photographs of this wild king of horses. It flashed over me that, with his ruling passion strong within him, our leader was laying some kind of trap for that mustang, was indeed bent on his capture.

Wallace, Frank and Jim were stationed at a point below the break where Stewart had evidently gone up and out. How a horse could have climbed that streaky white slide was a mystery. Jones's instructions to the men were to wait until the mustangs were close upon them, and then yell and shout and show themselves.

He took me to a jutting corner of cliff, which hid us from the others, and here he exercised still more care in scrutinizing the lay of the ground. A wash from ten to fifteen feet wide, and as deep, ran through the canyon in a somewhat meandering course. At the corner which consumed so much of his attention, the dry ditch ran

along the cliff wall about fifty feet out; between it and the wall was good level ground, on the other side huge rocks and shale made it hummocky, practically impassable for a horse. It was plain the mustangs, on their way up, would choose the inside of the wash; and here in the middle of the passage, just round the jutting corner, Jones tied our horses to good, strong bushes. His next act was significant. He threw out his lasso and, dragging every crook out of it, carefully recoiled it, and hung it loose over the pommel of his saddle.

"The White Mustang may be yours before dark," he said with the smile that came so seldom. "Now I placed our horses there for two reasons. The mustangs won't see them till they're right on them. Then you'll see a sight and have a chance for a great picture. They will halt; the stallion will prance, whistle and snort for a fight, and then they'll see the saddles and be off. We'll hide across the wash, down a little way, and at the right time we'll shout and yell to drive them up."

"Be extremely cautious to arrange the bunches in natural positions. A Rocky Mountain Big Horn is the only four-footed beast," he said, "that has a better eye than a wild horse. A cougar has an eye, too; he's used to lying high up on the cliffs and looking down for his quarry so as to stalk it at night; but even a cougar has to take second to a mustang when it comes to sight."

The hours passed slowly. The sun baked us; the stones were too hot to touch; flies buzzed behind our ears; tarantulas peeped at us from holes. The afternoon slowly waned.

At dark we returned to where we had left Wallace and the cowboys. Frank had solved the problem of water supply, for he had found a little spring trickling from a cliff, which, by skillful management, produced enough drink for the horses. We had packed our water for camp use.

"You take the first watch to-night," said Jones to me after supper. "The mustangs might try to slip by our fire in the night and we must keep a watch on them. Call Wallace when your time's up. Now, fellows, roll in."

When the pink of dawn was shading white, we were at our posts. A long, hot day--interminably long, deadening to the keenest interest--passed, and still no mustangs came. We slept and watched again, in the grateful cool of night, till the third day broke.

The hours passed; the cool breeze changed to hot; the sun blazed over the canyon wall; the stones scorched; the flies buzzed. I fell asleep in the scant shade of the sage bushes and awoke, stifled and moist. The old plainsman, never weary, leaned with his back against a stone and watched, with narrow gaze, the canyon below. The steely walls hurt my eyes; the sky was like hot copper. Though nearly wild with heat

and aching bones and muscles and the long hours of wait--wait--wait, I was ashamed to complain, for there sat the old man, still and silent. I routed out a hairy tarantula from under a stone and teased him into a frenzy with my stick, and tried to get up a fight between him and a scallop-backed horned-toad that blinked wonderingly at me. Then I espied a green lizard on a stone. The beautiful reptile was about a foot in length, bright green, dotted with red, and he had diamonds for eyes. Nearby a purple flower blossomed, delicate and pale, with a bee sucking at its golden heart. I observed then that the lizard had his jewel eyes upon the bee; he slipped to the edge of the stone, flicked out a long, red tongue, and tore the insect from its honeyed perch. Here were beauty, life and death; and I had been weary for something to look at, to think about, to distract me from the wearisome wait!

"Listen!" broke in Jones's sharp voice. His neck was stretched, his eyes were closed, his ear was turned to the wind.

With thrilling, reawakened eagerness, I strained my hearing. I caught a faint sound, then lost it.

