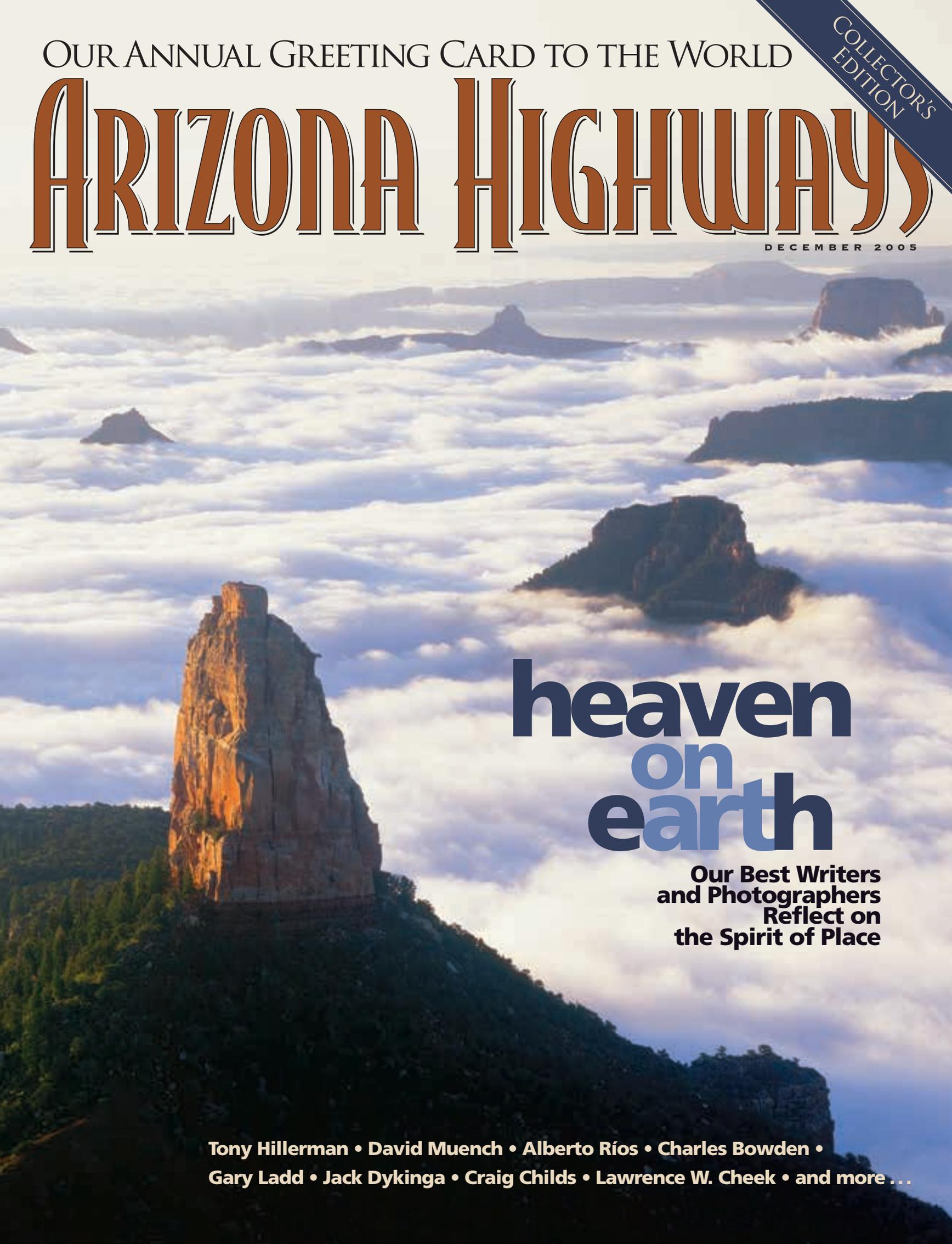


OUR ANNUAL GREETING CARD TO THE WORLD

ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

DECEMBER 2005

COLLECTOR'S
EDITION



heaven
on
earth

**Our Best Writers
and Photographers
Reflect on
the Spirit of Place**

**Tony Hillerman • David Muench • Alberto Ríos • Charles Bowden •
Gary Ladd • Jack Dykinga • Craig Childs • Lawrence W. Cheek • and more ...**

{ special features }

Spirit of Place page 6-45

For the December issue, we asked our writers and photographers to illuminate the spirit of place by describing special locations or memories that have shaped their lives. Here's what they have for you:

