

IF YOU'RE A GRASSHOPPER, BEWARE THE SHREW

arizonahighways.com APRIL 2004

ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

Ultimate
**Back
Roading**
from
Border to Border

LIES THE OLD-TIME
WRITERS TOLD

Sluggish Rattlesnakes,
Harmless Gila Monsters

Wild Terrain Along the
BLUE AND
SAN FRANCISCO
RIVERS

Life Atop a
GRAND CANYON
BUTTE

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COVER/PORTFOLIO

Back Roding Across Arizona

Writer Charles Bowden and photographer Jack Dykinga take a slow, thoughtful journey over desert and mountain dirt routes to discover a different state.

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HISTORY

Writing (and Lying) About the West

Zealous journalists and book authors showed little control over their adjectives and perspective when they wrote about Arizona and the West in the 1800s and early 1900s.

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FOCUS ON NATURE

Beware the Shrew

This tiny and adorable-looking mammal has an ill-tempered and stinky approach to survival as it goes in constant search of food.

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GRAND CANYON

Just What *Is* on Top of Those Tall Buttes?

In 1937, some curious scientists struggled to the summit of a Canyon butte to answer the question — and their findings were a bit surprising.

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TRAVEL

How to Get 'Rattled' on a Good Day Hike

The challenge of trekking into La Barge Canyon apparently wasn't enough for a group of adventurers, so they slithered their way to a few laughs with a rubber rattlesnake.

[THIS PAGE] The abandoned Wupatki Ruins of Wupatki National Monument north of Flagstaff bustled with activity from A.D. 1110 to A.D. 1250. The pueblo and similar ones nearby housed several thousand people. RICHARD MAACK
[FRONT COVER] Banked with yellow monkeyflowers and marsh grass, the understated Bill Williams River in western Arizona provides a riparian habitat for neotropical migratory birds on their way from South and Central America to their northern breeding grounds. Starting on page 6, read about a writer and a photographer's back road journey through Arizona's scenic wild country.
[BACK COVER] With a saffron message of renewal and hope, Arizona mules ears bloom in the ashes as the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in central Arizona recover from the 2002 Rodeo-Chediski fire. BOTH BY JACK DYKINGA

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GENE PERRET'S WIT STOP

Although Arizona is the youngest of the contiguous 48 states, it doesn't have nearly the problems that the youngest of a large family has.

ONLINE EXTRA

Robbing Stages, All for Love

In the 1860s, a clever Bradshaw Mountains stage robber — who was believed a good man at heart — lost his freedom after a romance caused him to turn bad.

WEEKEND GETAWAY

Palatki, Honanki and Tuzigoot Ruins

Among Sedona's colorful red-rock cliffs and hidden canyons, visitors can inspect ancient dwellings and experience thousands of years of Indian history.

EXPERIENCE ARIZONA

A Tucson festival featuring talks and videos about hummingbirds, and a state mining championship and related activities in Miami highlight Arizona events during April.

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PRODUCED IN THE USA

How Deep the Hole?

I enjoyed "Mystery Diamonds From Outer Space" (November '03), but I have a question. On page 14, it says Meteor Crater is 700 feet deep. On page 17, it says the crater is almost 600 feet deep. My question: How deep is the crater?

Don Allen, Sedona

Actually, both are correct. As reported on page 14, the hole was 700 feet deep when the meteor struck. As the thousands of years passed, the crater has begun to fill up and is now about 600 feet deep, as reported on page 17. We love readers like Mr. Allen who won't let us get away with anything.

Fall Color

It is early October and the leaves are beginning to fall here in Indiana. One of the most beautiful areas in the country for colorful fall foliage is in southern Indiana. That said, the "The Color of Autumn," (November '03) is absolutely striking in the beauty you found in your own back yard. The pictures you choose for each magazine are always pleasing to the eye, but you outdid yourself with this issue.

Laura Degenfelder, Frankfort, IN

Roadrunner Ritual

It was a warm, sunny day in Arizona, and snowbirds were trying to soak up all the sun they could. I no sooner got out the door than I saw a roadrunner with a gecko in its beak. It was walking right and then left, sort of prancing, if you will, mostly going in circles. I watched intently, and soon another roadrunner was making a beeline for the one I had watched for so long.

I immediately thought there might be a fight for the gecko. When they met, they didn't fight. It was quite the opposite. They engaged in a dance I can only describe as a sailor's dance on shore leave after six months at sea. I'm not a bird fancier, and I don't study their mating habits, but what happened next sure surprised me. When the deed was done, the gecko had changed beaks and each bird went its separate way.

Jerry DeBoy, Bullhead City

An Adventure Defined

I love Arizona Highways, but had some difficulty on a recent "Back Road Adventure" (November '03). A friend and I set off on the "meandering Patagonia-to-Sonoita" trip and lost our way after Lochiel/San Rafael Ranch. We retraced our steps and tried again, but just couldn't find the T-junction where "FR 58 turns north" 2 miles after the French-colonial house. We wondered whether there was a missing instruction or changed road sign. Perhaps we were just being bad navigators.

We eventually went home the way we had come — via Patagonia. I would be interested

to hear whether anyone else had any problems with this otherwise stunningly beautiful trip.

Garmon Ashby, Tucson

We send at least two persons from our office to double-check the back road directions. But we also get lost on occasion. The poor old editor says it's not an adventure unless you get lost at least once.

Peachfaced Lovebirds

My husband and I live in the El Encanto neighborhood of central Tucson, a quiet enclave of old saguaros and mesquite. Since April, our backyard feeder has been visited each day by a growing family of peachfaced lovebirds, up to six at a time. Although sightings are less frequent in Tucson than in Phoenix ("Along the Way," November '03), these lovely creatures are creating inroads here as well.

An unmistakable squawk alerts us to their presence each morning as they wait rather impatiently in the branches above for the feeders to be filled.

The best part of the story is that these beautiful native birds of Namibia first appeared in our yard the very week my husband was hosting a colleague whose entire career of anthropological field research has been based in . . . where else? . . . Namibia!

Mev Jenson, Tucson

Shiprock or Ship Rock?

Your article on the borderlands of the state ("Arizona's Rambling Borders," November '03) uses the word "Shiprock" in reference to the monolith in New Mexico. But the correct spelling for that monolith is Ship Rock, whereas the correct spelling for the community nearby is Shiprock.

This error was made a couple of years ago in an article about the Chuska Mountains. I thought someone else would pick you up on this, but apparently not.

Peter Dean, Waterbury, VT

Mr. Dean is correct. Apparently, the poor old editor is weak on his knowledge of the names of New Mexico's rocks.

The picture of Ship Rock in New Mexico is the most striking photo I've ever seen. I've taken photos of this peak, but nothing comes close to this aerial shot. Too bad it's not in Arizona, my favorite state.

Marshall Miller, Fort Collins, CO

Delighted Subscriber

I'm so glad I found your magazine. I took my 2001 vacation in Arizona and fell in love with the state I was born in but left when I was a baby. Finding your magazine was such a delight since every month I devour each article and picture to help me remember my vacation. You have a subscriber for life in me.

Carol Baril, Acworth, GA

Every now and then the poor old editor gets a huge boost from readers like Carol.

Canyon Adventures for Everyone

For 18 years, Ron Clayton, livery manager at the Grand Canyon National Park, has been doing something truly extraordinary — he takes people with severe physical impairments to the Canyon bottom on mules. His visitors include the blind, amputees, paraplegics and even quadriplegics.

"I probably have more expertise getting handicapped people into an extreme environment than anyone in the country," says Clayton, 55, a blacksmith by trade. "I believe I made the first wheelchair tracks into the Canyon. But this isn't about me. It's about the bravery of the people who do this."

The first such trip was made in 1986 by a 9-year-old boy whose adventure was sponsored by the Make-A-Wish Foundation, a nonprofit organization that grants the dreams of terminally ill children. The boy's parents desperately wanted their son to go on the river. Clayton was just as adamant that the boy should not go. He met with the parents and described all that could go wrong while riding a mule almost 8 miles on narrow trails with dramatic drop-offs.



BOB BINK

The boy's dad leaned over the table and said, "Ron, my boy has nothing to lose." Says Clayton, "It broke my heart." So he agreed and the trip succeeded. The boy died six months later.

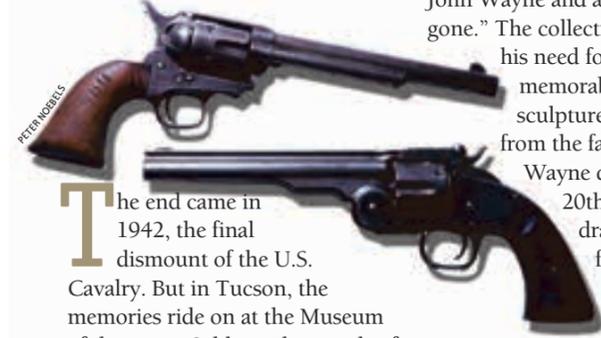
"It really opened my eyes," says Clayton. "Prior to that nobody with an impairment went on these trips, mostly because nobody wanted the added liability."

The trips come about informally. After a first meeting, Clayton makes the arrangements and leads the mule train.

Many of his clients ride secured by ropes to a saddle that Clayton designed and built himself. It has a high back, like a chair, to support the rider.

Information: (928) 638-2631.

Back in the Saddle



PETER NOBELS

The end came in 1942, the final dismount of the U.S. Cavalry. But in Tucson, the memories ride on at the Museum of the Horse Soldier. Thousands of artifacts from the period of history when men and their horses went to war have been amassed by Arizona sculptor Dan Bates.

As a child, Bates saw the

movie *The Horse Soldiers* with John Wayne and admits, "I was gone." The collection began with

his need for authentic memorabilia for his sculptures. Uniforms from the familiar "John Wayne dark blue" to 20th-century olive drab, weaponry from shell casing to sabers and saddles from black leather to brown fill the rooms. In this world, men sported horsehair plumes in their helmets and rode on McClellan saddles.

Information: (520) 296-4551.

Journey Along the River of Time

Located in the heart of Fountain Hills, near the junction of the Salt and Verde rivers, The River of Time Museum follows the regional history as determined by the presence of fresh water, essential for settlement in the desert.

An image representing the First Mother of the Yavapai painted against a simulated rock wall and waterfall mark the beginning of the



LES DAVID MAREWITZ

The Verde River meanders peacefully near The River of Time Museum.

path through the museum. The surface of the red stones seems more real as the sound of flowing water rises from the inanimate falls. A voice invites visitors to begin the journey through the museum exhibits beyond the wall, saying "Your path will lead to the peoples who have walked these lands."

Through a collection of displays, history unravels. From the Hohokam to the Yavapai, and the settlers, ranchers and military who have lived here, the museum presents a dynamic portrayal of the region.

Information: (480) 837-2612.

THIS MONTH IN ARIZONA

1854 The Gadsden Purchase is ratified, adding 30,000 square miles to New Mexico and Arizona. The U.S. paid Mexico \$10 million for the land.

1860 Thirty-one Tucson citizens meet and create a Territorial constitution.

1871 A group of 140 Anglo, Mexican and Tohono O'odham Indian men (then called Papagos) attack sleeping Aravaipa Apaches near Camp Grant. They massacre women and children, and carry off other children to be sold into slavery in Mexico. The news shocked the nation. Later, a jury acquitted every man involved.

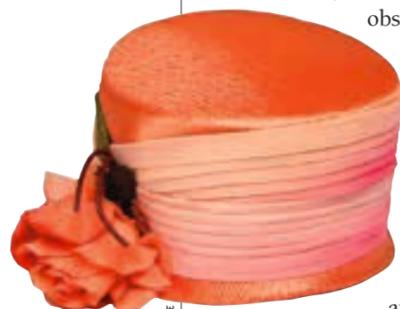
1894 Jerome, the largest mining town in Arizona, suffers a fire that destroys its entire business district.

1898 A mining camp at Congress is destroyed by fire. Two people die.

1906 A huge earthquake and fire in San Francisco prompts Arizona to rush carloads of cattle, refrigerated meats and dairy products to the survivors.

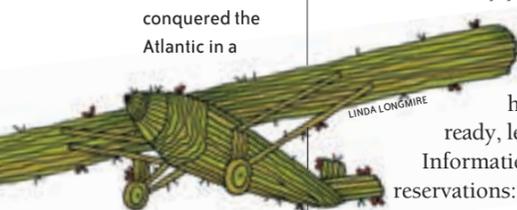
Tea With Style

The Amado Territory Inn, about 30 minutes south of Tucson, has taken the observation of afternoon tea to new heights. They serve up the ever-so-dainty finger sandwiches, fruit tarts and lemon cakes one might expect. But get a load of the real confections — the ones perched on the tea drinkers' heads.



Spirit of Ocotillo

In 1927, the citizens of Tucson stood ready when Charles Lindbergh flew into town as the hero who conquered the Atlantic in a



tiny plane. The parade had been scheduled and the gift prepared. They had built "Lucky Lindy," a full-size replica of his *Spirit of St. Louis*. And, in the true spirit of the desert, the Tucsonans built the plane out of ocotillo limbs, thorns and all.

Lindbergh must have been duly impressed with the innovative use of materials. However, he did not attempt to take the controls.

At the inn's Monday and Tuesday teas, the ladies wear hats, and just to make sure they do, the inn supplies them. Guests may choose from a pile of vintage nests of feathers, flowers, net and lace, hats the way your

grandmother loved them.

Ladies, hatpins at the ready, let the tea begin.

Information and reservations: toll-free (888) 398-8684.



OUR LADY OF THE SIERRA FOUNDATION

Hillside Shrine Has a Heavenly View

Jerry and Pat Chouinard operate a public religious shrine at their mountaintop home in Ash Canyon, 8 miles south of Sierra Vista off State Route 92. A 75-foot-tall fiberglass-reinforced concrete cross adorns the hillside, just above a 31-foot-tall earth-colored Madonna. A short distance down the hill is a 684-square-foot rock chapel.

The cross and Madonna face out across 40 miles of desert to the Mule Mountains, and can be seen in the morning by people driving

into Sierra Vista from Bisbee.

The Chouinards built the Our Lady of the Sierras Shrine, completed in 1998, after a visit to Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, to investigate reports of apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Jerry, who was raised in the Depression and became a successful printer, said it was the best way he knew to say thank you for a great life.

Visitors are welcome from 9 A.M. to sunset, seven days a week.

