

HISTORIC GRAND CANYON

WAITING for the **RAPTOR** page 40

THE ROAD to **EMPIRE RANCH** page 52

ARIZONA

HIGHWAYS

ESCAPE • EXPLORE • EXPERIENCE

grand
canyon
national
park
[1902-1967]

“National parks are the best idea we ever had.” — WALLACE STEGNER



South Rim, circa 1947

**PLUS: DINÉ COLLEGE TURNS 45 • SECRET CANYON TRAIL • PEEPLES VALLEY
STELLER'S JAYS • POEMS ABOUT AZ • BANANA YUCCAS • T-BIRD CAFÉ • SAGUAROS**

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5 THE JOURNAL

People, places and things from around the state, including the 45th anniversary of Diné College; Steller's jays; and Peeples Valley, our hometown of the month.

16 A LOOK BACK

For a place that's evolved over millions of years, it's probably an overstatement to refer to a collection of photos as "historic." However, in terms of the Grand Canyon as a national park, these old black-and-whites offer an interesting glimpse of the good old days.

A PORTFOLIO EDITED BY ROBERT STIEVE & KELLY VAUGHN KRAMER

34 SOMETHING TO CALL OUR OWN

California barely has any. New Mexico doesn't have any. Neither does any other state in the United States. In fact, with the exception of a handful of saguaros south of the border, Arizona is essentially the only place on Earth where the giant cactuses live.

AN ESSAY BY CRAIG CHILDS

40 PEREGRINE FALCONS CAN REALLY FLY

Although cheetahs and pronghorns are lightning quick, they can't touch the speed of peregrines, which have been clocked at more than 200 mph. To give you a little perspective, Tony Kanaan set an Indy 500 record this year with an average speed of 187.433 mph. Now you see me, now you don't.

A PORTFOLIO BY JOHN SHERMAN

44 IN SO MANY WORDS

For a long time now, we've been showcasing the best of Arizona with words and photographs. It's something we do in every issue, but it's been a while since we featured any poetry. This month, by popular demand, the metrical writing is back. And we even managed to dig up a few photos to go with it.

BY SHERWIN BITSUI, ALBERTO RÍOS & OFELIA ZEPEDA

50 GETTING HER HANDS DIRTY

When she started school at Arizona State University, Christina Akins studied nutrition. It would lead to a career, she figured, but not a dream job. What she really wanted was to play in the mud. So, she changed majors, and today she's protecting frogs as a wildlife specialist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

BY KATHY RITCHIE
PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK GIASE

52 SCENIC DRIVE

Empire Ranch Road: You might see pronghorns, mule deer and bobcats along this scenic drive, but the real payoff is the surrounding grassland.

54 HIKE OF THE MONTH

Secret Canyon Trail: It's not easy to get to, but this hike in the Red Rock-Secret Mountain Wilderness is worth the effort, especially in November, when there's still a hint of fall in the air.



POINTS OF INTEREST IN THIS ISSUE

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www.arizonahighways.wordpress.com

Check out our blog for regular posts on just about anything having to do with travel in Arizona, including Q&A's with writers and photographers, special events, bonus photos, sneak peeks at upcoming issues and more.

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Join our Facebook community to share your photographs, chat with other fans, enter trivia contests and receive up-to-the-minute information about what's going on behind the scenes at *Arizona Highways*.

Arizona Highways is on Instagram

Follow us @arizonahighways to see our travel photos from around the state.

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Join our creative community on Pinterest to share photo inspiration, outdoors ideas and more.

▶ A peregrine falcon, the world's fastest animal, surveys its surroundings from a tree branch. | JOHN SHERMAN
CAMERA: NIKON D7000; SHUTTER: 1/400 SEC; APERTURE: F/8; ISO: 1250; FOCAL LENGTH: 850 MM

FRONT COVER Passengers board a tour bus headed to Hermit's Rest, the westernmost viewpoint on the Grand Canyon's South Rim, circa 1947. | VIRGIL GIPSON, COURTESY OF GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK MUSEUM COLLECTION

BACK COVER Low clouds and a dusting of snow contrast with the red rocks of Sedona. | MARK FRANK
CAMERA: CANON EOS 5D MARK II; SHUTTER: 0.6 SEC; APERTURE: F/20; ISO: 100; FOCAL LENGTH: 35 MM

Pancakes and 20-Cent Sundaes

The soda fountain isn't around anymore. Not like it was. There's an ice-cream shop, which is called Bright Angel Fountain, but it's not the mid-century chrome-and-Formica sensation that visitors got to experience in 1955. I wish it were still around. I'd be sitting there right now, writing this column and eating a 20-cent sundae. Instead, I'm in the dining room at Bright Angel Lodge, contemplating pancakes and scribbling these words. The soda fountain, which had a 10-item menu that ranged from malts (30 cents) to phosphates (15 cents), would have been about 75 feet from where I'm sitting. The new place isn't bad, but it's not the same. Still, I love Bright Angel Lodge. Even more than El Tovar.

There's something special about Bright Angel. It's not as old as El Tovar, but it evokes the past on a higher level. You can feel it in the lobby — it hits you the instant you walk through the door. You can feel it at the front desk, too. You also feel it wandering the halls, standing in front of the magnificent fireplace, eating breakfast in the dining room ... every turn is a step back in time. In fact, despite a few modern upgrades, the lodge isn't much different than it was when it opened in 1935. Like all of Mary Jane Colter's architectural masterpieces, Bright Angel stands the test of time. That's not the case with everything in Grand Canyon National Park. A lot has changed over

the years.

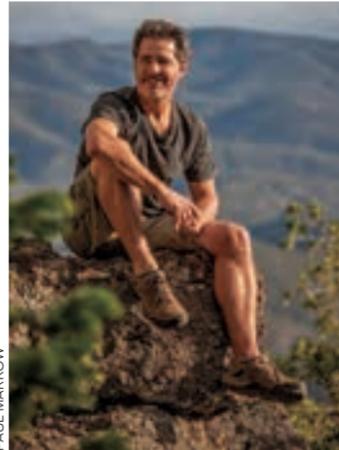
In this month's cover story, we take a look at what used to be. You'll see the original soda fountain, Lookout Studio under construction and the first automobile to ever enter the park. There's also a great shot of the old pool at Phantom Ranch, and about 20 other black-and-whites that date from 1902 to 1967. One of my favorite images was made in the 1940s. It's a photograph from the North Rim that shows a group of summer employees performing a "sing-away" for a busload of tourists who were leaving the park. Back then, that's the send-off everyone received. Imagine that scene in the 21st century.

Daddy's Little Girl: "Who are those people, Daddy, and why are they singing in front of our Land Rover?"

Daddy: "I don't know, honey. They obviously belong to a cult. Just roll up the windows. NOW. And don't look at 'em. We're getting out of here."

Today, with 4.5 million annual visitors, not even "Super Dave" Uberuaga, the omnipresent park superintendent, can personally say goodbye to every visitor to Grand Canyon National Park. But, for decades, that was protocol on the North Rim. It's part of the history, and one more reason Grand Canyon is arguably the most iconic park in the world. It's the first thing people think of when they think of Arizona. The second thing is saguaros.

Although Hollywood would have you believe that saguaros live in every state west of the Mississippi, they don't. The giant cactuses are, for the most part, exclusive to Arizona. There are a few in California and northern Mexico, but otherwise, they're all ours. They're a source of pride, and they're one of the things Craig Childs misses most when he's away from Arizona.



PAUL MARKOW

In *Something to Call Our Own*, he writes about his affection for saguaros, and the central role they played on a recent trip to Ironwood Forest National Monument: "At night,

as my family settled into sleeping bags in the tent, I stayed outside on quiet watch. The moonless sky was full of stars. Orion was cradled in the arms of a couple of saguaros standing side by side. It looked as if they were holding up constellations, their arms raised into the night sky as if acting out some ancient legend." Later, while visiting a friend in Tucson, he saw more saguaros: "I paused to listen to the soft hiss of morning breezes through their needles. Wildly shaped, like something out of a dream, a succulent given rein to become a tree, the saguaros seemed like a blessing."

Whenever we publish one of Craig's essays, it usually ranks as the best piece of writing in that particular magazine. And maybe it does this month, too. Or maybe that distinction goes to Alberto Ríos. He's one of three poets we're featuring inside. We get a lot of requests for poetry, and *In So Many Words* is our response. It's a collection of three poems by three of Arizona's most acclaimed poets — Mr. Ríos was recently named the state's first-ever poet laureate.

Like all poems, these are best read aloud. Start with *Desert Water*, the poem by Alberto Ríos, and then think about how it relates to the Grand Canyon. In six words, "Water hums its song into stone," he explains the creation of the Canyon — geologists typically need at least a thousand pages. That's the beauty of poetry. It's simple, and it's a simple pleasure. Like 20-cent sundaes or a stack of pancakes.

ROBERT STIEVE, EDITOR

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ARIZONA HIGHWAYS TELEVISION



ELLEN BARNES

If you like what you see in this magazine every month, check out *Arizona Highways Television*, an Emmy Award-winning program hosted by former news anchor Robin Sewell. For broadcast times, visit our website, www.arizonahighways.com, and click the *Arizona Highways Television* link on our home page.



JT THOMAS

CRAIG CHILDS

Craig Childs says he wrote *Something to Call Our Own* (see page 34) "to recognize the uniqueness of the saguaro, a plant found almost nowhere else in the U.S. but Arizona. It's a point of pride to live in the company of a species bizarre, beautiful and, I suppose, monolithic." In Childs'

essay, he reminisces about many of his experiences with saguaros, but one thing he doesn't mention is the time he heard one fall. "Down in the Kofa Mountains on a windy day, I heard a loud *thud*," he says. "When I walked over, I found the bulk of a saguaro and its arms sprawled on the ground. The wind had knocked it over at a rotten point that, once exposed, smelled like a brewery. It was a moment to remember — hearing the instant an ancient cactus toppled." Childs is a frequent contributor to *Arizona Highways*. He also writes for *The New York Times*, *Outside* and *Men's Journal*.



RANDY PRENTICE

Randy Prentice didn't have to go far for his photography assignment for this issue (see *Scenic Drive*, page 52), but even though Empire Ranch Road is fairly close to his home in Tucson, he had never driven down it before. "It's a very quiet road," Prentice says. "The only other person I encountered was a kid on an ATV, although I did see several mule deer along the way." Prentice says the assignment opened his eyes to the lush riparian greenery along Cienega Creek and Empire Gulch. "These are hidden places

that cannot be seen from the main highway." Prentice is a longtime contributor to *Arizona Highways*. His work has also been featured in *Sunset*.