Navajoland page 13

Getting to Goldtooth by Tony Hillerman

Yavapai County page 14

The Ranch-shaped Heart by Terry Greene Sterling

Flagstaff page 15

A Delicate River of Light by Roger Naylor

Nogales Wash page 16

Memory of a Summer Snow by Alberto Ríos

Cabeza Prieta page 23

Dry Tranquility by Craig Childs

Navajoland page 24

The Great Snowstorm of 1967 by Betty Reid

Picture Rocks page 25

And the Winner Is . . . by Jerry E. Airth

Colorado Plateau page 26

Lessons From Camp by Charles Bowden

White Mountains page 33

A Blue Christmas on the Mountain by Jo Baeza

Scottsdale page 34

An Airplane in the Hay by Ron Carlson

Gila River page 35

Peace in a Shady Grove on the Gila by Gregory McNamee

White Mountain Apache Reservation page 36

Down to the Cornfield by Kathy Lacapa

South Phoenix page 41

The Star That Followed El Niño by Stella Pope Duarte

Sabino Canyon page 42

The Canyon That Broke a Fall by Lawrence W. Cheek

Outback Arizona page 43

Mapping the Way to Self-reliance by Bill Broyles

Grand Canyon page 44

Death, Dreams and Fishing Poles by Pete Aleshire

{ also in this issue }

46 Christmas in Arizona Territory

Pioneers found peace and happiness during the holidays, despite Indian threats and sparse supplies.

50 Spirit of the Poinsettia

The multicolored plants, natives of Mexico, add special charm to Christmas.

{ departments }

2 ALL WHO WANDER

4 VIEWFINDER

52 ALONG THE WAY

54 DESTINATION

56 HIKE OF THE MONTH

THIS PAGE A Cape Royal vista offers a sunset view of the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. RICHARD DANLEY ■ To order a print of this photograph, see information at right.

FRONT COVER Clouds suffuse the Grand Canyon below Mount Hayden and Point Imperial. RICHARD DANLEY ■ To order a print of this photograph, see information at right.

BACK COVER Stars turn into streaks of light behind Monument Valley's famous Mittens during this eight-hour exposure. KERRICK JAMES ■ To order a print of this photograph, see information at right.

{ highways on television }

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ONLINE EXTRA Arizona ranchers find Japanese ingenuity mutually beneficial.

WEEKEND GETAWAY Visit Tucson's west side to experience Sonoran Desert splendor.

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Photography Editor RICHARD MAACK

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Arizona Highways Books

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Production Director KIM ENSENBERGER

Promotions Art Director RONDA JOHNSON

Webmaster VICKY SNOW

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E-MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

editor@arizonahighways.com

Regular Mail:

Editor

2039 W. Lewis Ave.

Phoenix, AZ 85009

Governor Janet Napolitano

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PRODUCED IN THE USA

Heart-stopping Light Can Heal Even Heartbreak in a Place That Smooths the Mind

THE APACHES BELIEVE that certain places smooth your mind and make you wise if you just listen to them. As this issue demonstrates, so do our writers and photographers. Is it the same for you? Is that why you read *Arizona Highways*, to find those places that smooth the mind? Perhaps you will write to me about the places your heart has embraced, as a cottonwood root grows around a stone. Send me a paragraph about your favorite place and why you love it, then I'll post it on our Web site (arizonahighways.com). Just write me at the e-mail address below or the address on our masthead

In the meantime, enjoy this issue as mystery novelist Tony Hillerman finds the perfect Navajo dog, writer Larry Cheek revisits the rock in a canyon where he found solace, iconoclast Charles Bowden watches the stars with a brilliant old man at the end of his journey and Navajo journalist Betty Reid remembers the blizzard that broke her heart in boarding school. In visual counterpoint, the best landscape photographers in the country capture photons bouncing off the places they love, freezing them in this celebration of light and place.

As I read these wise, sometimes-funny essays and marveled at this magical light, I found myself thinking of a place that healed me.

It was a decade ago as my rented boat spattered across the choppy surface of Lake Powell. My sons Noah and Seth, then 9 and 11, sat in the open front, laughing and gasping in fear and delight. I muttered a faint curse, realizing I'd once again overstayed the light. I'm a lackadaisical luffer of a photographer, light-addicted but undisciplined. Real photographers plan their whole day around sunset, but I blunder about until the light suddenly red-shifts toward magic before searching frantically for foreground.