Information: (520) 378-1764; www.ourladyofthesierras.org.

LIFE IN ARIZONA 1920s

TAKING THE SHORT ROUTE — STRAIGHT UPRIVER

Trail designers often comment how old mining and ranching trails took the shortest route between two points, no matter how steep or treacherous the landscape. When DeWitt Cosper bought a car right after World War I, he chose a peculiar route home. In rancher fashion, he took the shortest route between Clifton and his ranch on the Blue River, heading right up the river. "The man at the garage asked my dad if he wanted to be shown how to drive the car," says



ARIZONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY/TUCSON

Cosper's daughter, Cleo Cosper Coor, "but my dad told the salesman that he would learn as he went along. Then he started home up the river."

Cosper drove along the San

Francisco River, then continued north along the Blue River. Coor correctly says some places are "hemmed in by cliffs on either side and have boulders in the middle of the river. But those old cars were high-clearance."

During one long stretch, Cosper told his daughter that he got the car up to 25 mph, then decided he'd "better slow down or he'd kill himself at such a fast speed."

Nevertheless, Cosper and the car apparently made it home safely to the ranch.



ARIZONA STATE PARKS

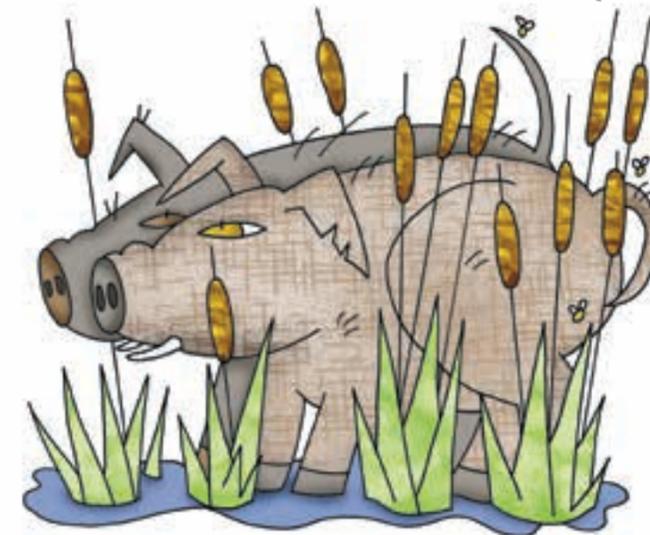
Enjoy a Yurt

Have you been yurting yet? Yurts, canvas-shelled domed tents, are similar to those used in Central Asia for thousands of years. You can rent a 16-foot-diameter yurt at Lyman Lake State Park, 11 miles south of St. Johns in eastern Arizona, March 15 through November 15. The yurt is outfitted with two futons, a table, four chairs and electricity. Showers and rest rooms are within walking distance.

Visitors can enjoy watching the stars through the yurt's skylight or sit inside during seasonal storms. With an open floorplan, a yurt sleeps six people (the park provides two additional cots free) and comes with picnic tables and charcoal grills.

While at Lyman Lake State Park, enjoy waterskiing, fishing and hiking, or tour ruins and see petroglyphs. Reserve your yurt up to 12 months in advance.

Information: (928) 337-4441.



LINDA LONGMIRE

Unwanted and Unloved

The Havasu National Wildlife Refuge along the Colorado River supports nearly 400 species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. But there's one uninvited guest — feral hogs.

These critters, descendants of domestic pigs, thrive in the marshy environment of the 37,515-acre refuge north of Parker. The wild pigs have been there for more than 100 years, long before the refuge was established in 1941.

In the wild, the domestic pigs

quickly adapt. Their hair and snouts elongate, their tusks lengthen and they develop thick hides. Feral hogs can weigh up to 400 pounds, said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There may be as many as 1,600 hogs in the refuge, it said.

Efforts to hunt the hogs failed because they hide in the thick stands of cattails and salt cedars along the river, a spokesman said, adding a study is being made to find ways to contain the beasts.



APACHE-SITGREAVES NATIONAL FORESTS

Explore White Mountains by OHV

The Saffel Canyon Off Highway Vehicle Trail in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests near Eagar in eastern Arizona combines cool mountain pines, spectacular views and just plain fun. Built by the Forest

Service in 2001 for OHV use, this 26-mile trail winds through the White Mountains at more than 8,000 feet elevation.

Accessible from various points, the Saffel Canyon OHV Trail is perfect for shorter trips. The

south trailhead near Pat Knoll has rest rooms, a covered area, parking lot and a "tot lot" for beginners. Wildlife viewing, spectacular scenery, old cabins and breathtaking views lure riders to this mountain trail.

Be prepared for rain during summer, and in fall enjoy the golden aspens.

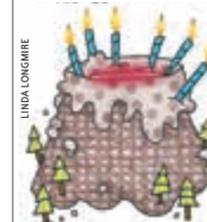
To get to the trail from State Route 260 south of Eagar, take Forest Service Road 285 south for about 3 miles. At Forest Service Road 74, marked 76 on older forest maps, turn left (east) at the sign indicating the way to the OHV trail. The well-marked northern trailhead is about one-half mile down the road. The southern trailhead near Pat Knoll is another 18 miles south on FR 285.

Information: Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, Springerville Ranger District, (928) 333-4372.

Question of the Month

How old is the San Francisco Volcanic Field in northern Arizona?

The volcanic eruptions began 6 million years ago in an area west of present-day Flagstaff. More than 600 eruptions later, the last live volcano in the 1,800-square-mile field fizzled out



LINDA LONGMIRE

only a thousand years ago, leaving a cinder cone that became Sunset Crater. According to scientists, the volcanic show isn't over yet. More eruptions will occur in several thousand years.

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Dirt trails open up majestic scenery . . . and self-discovery

BY CHARLES BOWDEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACK DYKINGA

CROSSING ARIZONA

ON BACK ROADS



T

HE MOUTH OF THE RIVER gapes with a yellow tongue of spent cattails swaddling a thread of quiet water that creeps through the slumbering plants. The Bill Williams River seeps into the noise of the east bank of the Colorado — the Parker Strip just below lined with houses, bars and powerboats. Lake Havasu with its regattas of pleasure-seekers sits a few miles north behind a dam.

But the Bill Williams purls along at a comparative trickle and, here in its lower reaches, flows embedded in the calm of a national wildlife refuge. The surrounding Sonoran Desert tastes 1 to 3 inches of rain a year and rises from the green mash of the riverbed with a stark face of mesquite, saguaro, ironwood, paloverde and creosote.

The river, named after a famed mountain man, is more than simply green with a big forest of cottonwoods, willow, mesquite and other trees. It is studded here and there with beaver dams, perhaps the last structure anyone expects to find within a hundred yards of a saguaro.

Photographer Jack Dykinga and I are embarking on a journey that sounds a lot like a stunt — drive west-to-east across Arizona on dirt roads. We will largely pull it off with a thousand miles of dust and maybe 50 maddening stretches of asphalt to make connections. But I want to state right up front that the stunt backfires in a wonderful way. When weeks later we hit the New Mexico line, I've learned a simple lesson: If I had it to do over, yes, I'd leave the paved highway for the dirt, and, yes, I'd still sleep under the stars rather than the roof of a motel and, yes, I'd drink black coffee in the gray light of early dawn and wait for the birdsong and then the thrumming of insects.

But what I'd never do is finish the journey. I'd get 5 or 10 or 20 or 50 or maybe even 100 miles down a dirt track and park and spend all of my life that I could spare right there. I'd spend it along the Bill Williams, I'd spend it in the Mohave, spend it sprawled in the juniper-piñon forests, spend it up on the Mogollon Rim surrounded by ponderosa pines, spend it in the high country surrounded by mountains and lashed by images of spruce, aspen and fir trees. It hardly matters where I would spend the time.

The pace is everything, and dirt-road Arizona slows me enough finally to be somewhere instead of pedal-to-the-metal headed for nowhere.

I'm here to talk about slow travel, the last sane kind of movement. At the moment, I'm sprawled out on the beige dirt surrounded by the dark rock of some stilled, volcanic moment. At 5:07 P.M. a raven glides down from a cliff and vanishes into the jungle of the Bill Williams bottom. Flies buzz, the leaves of the ironwood trees seem pale like ghosts amid the yellow blaze of blooms on the brittlebush, a half moon rides in the sky.

Eleven minutes later, two ravens twirl over my head on a thermal. By 5:30 I look at the southern edge of the forest clogging the bottom and finally notice the rose-blush of bloom on the tamarisks, then gaze past that to the gleam of fresh cottonwood leaves, and on the far side of the river discover a wall of rock warped in some long ago time so that it arcs

like a bow, all this beneath the flat top of a mesa banded with yellow beige and black.

Five minutes later, the white light of day begins to ebb toward golden. I look down and suddenly notice the pavement of pebbles at my feet, and stare out again and detect the bony arms of some dead paloverdes. Saguaros nibble at the very edge of the forest and swallows wheel through the sky. Around 6, a twin-engine prop plane buzzes overhead. In the past hour, the road upslope behind me has had one off-road vehicle of pleasure-seekers pass and one small truck belonging to the refuge staff.

I watch the light leave the land and track the colors that we seldom think are colors: beige, light beige, brown, dark-brown, red-brown, black-brown, gleaming black from the varnish on some rocks, black and blue like tar drippings, then I look past the dirt and rock and see yellow, green, lime-green, dark-green, a faint silver-green, yellow-green.

At 6:30 a breeze moves across the land signaling sunset. I get up and move a few feet and cross small animal tracks, some ancient coyote scat, a mesquite tree in bloom that roars with bees. A small butterfly passes, a raven croaks and an orange-brown spider with white specks strolls past my foot and forces me to notice the tracks of deer.

The sun falls out of my life at 7 as a great blue heron slowly wings its way downstream. Twenty-two minutes later, a meteor re-enters the Earth's atmosphere so close I can almost hear it roar — the core white, the aura edging it green — and then disappears behind a bluff.

The Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge gets about 30,000 visitors a year, and commonly they complain of seeing no wildlife. I know what they mean because I live mostly like everyone else. But for the moment, both Dykinga and I have entered a different zone. Dirt-road Arizona, apparently a way to finally go home.

Banking on Water

THEY'RE PARKED NOW, and to their surprise, they like it that way. Pat Powell and her husband were long-haul truckers before they came to rest at the Planet Ranch where the Bill Williams River ripples through a slab of Mohave Desert, just above Parker. Along with Larry Byers, they ride herd on a peculiar Arizona activity — water ranching, in this case under the direction of the city of Scottsdale, which has bought the huge spread in order to bank water resources against the day when urban thirst and court decisions make it all sensible as an investment. But for the moment, the ranch has a wondrously ghostly quality — cattle gone, corrals lonely and the ribbon of cottonwoods lining the river innocent of change. South of headquarters lurk the melting-adobes of what was once the community of Planet, briefly home to 10,000 during a mining frenzy. Below the calm of headquarters, the river disappears into a mild canyon clogged with beaver dams.

Things at Planet Ranch (a private and locked-gate

[PRECEDING PANEL, PAGE 6, ABOVE] Unpaved back roads beckon in Charles Bowden and Jack Dykinga's trip across the less-traveled byways spanning the width and breadth of Arizona. **[PRECEDING PANEL, PAGES 6 AND 7, BELOW]** The Bill Williams River winds through a sea of cattails and bulrushes on the way to its confluence with the Colorado River. **[OPPOSITE PAGE]** Pat Powell (above left) helps manage the Planet Ranch along the Bill Williams River. Desert ecosystems collide in Castaneda Wash (above right) where Sonoran Desert ocotillos intermingle with the Joshua trees of the Mohave Desert. Pat Prosser (below right) manages the sprawling cattle operation at Fort Rock Ranch near Seligman. Pink phlox blossoms (below left) provide a touch of color to blue-green agaves in a high-country tableau.





place) can be hot — Larry Byers saw it hit 132 degrees one afternoon — but never noisy. In 1993, when the river rose, it was a 178-mile drive just to get from one bank of the river to the other.

Of course, there are occasional guests. Every winter a 76-year-old retiree descends from Montana and camps out with his family, his kin being a turkey, some chickens and a couple of burros. Javelinas prowl the old alfalfa fields by the headquarters and wild burros have the irksome habit of descending and turning on the outdoor water faucets. But the main beast stalking the ground is silence. You can hear yourself talk here, assuming you even bother to talk.

Time crashes against time, what with the ebbing cattle ranch, the future water ranch, the melting ruins of the old mining town, and just a bit to the north a desert airfield from World War II that is said to measure off exactly the length of a 1940s-era aircraft carrier, an abandoned runway that once trained young men to face the white-knuckle landings they would make far off in the Pacific.

Or time stands almost still here, as the saguaro, paloverde and mesquite signature of the Sonoran Desert stutters at the river crossing and soon gives way to the cooler realm of the Mohave with its giant Joshua trees and this spring a blaze of lupine staining the ground blue.

Like time, Dykinga and I stall also. One of the realities of dirt-road Arizona is that it becomes increasingly difficult to move. Not because of bad roads, though now and again savage stretches of jolting four-wheel tracks come up. But because wherever we are seems like where we should remain. I hated leaving the lush bottomlands of the Bill Williams, but now I am about 30 miles west of Wikieup sitting on a rock in the creosote flats studded with the Joshua trees and I think I should stay here for maybe a hundred years. Forty miles to the north, I know Interstate 40 is lacerating the surface of the Earth, but I push this thought aside, light my tiny camp stove and make a cup of coffee. When I turn off the hiss of the burner, it's as if I've throttled some annoying boombox. Hedgehog cacti bloom with an almost acrylic rose-pink. A mule deer doe moves past, a Harris hawk wheels over my head.

In the night, I hear a mockingbird rattle the darkness and smell the aroma of a herd of javelinas moving down a nearby arroyo toward a water hole. Doves begin tolling as the gray light comes on, and then I notice the yellow flowers on the creosote, the bright blooms of brittlebush and glimpse the almost whiskey appearance of ocotillo groves on the ridgelines, red flower stalks dancing on the tips of the waving wands.

We've fully entered Slow Nation, a secret country sustained by the forgotten sinews of old dirt roads and trails, nameless routes that once formed the vital links of a continent. I sip coffee and share the rhythms of our ancestors.

