

**09-05-1970 Phoenix AZ – Gilbert A Duthie – Auto Flood Accident****Officer Gilbert A. Duthie**

United States

Arizona

Arizona Department of Public Safety

**Officer Gilbert A. Duthie**

*Arizona Department of Public Safety, Arizona*  
End of Watch Saturday, September 5, 1970

**GILBERT A. DUTHIE**

Officer Gilbert Duthie drowned when his patrol car was washed away by flood waters when Sycamore Creek, near Sunflower, Arizona, overflowed.

He was responding to assist stranded citizens due to the flooding. He was driving on the Beeline Highway and did not see that a portion of the bridge had been washed out. His patrol car left the roadway, went into the creek, and was washed away.

A monument in Officer Duthie's honor was placed at the north side of the bridge.

**BIO** Age 39

**BADGE 143**

**INCIDENT DETAILS**

Cause Drowned

**Arizona Trooper Remembered After Drowning When His Cruiser Was Swept Away By Flooding**

<https://kutv.com/news/local/arizona-trooper-remembered-after-drowning-when-his-cruiser-was-swept-away-by-flooding>

September 6th 2018 by Jennifer Weaver

(KUTV) -- The Arizona Department of Public Safety announced Thursday the commemoration of Trooper Gilbert Duthie, who drowned 48 years ago when his cruiser was swept away by the flooding of Sycamore Creek, near Sunflower.

Duthie was responding to stranded citizens. He had been driving along state Route 87 and did not see that a portion of the bridge had been washed out.



**The Arizona Department of Public Safety announced Thursday the commemoration of Trooper Gilbert Duthie, who drowned 48 years ago. (Photo: Arizona DPS)**

## Memorial recalls tragedy of 1970 Labor Day flood

### Deluge spawned one of state's worst disasters

[https://www.paysonroundup.com/news/local/memorial-recalls-tragedy-of-1970-labor-day-flood/article\\_58ae1d02-e996-5321-9d5f-708835a1256f.html](https://www.paysonroundup.com/news/local/memorial-recalls-tragedy-of-1970-labor-day-flood/article_58ae1d02-e996-5321-9d5f-708835a1256f.html)

Sep 4, 2016 Updated Mar 15, 2017 Teresa McQuerrey

The memories cast a heavy shadow across the memories of those who were there. Now, a band of Christopher Creek residents have resolved to shine a light on the shadow of that terrible tragedy — the 1970 Labor Day Flood.

A tropical storm dumped an estimated 18 inches of rain on Rim Country, generating a 30-foot-high wall of water that rushed down Tonto Creek, sweeping away homes, campers and cars — and claiming perhaps two dozen victims.

At 10 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 3 families, supporters and residents will dedicate a memorial to the victims in front of the Rim Country Historical Society Museum in Green Valley Park. The memorial grew out of a gathering three years ago in Christopher Creek to honor those who died and the first responders who saved many lives.

"Many people were just swept away. Some call it 'the deadliest natural disaster in the history of Arizona,'" according to an article written by Tim Ehrhardt, an area historian and former columnist for The Rim Review.

The Sept. 10, 1970 Payson Roundup devoted its front page to coverage of the Labor Day Flood, "... took a toll of at least 10 lives in the Payson area. Six others were still reported missing late Tuesday," that early report stated. "The known dead: Mrs. Margaret Dickinson, 59, Payson; Susie Allen, 28, Phoenix; Kyle MacDonald, 40, Mesa; Ina MacDonald, 33, his wife; two of their children, Sue, 8, and Nan, 10; Gilbert A. Duthie, 39, Mesa.

"The bodies of three unidentified drowning victims had been recovered. Those of a man and a girl were found near Gisela, and that of another man was found in the Kohl's Ranch area.

"Still missing were Arthur Dickinson, 59, who was believed to have been with his wife Margaret, when their car went into Sycamore Creek; Tod and Sloan Chandler, who were in the MacDonald party; Randall MacDonald, son of Mr. and Mrs. Kyle MacDonald; and an unidentified man and wife who lived near the Tonto Rim American Baptist Camp and whose home was swept away."