"Put your ear to the ground," said Jones. I followed his advice, and detected the rhythmic beat of galloping horses.

"The mustangs are coming, sure as you're born!" exclaimed Jones. "There I see the cloud of dust!" cried he a minute later.

In the first bend of the canyon below, a splintered ruin of rock now lay under a rolling cloud of dust. A white flash appeared, a line of bobbing black objects, and more dust; then with a sharp pounding of hoofs, into clear vision shot a dense black band of mustangs, and well in front swung the White King.

"Look! Look! I never saw the beat of that--never in my born days!" cried Jones. "How they move! yet that white fellow isn't half-stretched out. Get your picture before they pass. You'll never see the beat of that."

With long manes and tails flying, the mustangs came on apace and passed us in a trampling roar, the white stallion in the front. Suddenly a shrill, whistling blast, unlike any sound I had ever heard, made the canyon fairly ring. The white stallion plunged back, and his band closed in behind him. He had seen our saddle horses. Then trembling, whinnying, and with arched neck and high-poised head, bespeaking his mettle, he advanced a few paces, and again whistled his shrill note of defiance. Pure creamy white he was, and built like a racer. He pranced, struck his hoofs hard and cavorted; then, taking sudden fright, he wheeled.

It was then, when the mustangs were pivoting, with the white in the lead, that Jones jumped upon the stone, fired his pistol and roared with all his strength. Taking

his cue, I did likewise. The band huddled back again, uncertain and frightened, then broke up the canyon.

Jones jumped the ditch with surprising agility, and I followed close at his heels. When we reached our plunging horses, he shouted: "Mount, and hold this passage. Keep close in by that big stone at the turn so they can't run you down, or stampede you. If they head your way, scare them back."

Satan quivered, and when I mounted, reared and plunged. I had to hold him in hard, for he was eager to run. At the cliff wall I was at some pains to check him. He kept champing his bit and stamping his feet.

From my post I could see the mustangs flying before a cloud of dust. Jones was turning in his horse behind a large rock in the middle of the canyon, where he evidently intended to hide. Presently successive yells and shots from our comrades blended in a roar which the narrow box-canyon augmented and echoed from wall to wall. High the White Mustang reared, and above the roar whistled his snort of furious terror. His band wheeled with him and charged back, their hoofs ringing like hammers on iron.

The crafty old buffalo-hunter had hemmed the mustangs in a circle and had left himself free in the center. It was a wily trick, born of his quick mind and experienced eye.

The stallion, closely crowded by his followers, moved swiftly. I saw that he must pass near the stone. Thundering, crashing, the horses came on. Away beyond them I saw Frank and Wallace. Then Jones yelled to me: "Open up! open up!"

I turned Satan into the middle of the narrow passage, screaming at the top of my voice and discharging my revolver rapidly.

But the wild horses thundered on. Jones saw that they would not now be balked, and he spurred his bay directly in their path. The big horse, courageous as his intrepid master, dove forward.

Then followed confusion for me. The pound of hoofs, the snorts, a screaming neigh that was frightful, the mad stampede of the mustangs with a whirling cloud of dust, bewildered and frightened me so that I lost sight of Jones. Danger threatened and passed me almost before I was aware of it. Out of the dust a mass of tossing manes, foam-flecked black horses, wild eyes and lifting hoofs rushed at me. Satan, with a presence of mind that shamed mine, leaped back and hugged the wall. My eyes were blinded by dust; the smell of dust choked me. I felt a strong rush of wind and a mustang grazed my stirrup. Then they had passed, on the wings of the dust-laden breeze.