We have ceased to make time and simply joined time, and Dykinga and I sit around together without a schedule. Last night there was a ring around the moon and I would watch jet planes hell-bent on getting to Los Angeles disturb the ring with their contrails, then vanish over the horizon while the ring re-established its iron lock on the moon. I figure it will take me five or 10 lifetimes to absorb the half-mile of ground I can see from my camp.

Here is what I am learning: If you get up early with the first whisper of the gray light, you can own the entire planet, be in absolute sync with its twirl as the first breeze of dawn brushes your face and the dying stars slowly leave the sky. All the engines in the entire universe seem still and only birdsong ripples through the silence.

For endless moments, you are certain that there is enough grace and warmth and food and love to sustain anything and everyone, that nothing that matters moves faster than a heartbeat and that at this very instant all the hearts beat as one.

A black-chinned hummingbird hovers near my face, Gambel's quail roost in the nearby paloverde and begin to chat up the oncoming day. Little threads of disappearing Sonoran Desert penetrate the beckoning Mohave. And on a slope just above the Big Sandy River, oak trees appear. This splatter of different botanical realms may play havoc with tidy maps dedicated to prim life zones but for me

[OPPOSITE PAGE] The morning sun warms a Joshua tree above a stand of flowering lupines. The plant most often associated with the Mohave Desert, the Joshua tree isn't really a tree, but rather the largest yucca, a member of the agave family.

this veritable jukebox of various life forms is playing my song.

Have you ever noticed the different ways life can design a leaf? Well, I must admit I've been negligent in this matter. But not now, not this morning. I sip coffee and finally see things that have always been right in front of my lazy eyes.

High Country Beckons

ARIZONA SELDOM HIDES ITS BONES and the dirt road wanders through brazen geologic forms. In the west are the parallel mountains and valleys called Basin and Range, then comes the wafer cake of the Colorado Plateau, here and there studded with the hot flashes of volcanic peaks. The two rock forms collide and leave a huge scar we call the Mogollon Rim, a long cliff lancing across north-central Arizona and decked out on top with a world-class ponderosa forest. That is the big picture.

The little picture is called Knight Creek, a faint, dry desert streambed that slowly rises upward, and now east and north of Wikieup, runs wet and green within the embrace of a basalt canyon. Junipers mixed with paloverdes hug the hillsides and the sky roars with an approaching storm. Down in the canyon, cottonwoods spread green along the waterway. In a day snow will be in the air but now the ground is sun-drenched with lupine and other wildflowers insisting on spring.

Fortunately, all of our maps are out of date and so for a day the journey has been a series of feints up mountain grades in the Aquarius Mountains in search of an open dirt route that reaches from the desert floor to the higher country of grass, juniper and dabs of oak. Enormities such as Burro Creek, a tucked-away canyonland that would be a national park in most of the Lower 48, have foiled several efforts. Locked gates on private property have blocked some others. Knight Creek becomes the golden route to the higher country.

I live in a city and so am almost drugged with the sensation that everything on Earth has been paved and made safe and dull. Well, I'm wrong. Out here the Earth still seems endless and free. Even the forbidding corridor of I-40 just to the north seems like a tiny thread dropped on a huge pan of wildness.

In a cafe in Seligman, I glance up at a stuffed lion killed 3 miles from my cup of coffee. The waitress explains that her husband keeps a pack of hounds and guides hunters, as did his father before him. The trucks roar by on the four-lane road but somewhere on the edge of the screams of their air brakes I know a lion is taking in the scene. Even the little businesses of the town have thankfully retained an edginess: One barroom sign advises "Unattended children will be sold as slaves."

Back on the creek, pavement and big road signs seem like voices from another planet. Up ahead is Fort Rock Ranch, a huge spread of grass and junipers, with headquarters featuring an ancient



stone house once used as a 19th-century stage station. Finally, after much plundering, the high valley appears with the old stone building looking lonely in the immensity. Pat Prosser and his wife, Debra, lean against the gate leading to the yard.

Pat was raised around Kingman and has spent his life working cattle in this area—for 30 years he's cowboied this ranch off and on. Now he is the manager and, well, he worries about the crowding. Subdivisions are popping up in the area like mushrooms after a rain and he sees ranching doom all around him. "It's ruined all of a bunch of ranches—it's subdivisions everywhere," he says softly. "They come out of those cities and find something cheap, and there they go. But they gotta go so far to make a livin'. The places they buy are too small for cows. There's not enough water for farming."

Clearly, second homes puzzle him as a concept. Piled up near his boots are the giant racks of some elk that wander the ranch. At 60, Pat looks like an ad for ranching—lean, leathery and calm. His son stands near him and sports the large champion belt buckle of a rodeo winner. Lucas, a year-old border collie, watches. "He's workin' already," Pat notes with pride.

Looking out from the Fort Rock headquarters, it's hard to believe anyone is feeling crowded here but then space is the ultimate drug in Arizona and one not easily surrendered. Just to know that 10 or 15 miles away a cluster of houses has suddenly erupted can put a hand off his feed. I once lived in a valley where I could not see an electric light at night and I found then that anything but a star glowing in the dark was offensive to me.

All I can see is grass and juniper, a kind of private park, and the Fort Rock Ranch abuts another giant sanctuary, the Baca Float, a green universe based off an old Spanish land grant. For two hours, the dirt track slowly winds through a plateau of green splattered with the yellow shouts of mustard and then on the eastern edge of the Baca Float the first stands of ponderosas appear and then recede as this kingdom of piñon and juniper reasserts itself.

I suspect the most neglected treasures in Arizona are the vast stands of these small evergreen trees that decorate what is called the Central Arizona Highlands, a huge crescentlike swatch that cuts just above the hot deserts and just below the big forests of the high country. People like myself seem to race through them on their way to cool stands of pine. Ranchers have historically begrudged them their existence and tried various ways to remove the trees so that more grass might grow—efforts that have generally cost more than the resulting grass was worth.

Thanks to the sensible pace of dirt roads, I'm finally tasting this huge forest and realizing the error of my ways. On the second day in the junipers, we cross a fork of the Verde River near

[LEFT] Sunrise light rakes across the canyons and cacti of the Aquarius Mountains where Knight Creek nourishes a vibrant stand of Fremont cottonwoods.



CANYONS MEANDER A THOUSAND FEET BELOW. The walls are red, gray and sand-colored strata. THE GROUND IS STREWN WITH ROCK MUCH LIKE PEBBLES ON A BEACH and small cacti poke up here and there.

Perkinsville, a town now down to two people. The little valley gleams with green grass, and just to the east is the opening dive of Sycamore Canyon, another huge set of rock gorges that feels as wild as when Bill Williams and other mountain men were first coming into the country.

Just past the Verde, a thin slot in the stone, maybe 10 feet wide and 20 deep, knifes downward, the bottom smooth punch bowls from thousands of years of thunderstorms.

I walk off and sit among the trees and hear nothing but a faint whisper of wind rustling through the piñons and junipers. Behind my head, the huge wall of the Mogollon Rim towers, but in this place the ground seems safe and tidy with the trees evenly spaced and a soothing blue sky overhead. The hot desert now seems like a sonata and this perfect forest of regularly shaped trees more a piano concerto.

The Rim Country is clearly a symphony and I can sense nearby the crash of kettledrums and the surge

[ABOVE] Sycamore Point, southeast of Williams, provides a panoramic view of the vast, rugged and roadless expanse of the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness.

of a 100-piece orchestra. Of course, this part of the country seems to demand metaphors from us and all the metaphors seem inadequate when one is out on the ground itself.

Just south of Flagstaff, the route begins to climb on a ridge between Cedar and Bear canyons, and finally snow blankets the ground. The sun works the piñon pine and slowly sloughs the white off the green branches. The road itself turns into a red gumbo of mud and snakes ever upward. Finally, after many switchbacks, the top of the Rim is gained and a new world opens up, one with eight deer standing together and then a short way down the path, three elk grazing. One bony finger, Sycamore Point, reaches off the Rim and probes south.

The ponderosa pines thicken and then give way at

the tip of the point to a huddle of junipers and piñons. Canyons meander a thousand feet below. The walls are red, gray and sand-colored strata. The ground is strewn with rock much like pebbles on a beach and small cacti poke up here and there. Tire tracks have vanished for some hours and two bull elk stand nearby. Looking south, there is the central highlands forest, seeming like the landscape of some model railroad with junipers dotting the ground. I feel like a voyager looking out the porthole of a spaceship at a receding world. We're in the pines now, on the Rim, and the huge drop spilling off at our feet makes the deserts and the highlands a foreign nation.

Slow Nation Blues

BLUES DRIFT FROM THE RADIO as Dykinga and I work our way through steak and eggs in Doc's Rim Cafe in Overgaard. The Rim Country has owned my imagination for days, a smear of forest edged to the south by the escarpment and ebbing to the north as it first sputters into piñon-juniper, then grassland, and finally the over-the-top brilliantly colored desert of the

Colorado Plateau. For most of my life when I've roared down I-40 to the north, I've glanced over and seen the thin green line on the horizon, realizing it was the immense forest of the Rim and yet never quite believing it, even though at times I'd spent days and weeks in it. Sandwiched between the hot deserts of the south and the cooler high deserts to the north, this crescent of trees seems impossible and yet it is actual. Doc's Cafe, with blues blasting and a massive espresso machine staring me down on the back counter, is also actual but unanticipated. But I've been surprised for days.

After Sycamore Point, the aimless route meanders toward Flagstaff where elk stand in snow, then snakes down toward Mormon Lake and the clear stands of ponderosas before (Text continued on page 19)





(Continued from page 15) heading up toward Kinickinick, a lake I used to visit as a boy as my base camp in antelope country.

But Ashurst Run, a small lake, forces Dykinga's truck to take a one-day respite. Here is how the lake stops the machine: It is blue with a tongue of green on one edge where water percolates into it, and surrounded by pines and aspens. Its smooth surface perfectly reflects the San Francisco Peaks that tower over Flagstaff and all of northern Arizona. I can't help but think the lake's reason for being is simply to be a lens capturing this view of two mountains, one stabbing the sky, the other floating on the surface of the calm waters.

I pitch my bag in a dense stand and, as night falls, the tree trunks go black and march against the horizon with the dying blue of the lake between them. Later a full moon rises and walks the white ground of the forest, slips easily through the squads of huge pines and then skates across the surface of the lakes. The wind moans through the forest—a storm is coming to the high country. At dawn two mallards paddle the lake edge, the moon vanishes below the horizon and coffee and cold air greet me as the peaks once again return and relax on the lake surface.

There seems nothing to do but look and feel. This trip has become about leaving scenes and smells I either had never known or had, alas, forgotten. To my amazement, it has become a strange series of regrets—regret at leaving the Bill Williams River, regret at abandoning the Mohave, Knight's Creek, Fort Rock Ranch, the universe of piñon-juniper, the sheer cliffs of the Mogollon Rim, the elk that looked up from its spot in the forest and eyed me as the truck slipped through the silence of a glen.

That is a fact of living in Slow Nation—no matter how ambling the pace, it inevitably seems just too fast. The trip with its huge variations in altitude feels absolutely flat with everything on the same level of pleasure. I keep moving because of my culture, but I question this movement because of the cultures of deer and elk and javelinas and ravens and hawks crying over the canyons that make such a journey seem at best foolish and, in the end, as willfully missing the point.

All this rumbles through my mind as I take in the blues of Doc's Cafe, toss down a shot of espresso and look at a map. For a day or so, there have been false probes to the north looking for a dirt way to find a roundabout connection with the White Mountains, jaunts that have revealed to us things like Chevelon

Creek, a wonderland of water and green that's hidden in a slot snaking through the junipers and piñons. Frankly, all these wrong turns have been right turns. And now the path is heading back south into what is the scene of an inferno,

[PRECEDING PANEL, PAGES 16 AND 17] The highest group of summits in the state, the San Francisco Peaks loom above Ashurst Run in the first rosy glow of dawn.

[LEFT] Emerald-green foliage and steep canyon walls mark the course of East Clear Creek through the ponderosa pine forests on the Mogollon Rim.



THE BLACKENED FOREST TELLS ME A VERY OLD TALE,
that the Earth abideth forever, AND THAT IN THE WINK OF AN EYE
 LIFE RECLAIMS DEATH, **that change is the constant.**

the Rodeo-Chediski fire near Show Low that in June 2002 devoured 700 square miles of Arizona. Doc's Cafe rests just a mile or so from the end of this colossal burn. Doc himself is Arizona-born but spent years in Alaska working. The cold finally got to be too much for his wife, Wanda, and so he returned, took over his brother's cafe in Heber, founded a blues band, got himself a suitable 1950 Chevy pickup and went at his hash-slinging with gusto. Sometimes, the summer heat does get to him, he admits, but at such moments Wanda plunks him in the cafe's walk-in cooler to calm him down.

Well, if Doc's little blues oasis surprises me, that is mild in comparison to what I find in the fire zone. At its peak, the blaze hit temperatures of 2,000 degrees and everyone feared that this heat would sterilize the soil. Just a few hours ago, I was standing by a picture-perfect pond studded with dying aspens, the water backed up from the work of

[ABOVE] Gambel oak and Indian paintbrush begin the slow regeneration of the coniferous forest charred by the Rodeo-Chediski fire in the summer of 2002 along the Mogollon Rim. **[OPPOSITE PAGE]** Flowering claret cup cacti add splashes of brilliant color to the Mogollon Rim country near Heber.

beavers and I thought to myself that just a few miles ahead will be scenes straight from hell.

The Rim Road, a dirt track carefully following along the clifftop, glances against the most intense zones of the fire. Some patches, though severely burned, sustain scattered groves of surviving pine, fir, oak, juniper and spruce trees to repopulate the charred acres. It may take a century or so to get things back to the former towering forest level, but if this trip has taught me anything, it is that there is plenty of time once a person leaves the velocity of the interstate. I stop and walk periodically, always taking a straight line.

In the worst of the fire area, I find all the trees dead, the ground innocent of even a single track, the air bereft of birdsong, small plants and flowers





[LEFT] Near the White Mountains town of Greer, Hall Creek meanders below brilliant sunset skies, Douglas firs and ponderosa pines.

shooting up everywhere, insects thrumming constantly. In the milder areas of destruction, shoots burst forth from

oak stumps, rabbits colonize new caverns where once roots tunneled through the earth, and various birds zoom overhead. But now I'm in the very innermost hell and what I feel is the sheer joy of life. I have seldom felt more optimistic than when walking this black ground with the shards of exploded rocks scattered about and seeing huge yellow flowers beaming all over. The contorted shapes of the dead trees, some arcing and almost twirled by the blowtorch that killed them, are eerily beautiful.