JOHN SHERMAN

Photographer John Sherman has been rock-climbing for more than 30 years, and he's often found himself sharing a cliff with the world's fastest animal. "On a couple of occasions," he says, "I've been hanging by my fingertips and heard an air-ripping dive, a popping *thud* and an explosion of feathers when a peregrine falcon has made a kill nearby. It takes one from being in the moment to being even *more* in the moment." After discovering a family of peregrines, including three week-old chicks (see *Peregrine Falcons Can Really Fly*, page 40), at one such cliff, Sherman camped there for two months to document their fledging. He says he enjoyed finding solutions to the technical challenges of photographing the birds, but "what I didn't expect was the emotional attachment I felt to the falcons." Sherman is a former contributing editor to *Climbing* magazine.

— NOAH AUSTIN



DAWN KISH

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

I live in my beloved home state of New Mexico, but Arizona is very close to my heart. I have lived in Tucson twice, for a total of 12 years, have visited Arizona my entire life and had relatives in Yuma and Nogales. My two oldest children were born in Tucson. Every issue of *Arizona Highways* makes me smile and lifts my spirits. The September 2013 issue [*Cowboys & Indians*] was outstanding. I wonder if the people photographed have any idea of how beautiful they are.

Sharon White Miller, San Lorenzo, New Mexico



September 2013

COLOR GUARD

As someone who grew up in the Northeast and is now living in Arizona, I take strong exception to the totally false claim being made by *Arizona Highways* [October 2013] that fall in Northern Arizona is better than fall in Vermont. I've been to both Vermont and Northern Arizona in the fall, and the truth is, there's no comparison. Vermont's fall is vastly superior to Northern Arizona's fall in every respect. Northern Arizona doesn't have all of the trees that Vermont has that produce all of the spectacular fall colors that Vermont is world-famous for. The only fall color in Northern Arizona is orange. I would urge *Arizona Highways* to stick to promoting what Arizona is world-famous for, which is the Grand Canyon, and to stay away from such a pathetic ploy for attention.

Nancy E. Kuhn, Scottsdale, Arizona

MEDICAL OPINION

I have been a recipient of *Arizona Highways* for more than 20 years. Almost every publication brings to mind an incident that occurred in 1956, but the colorful August 2013 issue requires sharing this personal event. The associate professor of medicine at Duke University was Dr. Jack D. Myers. He grew up in the Southwest and received his undergraduate and medical education at Stanford. He was a brilliant and dynamic teacher. In discussing a medical question or topic, his most frequent and favorite expression was "Let me refer you to the literature."

And from there he would quote answers to the subject from the most popular to the most remote of journals. Dr. Myers, a popular professor, was invited to and attended a pre-graduation party of the 1956 Duke Medical School graduating class. During the evening, he and a student from New York got into a rather heated debate about the natural beauty of New England versus the Southwest. When the *New Yorker* said something to the effect that the Southwest was nothing but a "hot, dry, barren wasteland, home to nothing but cacti, snakes and scorpions," that did it. Red-faced and shaking his finger at the student, he said, "Let me refer you to the literature, *Arizona Highways*," and he quoted one or more issues (none of which I remember these 50-plus years later) depicting the beauty and history of the Southwest. The August 2013 issue would get a "high pass" from Dr. Myers.

Robert Mayo Failing, M.D.,
Santa Barbara, California

SHOCK AND AWE

As a winter resident of Phoenix and a dedicated amateur photographer, I look forward to receiving *Arizona Highways* every month. I am consistently impressed with the quality and variety of the images you publish. So I was shocked to see the image of Alpine featured on pages 6 and 7 of your July 2013 issue. The prominent, out-of-focus branches in the foreground are completely distracting, and the rest

of the image is mediocre, at best. I was stunned to see a photo of such poor quality so prominently featured in your publication. Was this a publishing mistake or just a rare lapse in judgment?

Jacqueline Byers, Minneapolis, Minnesota

EDITOR'S NOTE: We respectfully disagree.

DRUMMING UP THE PAST

I have to say I really enjoyed seeing the photograph and article about the Palace Saloon in the September 2013 issue [*Odd Jobs*]. In the mid-1940s, we lived in Prescott, and my father (Bill Hooper) worked at the Piggly Wiggly grocery store, and also at one of the banks. Some nights, he played drums at the Palace in a small band. I never got to see him play, because I was 5. I do remember his drum set after we moved to Phoenix. He sold it when I was around 7. I wish my mother would have made some pictures of Dad when he was playing at the Palace. I can still remember those smells coming out of the saloons along Whiskey Row.

Dorothy Curtis, Canby, Oregon

CORRECTION: In our September 2013 issue, in the story titled *Seeing It His Way*, we misspelled Bill Sandberg's name. We regret the error and apologize to Mr. Sandberg.

contact us If you have thoughts or comments about anything in *Arizona Highways*, we'd love to hear from you. We can be reached at editor@arizonahighways.com, or by mail at 2039 W. Lewis Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85009. For more information, visit www.arizonahighways.com.

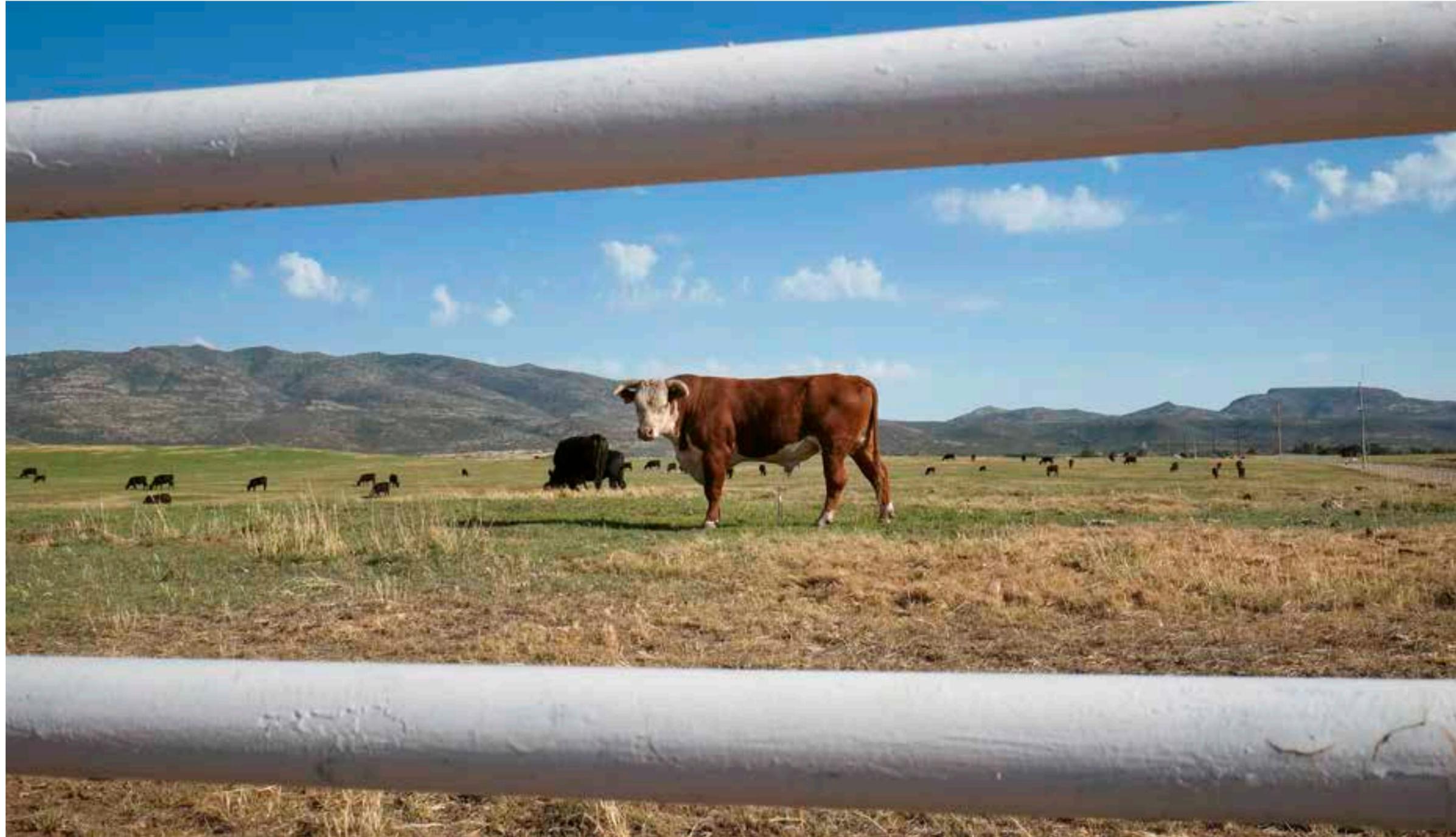


CHRISTINE KEITH

Snow Fall

Fresh powder falls from the branches of a ponderosa pine near Thumb Butte, just west of downtown Prescott. The 2.1-mile Thumb Butte Trail climbs about 600 feet to a ridge just below the butte's crest. *Information: 928-443-8000 or www.fs.usda.gov/prescott*

CAMERA: TOYO-FIELD 45A; FILM: KODAK EKTACHROME; SHUTTER: 1 SEC; APERTURE: F/45; ISO: 64; FOCAL LENGTH: 210 MM



MARK LIPCZYNSKI (2)

PEEPLER VALLEY

FOUNDED 1863	AREA 15 square miles	ELEVATION 4,479 feet	COUNTY Yavapai
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DURING THE SPRING OF 1863, A.H. Peeples, a handful of cowboys and guide Paulino Weaver wandered around what are now known as the Weaver Mountains in search of gold. One night, horses broke away from camp during a windstorm, and Weaver and Peeples found them at the top of a hill, in a bowl-shaped depression. They also found gold nuggets the size of potatoes. Today,

although Rich Hill is now part of a private claim and off-limits to casual gold hunters, Peeples Valley draws birders, history buffs and nature lovers. And although the Yarnell Hill Fire devastated neighboring Yarnell, Peeples Valley was not directly affected.

— KELLY VAUGHN KRAMER

www.y-pvchamber.com

local favorites



T-BIRD CAFÉ Peeples Valley

The T-Bird Café has been serving mouth-watering pizzas from its wood-fired oven since 2007. The restaurant is owned by Cheryl Tupper and her husband, Gary Wallen. Here's what Tupper has to say:

Why the name?

It's named for my 1964 Ford Thunderbird, which is parked out front. I think the name "T-Bird" embodies an American aesthetic — an American "cool." I always felt like Miss America when I rode in that car.

How did the café get its start?

We came here from California, and Gary built a large, dome-shaped pizza oven on the side of the building. The building dates to the 1920s; it used to be called the Eighty Niner Diner.

What makes the pizza so special?

Gary makes the dough from scratch every day. He grinds the sausage, makes the sauce and gets the vegetables from a local market. Everything's fresh, wholesome and unprocessed.

How do you keep the locals coming back for seconds?

