



DAY TRIP TO FORT BOWIE

From Willcox · Cochise County, Arizona



RAILROAD AND
ROAD



Photo: Old Gray Dog, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NPS site, free. Grounds and trail open daily, sunrise to sunset. Visitor center weekends; 1.5-mile walk from the trailhead.

From Willcox, Fort Bowie fills a morning, and with a stop or two it makes an easy day. The fort is a 1.5-mile walk from the trailhead, and the Park Service suggests allowing at least two hours. The only food for sale is snacks at the park store, so pack lunch and water. [Dos Cabezas](#) is right on the way out on AZ 186.

A SAMPLE DAY

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| ☐ 7:30 a.m. | Leave Willcox east on Maley Street, which is AZ 186. |
| ☐ 7:50 a.m. | Dos Cabezas . Pull well off the highway to look at the adobe ruins. They're private, so stay by the road. |
| ☐ 8:50 a.m. | Reach the Fort Bowie Trailhead after the unpaved climb over Apache Pass, about 45 minutes on from Dos Cabezas. |
| ☐ 9 a.m. | Walk in past the Butterfield stage station ruins, the post cemetery, the replica Apache camp, the 1862 battle site, the first fort and Apache Spring. |
| ☐ 10:15 a.m. | Reach the second fort's ruins and the visitor center. Refill your water at the fountain outside. |
| ☐ 11:15 a.m. | Return on the Overlook Ridge Trail, which looks down on the fort, to make the 3-mile loop. |
| ☐ 12:30 p.m. | Eat your packed lunch at the trailhead picnic shelter, then drive back to Willcox, about an hour. |
| ☐ Afternoon | The Rex Allen Museum on Railroad Avenue is open Thursday to Saturday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., and on Monday mornings. Admission is \$5; veterans and children under 10 get in free. |
| ☐ Dinner | The City of Willcox's dining list includes Big Tex BBQ on Maley Street, the road you drove out on. |

WHAT TO PHOTOGRAPH

- **The second fort from Overlook Ridge.** The return trail climbs above the parade ground. From up there the adobe walls, the visitor center and Apache Pass fit in one frame.
- **Adobe on stone.** The guardhouse and corral walls show adobe sitting on stone foundations. Low morning or evening light brings out the texture.
- **The post cemetery.** White headboards against dry grass. Shoot from outside the fence line and leave the graves undisturbed.
- **Apache Spring.** The spring the Army came to guard still runs. Frame it with the pass behind it to show why it mattered.
- **The replica wickiup.** The Apache camp beside the trail makes a good detail shot, especially with the hills behind.
- **Walk-in video.** The 1.5-mile trail makes a natural sequence, from the stage station and the cemetery to the spring and the first view of the fort.
- **Drones.** Prohibited at Fort Bowie without the superintendent's written approval.



USGS topographic map, 1917 (public domain). The ring and pin mark the town.

DAY TRIP ESSENTIALS

DRIVE	31 mi, about 1 h 00 min each way from downtown Willcox. From Tucson: 120 mi, about 2 h 25 min.
OPEN	Grounds, trails and ruins every day, sunrise to sunset. The visitor center opens Saturdays and Sundays, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; the same NPS page also says Friday through Monday, so call 520-549-6751 if you're counting on it. It closes on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day.
ADMISSION	Free. No entrance pass is needed.
TIME ON SITE	At least two hours, the Park Service says. The walk to the fort and back is 3 miles.
RESTROOMS	A vault toilet at the trailhead. Restrooms outside the visitor center, open every day.
FOOD AND WATER	The only drinking water is at the visitor center, 1.5 miles in, so carry your own. The park store sells snacks and doesn't take cash. Picnic tables at the trailhead and the visitor center.
SUN AND SHADE	There isn't much shade at the fort or in Apache Pass, the Park Service warns. The trailhead has a picnic shelter. Bring a hat and sunscreen.
ROAD	From Willcox, the last 8 miles over Apache Pass are unpaved. From I-10 by way of Bowie, only the last mile is. In monsoon season, June 15 to September 30, washes can flood.
ON FOOT	1.5 miles each way over uneven ground, with just under 200 feet of climbing. Leashed pets are welcome on the trails but not on the ruins. If you can't make the walk, an accessible lot near the visitor center can be opened during visitor center hours; call ahead.
DRONES	Not allowed. The park's rules prohibit flying unmanned aircraft without the superintendent's written approval.
CELL SIGNAL	Usually out of range inside the park, the Park Service says.
WEBSITE	nps.gov/fobo

COMING FROM FARTHER AWAY

Coming from Tucson? The Park Service's route by I-10 and Bowie takes about 2 h 25 min to the trailhead and skips Dos Cabezas. Leave by 6:30 a.m. to walk before the heat of the day.

BEFORE YOU GO

- Check the status with the land manager before you go; conditions change.
- Keep out of unstable buildings and off fenced ruins.
- Leave artifacts where they lie. Removing them can be a crime.
- Carry water, a paper map and a charged phone; signal is often poor.

Coordinates 32.14610, -109.43560 • 32°08'46"N
109°26'08"W

Full guide abandonedtowns.com/arizona/fort-bowie/

Directions [Google Maps](#)

Details checked October 2026. Hours, prices and access change: confirm before you go.