But two things stun me. First is that even burning 700 square miles of Arizona barely makes a dent in the greenery of the high country — the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, for example, lost 164,440 acres to the burn, but this took place in a federal reserve of 2 million acres. Second, and far more important, the blackened forest tells me a very old tale, that the Earth abideth forever, and that in the wink of an eye life reclaims death, that change is the constant. Ten thousand years ago there were hardly any ponderosas in Arizona; this huge tract was spruce. Then, the climate shifted and the ponderosas seized the high country like Europeans did at a much later date. Such facts can be lamented or celebrated, but now as I walk the fire-blackened dirt, I realize the Earth has no time for lamentations. The Earth greets the sun with life.

Finally, Dykinga and I push on and things get green and fine again. Elk once again stare at me, antelope gaze over, ravens croak overhead and ducks paddle about in the small ponds of the high country. I've gotten more than I bargained for lately: blues, espresso, the gleam of a '50 Chevy in cherry condition, and the devastation of the fire zone that despite the evidence of death manages to waft against my face like the breath of heaven. I'm sure all this was within my reach as a child. I simply had to slow down to regain this once familiar ground. And now I have.

In Touch With the Earth

THERE ARE THINGS I SHOULD TELL YOU. Sometime in your life, you must drop into the small town of Snowflake after days of sleeping out and listening to the moon walk across the sky. You must drop in on graduation night with the whole town up for the event and then go to the local steakhouse, have that T-bone and some iced tea and spread out the maps and have a fistful of local ranchers become your advisers as the surrounding tables fill with families having a good meal before the proud moment of diplomas and tassels tossed from one side to the other on mortarboard graduation caps.

And I should tell you about a guy who once wandered dirt-road Arizona and *(Text continued on page 27)*





(Continued from page 23) then left and finally died about 60 years ago fighting a forest fire in Wisconsin. His name was Aldo Leopold and he left behind the essay manuscripts of a little book called *Sand County Almanac*, a small thing that has never gone out of print. He had helped slaughter the wolves in Arizona and then thought twice about what he had done and wrote an essay he called “Thinking Like a Mountain.” This very ground stimulated him to think these thoughts. That we cannot make it without the ground and the ground is so rich and intricate, we will spend the rest of forever simply trying to understand what it is saying to us.

And there was the guy running a sporting goods store-gas station over in Alpine near the New Mexico line. A poster in his window announced an August worm race sponsored by a local tavern. I asked him how the event went. He smiled and said, “Slow.” I take note—slow has become my country.

And Alpine rests under the Escudilla, a massive peak crowded with trees and the meadows blue with wild iris. Up there on a ridge, I stare at an alligator juniper at least 7 feet in diameter and wonder what am I looking at? Five centuries? Six? Seven? The whistle of an elk on the slope cuts through my thought.

But mainly, I’ll tell you about one night near the end of the trip, a camp made on the edge of a meadow up around 9,500 feet, near Alpine. Big Lake spread out under the stars a few miles to the west. I slept in a mixed grove of pines and fir. Toward dawn I watched a thunderstorm roll in. Bats dove near my head, gobbling mosquitoes. Suddenly the wind came up, lightning jabs danced closer and then for half an hour the heavens unleashed a torrent. I had a waterproof sack around my sleeping bag and rode out the storm as a dry but engaged spectator. When the clouds moved off, the air became rich with the odor of pine and finally, in the gray light the forest emerged and the golden sweep of the meadow began to faintly

gleam. I could see my breath but could hear nothing but the soft rustling of needles in the enormous forest. Just over the hill in the next meadow, I saw two herds of elk, a good dozen in each band, grazing as calmly as cows. Then four bulls crept out of the forest.

Later, the tires crossed into New Mexico, and the tracery of dirt roads across Arizona ended.

But I hope that is not true so long as I can remember the storm, the blaze of lightning that signaled the bats to take cover, the rush of the rain pelting the earth, and then finally with dawn, the cup of coffee and my breath spiraling across the wet rich air. I want to remember the choreography of the storm and the slow creeping of dawn, not because I had some big thoughts I scribbled down on paper. Hardly that, since my mind seemed elsewhere and had been retired by my senses.

No, I think I’ll hang onto the memory of the storm and that morning because they took me back to a place I once knew and a place I suspect we have all known, where not only the Earth is alive but so are we. I got there by following dirt roads in Arizona.

I can’t guarantee such a result but I’ll tell you this—you’ve got a real good chance of getting to that place on the slow dusty roads, with or without a map. **AH**

Tucsonan Charles Bowden has lived in Arizona for more than 40 years, which he says is “not enough time.”

Jack Dykinga of Tucson says going from one life zone into another on these dirt roads renewed his appreciation for Arizona’s natural contrasts.

[PRECEDING PANEL, PAGES 24 AND 25] Stalwart hallmarks of the mountainous West, ponderosa pines and golden aspens crowd the slopes of Escudilla Mountain near Alpine.

[OPPOSITE PAGE] The handiwork of industrious beavers, the flooded flats of a small mountain meadow on the Mogollon Rim help provide water and habitat for other wildlife.

[ABOVE] Witness to countless seasons in the Escudilla Wilderness, an ancient alligator juniper’s prodigious girth attests to its survival skills.

Insects, Run for Your Lives Here comes that stinky, ill-mannered meat eater . . .

...the shrew

text and photographs by Marty Cordano

Pound for pound, inch for inch, they are Arizona's deadliest mammals. Nonstop killers with insatiable appetites, they seem to be a mixture of

ill-tempered badger, cunning coyote and malodorous skunk, all bundled into tiny energized packages. Shrews, called "dwarf wolves" in one dictionary, also are among Arizona's smallest mammals.

Shrews appear disguised as adorable baby mice. Mice, of course, are rodents. Shrews are not rodents, but rather fierce predatory insectivores that prey primarily on grasshoppers, snails, earthworms and other invertebrates found under leaf litter. Mice, small reptiles and occasionally other shrews may also find themselves on the dinner table.

For their weight—about that of a nickel—shrews have enormous appetites and must eat many meals a day or face starvation within hours. Researchers believe shrews are active both day and night throughout the year, alternating periods of hunting and sleeping in three- to four-hour

intervals. To maintain an exceedingly high rate of metabolism, which includes a heart rate of about 1,000 beats per minute, shrews are capable of consuming twice their body weight in food in a day. The shrew's ferocity is supported by needle-sharp teeth and lightning speed, enabling it to deliver a paralyzing or fatal bite to the unlucky victim.

Their obsession with food would be even greater if they didn't have the ability to lower their body temperature by about 20 degrees while spending half their time in deep sleep. When they awaken, they are out to kill.

Of the 322 known shrew species, six reside in Arizona. Of those, only two species live in the Huachuca Mountains near my southern Arizona home. My assignment was to find and photograph the rarely seen desert shrew, *Notiosorex crawfordi*.

My search led me up Miller Canyon in the Huachucas where shrews could find adequate nesting sites within old wood rat nests or under dead agave plants. A series of small trails radiating from a decaying log pointed me to a potential shrew nest. Now I would have to apply the tricks of my trade to capture one of these tiny "Jack the Rippers" on film.

What better way to befriend a hungry, beady-eyed killer than with a tasty tidbit? In addition to the required ton of camera equipment, I was also carrying a small ice chest containing a few chilled, but not dead, grasshoppers.

In seconds, a furry gray streak about the

[BELOW] Barely bigger than the grasshoppers they devour, Arizona's desert shrews compete with pipistrelle bats for the title of "smallest desert mammals." CARLTONS' PHOTOGRAPHIC INC. **[ABOVE]** The skull of a shrew species similar to *Notiosorex crawfordi* demonstrates the toothy final scenery witnessed by some unlucky grasshoppers and other invertebrates that encounter the voracious predator. **[OPPOSITE PAGE]** A toppled dead agave plant serves as a typical nesting site for desert shrews.



size of a wine cork shot out from underneath the log and savagely attacked a grasshopper that I had placed on one of its trails. The shrew bit off the grasshopper's legs, then delivered the coup de grâce bite to the back of the head with such speed that I wasn't really sure I saw what I thought I saw.

The next attack came moments later. This time the shrew and grasshopper vanished under the log where I thought I heard muffled screams. The grasshopper was doomed. I felt guilty. Worse still, it all happened so fast, I missed the photo.

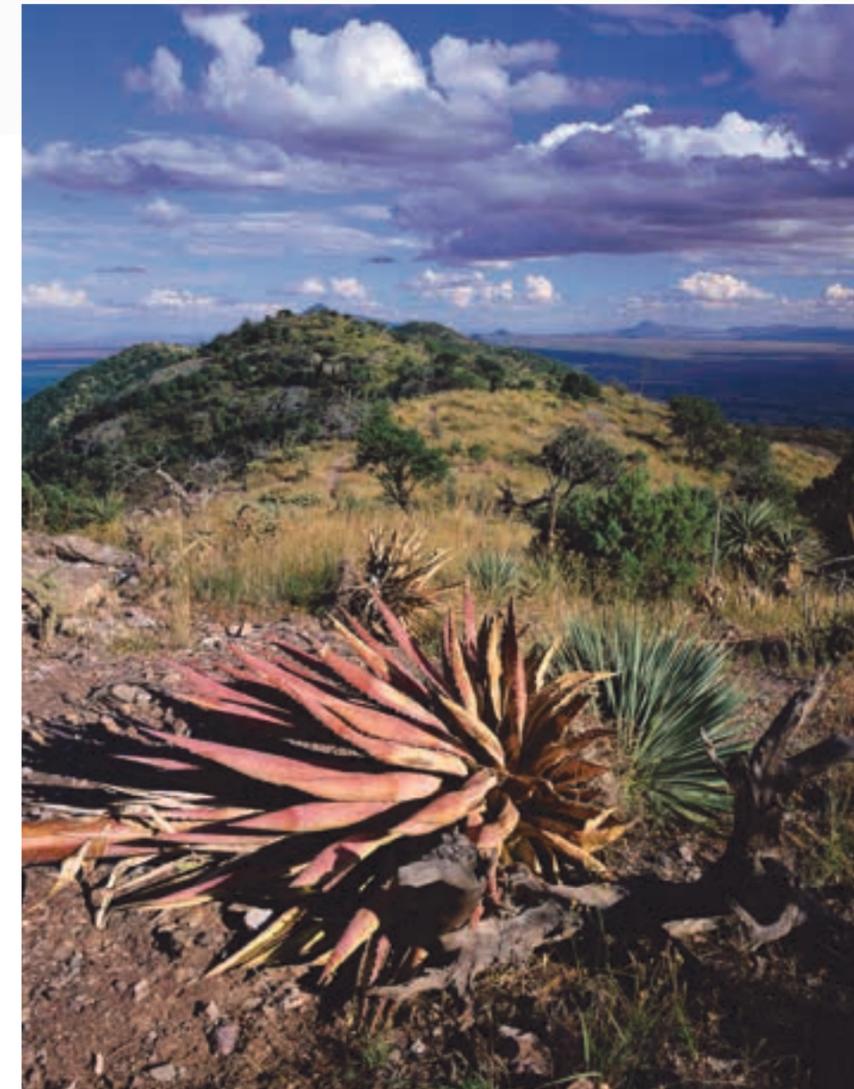
Oh well, the shrew had a family to raise. And that is precisely what this female was doing under the log, where four hairless, pink babies were hidden.

Shrews have a life expectancy of about a year, so courtship, mating and raising young must be done in a hurry. The dating game, which may include several vicious spats, lasts a few minutes; mating takes about 10 seconds; and the gestation period spans two weeks. From birth to maturity takes about 40 days. Females will have several litters of two to 10 young in their brief lifetimes.

Along with their cantankerous nature, shrews are, quite literally, little stinkers. The cute, thimble-sized critters with pointy, whiskered snouts that twitch constantly, emit a powerful stench. This "essence of shrew" attracts mates, marks territories and perhaps repels predators.

Shrews are fearless hunters, but can literally be scared to death by a loud noise. They are short-lived, although they have survived for more than 50 million years. Tiny, feisty, stinky and bold, the shrew is Arizona's king of beasts. ■■

Marty Cordano of Bisbee says if he weren't 20,000 times larger than the ferocious desert shrew, he might not have survived this assignment.