Peeples Valley is a wonderful, strong community, and I've always wanted the café to be a community center. We have a locals' club, and if you live here, you get \$2 off your pizza every time you come in. We also display works by local artists on the walls of the café.

— NOAH AUSTIN

The T-Bird Café is located at 19237 State Route 89 in Peeples Valley. For more information, call 928-427-9494 or visit www.tbirdcafe.com.

School Project

Forty-five years ago this month, a small school was founded on the Navajo Nation. Today, Diné College includes five satellite campuses in Arizona and New Mexico, and has an enrollment of about 2,000 students.

Not many colleges have octagon-shaped dormitories with fireplaces in the middle. In that and other ways, Diné College is unique. The school, the first tribally controlled community college in the U.S., celebrates its 45th anniversary this year. Diné serves residents of the Navajo Nation, which spans the Four Corners areas of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. The dormitories are intended to replicate the feel of a Navajo hogan, or traditional dwelling, says Ed McCombs, a Diné College administrator.

“The founders of Diné College wanted to incorporate and instill much of the Navajo culture into the campus,” McCombs says, adding that the layout of Diné’s campus mirrors that of a traditional Navajo community.

Originally called Navajo Community College, the school was founded in 1968 and spent a year in Rough Rock before moving to its present location, in Tsaile. Since then, it’s added three satellite locations in Arizona and two in New Mexico. From a 1969 graduating class of one student, the school has grown to a current enrollment of about 2,000 students.

In 1971, Congress authorized a \$5.5 million appropriation to build permanent facilities for the college. Rogers Morton, President Richard Nixon’s secretary of the interior, said then that the school “is not just another academic institution; rather, it is a rich community resource of knowledge and expertise which can contribute in many ways to the betterment of the Navajo community.”

And contribute it has. More than 4,500 students have graduated from the college, earning associate degrees in fields ranging from fine arts and Navajo language to environmental



Navajo traditional practitioner Charlie Benally (center), Rep. Wayne Aspinall (D-Colo., second from right) and Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter MacDonald (right) conduct a ground-blessing at Diné College’s Tsaile campus in April 1971.

COURTESY OF DINE COLLEGE

science and business management. For students transferring to other colleges, McCombs says, Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University are popular in-state destinations.

Navajo Community College became Diné College in 1997; Diné means “the people” in the Navajo language.

To mark its 45th anniversary, Diné is holding a celebration on November 21, the day the school’s charter was passed and enacted by the Navajo Nation Council in 1968. — NOAH AUSTIN

For more information, visit www.dinecollege.edu.

Q&A

Photo Editor Jeff Kida Discusses the Work of Mark Frank

Q Mark Frank lives in Sedona, which is where he made this photograph. What struck you about it?

A It’s such a different perspective of Sedona. I think that’s what sets him apart. He works very hard at finding different viewpoints of an area that we might think has already been photographed from every possible angle. He’s a member of a hiking club, and he credits those hiking trips with getting him to locations that the average person might not see. And when he hikes, he doesn’t take a camera; he’ll go back later to make his photographs.

Q Frank is a relative newcomer to professional photography. How do you think his background as a landscape architect benefits him in this field?

A Photography is a two-dimensional universe, and landscape architecture has three dimensions. He blends the two beautifully. When I see his images, I can see his background. By the way he composed this photograph, he was able to put that third dimension back into a two-dimensional image. He’s also a very hard worker, which doesn’t hurt. — NOAH AUSTIN



Early morning fog blankets the red rocks of Sedona. This photograph was made at Munds Mountain after a 5-mile hike. CAMERA: CANON EOS 5D MARK II; SHUTTER: 1/2 SEC.; APERTURE: F/22; ISO: 100; FOCAL LENGTH: 30 MM

this month in history

- George W.P. Hunt, the state’s first governor and president of the convention that wrote Arizona’s Constitution, is born November 1, 1859.
- Arizona women are granted the right to vote November 5, 1912.
- Bill Cheesbourg, an American race-car driver who partici-

- pated in six Indianapolis 500 races, dies November 6, 1995, in Tucson.
- The Arizona Historical Society is founded November 7, 1864. Its mission is to collect and preserve Arizona history.



■ Painter Maynard Dixon, whose work (above) celebrated the American West, dies in Tucson on November 11, 1946.

ARIZONA HIGHWAYS 50 Years Ago



The November 1963 issue of *Arizona Highways* features the work of painter Philip C. Curtis, who lived in Scottsdale with his two Siamese cats, Gus and Clarence. The issue also pays homage to the Arizona State Fair, which was then in its 58th year.

PHOTO TIP

MIXED BAG



Photographers can be a quirky bunch, so it’s no surprise that many of them have odd items buried in their camera bags. *Arizona Highways*

consultant Rick Burrell always carries a small piece of string with four knots in it — one knot to mark the minimum focal

distance for each of his four lenses. “It comes in handy for anything within 18 inches, where precise tolerances ‘make or break’ the focus,” he says.



ADDITIONAL READING
Look for our book *Arizona Highways Photography Guide*, available at bookstores and www.shop.arizonahighways.com/books.

HAT MAKER

S. Grant Sergot, Bisbee

AFTER MOVING TO ARIZONA FROM MICHIGAN in 1972, it wasn't long before S. Grant Sergot realized he needed a hat to protect himself from the scorching sun. The problem was finding a hat that could do the job. "All I could find were these cardboard things that don't break in," he says. "They were as hard as the box they came in." Sergot finally found a Panama hat at an estate sale for \$15. And so began his career as a "milliner/renovator." Today, at Óptimo Hatworks, his shop in Bisbee, Sergot not only crafts exquisite, hand-woven Panama-straw and fur-felt hats using tools that date to the Civil War and the early 20th century (for that "old-world style"), he also restores antique hats — a skill he taught himself. "If I'm going to accept a family heirloom, I need to know what I'm doing," he says. "There are no teachers; there's no literature on this." Despite the demands of his work — the hours, days and even weeks it can take to complete a hat — Sergot wouldn't change a thing. "I love everything about my job," he says. "There's always something to learn, and I never get bored."

— KATHY RITCHIE

Óptimo Hatworks is located at 47 Main Street in Bisbee. For more information, call 520-432-4544 or visit www.optimohatworks.com.



JILL RICHARDS

Full House

There are a few things you should know about the Burger House in Miami. One, it's also known as La Cocina de Casillas; two, it gets packed at lunchtime; and three, you'd better show up with an empty stomach. You're going to need it.

WHEN YOU'VE BEEN AROUND as long as La Cocina de Casillas — a.k.a. the Burger House — you have to wonder: What's the

miami

secret? After all, 36 years is a long time.

"It's just a good location on the 60," says owner and manager Derek Casillas with a laugh.

Actually, there's a lot more to the restaurant's success than its location, and Casillas, who's been running his family's business since the 1990s, is the first to admit it.

"I give all the credit to my mom," he says. "She started it and worked the long hours ... she still does the books."

Before Casillas took over the restaurant's day-to-day operations, his father, Jesús, and his brother, Bob, manned the kitchen. These days, it's Casillas who comes in around 3:45 a.m. to start cooking and prepping for the day ahead.

"It's a lot of work," he laments. "The first year I started, I wanted to quit, but I stuck it out."

It's almost noon in the tiny mining

town of Miami, and the line is already out the door. Inside, the line moves fast. Clearly, folks here know what they want before they reach the register. Most of the booths are filled with people who are digging into plates that overflow with burritos or burgers, rice and beans, and red and green chile. The smell of Mexican food permeates the dining room.

Perhaps harking back to the days when La Cocina was better known (and still is) as the Burger House, Casillas still serves up hamburgers. And if you're hungry, try the Burger Olay: a double cheeseburger smothered in a savory green-chile sauce. Another favorite: the french fries, which are covered in a red- or green-chile sauce, sprinkled with cheese and baked for maximum ooey-gooey satisfaction. It's the perfect fuel before embarking on a long drive to the White Mountains or anywhere else you might be headed.

If you're a Mexican-food purist, try one of Casillas' tacos or one of his hearty burritos. The beef used in both offerings is prepared fresh daily, which is one of the reasons Casillas hoofs it to his kitchen so early. He also adds a blend of spices, like his mother and grandmother did. The burritos are impressive, but if you're anything like a former *Arizona Highways* staffer who would roll his eyes at the mere mention of a burrito, Casillas also serves his burritos "enchilada style."

The perfect compromise.

Casillas takes pride in the food he dishes out. Almost everything that goes on a plate is homemade. What gives him the most satisfaction is knowing that the business he inherited from his mother, father and brother continues to provide for the entire family.

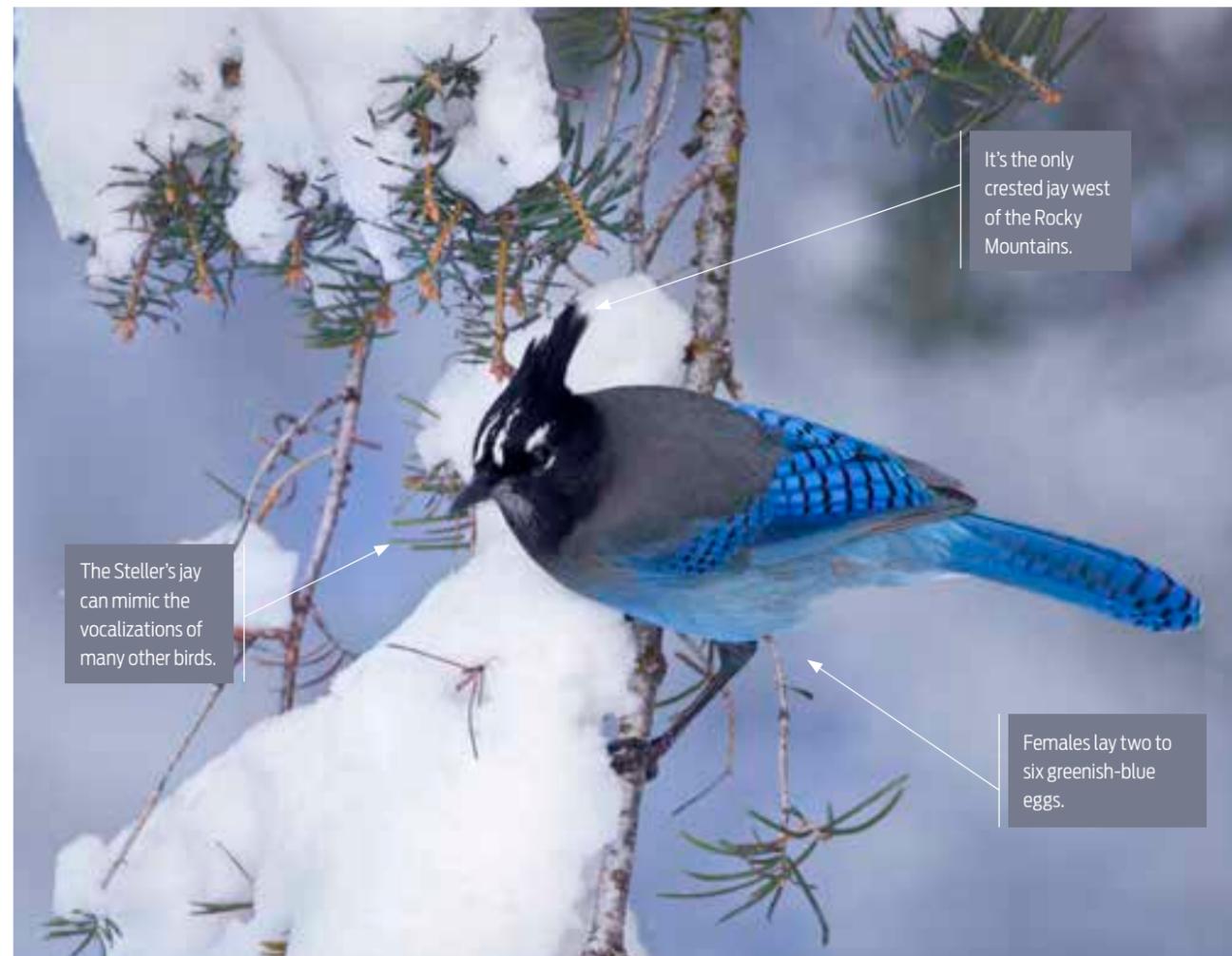
"That's what keeps me going," he says. "That's what it's all about."