But not all, for I saw that Jones had, in some inexplicable manner, cut the White Mustang and two of his blacks out of the band. He had turned them back again and was pursuing them. The bay he rode had never before appeared to much advantage, and now, with his long, lean, powerful body in splendid action, imbued with the relentless will of his rider, what a picture he presented! How he did run! With all that, the White Mustang made him look dingy and slow. Nevertheless, it was a critical time in the wild career of that king of horses. He had been penned in a space two hundred by five hundred yards, half of which was separated from him by a wide ditch, a yawning chasm that he had refused, and behind him, always keeping on the inside, wheeled the yelling hunter, who savagely spurred his bay and whirled a deadly lasso. He had been cut off and surrounded; the very nature of the rocks and trails of the canyon threatened to end his freedom or his life. Certain it was he preferred to end the latter, for he risked death from the rocks as he went over them in long leaps.

Jones could have roped either of the two blacks, but he hardly noticed them. Covered with dust and splotches of foam, they took their advantage, turned on the circle toward the passage way and galloped by me out of sight. Again Wallace, Frank and Jim let out strings of yells and volleys. The chase was narrowing down. Trapped, the White Mustang King had no chance. What a grand spirit he showed! Frenzied as I was with excitement, the thought occurred to me that this was an unfair battle, that I ought to stand aside and let him pass. But the blood and lust of primitive instinct held me fast. Jones, keeping back, met his every turn. Yet always with lithe and beautiful stride the stallion kept out of reach of the whirling lariat.

"Close in!" yelled Jones, and his voice, powerful with a note of triumph, bespoke the knell of the king's freedom.

The trap closed in. Back and forth at the upper end the White Mustang worked; then rendered desperate by the closing in, he circled round nearer to me. Fire shone in his wild eyes. The wily Jones was not to be outwitted; he kept in the middle, always on the move, and he yelled to me to open up.

I lost my voice again, and fired my last shot. Then the White Mustang burst into a dash of daring, despairing speed. It was his last magnificent effort. Straight for the wash at the upper end he pointed his racy, spirited head, and his white legs stretched far apart, twinkled and stretched again. Jones galloped to cut him off, and the yells he emitted were demoniacal. It was a long, straight race for the mustang, a short curve for the bay.

That the white stallion gained was as sure as his resolve to elude capture, and he never swerved a foot from his course. Jones might have headed him, but manifestly

he wanted to ride with him, as well as to meet him, so in case the lasso went true, a terrible shock might be averted.

Up went Jones's arm as the space shortened, and the lasso ringed his head. Out it shot, lengthened like a yellow, striking snake, and fell just short of the flying white tail.

The White Mustang, fulfilling his purpose in a last heroic display of power, sailed into the air, up and up, and over the wide wash like a white streak. Free! the dust rolled in a cloud from under his hoofs, and he vanished.

Jones's superb horse, crashing down on his haunches, just escaped sliding into the hole.

I awoke to the realization that Satan had carried me, in pursuit of the thrilling chase, all the way across the circle without my knowing it.

Jones calmly wiped the sweat from his face, calmly coiled his lasso, and calmly remarked, "In trying to capture wild animals a man must never be too sure. Now what I thought my strong point was my weak point--the wash. I made sure no horse could ever jump that hole."

Not far from the scene of our adventure with the White Streak as we facetiously and appreciatively named the mustang, deep, flat cave indented the canyon wall. By reason of its sandy floor and close proximity to Frank's trickling spring, we decided to camp in it. About dawn Lawson and Stewart straggled in on spent horse and found awaiting them a bright fire, a hot supper and cheery comrades.

"Did yu fellars git to see him?" was the ranger's first question.

"Did we get to see him?" echoed five lusty voices as one. "We did!"

It was after Frank, in his plain, blunt speech had told of our experience, that the long Arizonian gazed fixedly at Jones.

"Did yu acktully tech the hair of thet mustang with a rope?"

In all his days Jones never had a greater complement. By way of reply, he moved his big hand to button of his coat, and, fumbling over it, unwound a string of long, white hairs, then said: "I pulled these out of his tail with my lasso; it missed his left hind hoof about six inches."

There were six of the hairs, pure, glistening white, and over three feet long. Stewart examined them in expressive silence, then passed them along; and when they reached me, they stayed.