CHRONICLING THE WEST

EARLY DAY SCRIBES KNEW HOW TO SPELL

H-Y-P-E



JOHN VAN DYKE, an Eastern college professor welcomed in society's highest circles, sent his editor a book manuscript about the Southwestern deserts. In an accompanying letter about the manuscript, he wrote:

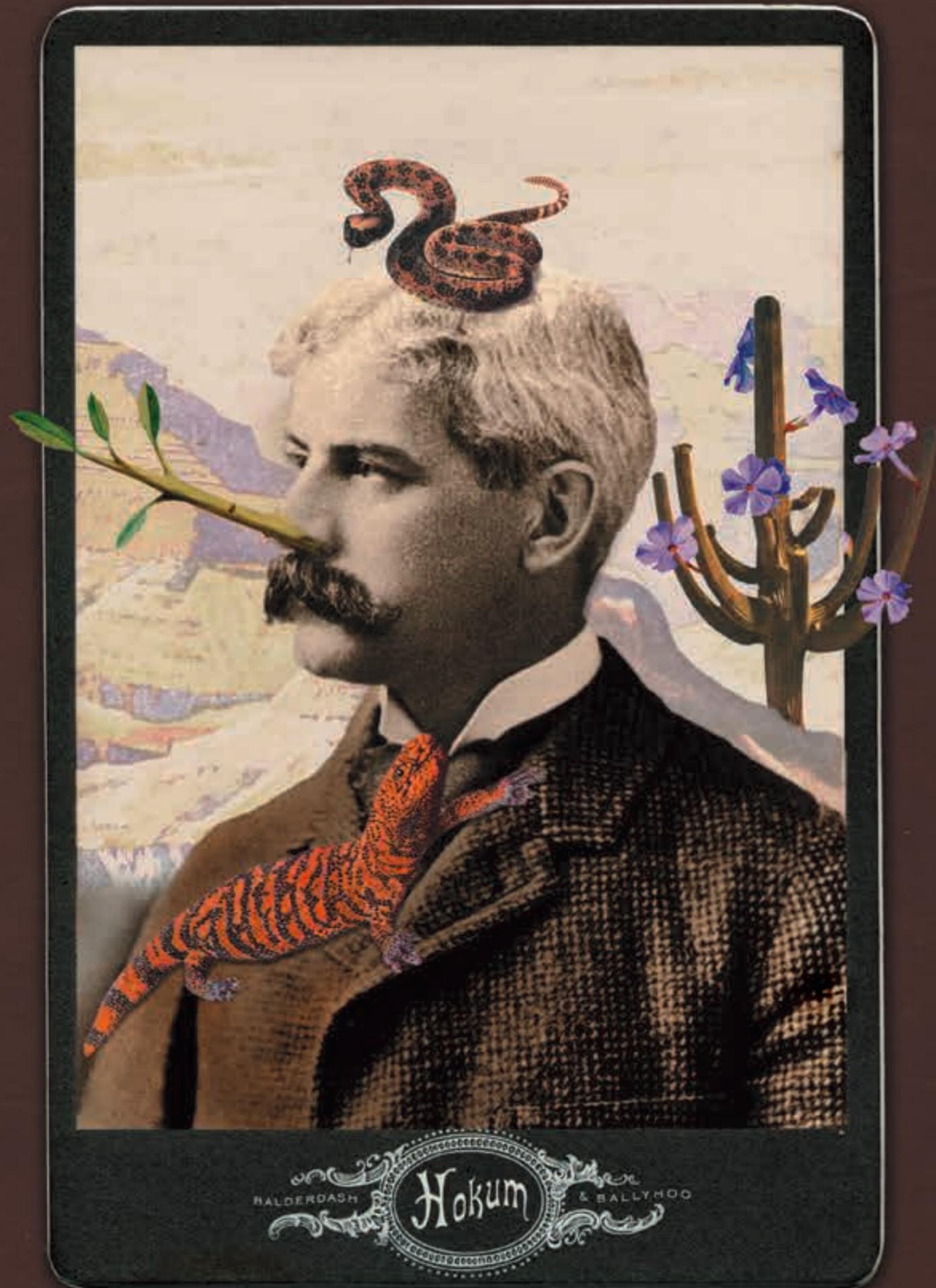
"It is a whole lot better than the swash which today is being turned out as 'literature' . . . and it will sell too, but not up in the hundreds of thousands. It is not so bad as that. My audience is only a few thousand, thank God."

Van Dyke was wrong. His 1901 book, *The Desert*, sold like hot tortillas and went into several reprints, inspiring generations to journey vicariously with the desert pilgrim, his "half Indian pony," and spunky fox terrier.

One small hitch: Van Dyke's book "is a grand fraud," according to Peter Wild, an English professor at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He and Arizona editor, writer and historian Neil Carmony argue that Van Dyke experienced the desert by viewing it from trains, hotels and the porch of his brother's California home, rather than undertaking the death-defying trek as he claimed.

Certainly, specific details — "sluggish" rattlesnakes, "harmless" Gila monsters, "purple" saguaro blossoms — ring false. And yet Van Dyke's descriptions appear authentic despite inaccuracies, as in this passage, where he reversed the tarantula hawk's colors: "The tarantula-wasp, with his gorgeous orange-colored body and

Text by **KATHLEEN M. BRYANT** Photo illustrations by **MARTY BLAKE**





ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH OF CHARLES LUMMIS, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

for the next flash from the frontier. *The Nation* peevishly complained that interest in the West “has not been elevating or refining, and it would have been vastly better for the country had circumstances made the growth of these communities slower.”

Indeed, Arizona grew from “the worst class of gamblers, renegades, and cutthroats . . . gathered together from the four quarters of the globe. . . .” So said Samuel Cozzens, and as Territorial judge, he knew the truth of it. But Cozzens snared readers with his 1876 book, *The Marvelous Country: Three Years in Arizona and New Mexico, the Apaches’ Home*. Reading it is akin to riding blindfolded on a runaway horse, both time and place a dizzying blur. His “strange events and adventures” during 1858 and 1860 include shoot-outs, scalp-tingling stories about white captives and conversations with Cochise himself.

Similar in subject but more grounded in reality is the work of footloose Irish immigrant J. Ross Browne, who visited Yuma, Gila Bend, Tubac and other settlements in 1864 and wrote six articles for *Harper’s Monthly*, later combined into the book *Adventures in the Apache Country*. He warned readers Arizona was “not a jolly country. The graves of murdered men . . . and scenes of ruin and desolation are profoundly interesting; but they are not subjects for the indulgence of rollicking humor.”

Indeed, Browne’s humor is sly, his exaggerations intentional. He arrived via Yuma, in those days the usual gateway from “inside” (the local lingo for California and the States). The dusty journey primed him for the civilized comforts he expected to find in Tucson, the Territory’s largest city. Instead, he beheld “the most wonderful scatteration of human habitations . . . a city of mud-boxes, dingy and dilapidated, cracked and baked into a composite of dust and filth; littered about with broken corrals, sheds, bake-ovens, carcasses of dead animals, and broken pottery. . . .” The best view of this “Sodom and Gomorrah,” he insisted, was looking backward on

the trail out of town.

He judged the desert’s winter climate superior to Italy’s, but warned that “fastidious people might object to the temperature in summer,” sharing a tale about a “wicked” soldier who died and went to hell, then sent back to Arizona for his blankets. As for Arizona’s infamous dry heat: “The carcasses of cattle rattle inside their hides,” chickens hatch already cooked, “bacon is eaten with a spoon, and butter must stand an hour in the sun before the flies become dry enough for use.”

Browne’s indefatigable humor permeates his writing, as do signs of the time. “Rude sketches of Jeff Davis hung by the neck and President Lincoln fleeing from the vengeance of the Chivalry” marred the walls of ancient Casa Grande ruins. War left the Territory vulnerable to the Apaches, who didn’t welcome newcomers: “I was compelled to pursue the fine arts with a revolver strapped around my body, a double-barreled shotgun lying across my knees, and a half a dozen soldiers armed with Sharpe’s carbines keeping guard in the distance.”

Readers thrilled to such passages, but not Arizona’s leading

citizens, who knew the best way to civilize a land was to populate it. They backed boosterish guidebooks offering advice to would-be settlers. Richard J. Hinton’s 1877 *The Handbook to Arizona* detailed mining districts, wages, stage schedules and local flora and fauna. His helpful suggestions to erstwhile immigrants included how to prepare for a long stage journey. (He recommended riding on the roof, or failing that, a rear seat next to the window, with a “stout strap” as makeshift seatbelt.) Less helpful assurances: Wood rats made good eating and the “Gila monster is an overgrown, variegated, perfectly harmless lizard. . . .”

George H. Tinker’s slim volume on northern Arizona, *The Land of Sunshine*, probably didn’t overwhelm him with royalties (he first published only 50 copies), but the Flagstaff newspaperman provided a valuable service by touting Arizona’s charms. And though he admitted that describing the Grand Canyon was a waste of adjectives, he offered a page about the abyss, where “stars glisten in all their nocturnal beauty at midday, while not even a stray gleam of sunshine has ever penetrated.”

Journalist Hiram C. Hodge joined hordes of other “lungers” (persons afflicted with tuberculosis) relocating to Arizona and financed his recovery with more than 500 articles, later gathered into a book, *Arizona As It Is, Or the Coming Country*. He encouraged females to emigrate, assuring them Arizona needed “large numbers of the true, the pure, the good . . . and would give them a welcome such as goddesses might envy.”

Whether by guidebooks or goddesses, Arizona’s wilderness was gradually tamed into communities of (mostly) lawful citizens. Railroads crossed the Territory, comfortable hotels beckoned and Easterners longed to journey “where the Apache used to ride in wildest abandon.” A flurry of new magazines about the West enticed them. So did the travel lecture, a grand event in Eastern cities at the turn of the last century.

“The acme of sublimity in natural scenery is reached in Arizona,” world-traveler Burton Holmes told his audiences — gentlemen and ladies in evening dress who paid as much as \$1.25 for his “travelogues.” Holmes packed them in with his slides of the Grand Canyon, hand-painted in ethereal colors by Japanese artists. Viewing the Canyon, he theorized, spurred the brain to create new cells. Even then, the initiated might “tremble at the thought of grander chapters and long for their former ignorance . . . ere they approach a climax too overwhelming to be borne by the human mind.”

Corseted matrons and proper young misses gasped as John Stoddard, another lecturer, described the Canyon: “Nature wounded unto death, and lying stiff and ghastly with a gash, two hundred miles in length and a mile in depth, in her bared breast, from which is flowing fast a stream of lifeblood called the Colorado.”

“Trivial,” sniffed Charles Lummis, magazine editor and author. He preferred a shorter, but no less lofty tag for the Grand Canyon — “Cosmic Intaglio.”

Similar adjectives flowed from dozens of pens. Among the most prolific writers was George Wharton James, a defrocked Methodist minister accused of committing dastardly deeds by his ex-wife. Fleeing the resulting gossip, James tramped through Arizona and New Mexico, eventually returning to California,

where he found his niche writing and publishing travel guides.

Reborn as author and editor of *Out West* magazine, James did “more to make the wonders of the Southwest known to the world than any other 10 men,” according to fellow outdoorsman Teddy Roosevelt.

From the late 1800s through the first couple decades of the new century, James wrote more than 70 books and articles with the aid of two anonymous assistants — a torrent of words untouched by

an editor’s red pen. In *Arizona, the Wonderland* (1917), he opened with a fantasy tour on a “magic sky-steed,” then described the ultimate tour, the “Wonder Circuit,” covering 1,000 to 1,300 miles, featuring “such a veritable revelation of marvels” that American travelers will “feel that they were in a new, utterly foreign, and altogether strange and marvelous land.”

He judged Phoenix one of the most “exquisitely embowered . . . cities of the world.” Douglas, he predicted, “will see a great influx of transcontinental travelers, for it is a city that no one will desire to pass by.” On the Grand Canyon: “The most delicate of transcontinental travelers may take her Pullman drawing-room in Chicago . . . and without a moment’s weariness, ennui or deprivation of any accustomed luxury, gaze upon this wonderland of form, color and mystery.”

Eschewing luxury himself, James worked in a Grand Canyon cave with a boulder as desk. He rode a mule, hiked and even floated part of the

Colorado, a voyage he made into a metaphor for life, likely thinking of his own: “Friends have forsaken him, loved ones gone, perhaps even God seems to have left him to himself, but as he looks up, even here he sees the sun of grace shining upon the Lighthouse Rocks that raise their heads above the Canyon walls, and new hope, new faith, new encouragement are the result. . . .”

Through writing, James simply re-created himself. John Van Dyke re-created the desert. His book’s dedication declared: “The desert has gone a-begging for a word of praise these many years. It never had a sacred poet; it has in me only a lover. But I trust that you, and the nature-loving public you represent, will accept this record . . . as at least truthful.”

Truthful? Not entirely. But with Van Dyke’s vivid rendering, the awesome florid pen of the Victorians eased into a more straight-shooting style before the birth of *Arizona Highways* magazine in 1925.

And yet, dear readers, shivers of longing sometimes overwhelm modern-day travel writers who yearn for the days when Arizona’s deserts and canyons were as strange and marvelous as Mars, and editors looked upon excessive adjectives with a kinder eye. ■■■

ADDITIONAL READING: *Rattlesnake Blues: Dispatches from a Snakebit Territory*, by Leo W. Banks, No. 8 in *Arizona Highways’ Wild West Collection*, gathers anecdotes and stories from newspapers published in the era when “Arizona” still defined the unknown for most folks. Order the softcover book (\$7.95 plus shipping and handling) by calling (800) 543-5432 or visit arizonahighways.com.

Kathleen Bryant of Sedona prefers her computer to quill pens, but otherwise would happily travel to an earlier era. Marty Blake of New York admits she’s hooked on collage illustration, believing that it gives new life, in a new context, to images.

N

Not so many years ago, I stood on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon staring into its eroded depths when, suddenly, I was jerked out of my reverie by a voice with a Texas drawl.

“What’s up on top o’ them babies, anyhow?”

I turned and inquired, “Which babies are those?”

“Them pinnacle-like things out there.”

Ah, yes, the buttes. That’s what he’s referring to. Those immense upthrusting formations of stone that rise thousands of feet from the Canyon floor. They bear exotic names like Wotans Throne, Zoroaster Temple, Tower of Ra. Virtually all of them are ringed by soaring cliffs so precipitous the average person would judge them unscalable. Their summits, sometimes extending across hundreds of acres, appear as islands in the sky.

“What’s up there?” he wants to know. *I haven’t the foggiest idea*, I thought.

After returning home, I go to the library and leave with an armload of books. I call people who are in the know. Eventually, I’m surprised to learn that not until 1937 did a serious scientific expedition climb to the top of a Grand Canyon butte to seek an answer to the question, “What’s up there?”

When the American Museum of Natural History announced it would send scientists to the top of Shiva Temple, the nation was still in the throes of the Great Depression. People needed diversion from their economic woes, and the newspapers did their best to deliver. Journalists speculated on the possibility that the daring expedition, headed by Dr. Harold Anthony, might find dinosaurs on the top of Shiva, a 7,618-foot Grand Canyon butte that had been cut off from the rest of the world for as many as 100,000 years.

The belief that no human had ever ascended to the summit of a Grand Canyon butte aroused the public’s interest even further. Anthony and his team decided to climb “where no man had ever

climbed before” because other modes of transportation were considered either too dangerous or impractical. The “sky island” was too densely forested for a landing by autogiro, and unpredictable canyon winds ruled out an approach by blimp.

Assisted by professional mountaineers, the Anthony party successfully scaled Shiva, pulling themselves up and over cliffs where the best approaches were no less than 20 to

25 vertical feet. One member was forced to drop out because of a bloody scalp wound caused by falling rock. But Anthony and the others persevered. On the night of September 16, they built a large bonfire on the summit to inform a waiting world that the “first” humans finally had reached the top of Shiva.

According to Anthony’s official report, there was no evidence of primordial creatures on the mesa, but the scientists did not seriously expect any. He recorded finding recently cast-off deer antlers and coyote tracks, and theorized that the agile desert creatures ascended the south face of Shiva where footing, treacherous to man, could have provided a possible avenue for wildlife.

For further scientific study, the party

trapped a large number of wood rats, mice and chipmunks, but nothing indicated evolutionary changes in these small mammals that had, presumably, been isolated at the top of Shiva Temple.