— KATHY RITCHIE

La Cocina de Casillas (the Burger House) is located at 812 Live Oak Street in Miami. For more information, call 928-473-9918.



PAUL MARKOW



It's the only crested jay west of the Rocky Mountains.

The Steller's jay can mimic the vocalizations of many other birds.

Females lay two to six greenish-blue eggs.

BRUCED. TAUBERT (2)

You Can Call Me Jay

If you've hiked, camped or had a picnic lunch in one of Arizona's forested areas, chances are the Steller's jay has made an appearance. A close relative of the blue jay, the Steller's jay was discovered by naturalist Georg Steller on an Alaskan island in 1741. It has a black head, a black upper body, a more slender bill and longer legs to distinguish it from its Eastern cousin. It also has an appetite for human food, making it a frequent visitor to campgrounds and picnic areas in the western United States.

When they aren't pilfering campers' rations or begging for handouts with loud, raspy calls, Steller's jays forage in trees. While

two-thirds of their diet is vegetable matter, they also scavenge other bird species' eggs and nestlings, invertebrates, and small rodents.

In the forest, Steller's jays generally stick to the high canopy, but even when out of sight, the birds make their presence known with a diverse array of squawks, rattles and screams. In flight, they've been described as graceful and almost lazy, flying with long swoops on their broad, rounded wings. They typically form monogamous, long-term pairs and remain together year-round, nesting in conifers and sharing the task of feeding their young.

— NOAH AUSTIN

nature factoid



BANANA YUCCA

The banana yucca (officially *Yucca baccata*) gets its colloquial name from its sweet, banana-shaped fruit. The Southern Paiutes who inhabited the Mojave Desert traditionally dried the fruit, which tastes somewhat like sweet potato when baked, for use in winter. The banana yucca flowers in the spring — sometime between April and July, depending on altitude — and is common throughout the Southwest.

— NOAH AUSTIN

~lodging~



MARK DURAN

Desert Rose B&B

WHEN YOU'RE HEADING FOR A GETAWAY IN THE HEART OF VERDE VALLEY WINE COUNTRY, you expect to see rolling hills and rows of grapevines. You don't necessarily expect to see a trio of llamas standing guard, but that's exactly what greets you at Desert Rose Bed and Breakfast in Cottonwood. Just as llamas aren't a typical B&B mascot, Sebastien Lauzon isn't a typical B&B owner. Many people get into this business when they retire from their first career and they're ready to escape the rat race and slow down. For the relatively young Lauzon, this business *is* the rat race, and he pours everything into making sure Desert Rose guests have an unforgettable experience. Plan ahead, and Lauzon will take groups or individuals on a private tour of nearby vineyards. Or just venture into quaint downtown Cottonwood to peruse the myriad tasting rooms. Desert Rose's community breakfast table is ideal for sharing tales from the road and getting insider tips on the best wineries from fellow guests. And don't forget to save a few bites for the llamas. — JACKI MIELER

Desert Rose B&B is located at 4190 E. Bridle Path Road in Cottonwood. For more information, call 928-646-0236 or visit www.desertrosebandb.com.

things to do in arizona

Balloon Regatta
November 1-3, Page
Hot-air balloons take to the skies over Page and Lake Powell. *Information:* www.pageregatta.com

Lobster Landing
November 2, Tucson
This fundraiser, dubbed "Tucson's Largest Crustacean Celebration," features food samples, as well as beer- and wine-tasting, from some of the city's finest restaurants. *Information:* www.lobsterlandingtucson.com

Grassland Fair
November 16, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge
Exhibits and presentations showcase the refuge's wildlife at this free festival, which also features musicians, food, arts and crafts, and children's activities. *Information:* 520-823-4251

Gem and Mineral Show
November 16-17, Payson
The Payson Rimstones Rock Club hosts fossil, jewelry and gemstone vendors, along with a silent auction and activities for all ages. *Information:* 928-970-0857

Fantasy of Lights Parade
November 30, Tempe
Kick off the holiday season at this annual parade down Mill Avenue. Santa Claus arrives at the parade's conclusion to hear children's holiday-gift requests. *Information:* www.millavenue.com

Winter Photo Workshop
January 17-19, Grand Canyon
Experience the beauty of a snowy Grand Canyon at this workshop, hosted by former *Arizona Highways* Director of Photography Peter Ensenberger on the Canyon's South Rim. *Information:* 888-790-7042 or www.ahpw.org **AH**



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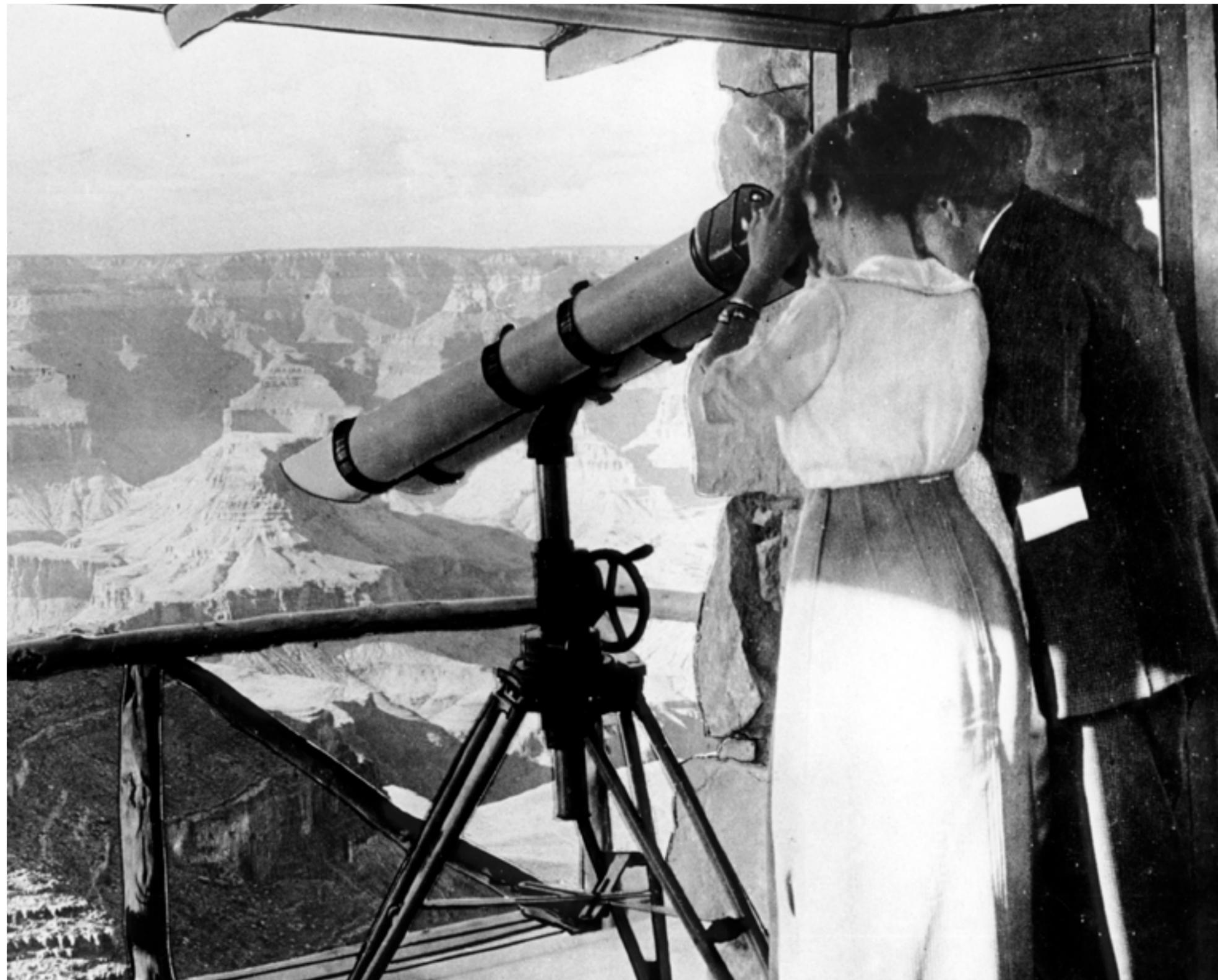
For more information, visit AZ.AAA.com/travelshow.

A LOOK BACK

For a place that's evolved over millions of years, it's probably an overstatement to refer to a collection of photos as "historic." However, in terms of the Grand Canyon as a national park, these old black-and-whites offer an interesting glimpse of the good old days.

A PORTFOLIO EDITED
BY ROBERT STIEVE &
KELLY VAUGHN KRAMER

Photographs Courtesy of Grand Canyon
National Park Museum Collection



1915

A couple views the Grand Canyon through a telescope at Lookout Studio. This photograph was made shortly after the studio's 1914 construction.



[ABOVE]
1903
A large mounted group poses in front of Cameron's Hotel. The Kolb brothers' photography tent is visible on the left. Today, the Cameron's Hotel site is the location of Bright Angel Lodge.

[LEFT]
1902
The first visitors by automobile arrive at the South Rim on January 12, 1902. This steam-powered contraption was driven by Oliver Lippincott.