The Roundup reported, "Hundreds of holiday travelers were marooned in and near Payson, and a hundred or more rescuers spent Sunday, Monday and much of Tuesday scouring the flood-swept land for victims and survivors ... The Payson schools opened their cafeteria to serve both rescuers and marooned visitors, supplying hot food and beverages to about 80 on Saturday, 14 on Sunday, and 100 (mostly rescue squad) on Monday.

"The gymnasium at Julia Randall Elementary School was opened to visitors, and about 40 persons slept there. The lobbies of the Ox Bow Inn and Kohl's Ranch Lodge also served as sleeping quarters for travelers."

The highway patrol asked for the schools to send buses to the Mount Ord area to pick up refugees and a church bus also went to help. Instead of the 175 expected, "only 80 were able to reach the buses."

The flood destroyed bridges and damaged long sections of highway. The state needed 6,000 yards of dirt to fill the gashes in the road north of Sycamore Creek, which is between Sunflower and Payson.

Roundup columnist Rod Britain, who has been involved in the development of the Labor Day Flood reunion and memorial, talked about the historic and upcoming events in his Friday, Aug. 26 column.



**The 1970 flood swept away many cars and killed as many as two dozen.**

**Nyle Leatham photo courtesy of the Northern Gila County Historical Society**

Many others facts have come to light since the Labor Day Flood reunion:

- One couple and their son were returning from dropping off a car, which they had donated to a missionary woman on the Navajo reservation. A few miles from a tiny town of Aneth in southeast Utah, the bridge on McElmo Creek had washed away. The victim's car and trailer were swept down the raging creek. However, their 10-year-old son, Dewey, escaped from the plunging vehicle and grabbing a bush along the bank, he held on for dear life until rescued by two Ute Indian policemen.
- Heather Fuller and her friend, Pamela Weese, made their way out of a sinking vehicle, clawing their way to a tree on higher ground as Heather watched the

remainder of their families wash down Tonto Creek. Wet and cold, they waited for rescue.

The Sept. 10, 1970 Roundup had this account, "The party had been staying at a cabin north of Kohl's Ranch owned by the Fuller family. Fearing the building might be washed away, MacDonald had everyone get into their cars. Mrs. MacDonald drove the leading auto, MacDonald the second. As they approached the Tonto-Horton Bridge over Tonto Creek, Miss Weese said, 'I saw a huge wall of water coming.'

"The water caught him up and the car went over a cliff like a toy,' Miss Weese said. 'I saw him clinging to a tree. Then he disappeared.'"

- A couple of young friends were caught in the floodwaters, desperately holding on to a tree awaiting rescue. Suddenly, Kim Ashby's hands slipped from the tree as Karen "Cookie" White quickly reached into the floodwaters, grabbed a handful of hair and brought Kim back to relative safety. This is an event that Cookie blocked from her memory for 43 years.

- Moris and Beverly Rhodes and their three children were camping along the creek and were washed away in their Volkswagen minibus. Along the Tonto, just before the confluence with Christopher Creek, are the engine, transmission and undercarriage of the Volkswagen minibus swept away at the Horton Creek Bridge. Dave Elston tells of the search and recovery effort on the day following the flood, in which young Dave and his dad participated. Focusing their eyes on the ground, he happened to look up to find the body of that Volkswagen minivan hanging precariously some 25 feet above the ground in an oak tree.

Heather Fuller continues to come to Rim Country to fish the area streams and will be attending the dedication.

Seven families representing 18 of the flood victims will be in attendance. Two of the survivors will also attend. Susan Leota Allen, the lone victim from Christopher Creek, along with her daughters Lori and Lisa.

Janis Hall has helped locate victims' family members. She shared this account, "Upon contacting the Fellars family, the daughter named Nancy kept saying to me that she thought it was a hoax when she heard about it because it had been so long and why would anyone be so nice to remember them in this way."

The 1970 Labor Day Flood resulted from the remnants of Tropical Storm Norma, according to Ehrhardt.