Anthony’s report did not mention the Kodak film boxes left there by Grand Canyon photographer Emery Kolb only weeks earlier or the flag made from a burlap bag attached to an agave stalk planted firmly in the ground by his fellow climbers. When Anthony rejected Kolb’s offer to guide the expedition, Kolb had planned his own trip, pre-empting Anthony. Because Kolb’s party did not have the support of the park service, the accomplishment wasn’t made public for a decade, but, apparently, they were all quite satisfied with their secret. After returning

from his Grand Canyon adventure, Anthony was widely interviewed and a lengthy account of his adventure was published in the American Museum’s *Natural History* magazine.

Strangely, Anthony’s most intriguing find on Shiva received only brief mention in his report. Perhaps this was because Anthony, human as we all are, was not overjoyed to inform the world that other humans had preceded him, and even Kolb, to Shiva’s summit. For, you see, Anthony and his team found ample evidence that Indians, perhaps a thousand years before, had not only climbed Shiva and explored it, but also had lived on it as well.

Small stone rooms, cooking pits, spear-points and shards of flint were discovered by the Anthony group.

Sometime after the Anthony expedition finished its work on Shiva, its professional climbers, led by George B. Andrews, made a successful ascent of Wotans Throne, which lies off the North Rim of the Canyon near Cape Royal. Andrews later reported that while he and his companions had climbed extensively in the Swiss Alps and the Himalayas, they considered Wotans Throne their most dangerous challenge.

About their final approach, Andrews wrote: “Slowly we crawled like giant spiders along the base. We peered up at the broken crags and boulders above, picking the route, trying to visualize every hand and foot hold.”

After reaching the summit, Andrews paused to catch his breath and take a drink of water. As he lowered the canteen, he noticed—only a few feet from the rim—an ancient stone oven.

In recent decades, experienced climbers have scaled most of the canyon’s 147 buttes, often finding evidence of ascents by early man. And that, of course, raises another ponderable question: Why did the ancients climb the buttes?

Many would guess that prehistoric man was seeking protection from warlike neighbors. Perhaps. But I have a theory of my own. I have a feeling that ancient people had as much innate curiosity and as much love of adventure as modern man. Unfettered by time clocks and airplane schedules, they were free to pursue whatever interested them. The buttes called, and they climbed them—for the same reason Hillary climbed Everest—because they were there. **AH**

The late William Hafford contributed many stories to Arizona Highways over the years. This was among his last.

WHO KNOWS WHAT LURKS ON THOSE GRAND CANYON BUTTES?

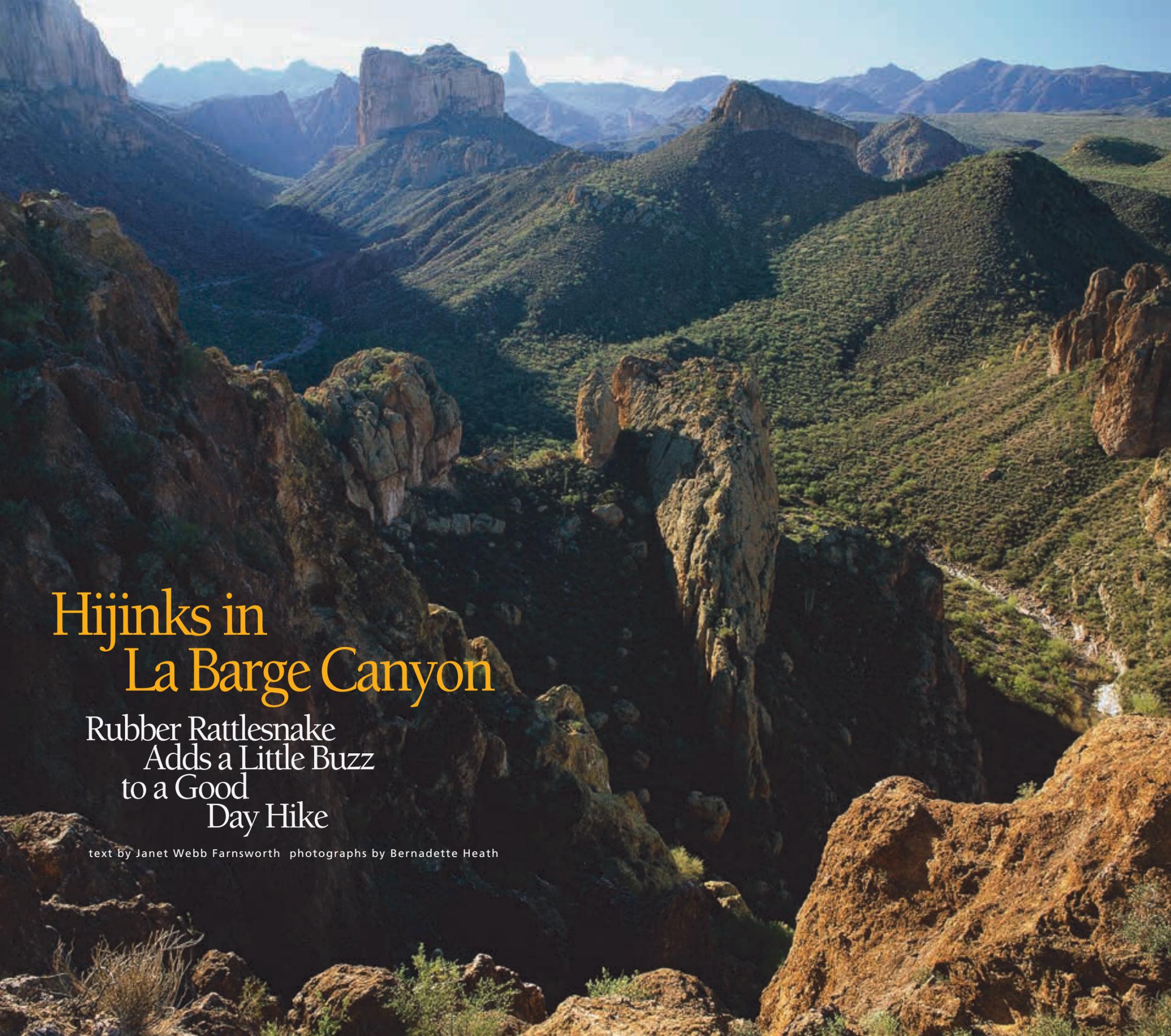
WE DO



by WILLIAM HAFFORD

[RIGHT] Sunlight slanting through monsoon clouds creates smoky drama in the Grand Canyon’s shadowy depths, while torching Shiva, Confucius and Mencius temples (left to right) with fiery color. GARY LADD





Hijinks in La Barge Canyon

Rubber Rattlesnake
Adds a Little Buzz
to a Good
Day Hike

text by Janet Webb Farnsworth photographs by Bernadette Heath

“All we need is a dead rattlesnake,”

I told photographer Bernadette Heath. I'd found a recipe for chicken-fried rattlesnake and couldn't resist the chance to play a practical joke. I knew she liked her snakes far away, not on her plate.

“The recipe says, ‘Skin snake and wash inside and out. Cut snake into 1-inch chunks and soak in cold water for one hour.’ You do that and I'll do all the rest,” I said.

“Why do I have to be the one to kill the rattlesnake?” Bernadette asked with a whine.

“Because you're the one who attracts snakes,” I answered. “I never find them. All you have to do is go out in the desert, and snakes flock to you.”

Bernadette and I were planning to hike La Barge Canyon at Canyon Lake, approximately 45 miles northeast of Phoenix and a perfect location for snakes.

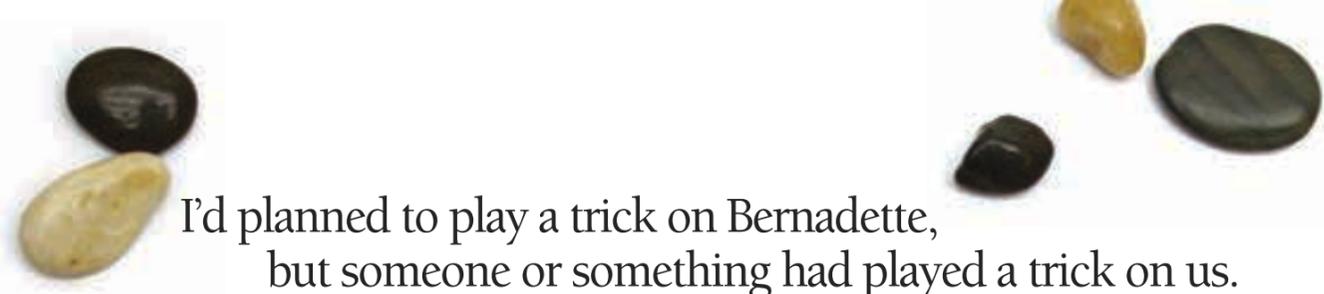
According to legend, old man La Barge, the canyon's namesake, was on a hunting trip with his son when he came upon an Indian man laughing at him. The Indian told La Barge that he had been watching the two of them coming into the Bluff Springs Mountains that morning, and at one point La Barge was standing on \$50 million worth of gold. La Barge believed the Indian's story and spent the rest of his life scouring the area for the gold. Now the legend claims old man La Barge's ghost still stalks the canyon looking for gold.

Bernadette was already spooky about this canyon, so I made sure I mentioned rattlesnakes or ghosts to her often before the hike. To make the joke work, her brain needed to be crawling with snakes and her nerves edgy. Meanwhile, I bought a lifelike rubber rattlesnake and convinced my 14-year-old daughter, Jessica, to come along.

Elyse Hulse, a school teacher from New York, also joined us. Elyse works with emotionally challenged children and was developing a program involving photography and writing. She figured spending time with a pair of professionals would help her with ideas. Her first day would be hiking La Barge Canyon, and I thought some fried rattlesnake and a cranky ghost would be good for a New Yorker, too.

April sunlight glinted off Canyon Lake as Bernadette unloaded a brilliant yellow inflatable raft. La Barge Canyon could be reached two ways: via Boulder Canyon Trail (No. 103) starting from State Route 88 on the east side of the bridge across from the Canyon Lake Marina, or by rowing across Canyon Lake to the mouth of La Barge Canyon. Bernadette chose the water route, but the raft was too small to hold us and our gear.

The best plan called for Bernadette to row Jessica and our backpacks across, then come back for Elyse and me. “Your



I'd planned to play a trick on Bernadette, but someone or something had played a trick on us.

backpack is heavy," Bernadette grumbled as she tossed my pack into the raft.

"I need a frying pan to cook the rattlesnake," I said in a serious tone.

Bernadette glared. Elyse asked quizzically, "Fried rattlesnake?"

"Don't worry," Bernadette reassured. "It's not going to happen."

We headed toward La Barge Canyon propelled by the combined efforts of tailwind, water current and Bernadette's rowing. At our destination, she chained the raft to a small tree, and we donned our packs and started hiking up the canyon.

La Barge and its tributary, Boulder Canyon, serve as a main drainage of Canyon Lake. Strewn with boulders, the route does not have a trail and is not recommended for horses. The creek was dry at that time, but a rainstorm can leave it running high. Black, mauve and red rocks, smoothed by floodwater over the ages, decorate the canyon. I stopped often to pick up colorful stones and wonder at their origin. The canyon walls appeared to be volcanic-formed rhyolite. And I wondered if the glittering rocks were some of La Barge's gold. The region looked favorable for both gold and rattlesnakes, but in the spring sunshine, ghosts seemed pretty improbable.

We were stretched out in single file, Bernadette leading, followed by Elyse and Jessica, with me bringing up the rear. From time to time, I'd call ahead to Bernadette, "Spotted any rattlesnakes yet?"

Bernadette gave me an evil look, Elyse looked confused and Jessica just ducked her head and giggled.

The morning temperature rose into the 90s, and the canyon bottom littered with big black boulders held the heat. We were all sweating by the time Bernadette pointed to a shady spot against the canyon wall and said we would rest there.

"Now," I hissed at Jessica. She carried the fake snake wrapped around her waist under her shirt and, without missing a step, she dropped it next to a boulder and went on. Coming up from behind, I reached the spot and yelled, "Bernadette, here's a rattlesnake. Get out your pocketknife."

I danced around the snake making motions as if to grab it. All the while, Bernadette was screaming, "Janet, get away from that snake. Leave it alone."

Finally, I darted in and grabbed the snake by the neck. Boulder-hopping, I ran toward Bernadette with the rubber snake writhing

convincingly. She took off yelling, "Don't bring that snake over here." Jessica screamed, adding to the melee, but Elyse just sat on her rock, nonplused, watching the whole scene.

I couldn't stand it any longer and burst out laughing. "Come back, Bernadette, it's only a rubber snake."

She returned to where Jessica and I were laughing hysterically and giving each other high-fives, but her nose was definitely out of joint. "That wasn't a bit funny. You don't joke about snakes." That just made us laugh all the harder.

I turned to Elyse and asked, "Why didn't you scream and run?"

"Oh, I knew you weren't dumb enough to pick up a real snake."

Bernadette threw her arms in the air and said biting, "You don't know Janet. She is dumb enough to pick up a snake." We headed on up the canyon, enjoying a fairly easy hike. Grass, the startling green of spring, bunched near large rocks. Large prickly pear cacti grew out of crevices in the canyon, and cattails clustered around small water holes. Brittlebush and mesquite added to the scenery. In stretches of sand, we discovered a variety of tracks. Deer, javelinas, coyotes and even an elusive mountain lion came here for water. Above us, turkey buzzards circled, their fringed wings spread as they glided in slow, lazy circles. To me it seemed unlikely such a pretty canyon would be haunted.

At the junction of Boulder Canyon and La Barge, we met a maze of bamboolike stalks, tamarisk and willow trees thick enough to turn

us back. We were out for a fun hike, not an endurance march through the jungle, so we backtracked to a water hole for lunch.

The shady pool in the curve of the canyon was refreshing. Waterbugs skated across the top as Elyse and I soaked our feet and ate sandwiches. Bernadette, still recovering from snake-shock, braved the green water to take a swim. Watching her splash around enticed the rest of us to jump in for a much needed cooling off.

Hiking back down the canyon in the afternoon heat, I could tell Elyse wasn't feeling well. Her face was red, and she walked slowly. "It's hard to go from the tundra weather of upstate New York to Phoenix heat in one day," she explained.