[RIGHT]
1911
After fishing from their collapsible boat, two men show off their catch of humpback chubs along the Colorado River near Phantom Ranch.



[RIGHT]

1904

The original Grand Canyon Railway was an Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway branch line. This photograph shows the original depot shack and boardwalk. A train ride from Williams to Grand Canyon Village cost \$3.95 when the line opened in 1901.

[BELOW]

1902

Four horses pull a water wagon through a ponderosa forest at the Canyon. This photograph likely was made in the Hance Camp area.



“It is almost axiomatic that the worst trains
take you through magical places.”

— PAUL THEROUX





[LEFT, ABOVE]
1914-15
Lookout Studio construction continues during winter. Established to compete with nearby Kolb Studio, the building houses a gift shop and an observation area.

[LEFT, BELOW]
1933
This photograph shows Cameron's Hotel, which by then had become the Canyon's post office. The log portion of the structure is now part of Bright Angel Lodge.

[BELOW]
1927
A log frame marks the road to Hermit's Rest, the westernmost viewpoint on the South Rim. Today, Hermit Road is closed to private vehicles most of the year.





1933
Grand Canyon Lodge employees perform a musical farewell to guests on the North Rim. The previous year, a fire had destroyed the main lodge building; the remains of the lodge are visible in the background.



[LEFT]
1932
The remains of Grand Canyon Lodge smolder after a fire. The lodge was rebuilt in 1936-37.

[BELOW]
1938
The *El Capitan* arrives at the South Rim in February 1938, on its first run from Los Angeles to Chicago. The train made a special detour to the Canyon as part of its inaugural run.

[RIGHT]
1938
Fred Harvey tour buses line the road in front of Desert View Watchtower, on the East Rim of the Canyon.



“There are two kinds of people in the world,
observers and non-observers.”

— JOHN STEINBECK



“The glories and the beauties of form, color and sound unite in the Grand Canyon — forms unrivaled even by the mountains, colors that vie with sunsets, and sounds that span the diapason from tempest to tinkling raindrop, from cataract to bubbling fountain.”

— JOHN WESLEY POWELL



[FAR LEFT]
1947
The Nevills Expedition, which rode the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, arrives at the mouth of Bright Angel Creek. Norman Nevills, the leader of the expedition, died in a plane crash two years after the journey.

[LEFT]
1950
In the 1940s and '50s, telephone booths, such as this one near Bright Angel Lodge, were the only links for visitors to the outside world.

[BELOW]
1947
This North Rim building was a garage for the Utah Parks Co., which built Grand Canyon Lodge and many other tourist facilities.





[ABOVE]
1951
Motorists line up to pay the entrance fee at the South Rim entrance station in August 1951.

[RIGHT]
1955
Sunbathers relax by the Phantom Ranch swimming pool. The pool closed in 1972.



[FAR RIGHT]
1955
The Bright Angel Lodge soda fountain, shown shortly after its June 1955 completion, was a popular destination for lodge guests and other Canyon visitors.





[ABOVE]
1967
Phantom Ranch kitchen workers garnish plates of food before serving them.



[RIGHT]
1949
Grand Canyon Lodge employees carry on the North Rim tradition of the “sing-away” ceremony. [AH](#)

SOMETHING TO CALL OUR OWN

California barely has any.
New Mexico doesn't have any.
Neither does any other state in
the United States. In fact, with the
exception of a handful of saguaros
south of the border, Arizona is
essentially the only place on Earth
where the giant cactuses live.

AN ESSAY BY CRAIG CHILDS

Sonoran Desert National Monument, east of Gila Bend in Southern Arizona, is home to an extensive forest of saguaros. Several hiking trails pass through the monument, which is best visited from late October to mid-April due to extreme summer temperatures. | PAUL GILL

Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark II;
Shutter: 0.4 sec; Aperture: f/11; ISO:
100; Focal Length: 24 mm



THEY ARE LEGENDARY BEINGS, part plant, part human, part god. On their coldest nights, sometimes the great arms of saguaros will sag and sway, and then slowly grow back into absurd, sometimes lewd positions.

Saguaros actually make a unique sound. As wind passes through their high needles, you'll hear it. You've got to stand up close and take off your hat. In 5 mph or 10 mph wind, a tall, narrow, armless *Carnegiea gigantea* will sound like a single, breathy whistle. The many-armed cactuses sound more symphonic. Those scarred with "cactus boots" can almost moan at the very edge of human hearing.

I grew up half in Colorado, half in Arizona, and it was always a mark of return when I saw the first saguaros. Every two or four years we'd move back to the des-

ert, and I remember looking for the very first one, the real sign of change. It would appear along Interstate 17 southbound in some steep, rocky arroyo watering down toward Bumble Bee, Arizona. We often came through in the evening, catching the last light on our way to Phoenix. It felt like good luck spotting the first one: *Star light, star bright, first saguaro I see tonight.*

This ecological margin between the northern highlands and the Sonoran Desert, where saguaros live, is where the grassy, bouldery plain of Perry Mesa plunges into the canyons of Agua Fria National Monument. Below is the Agua Fria River, flowing down to Black Canyon City, where you are deep into saguaro country, hardly able to walk a hundred yards without getting



ABOVE: Flowers bloom on the arms of saguaros in Ironwood Forest National Monument, northwest of Tucson. The flowers, which bloom in May and June, are pollinated by lesser long-nosed bats, as well as by birds and insects.

| PAUL GILL

📷 Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark II; Shutter: 1/500 sec; Aperture: f/8; ISO: 1250; Focal Length: 85 mm

LEFT: Saguaros guard a hillside in the Sand Tank Mountains, west of Phoenix. **| JACK DYKINGA**

📷 Camera: Arca-Swiss F-Line 4x5; Film: Fuji Velvia 120; Shutter: 2 sec; Aperture: f/45; ISO: 50; Focal Length: 300 mm

into a gaggle of them.

North of here is a different kind of desert: sandstone and frozen winters. Northern Arizona has no saguaros. They can't take the cold and the dry above here.

It's better to explore this transition into warmer, wetter desert by foot, rather than the four-lane interstate. Go into Agua Fria National Monument and walk to the edge of the mesa looking down into many rough canyons that fall off the southern margin. You can sit right on that edge,

among boulders — some of which are decorated with elaborate, animal-figured petroglyphs — where you look both north and south into two very different worlds. To the north is a rolling hard-dirt grassland sprouted with yucca and basalt. It looks like a sort of Central Arizona prairie. To the south, the edge of the mesa drops abruptly into the Sonoran Desert. Gullies open into wide-mouth canyons and overhanging cap rock where you see among tumbled boulders the first, northernmost saguaros.

Narrow, dry washes lead down through agaves, cat-claws and thorny brambles of mesquites. Sycamores and cottonwoods form winding, winking canopies at the bottom. Their leaves sound like water clapping whenever the wind blows. The sound I love most, though, is wind hissing through saguaro needles. It sounds like home.

THIS CORNER OF THE SOUTHWEST — Arizona, two small areas of California, and the Mexican states of Sonora and Baja — is the only place on Earth where saguaros live. Other desert areas don't have them, the perpetual dryness uninviting to water-heavy succulents. The Sonoran is a monsoonal desert. Hot summer air shimmers off the ground, colliding at high altitude with cooler, Gulf-wet layers, resulting in copious bouts of rain. In the winter, big weather comes in waves heavy with maritime moisture, which delivers a second punch of rain every year. This makes the region an arboreal desert, a desert of trees.

Other columnar cactuses similar to saguaros are known down past the equator, and as far south as the subtropical deserts of South America. Mexico has the very similar cardón cactus, larger even than the saguaro with a big, oak-sized trunk and fat, numerous arms. The cardón, however, does not have the spare, commanding elegance of a 40-foot-tall saguaro. Some saguaros will have so many arms they appear to be carrying baskets of



themselves. Others shoot straight up and are as armless as candlesticks. Arms, like I said, are known to sometimes droop and twist, aiming every which way like scarecrows pointing in all directions.

These are old creatures. They won't even sprout their first arm buds for 70 years, which makes some well over 200 years old. They grow on mountaintops and along the steepest ravines. Bajadas and basins wear them like bristling capes.

I went with my wife and kids to Ironwood Forest National Monument, between Phoenix and Tucson. Two little boys in the back seat counted arms on saguaros as we passed, while my wife drove and I sat in the passenger seat thinking we must have gone by 10,000 arms by now. For years, these boys have been looking for what they call the "saguaro stereotype," the ones on the Arizona license plate with exactly two arms, one slightly taller than the other. Rarely do they find a cactus with two such perfect arms. Usually four or seven, sometimes eight, even 10 on the biggest. But two architecturally perfect arms are rare, and so they kind of sneer at the license plate for false advertising. Saguaros are more lively and complex than most people would have them.

This monument is called Ironwood Forest, but you come to think of it more as a saguaro forest. The monument does, indeed, have many ironwood trees, their long, bony arms weeping across waterless arroyos, but saguaros are even more numerous, fields of them marching around rocky hills and ragged-topped mountains. We set our tent at the collective base of three saguaros from 20 feet to 30 feet tall. Around us grew creosote, chollas, ocotillos and big, fish-hook-spined barrel cactuses.

This place doesn't feel like a desert, not the kind that readily comes to mind. There is too much life here. The ground is parched and the air tastes clean in the heat, but things are alive everywhere.

At night, as my family settled into sleeping bags in the tent, I stayed outside on quiet watch. The moonless sky was full of stars. Orion was cradled in the arms of a couple of saguaros standing side by side. It looked as if they were holding up constellations, their arms raised into the night sky as if acting out some ancient legend: *Saguaro gives the sky its stars.*

VISITED A FRIEND on the outskirts of Tucson, his modest home hemmed against low, rough mountains. We sat on his porch at sunrise, mugs of tea in our hands. Our morning talk show was five doves pecking at bugs and seeds, and one bob-headed quail riding roughshod over the scattering doves. In the background, cactus wrens and thrashers rattled and sang.

His front yard is a good piece of desert, very little sign of disturbance, no strange plants like hollyhocks or shady elms, only desert plants: creosote, datura, cholla, saguaro.

First sunlight struck the tops of the saguaros, capping them brightly before coming down their arms and stout trunks and gnarled, exposed roots. Tea finished, my friend got ready for work while I took a stroll through his yard. Unfair to call it a yard, really; it is a patch of desert, a place more nature than not. Even with the city crawling right up to the edge of his property, desert stripped away and replaced by marching rows of houses, this was a little piece of wildness.

One saguaro near the corner of the house had wires and small instruments attached.

They were gathered around a hole in which at least 26 bats roost. Down inside a hollow within the cactus, inside one of these "saguaro boots," the bats shelter from the light and heat of the day. The equipment is used by researchers to take humidity and temperature readings at the mouth of the roost. This is the only saguaro in the state known to be used as a bat roost. There are probably many more; you just don't see them. I spent two mornings next to this cactus, and the 26 bats would have flown back in from their nightly insect feasts, yet I saw not one. They were too small and too swift for me to spot.