But I'd gotten so caught up in exploring with my boys that the only foreground in sight was a rusted-red slump of an island. So I spun the wheel, which rolled Noah into Seth and provoked a fresh flurry of elbows and laughs. The sound lanced a gleam of happiness through the shadow of my grandfather's recent death. Walter Jennings grew up poor and built his own glider soon after the Wright Brothers proved it possible. He ran his own construction business, married, divorced, remarried and lived a rich life, brimming with joy, loss, courage, insecurity, love and regret. I loved him fiercely,

for I was his shadow. He dropped out of grade school after an argument with the teacher, but spent one week with me in college attending my classes. His extravagant joy in learning about ancient China and constitutional law has made me revere books ever since. He died hard, but only after the prostate cancer got into his brain. The last time he remembered me, I took him out of the nursing home to sit at the end of an airport runway watching the jets pass overhead. He was a child in his glee.

So I had come wounded to this intersection of water and sky—the most beautiful of lakes made by drowning the most exquisite of canyons.

But seeing my boys roll about in the burnished light, I felt a renewed throb of life. They have taught me most of what I know, although they won't understand that until

they have forgotten those essential things and learned them afresh from their own children.

The moment we reached the island, the boys leaped from the boat, Seth in the lead as always and Noah following him like a duckling imp with a crooked grin.

I hastily looped the bow rope around a rock before turning to survey the photographic possibilities.

The boys had run out across a ridgeline ruffle of red sand. Seth was dancing along the ridge, intoxicated by the light. Noah shadowed him with demented, sorcerer's apprentice leaps to ensure that his small feet landed precisely in his older brother's footprints. They each cast a manic shadow 30 feet long.

They danced in perfect tune to the wind and the water and the sky and the rock.

I was struck dumb. For the surge of a yearning, I wished that Walt could see them. But I understood then that I must see it for him, as my boys must one day watch for me.

Belatedly, I fumbled with my camera as the

best light I've ever felt washed over me. Then I stood and watched them; my grief shrank to a ripple of sand.

Finally, I turned back to the boat.

Freed by the wind from my careless mooring, it floated 50 feet from shore.

"The boat, the boat," I cried as I stripped off my clothes.

Noah and Seth ceased from their dancing and watched me in wonder.

I plunged into the cold water, swam through the choppy seas, clenched the bow rope in my teeth and somehow breaststroked it back to shore against the wind.

The boys laughed until they rolled on the ground when I emerged from the water, naked and exhausted.

Chilled, I sat on the red sand in the last light—perfectly happy with the spirit of that perfect place.

Peter Aleshire
editor@arizonahighways.com

Healing Place
Noah and Seth
Aleshire dance across
Lake Powell sands
in light so rich it
can ease grief.
PETER ALESHIRE





Burning Bush? Early morning light in the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge seems to outline an ocotillo's spindly arms with tiny orange tongues of flame.

Stark on the northern horizon, the Granite Mountains form a cool backdrop to a lavish display of Sonoran Desert plant life in the Cabeza's Sheep Mountain Wash.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.

scope of their searches to only the top one or two places that stoke their creativity the most.

Then I asked them to tell us why these places speak to them. Their insights will surprise you and, hopefully, stimulate you to search out and identify your own inspiring Arizona places.

Poring over these images was one of the most interesting photo edits I've ever worked on. Knowing the photographers and their stock files as I do, I could have predicted some of their choices. Obviously, a large body of work from one location suggests a powerful connection between land and landscapist.

But other submissions caught me off-guard. Some photographers have secret devotions to little-known, off-the-beaten-path locales that few of us have seen. Not only are the images surprising, but finding photographers willing to share their secret spots with us is equally unexpected. It's akin to trout fishermen giving away the locations of their favorite streams where the lunkers hang out.

As I edited the stacks of photographs, I tangled with this chicken-and-egg conundrum: Do special places in our lives evoke stronger responses, or do they become special to us because of our experiences there? Which came first, the inspiring land or the successful photo shoot?

On this question, I lean to the former. Certain landscapes stir my sentient spirit. I'm drawn to places that are tranquil, where I can relax and see the world with clarity. Wrapped in remoteness, I breathe easy and my heightened awareness leads me to quiet recesses where light and shadow come to rest. In these places, the work seems effortless.

Conversely, some places demand a steeper learning curve. Visiting a location for the first time can result in a bit of wandering before I begin to really see it. I have to work harder for good photographs, revisiting these spots again and again before they give up their best images.

We all have our favorite places where we're absorbed by the natural surroundings. For me, that locus is Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge along our border with Mexico. Not heroic, as are the buttes and canyons of the Colorado Plateau, this swath of Sonoran Desert is subtle by comparison. In the immense space of the Cabeza, things once important are diminished by scale. Perhaps it's the oblique nature of this place that makes it so acute for me.

That's the spirit of place.