I sympathized with her. I have experienced heat exhaustion and know it can be serious. Besides, I was tired myself. Stopping at water holes, we wet down our hair and hats to keep us cool and started sipping Gatorade.

Bernadette said she would go ahead, unchain the raft and get it

ready so that when we got there we could start for the trucks. The three of us hiked along slowly, stopping for frequent rests. Suddenly, Bernadette came running up. "It's gone. Someone stole the raft."

I first thought she was joking—a revenge for the snake trick—but one look at her face was enough to convince me. "Someone broke the tree off and slipped the chain over the stump. The raft is gone; no sign of it."

I cringed at the thought, but maybe those canyon ghosts were really here.

The whole atmosphere of the hike changed from an easy day-outing to a life-threatening problem. Bernadette knew that the Boulder Trail was on top of the hill, but we had a steep climb to reach it. I looked at Elyse questioningly, but she said, "If that is what we need to do, I can do it."

Scrambling around cacti and loose rocks, we made it to the top. Looking down on Canyon Lake, we could see a bright yellow raft floating near the shore. Some children climbed on it, then dove into the lake. Elyse's spirit stayed strong, but the rest of her wasn't, and the heat took its toll on all of us. Stopping under a paloverde tree, I retrieved an orange plastic slicker from my pack and draped it over the leafless limbs to make some welcome shade.

After a powwow, we decided that Bernadette, who knew the path and was in the best condition, would head down the hill to State Route 88, then follow it around to where the trucks were parked, notify the rangers we might need rescuing and bring her truck closer to our descending trail. The rest of us would remain on the mountain.

As we waited, the sun sank lower and the shade increased. Occasionally, I'd wander to the edge of the ridge and watch for Bernadette. Finally, I could see her truck parked off the highway far below as

she climbed the hill. We welcomed her for the rescuer she was when she brought more cool Gatorade.

Bernadette explained that the kids had found the raft floating in the lake. "Someone had to put that raft out in the lake," Bernadette insisted. "Rafts don't break off live trees and slip the chain off by themselves."

I wondered if La Barge's ghost didn't like yellow rafts at the mouth of his canyon. I'd planned to play a trick on Bernadette, but someone or something had played a trick on us—one that could have had a bad ending.

We took frequent rest stops, but we all made it off the mountain before dark and under our own power. That fact made us proud with an underlying sense of relief that we didn't need to be rescued. We climbed into Bernadette's waiting truck and drove back to the lake to our starting point, where we reclaimed the raft. As we hoisted it in the truck, I wished that bright yellow hunk of rubber could tell us how it got loose.

"Let's get back into town and find a place to eat," Bernadette suggested.

"Maybe we can find one that serves fried rattlesnake," I added.

Bernadette glared, Elyse and Jessica rolled their eyes, and I decided I'd better not mention chicken-fried rattlesnake again, at least not on this trip. I looked back over my shoulder at La Barge Canyon and wondered if the ghost had the last laugh on me. ■

Janet Webb Farnsworth of Snowflake wishes she'd found La Barge's gold rather than heat exhaustion, but still considers the trek a lot of fun.

Star Valley resident Bernadette Heath prefers the rafting method of ending the La Barge Trail. She says it's easier, cooler, faster and less stressful than sweating, puffing and climbing over a huge pile of rocks without a trail.



[PRECEDING PANEL, PAGES 36 AND 37] Boulder Canyon Trail winds through the wild and unforgiving landscape of the Superstition Mountain Wilderness on the way to La Barge Canyon.

[ABOVE] Spring rains feed the seasonally flowing creek that runs through the canyon.

[OPPOSITE PAGE] Flood-scoured cobbles at the bottom of La Barge Canyon provide challenges to Jessica Farnsworth as she negotiates the creek bed.



VULTURE JOKES

Here's a sample of the vulture jokes our readers sent us:

Why did the vulture delight in finding a squished roadrunner?

He really enjoyed eating fast food.
EDDIE JELLESED, Eugene, OR

Why do buzzards fly in circles? They're too stubborn to ask for directions.

GUY BELLERANTI, Oro Valley

{early day arizona}

"I see you play *Hamlet*," remarked the novice.
"I do," admitted Yorick Hamm.
"It's a tragedy, isn't it?"
"Nearly always."
Jerome Mining News, OCTOBER 21, 1911

Vultures are some of the best critters I've ever known. Who else will hang around when things are really dead?

CHERI CAREY, Payson

The vultures' favorite restaurant is the Road Kill Cafe, where

they're dying to serve you. Specials include blacktop surprise, smashed rodent and pavement pudding. Catch of the day is the chicken that didn't make it across the road.

The husband vulture was constantly complaining to his wife, "All we ever have is leftovers."

We're cultured vultures — we always wipe our beaks on the road after we eat.

ALL BY PAMELA HAMILTON, Phoenix

Question: What do vultures call a toothache?
Answer: Tough pickin's.
JOSEPH A. MORRIS, Missoula, MT

Two vultures go into the airport, ready for their vacation. They get in line for the ticket agent and soon it is their turn. The first vulture checks his bag and turns to his friend.

"Don't you have any luggage to check?" he asks. The second vulture

heat strokes

BY GARY BENNETT



"That's sooo irritating. Just once I wish she would remember the words!"

PERSPECTIVE

UNUSUAL

The Arizona tree frog is the official state amphibian. I keep kissing them, hoping they'll turn into the official state Prince Charming. — Linda Perret

says, "No, I only have carrion."
DONNA KIMBLE, Tucson

COLORLESS LANGUAGE

An old Arizona farmer drove his team of mules to town and was late returning.

"What took you so long?" asked his wife.
"Well, on the way back," the farmer explained, "I had to pick up the priest and, from there on, them mules didn't understand a thing I said."

HERM ALBRIGHT, Indianapolis, IN

CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

Several years ago, six carloads of friends from California were going to New Mexico for a reunion. All of us had citizens band radios in our cars. We were driving along a lonely stretch of road in Arizona when a strong signal came over the CB.

"Break," said a man's voice.
"For the first time in 25 years, my wife and I are vacationing without having children in the car, and the silence is getting intense."

Almost immediately a whining second voice replied, "I'm hungry! I have to go to the rest room. Are we almost there?"

"Ah, that's a 10-4," came back the original voice. "Thanks and over and out."

THOMAS LAMANCE, Prewitt, NM

ALL SYSTEMS GO

My mother, who is 90, has lived alone for years. When I last visited her, she said, "Son, I admit it. When I'm here all alone, I sometimes talk to myself."

I'm sure this brought a look of concern to my face. She then looked at me and

said, "Oh, don't worry, it's really a good thing. It helps me check to see if my hearing aids are working!"

BOB LAWSON, Chevy Chase, MD

REDEFINED RUINS

My wife and I took my brother and his wife to Montezuma Castle National Monument.

Shortly after we started down the path, we came upon a large group of tourists from various parts of the world and stopped to listen to the tour guide's spiel. He finished by saying, "Arizona has more than 26,000 ancient ruins." There was a lot oohing and ahing, so I added, "And I'm one of them."

H. SCOTT NEWLAND, Sun City West

UNSAFE AT ANY SPEED

While traveling on Interstate 10 to Tucson with a friend who disliked criticizing anyone, we came up on a very slow-moving car with an Arizona license plate. The car was going dangerously below the speed limit.

When I made a comment about how some Arizona residents drive much worse than winter visitors, she observed, "I guess he's just the abominable slow man."

RUTH BURKE, San Simon

{reader's corner}

About 27 million tourists visit Arizona each year . . . better make that 27 million and two. I'm expecting my aunt and uncle for a visit next week. If you've got a good **tourist joke**, we'd like to hear it. We'll pay \$50 for each one we publish.

TO SUBMIT HUMOR: Send your jokes and humorous Arizona anecdotes to Humor, *Arizona Highways*, 2039 W. Lewis Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85009 or e-mail us at editor@arizonahighways.com. Please include your name, address and telephone number with each submission.

Navajo Grandmother Shares Her Plant Wisdom for Everyday Living

KATHERINE PESHLAKAI SAYS she learned about plants the same way many Navajo Indians do—as part of daily living on the land. From certain plants, she makes dyes that reflect subdued earth tones. There are plants to make a tea or add to a stew; plants the sheep will eat; plants to cure a stomachache or put on a snakebite; and, the most guarded ones, plants for sacred ceremonies.

Originally from the Sand Springs area of the Navajo Indian Reservation, Katherine was "born to" Red House (her mother's clan) and "born for" Tobacco (her father's clan). She proudly notes that her grandfather, Chez Nez, was a well-known Navajo headman, a leader and highly respected member of the community.

Katherine grew up in Wupatki National Monument, out in the wide valley of the Little Colorado River, and was married to Clyde Peshlakai, who held a great store of native plant information. Some years later, Katherine moved east across the Little Colorado, where she still lives with her daughter, Eleanor Peshlakai, on the family homestead.

On the walls of her modest home hang pictures of her family—one of Katherine as a young woman with four of her children clinging to her skirts. She eventually had nine children. The photograph, in color, appeared in *Arizona Highways* years ago.

Katherine's face now shows the impressions of seven decades of wind and sun, and her gaze seems set on the long distances of her home country. A weaving loom made of metal pipe occupies the center of her living room. The kitchen has a large woodstove; assorted metal bowls and buckets are stacked neatly on shelves.

They have no refrigerator or electricity. Katherine and Eleanor haul water and heat with juniper wood. Groceries and laundry require a trip to Flagstaff, maybe once a week unless the river rises. Katherine shakes her head as she tells stories of getting stuck in quicksand during these trips.

She kindly agrees to let this garrulous, inquisitive Anglo address her as Shima. It means "my mom," say her other daughter, Polly, and friend Phyllis Hogan. Phyllis, owner of an herbal shop in Flagstaff and founder of the Arizona Ethnobotanical Research Association, began learning sprigs of knowledge from "Grandma" Peshlakai about traditional Navajo plant uses.

A trip to the Peshlakai home in late April

means waiting until the spring runoff in the Little Colorado has slackened enough to allow vehicles to splash through the chocolate-muddy water at Black Falls. A maze of dirt roads leads through the striped hills of the Painted Desert, past an old "male" hogan.

Following Navajo custom, one of the first things to do with visitors is to share a meal. Besides, Katherine and Eleanor have been up for hours herding cattle and tending sheep, and they're hungry. After a feast of frybread, chiles, chicken and watermelon, Katherine announces that the wild onions, *l'ohchin*, are ready to harvest.

The sparse green sprouts emerge from cracked ground in the gathering place out in a stark, wind-cleansed part of the desert. In full-tiered skirt and velvet blouse, Katherine bends at the waist, stabs a curved hay-baling hook cleanly into the dirt around the plant's base, carefully grasps the entire plant, then pulls it out and places it in a basket.

She walks slowly, surveying the ground for more. It's best to get them before they flower, she advises, and important to know the difference between the two kinds of onions: the one you can eat, "the other one is poisonous." She can tell the edible onion by the smell, the round leaves and the arrangement of the bulb. When the sheep eat them "you can smell it on their breath when they come home."

Katherine and Eleanor also glean a small saltbush, the one whose leaves have "ears." Eleanor even gathers fresh young tumbleweeds. "They taste a little greasy," she says, but eaten like spinach they're good.

Later, back around the kitchen table, Katherine recounts the plants she uses to dye wool. She ties stems of rabbitbrush together with yucca, pounds them, then cooks them in a big pot of water. Stir in some salt, drain off the liquid and the wool turns a deep yellow or gray color. Walnuts yield a brown; Katherine says she gets them from trees up on a mesa or from a relative at Canyon Diablo. Other plants are put to different uses: The wood of Apache plume makes weaving tools, and juniper ashes get mixed into cornmeal mush.

Daughter Polly echoes her mother's statement: Plants "were an everyday living thing" that she learned about, just as she did weaving and making frybread. It is knowledge passed down from her Shima by word and by deed—wisdom worth nurturing and saving.

Rose Houk, who writes from her home in Flagstaff, hopes to keep learning about the value of plants to peoples' lives.



PLANTS COURTESY OF MOUNTAIN STATES WHOLESALE NURSERY, LITCHFIELD PARK

[ABOVE] Plants used by Katherine Peshlakai include a) saltbush, b and e) Apache plume, c) rabbitbrush, and d) walnuts. 2C IMAGERY

Take the Safe Route to the Confluence of Two Scenic Rivers

TIME IS A BENEVOLENT HEALER. Now that I am no longer staring into a gorge that could have become my final resting place, I can see my journey to the confluence of the Blue and San Francisco rivers without breaking out in a cold sweat. Thanks to the passage of time, fear has become a mere footnote in a fading memory. Now I find I can comfortably say to my friends, “This is a good weekend excursion” — which it is — while acknowledging my brush with death in a very deep canyon.

The San Francisco River bubbles out of the ground near Alpine and south of a big mountain called Escudilla in some of the state’s most scenic country. Then the river slides downhill through the steep canyons of the Blue Range Primitive Area on Arizona’s border with

New Mexico, eventually joining the Blue River near the copper-mining town of Clifton. If you take the trip, do so in a four-wheel-drive vehicle. You won’t need four-wheel drive for most of the way, but you will need it eventually.

I always hoped to see the San Francisco-Blue confluence, in part because I’d crisscrossed both rivers for many years and had heard about the spot so many times that it had taken on mythical proportions in my imagination. For me,

seeing the rivers glide together at the base of a towering cliff would be like finishing a good book. That’s what I thought.

Photographer Randy Prentice and I met Jay Rasco and Hal Herbert, who operate the Safford-based J Train Tours using a yellow sandrail that Rasco manufactured. It looks a little like a lunar lander with knobby tires. Rasco and Herbert towed the sandrail 50 miles northeast of Safford to Forest Service Road 212, a dirt track off State Route 78, also known as Mule Creek Road.

Boarding the sandrail after 7.5 miles on the level beginning of the forest road, we began a steep ascent of Dix Mesa through juniper and oak stands. This is where you need four-wheel



[ABOVE] Scarlet-blooming hummingbird trumpets thrive in the rocky bottom of Red Tank Canyon along Forest Service Road 212 in eastern Arizona.