My friend harvests rainwater off his roof and stores it in barrels and culverts he set upright. He keeps the desert around his house mildly watered, just enough to give it that much more life. It is not an obscene oasis of water features, but simple, beautiful ground. It is a desert refuge. Thus the birds and the profusion of wildlife, the javelinas who come and go, the sleek-whiskered wood rats, and the rare but occasional desert tortoise showing up red-faced from eating cactus fruit.

The bats are here because this is a healthy place, a good desert.

My friend hopped on his bicycle and headed to work, managing an art gallery in the city, while I continued my stroll, sizing up his saguaros. I paused to listen to the soft hiss of morning breezes through their needles. Wildly shaped, like something out of a dream, a succulent given rein to become a tree, the saguaros seemed like a blessing. You'd want them growing where you live, too. Looking up into their arms, I thought they looked like people, like plants, like gods. **AH**

OPPOSITE PAGE: First light grazes a trio of young saguaros below Ragged Top, at the north end of the Silver Bell Mountains. Saguaros have been known to live for 200 years or longer.

| RANDY PRENTICE

📷 Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark II; Shutter: 1/4 sec; Aperture: f/22; ISO: 100; Focal Length: 67 mm

BELOW: Saguaro arms frame a nearly full moon at Ironwood Forest National Monument.

| RANDY PRENTICE

📷 Camera: Canon EOS 5D Mark II; Shutter: 1/6 sec; Aperture: f/22; ISO: 100; Focal Length: 97 mm



Peregrine Falcons Can Really Fly

Although cheetahs and pronghorns are lightning quick, they can't touch the speed of peregrines, which have been clocked at more than 200 mph. To give you a little perspective, Tony Kanaan set an Indy 500 record this year with an average speed of 187.433 mph. Now you see me, now you don't.

A PORTFOLIO BY JOHN SHERMAN



Photographer John Sherman happened upon a peregrine-falcon aerie while he was out rock-climbing. Here, an adult peregrine, clutching its family's next meal in its talons, returns to the aerie to feed its chicks, which Sherman estimates were a week old when he found them.

Camera: Nikon D7000; Shutter: 1/1000 sec; Aperture: f/8; ISO: 1000; Focal Length: 500 mm



“What was I thinking?” asks photographer John Sherman. “It would have been so much easier shooting penguins than peregrines. After all, peregrines are the fastest animal on the planet — they’ve been clocked flying faster than 200 mph. With these peregrines, the parents cleverly picked an aerie in a small northwest-facing corner that was hidden from view from most angles (and predators), and I had my share of challenges. I erected a blind on the edge of the cliff — I stayed tied into a rope and harness when in the blind — but even so, I could only see the edge of the ledge. So I also constructed a camouflaged boom that I gradually inched out over the aerie over the course of a few days. Each day, I would slide a remote-controlled camera to the end of the boom, which enabled me to shoot 40 feet straight down on the nest. The parents are very protective and will attack you (or any other creature) if you violate their tolerance zone. This happened a couple of times early on, and I quickly learned when and how closely I could approach.”

For more information about peregrine falcons and other raptors, contact The Peregrine Fund at 208-362-8687 or visit www.peregrinefund.org. [AH](#)

ABOVE: About a week after fledging, one of the chicks rests on a branch. “At one point, a chick exercising its wings on the edge of the cliff fell off, only to get stranded on a sloping bump of rock,” Sherman says. “It was heart-wrenching watching the parents ignore its pleas for help. Eventually, the stranded bird took flight during an enormous wind gust.”

📷 Camera: Nikon D7000; Shutter: 1/800 sec; Aperture: f/9; ISO: 1000; Focal Length: 500 mm

LEFT: Having delivered its catch, the adult peregrine leaves its three chicks and ventures out for the next meal.

📷 Camera: Nikon D90; Shutter: 1/1000 sec; Aperture: f/11; ISO: 1400; Focal Length: 105 mm

RIGHT: Another of the fledglings strikes a pose. “I’m happy to report that when I left the canyon after two months there,” Sherman says, “I could hear all three fledglings in the canyon.”

📷 Camera: Nikon D7000; Shutter: 1/1000 sec; Aperture: f/8; ISO: 500; Focal Length: 500 mm



In So Many Words

For a long time now, we've been showcasing the best of Arizona with words and photographs. It's something we do in every issue, but it's been a while since we featured any poetry. This month, by popular demand, the metrical writing is back. And we even managed to dig up a few photos to go with it.



Desert Water

In the desert, water is the animal hunters track first.
To visit the river quickly, cut an onion.

Water falls down wet and gets up green.
Water is the blood of the land.

In water, the stars and the animals see themselves side by side.
Water is how we are all related.

Nobody owns water — drink some, and try to keep it.
Water rules kings.

Raindrops on the hard dirt make the ghosts rise.
Water hums its song into stone.

Water is the desert's medicine.
Water is the solid ground of dreams.

Water speaks, but you must listen with your mouth.
Water is our common language.

— Alberto Ríos

Alberto Ríos, a native of Nogales, Arizona, is the author of 10 books of poetry, as well as three collections of short stories. He is a regents' professor of English at Arizona State University, where he holds the Katharine C. Turner Endowed Chair in English. He was recently named Arizona's first poet laureate.

A seasonal stream curls over a granite rock at sunset in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains, near Tucson.

📷 JACK DYKINGA

Music Mountains

Cemamagi, Tumamoc
Babad Do'ag, Santa Catalina Mountains
Cuk Do'ag, Black Mountains, Tucson Mountains
Cew Do'ag, Rincon Mountains
Giho Do'ag, Kihotoa, Burden Basket Mountain
Waw Giwulig Do'ag, Baboquivari Mountain

It has been said before,
these mountains will not listen
if we simply speak words to them.
They will only hear us
if we come with melody, rhythm,
pitch, and harmony.
To these circling mountains
we must speak with voices
in songs, rhythmic speeches, orations, and prayers.
We must be prepared with repetition,
a singular, undisturbed beat.
That is the way of mountains.
This is what they want to hear.

We must come to them with music
so they are generous with the summer rains
that appear to start their journey from their peaks.
We must come to them with song
so they will be generous
with the winter snow that settles there.
We must come to them with a strong recognizable beat,
a beat that reaches the core of the mountain —
a core still molten and moving to its own sounds —
and simultaneously reaches
a core long frozen into submission
with only a memory of the heat of its birth.
For the mountains of Tucson
the sound of spoken word is not enough.
They will not hear us.
We must be prepared
with harmony,
a strong rhythm,
a beat.

— Ofelia Zepeda

Ofelia Zepeda, a member of the Tohono O'odham Nation, is a regents' professor of linguistics at the University of Arizona and the founder of the American Indian Language Development Institute. She has published three books of poetry.

A winter storm
leaves a dusting of
snow and wisps of
fog on Pusch Ridge,
in the Santa Catalina
Mountains.

📷 JACK DYKINGA



Trickster

He was there —
before the rising action rose to meet this acre cornered by thirst,
before birds swallowed bathwater and exploded in midsentence,
before the nameless
 began sipping the blood of ravens from the sun's knotted atlas.

He was there,
sleeping with one eye clamped tighter than the other,

he looked, when he shouldn't have.

He said, "You are worth the wait,"
in the waiting room of the resurrection of another Reservation
and continued to dig for water, her hands, a road map,
in a bucket of white shells outside the North gate.

He threw a blanket over the denouement slithering onto shore
 and saw Indians,
leaning into the *beginning*;
slip out of turtle shells,
 and slide down bottle necks,
aiming for the first pocket of air in the final paragraph.

He saw anthropologists hook a land bridge with their curved spines,
and raised the hunters a full minute above its tollbooth,
 saying, "Fire ahead, fire."

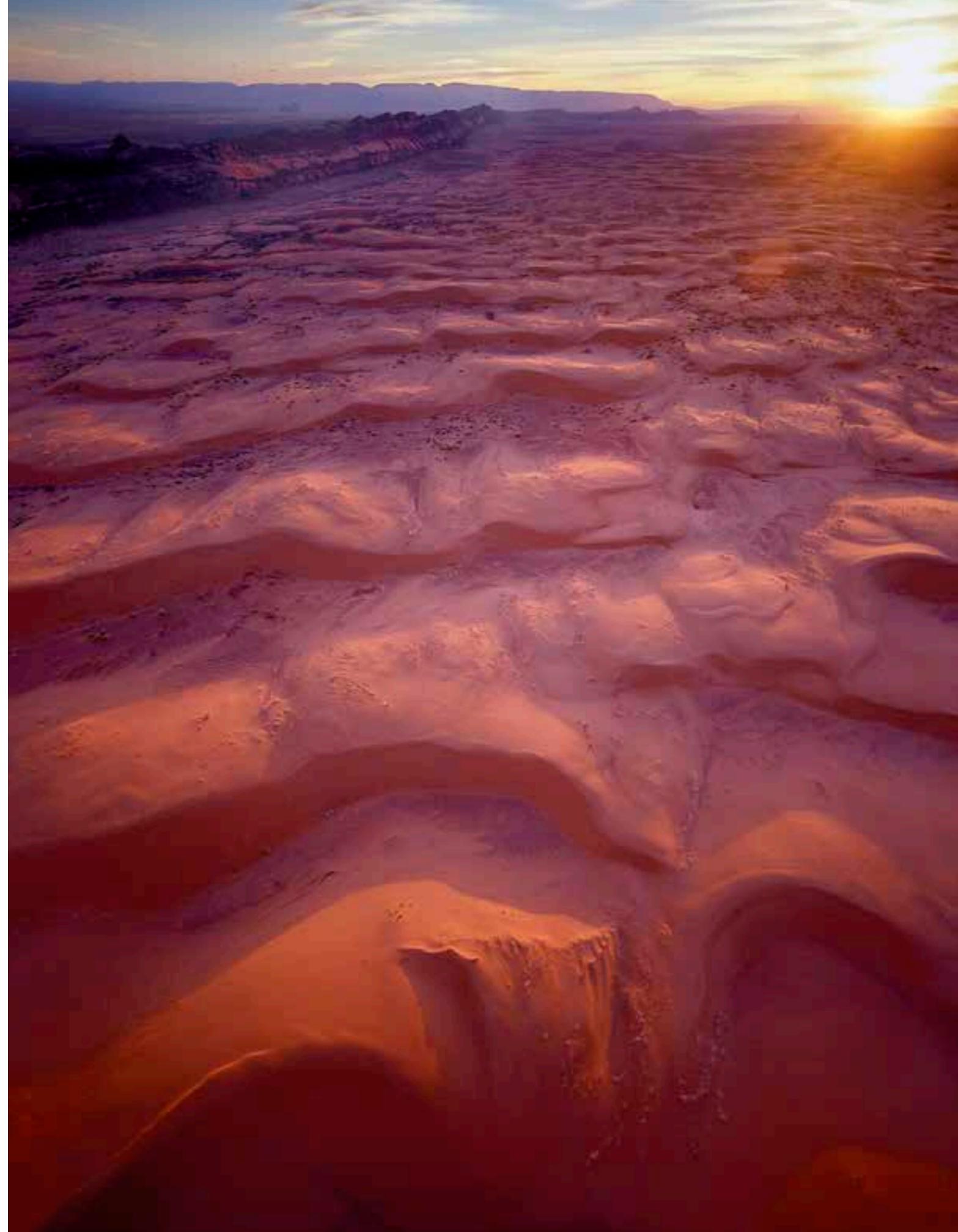
When they pointed,
he leapt into the blue dark
 on that side of the fence;
it was that simple:
 sap drying in the tear ducts of the cut worm,
 his ignition switched on —
 blue horses grazing northward in the pre-dawn.