Drawing Inspiration From the Land

AS A PHOTOGRAPHER, it's in my job description to artfully render my surroundings no matter where I am. But some places inspire my best work and hold a connection for me that I can't explain.

Why does a particular landscape seem to merge with one's own life? What forces enrapture us in these special places?

In this, our holiday issue, we explore the meaning of "place." We share the beauty of Arizona's special, often sacred places and recount the personal experiences that connect us to them.

Assembling this year's December issue photography portfolio, I asked our contributors to select their favorite images of the Arizona locations that inspire them. Normally our call for photography for each December's portfolio elicits an avalanche of stunning images. But this year I cajoled them to narrow the

online Learn how to capture the innocence and joy of children in your photographs at arizonahighways.com (Click on "Photography")

Peter Ensenberger can be reached at photodirector@arizonahighways.com





GRAND CANYON

The Royal Treatment

"The extended peninsula of Cape Royal on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon offers compositional choices in almost any light and weather conditions. This photograph was made during a seemingly endless flow of intense thunderstorms passing through the Canyon. Dark clouds and heavy showers inundated the village at the North Rim, about 10 miles away, while I experienced only light sprinkles at Cape Royal. Severe weather kept the skeptics indoors, allowing me to enjoy the spectacle of clouds in the Canyon all by myself."

steve bruno

Steve Bruno of Tempe prefers using his large-format camera when shooting the Grand Canyon. Despite having to carry heavy equipment, he likes to hike to the Canyon's more remote areas for seldom-seen views.

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SPIRIT OF PLACE

DO PLACES HAVE A SPIRIT? Do places shape us? Save us? Teach us? Do we love certain places for their intrinsic qualities or because of things that happened to us there? And do writers and visual artists like photographers see the same thing when they look at a place? We wondered, since *Arizona Highways* is really all about that elusive and spiritual sense of place. So we asked some of the best writers and photographers in the country to tackle those questions. We said: Send us a story or a picture about a place that has inspired you or changed you—or share with us a Christmas memory connected to such a place. The personal essays and images that follow are what they gave us—for you.

HARCUVAR MOUNTAINS

Chasing Wildflowers

"Every spring, hordes of photographers intoxicated by wildflower pollen charge off to secret desert locations in search of perfect blooms. Feverishly working my own choice plot, I heard a shout from a passing truck, 'You really oughta see Alamo Lake!' I thanked her, but figured she's from out of state and probably considers any wildflower display to be good. Still, I spun my wheels in a two-hour sprint to find the Harcuvar Mountains ablaze in the year's best wildflower display. As I pumped film through my camera, I reflected on the woman's gracious gift. The moral of the story: When someone who loves the desert gives me a tip, I'll always get going and pack extra film because the next image waiting for me may be my best."

jack dykinga

After 30 years and countless miles chasing wildflowers and rainbows, Jack Dykinga is still in love with Arizona. His latest book, *Jack Dykinga's Arizona*, was released last fall.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.





LAKE POWELL

Water Wonder

"Lake Powell is insanely photogenic, thanks to the interaction of the lake and the surrounding landscape. The interface of lake and land produces strong graphic patterns, the foundation of most pleasing photographs. As its water level fluctuates, its bays, islands, sandy beaches and side canyons evolve, and the lake's edge offers endless photographic potential. To me, Lake Powell's spirit—although admittedly blemished by environmental questions—is pure magic."

gary ladd

Gary Ladd lives in Page between the three parks he most enjoys photographing: Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Grand Canyon National Park and Vermilion Cliffs National Monument.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



MILLER CANYON

Fallen Autumn

“Tucked in the Huachuca Mountains, Miller Canyon offers the quintessential Arizona autumn, close enough to home for me to explore on day trips. On this particular outing, the brilliant fall color I sought had browned and fallen to the ground. Stuck with a bushel of metaphysical lemons, I tried my hand at lemonade. The canyon gave me elements to work with—fallen leaves, flowing water and moss. I found this view and headed home with just one image in my camera.”

randy prentice

Using his experience as a photographer, Randy Prentice developed photography-management software that is currently used by many professionals. By night, he’s a blues guitarist playing regularly at venues around his hometown of Tucson.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.

NAVAJO INDIAN RESERVATION

Getting to Goldtooth

BY TONY HILLERMAN

The Navajo lady at the Tuba City trading post responded to my question, “How can I get to Goldtooth?” with a question of her own:

“Why in the world would you want to get to Goldtooth?”

Since another customer was awaiting her attention and an honest answer would have taken a long time, I just said I’d never been there and was curious.

But now that I’m writing to the readers of *Arizona Highways*, I’ll try to explain.

