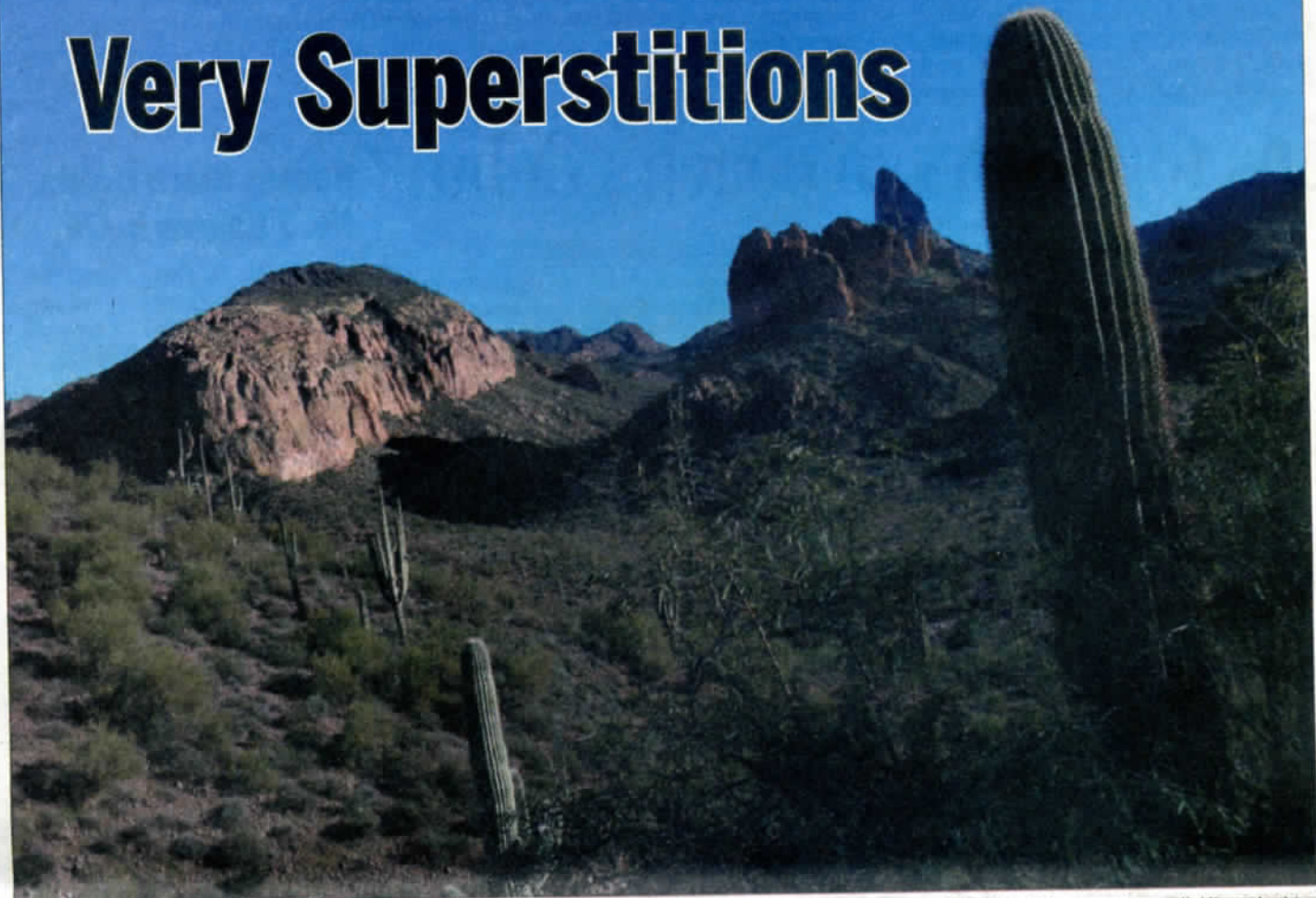


Very Superstitions



THE TRAIL TO BLACK TOP MESA (left) connects to others leading to Palomino Mesa and Weaver's Needle. **BELOW:** Writings on the wall: Hieroglyphics on the Black Top Mesa trail. **BOTTOM:** More volcanic spires and saguaro cacti of the Superstitions. (Photos courtesy of Rob Jones)

The volcanic spires east of Phoenix make for some spectacular day hikes during Spring Break or a long holiday weekend.

By **ROB JONES**
Special to the Daily Sun

The buffy volcanics scrape the eastern skyline as we drive to First Water trailhead at Lost Dutchman State Park to start the quest for Black Top Mesa, for the so-called Spanish hieroglyphs, for native rock and saguaro cactus.

