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BANKS, LENA R.

NAVAJO MOUNTAINS.

10558

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LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

98

BANKS, LENA R.

NAVAJO MOUNTAINS

10558

Field worker's name Bessie L. Thomas

This report made on (date) April 19 1938

1. This legend was secured from (name) Lena R. Banks

Address Cache, Oklahoma

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe _____

2. Origin and history of legend or story _____

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 7

BANKS, LENA R.

NAVAJO MOUNTAINS

10558

Bessie L. Thomas,
Investigator,
April 19, 1938.

Interview with Lena R. Banks,
Cache, Oklahoma.

The Navajo Mountains.

In southwestern Oklahoma, about twelve or fifteen miles east of the town of Altus, is a group of mountains called the Navajo Mountains; they are steep and rugged and rise from the level plain about one thousand feet. The timber growth on these mountains are cedar, hackberry, and currant bushes. Although the mountains have not much soil on them, every spring and until late in the summer there are hundreds of native Oklahoma flowers that bloom in a riot of colors. The highest peak in this group is 5,280 feet.

It seemed strange that they should be called the Navajo Mountains, for the tribe of Navajo Indians lived many hundred miles to the west. An old full blood Comanche gave this version of the naming of this group of Mountains for the Navajo Indians.

A great many years ago there were several villages of Comanches camped along the stream a few miles east of these mountains. The country was very beautiful, with

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acres of tall native grass, plenty of wild game, fruits, and pecans, and there were no enemies near so the people lived for many years in peace and happiness. They went about their daily tasks with a song in their hearts and no thought of conflicts with other tribes, though they would sometimes make raids against the whites in Texas, leaving in camp the women, children, and old men and one summer had even sent some of their young braves north against the Cheyennes, but no enemy had ever come near their own villages.

They were therefore greatly surprised one day, when a scout came running into camp with the news that a great war party of strange people had been sighted by some Comanche hunters only a few miles to the west. He said there were hundreds of them, that they were well armed and equipped, and were coming rapidly eastward towards the Comanche villages. This caused a great confusion in the camp, as they had never before been attacked and there was much hustling among them to get the women, children and old men together in a place where the braves thought they would be safe.

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The strangers proved to be a tribe of Navajos, they lived very far to the westward, but had often heard of the Comanches, so a great war party had been organized to come into the Comanche country in order to fight them, and take possession of their ponies and other property.

The ponies of the Comanches were quickly driven in by the Comanches and the best ones caught and mounted by the young men and older warriors, who had hastily painted their faces with the bright war colors and armed themselves with their best weapons. The more remote camps were notified by a fast courier, of the ensuing danger and as soon as their warriors had arrived the little Comanche army rode rapidly away toward the west to meet the advancing enemy.

As they drew near this group of mountains they sent scouts ahead who presently returned with the news that the Navajos were encamped in a small grove west of the mountains, where they were resting and grazing their ponies, apparently without thought that the Comanches might be near.

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A council of war was held by the Comanche Chiefs and, after a brief talk, it was decided to attack at daylight the next morning. Camp was accordingly made in a little glen among some low hills and the warriors lay down and slept, leaving two lookout scouts on guard duty. Near daylight they all arose mounted their ponies and moved silently forward to attack the Navajo camp. The sun was just coming up when they approached the grove where the enemy was encamped. As they drew near the leaders gave the word to charge and the little Comanche army dashed upon the camp uttering their blood-curdling, and fearful warwhoops, and firing arrows at the Navajo warriors, who had just arisen from sleep and were cooking breakfast.

The fight was long and fierce; the Navajos, recovering from their surprise, seized their bows and arrows and fell back from camp, shooting as they went. Some of them leaped upon their ponies, others kept on afoot, sheltering themselves as best they could from the Comanches' arrows among the big rocks at the foot of the mountains.

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The Comanches slowly pushed them backward along the foot of the mountains toward the north. The Navajos kept together, however, and disputed every foot of ground. Their camp was now in the hands of their enemy but the Comanche warriors had no time to stop and loot now. They had the advantage, but the battle was by no means won. The fighting continued for hours. At last the Navajos were pushed away from the sheltering rocks and losing heart fled in wild confusion, each warrior trying only to save himself. The Comanches pursued and shot them down one by one until at last it seemed that all the Navajos were killed, the Comanche warriors believed that not a single one had escaped.

They then returned to the Navajo camp, gathered up all the ponies that had been left behind, and collected all the booty of which there was a large amount; there were tepees, saddles, blankets, weapons, and food, besides all the ponies of the Navajo war party.

The Comanches then returned home to their women and children, who welcomed them with great delight, and a

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splendid feast and dance lasting several days was held to celebrate the victory.

As the years passed, the battle with the Navajos was almost forgotten; then, almost twenty years afterwards, a party of Comanches was returning from an expedition against the whites, far down in Texas and late in the evening, they drew near this group of mountains, and decided to camp at the edge of the rocks. The men were hobbling the ponies and some of them were lying in the shade of the first tepees erected when some of the women who had gone off along the edge of the rocks looking for dry wood with which to start a fire to cook supper came running back to camp screaming that they had seen a Navajo on the mountains. The Comanche braves seized their bows and ran out to meet the women. When they came near, they saw high up among the rocks the half-naked form of a Navajo brave, running along and leaping from rock to rock. They took after him, after climbing the mountain and pursued him as long as they could see him, but it was soon dusk and they lost him among the

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The next morning they found his home, merely a cave among the boulders, but though they searched long and diligently they could never find the man himself, so they destroyed his simple furniture, and went on their way to their own homes farther north. They knew that this Navajo must be a lone survivor, of the great battle fought twenty years before and that after his companions were all dead he had not dared to attempt to traverse along the hundred of miles of prairie that lay between this and his people, so he had settled down on top of these mountains to spend the remainder of his life as hermit in this little group of mountains. What became of him the Comanches never knew but they supposed he lived out his life and died there.

In time, most people forgot all of these incidents but along the edge of the rocks flint arrow-heads are still found relics of the great battle and the mountains are still called the Navajo Mountains.