"Tropical Storm Norma started as a tropical disturbance on Sunday, Aug. 30 and became a tropical storm the next day. Over the following days it strengthened, with winds of 60 miles per hour on Thursday, Sept. 3. It would weaken into a mere tropical depression by the following day, but its outflow was sucked into Arizona.

Rainfall records were set throughout the region. During a 24-hour period covering part of Friday, Sept. 4 and Saturday, Sept. 5, an estimated 18 inches of rain fell on the Rim above Tonto Creek Fish Hatchery northeast. Millions of dollars in damage occurred and there were at least 20 fatalities. Most of those fatalities happened when a 30-foot wall of water swept down Tonto Creek just above Kohl's Ranch. Campers and second homeowners were swept away to their deaths.

"Frank Kush's Arizona State University Sun Devils football team was practicing at Camp Tontozona when the storm hit. According to the Sept. 10, 1970 Payson Roundup, 'players saw two automobiles and parts of two cabins from a neighboring area float by.' A little bit upstream from Camp Tontozona, on Tonto Creek, is where the worst part of the tragedy occurred."

Sandy Carson, vice president and archivist for the Northern Gila County Historical Society, said photos of the flood's aftermath taken by the late Nyle Leatham and donated to the Society, will be specially displayed at the Rim Country Museum for the dedication.

### **On this day in 1996, much of SR 87 became Duthie-Martin Highway**

<https://azdot.gov/adot-blog/day-1996-much-sr-87-became-duthie-martin-highway>

7/20/2020 By Laurie Merrill / ADOT Communications



On this day in 1996, the route commonly called the Beeline Highway was officially named Duthie-Martin Highway between the Valley and Payson. That designation honors two law enforcement officers who lost their lives in the line of duty along that stretch of SR 87.

The name change was the result of a resolution approved by the Arizona Legislature.

Arizona Department of Public Safety Officers Gilbert Duthie and Robert Martin were killed 25 years apart on the highway, which is also known as State Route 87.

On Sept. 5, 1970, Duthie, (Badge No. 143), was driving on SR 87 on his way to help citizens who had been stranded by flooding. But Sycamore Creek had overflowed and taken out part of a bridge, and Duthie drowned after his cruiser washed away. He was 39.

On Aug. 15, 1995, Robert Martin (Badge No. 474), was conducting a traffic stop on SR 87 about 7 miles north of Shea Boulevard when he was fatally shot. He was 57.

A monument for the Duthie-Martin Highway sits at the spot of the shooting. The highway, which stretches from Casa Grande to Arizona 264 in Second Mesa, has enjoyed numerous names and extensions since 1924, when it was designated Arizona 87. In 1959, after considerable miles were added to it, it became the Beeline Highway because it makes a "beeline" for the high country of Payson. [This blog](#) from earlier this year has more information on the history of SR 87 north of Payson.

## Officer Gib Duthie - Sunflower, AZ

[https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMVZ6Q\\_Officer\\_Gib\\_Duthie\\_Sunflower\\_AZ](https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMVZ6Q_Officer_Gib_Duthie_Sunflower_AZ)  
in [Police Memorials](#)

Posted by:  [rjmcdonough1](#)

**N 33° 47.870 W 111° 29.518**  
12S E 454460 N 3739849

**Quick Description:** Officer Gib Duthie died in the line of duty, September 5, 1970.

**Location:** Arizona, United States

**Date Posted:** 6/14/2017 1:46:33 PM

**Waymark Code:** WMVZ6Q

**Published By:**  [bluesnote](#)

**Views:** 1

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**Long Description:**

Officer Gilbert (Gib) A. Duthie died September 5, 1970. He was responding to assist stranded citizens due to flooding. He didn't notice a washed out bridge. His cruiser went in to the flood waters and he drowned. He was the first Officer of the Arizona Department of Public Safety to lose his life.

**Website pertaining to the memorial:** [\[Web Link\]](#)

**List if there are any visiting hours:**

The monument is located in a median between the North and South bound lanes of State Route 87. Safe parking is available.

**Type of memorial:** Monument

**Entrance fees (if it applies):** Not listed