It's pleasantly quiet at this usually busy trailhead 30 miles east of Phoenix as we start off on the Dutchman 104, the trail that roves from north to south across the wilderness, between this and the other busy trailhead, Peralta.

After starting out with an insulation layer, it's not long after we encounter the first water prior to Parker Pass that we are stripping down to T-shirts and long pants. Ahh, glorious sun, shining through the Phoenix area haze (which seems thin today — perhaps it's our slightly higher elevation?). The trailhead is at about 2,300 feet and we'll be climbing to about 3,400 feet on Black Top Mesa.



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IF YOU GO ...

Pausing at the junction of the Dutchman with the Black Mesa Trail 241, we enjoy an earned snack and ponder the route we took to the Ojo de Caballo Arch, high in the Palomino Mountain, during one of our first trips to this wilderness. It's certainly not an obvious route, we muse.

Continuing on, and leaving the Dutchman to climb to Bull Pass, we get a distant view of the Ojo. It's high in the buffy bluff-side of Palomino (look behind and up in the cliff as you climb the lower level of the pass).

Tremendous vistas of Weaver's Needle to the south and the wilderness area to the north pop into view as we mount Black Top Mesa. We search for the petros/hieroglyphs and find several — yet wonder about their origin. Then, we find a bucket seat in the ebony lava and enjoy lunch looking over the Superstition Wilderness domain.

Back at the Dutchman/Black Mesa Trail junction, we continue up the hill past stately saguaro. A rocky descent north from near the county line slows us some, and we're rounding the Second Water Trail as dusk settles in and cold air slumps into the gulch. Total miles: about 12.5.

WEAVER'S NEEDLE

We're up and on the road to Peralta trailhead early, knowing our plans include a long hike around Weaver's Needle. Along the way, we'll roll 2,800 feet up (and down, too), making this a hike that, although only 12 miles on the map, feels twice as long.

The south face of Black Top Mesa looks like an eco-friendly Oreo cookie, with a black top (basalt), a buffy center (the tuff), and a green colluvium bottom (cat claw shrubs and cactus on talus), as we

A distinctive spire

Weaver's Needle is a 1,000-foot-high column of rock that forms a distinctive peak visible for many miles around. Weaver's Needle was created when a thick layer of tuff (fused volcanic ash) was heavily eroded, creating the spire as an erosional remnant with a summit elevation of 4,555 feet. The peak was named after mountain man Pauline Weaver.

Weaver's Needle has played a significant role in the stories of the Lost Dutchman's Gold Mine. The Needle's shadow reportedly indicates the location of a rich vein of gold, and many treasure hunters have searched for it.

— Source: Wikipedia

slip and walk down from Terrapin Pass to once again join Dutchman Trail as it scribes an arc below Black Top before joining the Peralta Trail on the west side of Black Top. We're less than a half-mile from our lunch spot atop Black Top yesterday.

Climbing out of Boulder Canyon, we intersect the Peralta Trail and stop for a late lunch in view of the rufous and buffy cliffs of Palomino Mountain to the north. Shadows from the spiny ridge to the west cast long fangs over the granite lowlands near the base of Weaver's Needle. A few climbers are setting up camp on polished granite near the surprisingly fast-flowing water, preparing for or rejoicing about a Weaver climb.

Once again it's approaching dusk, this time as we top out on Fremont Saddle, to views down Peralta Canyon and a picket fence of saguaro in the distance. Going down, we pass some minor arches and more good country. To the trailhead, to dinner, to a discussion of today's Weaver roundabout. Total miles: about 12.6.

Rob Jones is a Flagstaff-based outdoors writer. Read his trip reports at wildernessvagabond.com

The geology of the Superstitions

The Superstition Mountains are the result of intensive volcanic activity. They are composed of welded tuff (volcanic ash cemented under extreme heat), breccia (rock fragments cemented together with lava or welded turf), granite, dacite, basalt, and some conglomerate.

A few gold deposits pocket the surrounding areas.

Some 25 million years ago, during the mid-Tertiary Period, volcanoes in this region emitted about 2,500 cubic miles of ash and lava, the ash spreading

as far south and northeast as present-day Florence and Roosevelt Lake. The volcanoes collapsed into their partly emptied magma chambers, producing depressions or calderas. A subsequent up-thrust of thick lava within the largest of these calderas and the forces of erosion have created the Superstition formations that we see at the park today. Thick, alluvial fans spread outward from this eroding resurgent dome. The alluvial material is primarily tuff, dacite, and decomposed granite.

— Source: *Lost Dutchman State Park*