— *Sherwin Bitsui*

Sherwin Bitsui is a Navajo poet from White Cone, Arizona, and he's the recipient of the 2000-2001 Individual Poet Grant from the Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry, as well as the Truman Capote Creative Writing Fellowship. His work has appeared in two published anthologies. [AH](#)

**Sand dunes dominate the landscape
of Little Capitan Valley, north of
Kayenta on the Navajo Nation.**

📷 ADRIEL HEISEY



Christina Akins isn't your typical 29-year-old. I learn this even before I shake her hand. Actually, I don't shake her hand, because she's holding a gopher snake that looks agitated. Instead, Akins, who is covered from head to toe in mud, greets me with a huge smile. With her long blond hair tied up in a ponytail, athletic physique, glittery nail polish and mud-caked leather and turquoise bracelets, she doesn't exactly look like a wildlife specialist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Then again, I probably don't look like someone who has been momentarily paralyzed with fear.

Akins later tells me that she was excited to show me the snake, which was why she brought it down.

"People make fun of me," she says. "I see something, and I have this childlike excitement."

The medium-sized snake, which from my vantage point looks more like a rattlesnake, is writhing, struggling to free itself from her muddy grip. I take a few more steps back. Finally, Akins hands the snake to Chip Young, a Game and Fish wildlife biologist, who hikes to a nearby garden and lets the snake go. If first impressions count for anything, Akins certainly takes the cake. This girl has *cojones*.

BORN AND RAISED IN SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA, ALONG with her twin sister, Akins has always been somewhat of a tomboy. As a child, she spent time at her grandparents' cabin north of Payson, where she would hunt for fossils, quartz crystals and tadpoles.

And that's how she arrived at Beatty's Guest Ranch in Hereford. When a species is listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act, a recovery plan is implemented. Within the plan, there are action steps designed to prevent extinction. Akins' job is to execute those actions.

"Some of the things we do include surveying and monitoring populations that are existing now," she says. "We also do conservation work, captive rearing and habitat renovation, like this project."

In 2011, the Monument Fire charred the hillsides surrounding the Beatty property. When the rains finally came, they unleashed ash and sediment, flooding the family's homesite, as well as several ponds that contained threatened Chiricahua leopard frogs, ruining their habitat.

Last year, Akins organized the "first-annual work day" to remove the debris that had poured into the ponds and rehabilitate the habitat. The effort was a success, and when she asked the family whether they could use more help, they said yes.

IT'S MIDMORNING IN EARLY MAY, AND AKINS AND her team of volunteers have almost finished digging out a pond that sits on a hill several hundred feet from any structures on the Beatty property. Everyone is covered in mud. Akins walks around the pond barefoot and uses her hands to scoop out the thick, black muck and pull any remaining root masses. Though the pond looks small, Akins has been working since the night before.

Getting Her Hands Dirty

"I was the one who, if there was something to look for and find, I would go out and find it," she says.

An uncle who owned a collection of lizards, geckos and snakes helped pique his niece's interest in reptiles and amphibians, and eventually, Akins adopted her own pets: frogs, gecko varieties and even a bearded dragon. These days, Akins owns a kingsnake.

Akins says she never considered that working with reptiles and amphibians could be a real possibility when she entered college, so she initially studied nutrition. It wasn't until she began looking at programs at Arizona State University's Polytechnic Campus, in Mesa, that she found a degree more in line with what she loved doing outside of school.

"At the time, it was called wildlife habitat management," she says. "I read the description, and it was basically everything I did for fun. That's when I started going to school to get a wildlife and restoration ecology degree."

Because Akins was the only student in her class who expressed an interest in herpetology, the study of reptiles and amphibians, a professor encouraged her to apply for an internship with Game and Fish. Akins loved the program, and she reapplied to be an intern every chance she could.

In 2010, a matriculated Akins landed her dream job: a full-time position as a wildlife technician in the non-game branch at Game and Fish, specializing in ranid frogs (she was recently promoted to specialist). Today, instead of assisting in the recovery efforts of endangered or threatened animal species, she's leading them.

"At night, you can shine the light and see eye-shine in the frogs, similar to mammals on the road," she explains. "It's not as distinct, but when you put the light in the pond, you can reach in and grab them."

Over a three-hour period, Akins, Young and a volunteer named Daniel pulled out nine adult frogs and some 200 tadpoles by hand. Akins says some tadpoles were only a centimeter long, while others had nearly completed their metamorphoses, meaning their front and back legs were formed and they were in the process of absorbing their tails.

"It was pretty cool to see the age classes within that one pond," she says.

With the pond finally emptied, Akins is now playing a waiting game. There's a spring up the mountain that fills a water storage tank, and it has to fill up completely — gravity pulls the water to the pond.

"Once we put the frogs back, the vegetation back and the tadpoles back, I'll be on my way," she says.

Akins' enthusiasm for her work is contagious, and her attitude is inspiring. But this passion, not always seen in 29-year-olds, stems from the fact that she's doing what so many people her age only dream about — something she genuinely loves.

"I like hard work," she says. "I don't care about getting dirty; it just makes it more fun. I would rather be doing something outside than sitting in an office."

Like catching snakes. **AH**



When she started school at Arizona State University, Christina Akins studied nutrition. It would lead to a career, she figured, but not a dream job. What she really wanted was to play in the mud. So, she changed majors, and today she's protecting frogs as a wildlife specialist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

BY KATHY RITCHIE | PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK GIASE

Empire Ranch Road

You might see pronghorns, mule deer and bobcats along this scenic drive, but the real payoff is the surrounding grassland.

BY KATHY RITCHIE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY RANDY PRENTICE

It's hard to believe that Las Cienegas National Conservation Area was, at one time, at risk of becoming a master-planned community and golf course. Instead, the locals rallied, and in 1986, the area came under the protection of the Bureau of Land Management. In 1988, it became part of the National Landscape Conservation System. Today, it's accessed by a 24-mile drive that's best described as spectacular.

But before you head out, be warned: Although the landscape, with its rolling grasslands and verdant riparian area, is magnificent, the road itself isn't. It's challenging at times and might require four-wheel-drive in places.

To begin, turn left off of State Route 83 onto the gravel road marked "Historic Empire Ranch" and continue for 3 miles to a "T" junction. There, turn left onto Bureau of Land Management Road 6901 and follow the sign to Oak Tree Canyon. Some area maps list the route as Bureau of Land Management Road 901, but the agency updated its signage to include a numerical prefix that indicates road condition. In this case, the "6" means "off road." Moving along, you'll quickly come to the riparian area around Empire Gulch. At about Mile 4, the cottonwood trees and mesquite bosque lining the road give way to vast open grasslands. Just beyond the rolling hills, you'll enter

another riparian area, where you'll cross Cienega Creek. As you pass over a bridge, a small sea of cattails hides any sign of water, but the reeds are beautiful and unexpected. Around Mile 8, the road turns left, then abruptly right. At that point, you'll be on Bureau of Land Management Road 6914.

This is where you can expect a few challenging conditions. That's because the road is maintained on an as-needed basis. Besides a few bumps in the road, you'll also cross several sandy washes (don't even think about attempting them in inclement weather). In addition, the conservation area hosts a working ranch, so you might encounter a few cows.

RIGHT: Willows thrive in the lush riparian area near Cienega Creek, along Empire Ranch Road.

OPPOSITE PAGE: A Bureau of Land Management road meanders through rolling grasslands and mesquite trees.



Thus, it's important to leave gates as you find them. Pronghorns, mule deer and bobcats are also prevalent in the area, as are black-tailed prairie dogs, which the Arizona Game and Fish Department recently reintroduced to the area.

Near Mile 11, you'll begin a serious climb, but the payoff is a spectacular view of the Whetstone Mountains on your left. As soon as you reach the top, the road drops, and for the next mile or so, it becomes increasingly difficult

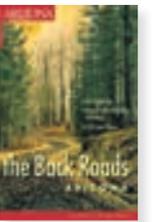
to navigate. Take your time. If you can safely transition into four-wheel-drive, do so, because the narrow road twists and turns sharply.

As the road begins to level out, you'll face another potential obstacle: The road forks, and there are no clear markers to indicate which road is BLM 6914. Continue in the direction you were already headed — southwest. At Mile 13.9, you'll cross another sandy wash, and in less than 1.5 miles, the road connects with

Bureau of Land Management Road 6900. This marks the final stages of the drive, and by Mile 24, you should be back where you started.

ADDITIONAL READING:

For more scenic drives, pick up a copy of our book *The Back Roads*. Now in its fifth edition, the book features 40 of the state's most scenic drives. To order a copy, visit www.shoparizonahighways.com/books.



tour guide

Note: Mileages are approximate.

LENGTH: 24 miles round-trip (from State Route 83)
DIRECTIONS: From Tucson, go east on Interstate 10 for 23 miles to State Route 83. Turn right onto SR 83 and continue 19 miles to Historic Empire Ranch Road (Bureau of Land Management Road 6900). Turn left onto Historic Empire Ranch Road and continue 3 miles to Bureau of Land Management Road 6901. Turn left onto BLM 6901 and continue 8.4 miles to Bureau of Land Management Road 6914. Turn right onto BLM 6914 and continue 7 miles to BLM 6900. Turn right onto BLM 6900 and continue 5.6 miles until you arrive at the starting point of the drive.

VEHICLE REQUIREMENTS: A high-clearance, four-wheel-drive vehicle is required.

WARNING: Back-road travel can be hazardous, so be aware of weather and road conditions. Carry plenty of water. Don't travel alone, and let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return.

INFORMATION: Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, 520-439-6400 or www.blm.gov/az

Travelers in Arizona can visit www.az511.gov or dial 511 to get information on road closures, construction, delays, weather and more.