[OPPOSITE PAGE] Muddied by sediment from an upstream source, the San Francisco River seems to abut the Blue River rather than merge and continue its southwesterly flow from the rivers’ confluence northeast of Clifton.



drive, and during wet weather this portion could be extremely hazardous. Within an hour, we dropped off the mesa into the comforting shade of Martinez Ranch, a working cattle and sheep spread. Since it was still early in the day and we would be spending the night at the ranch (one of our guides knew the owners), we went looking for the confluence in the early

afternoon. From the ranch west to the confluence measures just 2.5 miles, but the distance, we discovered, means little.

A half-mile south of the ranch, an old four-wheel-drive road, which is, to tell the truth, a barely identifiable clearing, crosses the river several times before it reaches the confluence. We rumbled through the first crossing, but at the second one the water was too high for the

sandrail's engine. It was deep—as Arizona rivers go—almost up to my waist when we waded across. The current wasn't too bad at that second crossing, but we had trouble keeping our balance. At some crossings, I waded into calf-high water, and then suddenly I'd be in a hole up to my thighs. At least it was refreshing. During high-water periods, even the first crossing may be impassable.

As we approached the confluence, my pants were soaked and my shoes filled with sand, but maybe this was better than in the old days.

Before he built the Dix Mesa road in about 1966, Abe Martinez told me, he and his wife and sons reached their ranch by riding horseback up the San Francisco River from Clifton, a distance they measured by the number of river crossings. There were 58 crossings, he said, and at some point his wife, Lydia, insisted she wanted to drive a road instead of a river, which is why there is now an unpaved road in from Dix Mesa via FR 212.

At the confluence, where the San Francisco made a graceful bend as it met the Blue, a pale



cliff rose like a divider between the two waterways. We rested and then poked around a bit, finding a lot of obsidian shards and one abandoned homestead, a small wooden building tucked into a grove of mesquite and cottonwood trees. *How many floods did the people who once lived here endure before they gave it up?* I wondered.

The following morning, we left Martinez Ranch and started out for Clifton, but this time a different way. We went through Rattlesnake Canyon, just for variety. The hills are very steep and the road narrows along this route, but it's also scenic. The sandrail struggled on some of the steeper hills, but the clincher was yet to come.

After an hour, we topped out in some rolling meadows surrounded by higher mountains and great puffs of cumulus clouds. Suddenly, we reached the top of Rattlesnake Canyon. The road before us fell away almost vertically. After the first 75 feet, it made a 90-degree turn to the left. If we didn't make that left, we'd go straight over the edge. We began the descent. Halfway down, we started to fishtail in loose rocks. As we came to the turn, Rasco seemed noticeably tense, dancing lightly on the brake, his arms tight. The sandrail's turning radius wouldn't do it. Not quite. I sucked in my breath thinking, *This is not going to end well.*

We couldn't make the abrupt left turn. Coming to a stop maybe 3 inches from the drop into eternity, Rasco tried to back up, but reverse gear wouldn't work—he had built the buggy with a Volkswagen transmission, which obviously needed more adjustment. Each time he tried to get into reverse, we pitched forward a little more.

Fortunately, Herbert followed a short distance behind us with a four-wheel-drive

truck. We chained the sandrail to the truck's front bumper. But the truck sat on a steep downhill slope and, when Herbert tried to back up, his tires began to spin. Gradually, he was able to drag us away from the ledge so that Rasco could drive back onto the road.

I walked down the next quarter-mile, and even that was nerve-wracking. After Rasco caught up, he said, "I think the worst is over. Climb in." I did, and guess what? Five minutes later, we found ourselves in the same situation we had just escaped—facing downhill on a sharp switchback that we couldn't negotiate. It ended well, but I'm not pushing my luck again.

Next time I'll go back out the way we had gone in—and I recommend this for others, as well—over Dix Mesa, which is only 12 miles from Martinez Ranch and not nearly as threatening as Rattlesnake Canyon. **AH**



WARNING: Back road travel can be hazardous if you are not prepared for the unexpected. Whether traveling in the desert or in the high country, be aware

of weather and road conditions, and make sure you and your vehicle are in top shape. Carry plenty of water. Don't travel alone, and let someone at home know where you're going and when you plan to return. Odometer readings in the story may vary by vehicle.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, Clifton Ranger District, (928) 687-1301; J Train Tours, (928) 485-9404; www.jtraintours.com.



[ABOVE] Clutching the San Francisco's riverbank with its exposed roots, an Arizona white oak tree frames a view of Antelope Mesa to the north.

[RIGHT] Cumulus clouds floating in a sapphire sky augment a tranquil panorama of Pleasant Valley just north of Rattlesnake Canyon.

[OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT] Using a walking stick, author Sam Negri checks his footing in the San Francisco as he crosses the river with Hal Herbert and Jay Rasco of J Train Tours.

[OPPOSITE PAGE, RIGHT] Desert sand verbena, here spent and going to seed, grows in vibrant pink clusters, often blanketing sections of Arizona's deserts and roadsides.



Guests at Bisbee's School House Inn Get to Sleep in Class

[BELOW] Early morning sunlight shines on Chihuahua Hill overlooking Bisbee, brightening the "B" originally painted in the 1920s by the Bisbee High School lettermen.



THE EARLY MORNING LIGHT creeps over the Mule Mountains, lighting up rocks with a pink and purple glow. Even though it's early, Bisbee's residents are busy at work. Miners dig deeper into the mines, railroad workers unload cars, shopkeepers prepare for the coming day and Bisbee's children scramble to school to play on the playground before the first bell rings.

That was 1918, the height of Bisbee's glory, and with 15 schools strategically placed at half-mile intervals, no child had to walk far to get

an education. Today, Garfield Grade School carries on its tradition as a schoolhouse—as the School House Inn that is.

Once through the tunnel at Mule Pass—the longest tunnel in Arizona—visitors to this ramshackle town are drawn into the rich copper canyons. Another mile down Tombstone Canyon stands the large red brick School House Inn, sitting on its lofty perch above the two-tiered playground that is now a city park.

Jeff and Bobby Blankenbeckler greet visitors and offer a tour through the lower level before taking them upstairs to check in. A step down leads to an enlarged foyer. Ceramic apples line a ledge dividing the area from the kitchen, which is off-limits to guests. Raggedy Ann and her twin sister sit in old-fashioned high chairs as Jeff explains the rules of the house: no smoking, candles, incense, pets or children under 14.

He then continues into the large dining area and living room, where breakfast is served at 8 A.M. A microwave is available for those wanting a bag of popcorn to munch on while watching a little television or a video from the Blankenbecklers' collection. There's also the requisite cabinet of games for those wanting some quiet competition.

Guests travel up the wide staircase past photos from the building's days as a member of Bisbee School District 2. Solemn students, in grades 1 through 4, stand clean-cheeked in rows with their teachers. A closer glance reveals that although the children are wearing clean clothes, several of them are barefoot.

Floor plans of the building from June 1917 show that the upper level was divided originally into four large classrooms with a boys'

lavatory on one end and the girls' on the other.

Garfield Grade School didn't stay open for long and was the first school in the district to close its doors when the boomtown's population began to decline.

However, it didn't stay closed for long. In the 1940s, the large classrooms were divided into individual apartments, which were leased primarily by military families stationed at Fort Huachuca on the other side of the San Pedro River valley. The common area and kitchen downstairs were shared by all.

"They were one big happy family," said Jeff.

The schoolhouse made its last transition in 1989 when it became a bed and breakfast. The Blankenbecklers took over in 1996 as the third owners of the School House Inn.

"Jeff likes to fix things, and I like to cook, clean and entertain, so this seemed a natural fit," said Bobby.

Each suite retains its structure from the days when the building was used as housing, and has its own theme: history, music, library, reading, arithmetic, art, geography and the principal's office. The Blankenbecklers reside in the teachers' lounge.

Old-fashioned toys, knickknacks, books, pictures and antiques add cozy charm to the corners of the halls and rooms. The upstairs deck provides a place to lounge or to set up the telescope for an impromptu astronomy lesson. There's even an old-fashioned soda machine where guests can get an ice-cold drink to sip while watching the sun set.

Jeff recommends several restaurants in town for dinner, including the renowned Cafe Roka, his personal favorite. There's also a binder full of menus from all of the eateries in Bisbee next to the hall phone. Many guests hit the shops in Old Town Bisbee before dining downtown, but others prefer just to lounge around or walk down the quiet streets.

The individual rooms at the inn all have sitting areas stocked with books. Best of all, the open windows catch the cool evening breezes to complement a night tucked in cozy comfort.

The next morning, the smell of coffee, the



[LEFT] No signage detracts from the original red-brick-schoolhouse look of the School House Inn, whose nine rooms lodge visitors year-round.

[BELOW] Situated on the east side of the building and cooled by a light breeze from Tombstone Canyon, the inn's patio makes a pleasant breakfast setting for its guests.

creak of floorboards and the sounds of Bisbee waking to bright sunrise encourage guests to amble downstairs for one of Bobby's breakfast creations. She alternates between egg dishes, such as baked eggs and cornbread, and sweet treats, like French toast topped with bananas and pecans. On nice mornings, breakfast is served at tables on the patio and, once everyone is settled, Jeff and Bobby come out to visit with their guests.

Bobby regales visitors with tales she's been told by residents and guests over the years, including stories of Garfield Grade School related to her by a gentleman who had been a pupil there.

"One woman who lived on the other side of Mule Pass would bring her kids to school on a donkey," said Bobby. "And then when school was over, she'd come back and put the kids in the donkey packs and head back through the pass."

On a wall in the School House Inn, a sampler proclaims, "A teacher plants the seeds of knowledge, sprinkles them with love and patiently nurtures their growth to produce tomorrow's dreams."

Dreams continue to be commonplace at the School House Inn. Jeff and Bobby have every intention of keeping it that way. **AH**



LOCATION: Approximately 95 miles southeast of Tucson.

GETTING THERE: Follow Interstate 10 southeast to Benson, Exit 303. Turn south on State Route 80 and travel about 50 miles to Bisbee.

RESTAURANTS: Cafe Roka, (520) 432-5153, www.caferoka.com.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: School House Inn, (520) 432-2996 or toll-free (800) 537-4333; City of Bisbee, (520) 432-5446, www.cityofbisbee.com; home.earthlink.net/~schoolhouseinnbisbeeaz/.

Pinnacle Peak May Be ‘Citified,’ but a Scenic Workout Still Awaits

IN 1969, I HIKED PINNACLE PEAK, a rocky mountain northeast of Phoenix. Back then there were no houses or pavement, and the city was in the distance. These days Scottsdale has crowded into the area, but the hike still offers wonderful elements of a backcountry experience as well as a good workout.

The Pinnacle Peak Trail in north Scottsdale, established in April 2002, offers a 1.75-mile (one way) hike through some of the most lush Sonoran Desert vegetation found anywhere close to a large city. Much of Pinnacle Peak Park is covered with large granite boulders that seem to cascade down each side of the peak. At the trail’s apex, hikers can see Camelback Mountain to the southwest, Humboldt Mountain on the north, and the most dramatic view, Four Peaks, some 25 miles to the east. Near the trail parking lot stand visitor buildings, which offer interpretive

more than vistas, however. Wildlife is not hard to find if you come at the right time of day. Cottontail rabbits, coyotes, snakes, lizards and birds make the peak their home. Park rangers told me that a youngster once saw 13 chuckwalla lizards on a hike. Very lucky hikers might even chance upon a bobcat or mule deer resting in the shade of a tree.

The trail continues a bit to its high point of 2,889 feet and then descends a pass that looks down on multimillion-dollar homes. After another short climb, the trail drops to 2,366 feet at the western end. There is no exit from the park at this point, so turn around and go back up the trail, completing an invigorating 3.5-mile hike. **AH**

ADDITIONAL READING: For 67 more urban and backcountry hikes around Arizona, complete with tips, directions, contact information and full-color photographs, read *Arizona Hiking: Urban Trails, Easy Paths & Overnight Treks* (\$16.95) from Arizona Highways Books. To order, call toll-free (800) 543-5432 or go online to arizonahighways.com.



LOCATION: This desert park is within the city limits of Scottsdale, northeast of Phoenix, at 26802 N. 102nd Way.

GETTING THERE: From north Phoenix, drive east on Dynamite Boulevard to Alma School Parkway and turn south for 1 mile.

HOURS: Access to the trailhead available from dawn to dusk.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: Always carry water when hiking any Arizona trail.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: (480) 312-0990; www.scottsdaleaz.gov/parks/pinnacle.



Before you go on this hike, visit our Web site at arizonahighways.com for other things to do and places to see in the area.



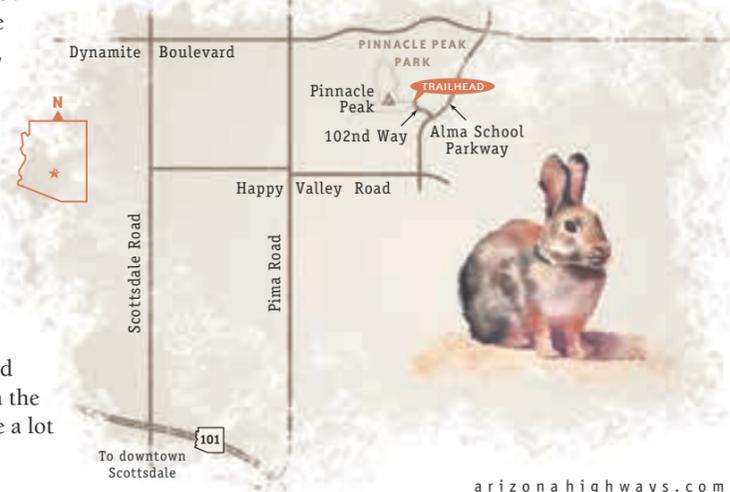
[ABOVE] With its signature crag looming overhead, Pinnacle Peak Trail in north Scottsdale provides dramatic desert views and moderate challenges for hikers, experienced horseback riders and rock climbers. [OPPOSITE PAGE] Sonoran Desert vegetation, such as saguaro cacti, ocotillos, creosote and brittlebushes, surrounds Pinnacle Peak.

information, water and rest rooms.

Starting at an elevation of 2,570 feet, I feel a sense of ease as the trail passes by specimens of foothills paloverde trees, banana yuccas and saguaro cacti.

Despite being inside the city limits of Scottsdale, these saguaros are large and healthy looking. Many are tall and have multiple arms, characteristic of the classic saguaro shape.

Shortly, the trail switchbacks steeply up nearly 300 feet to Grandview Point, a good place to rest and take in the sights. A visitor may see a lot



KEVIN KIBSEY