Secret Canyon Trail

It's not easy to get to, but this hike in the Red Rock-Secret Mountain Wilderness is worth the effort, especially in November, when there's still a hint of fall in the air. **BY ROBERT STIEVE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK FRANK**

Despite its name, this trail isn't much of a secret. None of the hikes in and around Sedona are. Nonetheless, you'll want to put Secret Canyon on your list. You probably won't have it to yourself, but you might. That's because of the 3.4 miles of dirt, sand and rocks between Dry Creek Road and the trailhead. There's only one way to drive through it, and that's with a high-clearance vehicle — four-wheel-drive is even better. The other option is to park at the front end of Forest Road 152 and ride a mountain bike to the trailhead. Either way, you'll be glad you made the effort.

From the trailhead, the hike immediately crosses Dry Creek and arrives at the boundary of the Red Rock-Secret Mountain Wilderness, a 43,950-acre wonderland that'll make you think: *Holy moly. I can see why this place was given the world's ultimate protection.* Piñons, junipers,

manzanitas and Arizona cypress are the dominant tree species in the early stages of the hike, but they're overshadowed by the surrounding red rocks that epitomize the area. You'll see a lot of iconic scenery in front of you on this hike, but every once in a while, it's a good idea to do a three-sixty. The views are impressive, and that's an understatement.

After 15 minutes, you'll arrive at an intersection with the HS Canyon Trail, which veers left. From there, the footpath turns to a soft-packed red sand. It's an ideal surface for hiking, but it doesn't last long. Most of the route is a mix of rocks and dirt, with a lot of ground cover along the trail. In the summer, it gets pretty thick, but this time of year, it should look like fall.

Continuing northwest, the trail climbs gradually and arrives at a nice cluster of alligator junipers. In addition

to the gators, you'll get a glimpse of some tall trees growing from the side of a cliff to the left. It's a hint of what's to come when the trail transitions from piñons and junipers to pines and firs. But first, you'll come to an intersection with the David Miller Trail, which splits to the right. Stay left for Secret Canyon.

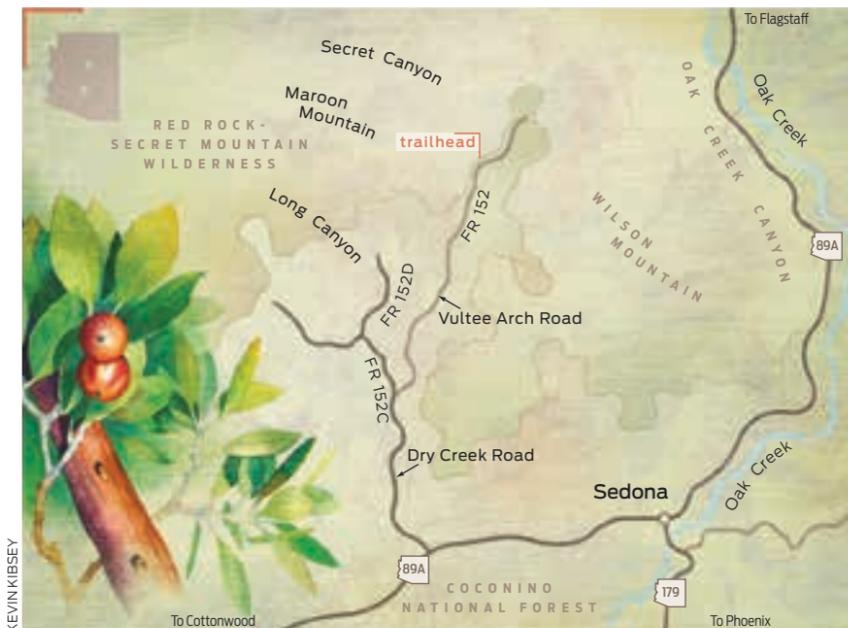
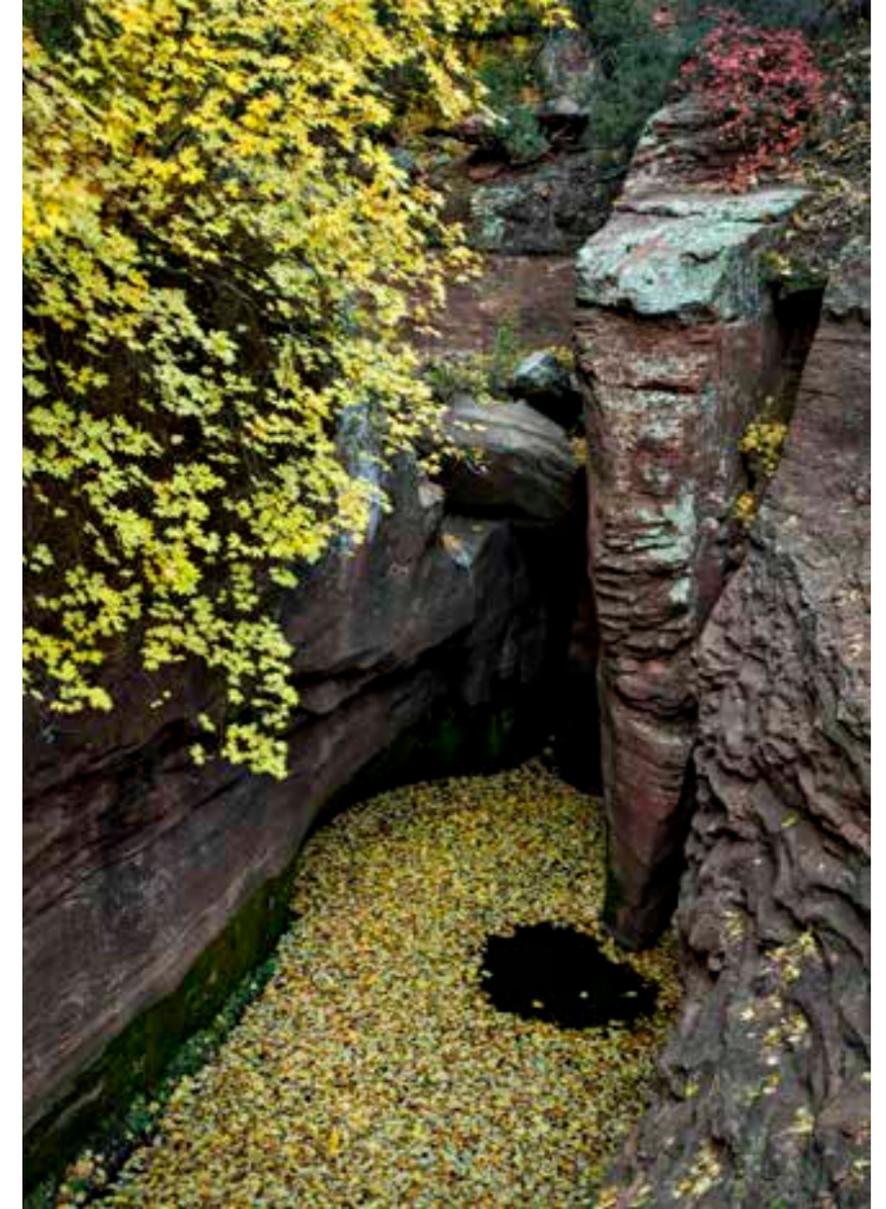
From there, the trail drops about 100 yards and then climbs back up to a ridge before heading toward the canyon. Within 10 minutes, the route turns to pine needles and pine cones and arrives at a spot as beautiful as any. On this stretch, the trail skirts a sheer wall surrounded by Arizona sycamores, ponderosa pines and Douglas firs. This is the gateway to the canyon.

OPPOSITE PAGE: A deep ravine and a series of pools mark the end of the Secret Canyon Trail. **BELOW:** Sedona's iconic red rocks are predominant along the trail.

Continuing on, about an hour into the hike, the canyon narrows and the trail gets a little tricky to follow, especially in the summer, when a little bushwhacking is necessary. It's less of a problem in November, but regardless of when you hike, common sense will guide the way.

The rest of the route stays about the same, with several creek crossings (don't expect water) and a few scrambles up and down the various banks. Then, about 90 minutes in, you'll start seeing some massive old-growth ponderosas, which shelter some equally impressive primitive campsites (if you backpack, mark the coordinates). At this point, you'll be deep into Secret Canyon. Although there's no obvious landmark to signal the end of the trail, you'll know you're there when you arrive at a deep ravine that cradles a series of pools. Another indicator is a massive flat rock, about the size of a boxing ring. It makes a great place to sit and enjoy the views. If you're lucky, you'll have it to yourself. If not, there's room to spare.

ADDITIONAL READING: For more hikes, pick up a copy of *Arizona Highways Hiking Guide*, which features 52 of the state's best trails — one for each weekend of the year, sorted by seasons. To order a copy, visit www.shoparizonahighways.com/books.



trail guide

LENGTH: 11 miles round-trip
DIFFICULTY: Moderate
ELEVATION: 4,684 to 5,097 feet
TRAILHEAD GPS: N 34°55.803', W 111°48.399'
DIRECTIONS: From the roundabout intersection of State Route 179 and State Route 89A in Sedona, go southwest on SR 89A for approximately 3.1 miles to Dry Creek Road. Turn right onto Dry Creek Road and continue 1.9 miles to Forest Road 152 (Vultee Arch Road). Turn right onto FR 152 and continue 3.4 miles to the trailhead on the left.
VEHICLE REQUIREMENTS: A high-clearance vehicle is required.
DOGS ALLOWED: Yes
HORSES ALLOWED: Yes
USGS MAP: Wilson Mountain
INFORMATION: Red Rock Ranger District, 928-203-7500 or www.fs.usda.gov/coconino

- LEAVE-NO-TRACE PRINCIPLES:**
- Plan ahead and be prepared.
 - Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
 - Dispose of waste properly and pack out all of your trash.
 - Leave what you find.
 - Respect wildlife and minimize impact.
 - Be considerate of others. **AN**

where is this?



JILL RICHARDS

Stair Contest

These steps are located in an Arizona town that's famous for all kinds of things, including this staircase. The town hosts an annual race that sends participants climbing several flights of stairs in its historic district. — NOAH AUSTIN

September 2013 Answer & Winner

Snow fences near Sunrise Park Resort. Congratulations to our winner, Bill & Rene Lloyd of Newport, New York.



MARK LIPCZYNSKI

Win a collection of our most popular books! To enter, correctly identify the location pictured at left and email your answer to editor@arizonahighways.com — type "Where is This?" in the subject line. Entries can also be sent to 2039 W. Lewis Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85009 (write "Where is This?" on the envelope). Please include your name, address and phone number. One winner will be chosen in a random drawing of qualified entries. Entries must be postmarked by November 15, 2013. Only the winner will be notified. The correct answer will be posted in our January 2014 issue and online at www.arizonahighways.com beginning December 15.



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