I had been searching my AAA “Indian Country Guide Map” looking for an isolated place to have two characters meet to commit a dastardly deed in one of the Navajo Tribal Police mysteries I was trying to finish. Our high, dry Arizona-New Mexico-Utah landscape is endowed with a wealth of such places, but for plot reasons I wanted one near the Hopi Reservation-Navajo Reservation border. I also prefer places endowed with the interesting names our ancestors gave their communities. Lots of those available, too, but I had already used Lower Greasewood, Blue Gap, Steamboat, Burnt Water, Old Leupp, Lower Colonias, Rotten Bananas and even both Upper and Lower Nutria. I was looking for something new.

I found Goldtooth on my map, 24 miles southeast of Tuba City on the great rolling emptiness of Ward Terrace. That name seemed to me as interesting as the mystery I was writing, but I had never been there. I spent time remembering what abandoned villages of Arizona’s Painted Desert are like, mixed them together, and applied that to Goldtooth without going to take a look at Goldtooth itself. A lot of my readers tell me they like my landscapes better than my stories, so my rule has been accuracy. The violation bothered me. So Marie and I headed for Goldtooth.

A GREAT TRIP, 160 miles, more or less, from Window Rock to Moenkopi on State Route 264. It’s an easy three hours and 15 minutes drive if you can resist the endless urges to duck into such fascinating places as the Kinlichee Ruins (now a Navajo Tribal Park) or the old Hubbell Trading Post, (now a national monument) or the Jeddito Chapter House (in the wee bit of Navajoland surrounded by Hopi Reservation) or historic Keams Canyon, or the countless places that tempt the curious as State

264 wanders up and over the Hopi First, Second and Third mesas and past the Hopi villages.

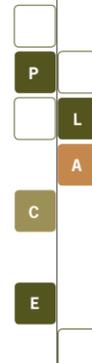
Marie and I, never able to resist such temptations, took about six hours to make that journey and thus rolled down the Third Mesa slopes toward Moenkopi in early afternoon. We figured we were miles from the U.S. Route 160 junction at Tuba City and about 7 miles from the place where, according to my AAA map, the road to Goldtooth joins 264. We slowed down and started looking out the passenger side window for the junction. We saw nary a sign of a junction, nor of any road of any sort leading southward across the rolling and treeless plains of Ward Terrace. We drove slower and slower, down into Moenkopi Wash, through Moenkopi village, the residents of which were engaged in a ceremony down below the highway and not available to handle questions.

So we continued onward to the Tuba City trading post, to the Navajo lady and her instructions on how to find Goldtooth.

“Go back through Moenkopi on Highway 264,” she told us. “When you get out of the village, across Moenkopi Wash, go back up the side of the slope there, have your window rolled down and be watching the side of the pavement. In just a mile or so you’ll see a place where people have been turning off the highway and out into the sagebrush. That’s where you turn off. Then it’s about 15 miles to Goldtooth.”

BY MY CALCULATIONS, it was 15.4 miles from the point we jolted off the pavement onto the dirt and a drive I would recommend to anyone who wants a view of the quiet, silent, empty world as it was before sloppy, careless humanity invaded it. It’s hardly necessary to tell *Arizona Highways* readers that there was no traffic, no traffic sounds, no fumes and only the dust kicked up by our own wheels. Only sagebrush, rabbit brush, snake-weeds and the endless variety of demure little blossoms produced by dry country grasses. To our left, the cliffs of the nearest Hopi mesa dappled by cloud shadows, to the right the ridge of Gray Mountain and the Coconino Rim and in the blue distance far ahead the shape of Newberry Mesa and the butte that once reminded some antiquarian of Montezuma’s chair. And over it all arched an immense deep blue high-country sky, decorated here and there by the rising columns of clouds promising brief afternoon thundershowers.

I must also report that Marie and I also saw one windmill, far west toward the Colorado River, one windmill a bit closer out in the sagebrush flats toward Third Mesa, and three cows munching on some grass discovered amid the sage. The road wandered silently south, following the ups and downs of the



Painted Desert, in no more hurry than were we.

The odometer told us we had used up the allotted 15 miles since leaving the pavement. And there ahead, off to the right of our road, rose the square shape of a building of dark stone.

I am an octogenarian now, and am told that when one passes the 80th year, one can expect to have one's head so jammed with memories that some lose their precision. But I remember when I saw Goldtooth about 20 years ago—all the windows were missing from the great old structure, and the doors as well, but the walls remained sound. It had been, so I was told, a school building once, but from whence its students came no one could guess. There were the skeletons of long dead trees around the structure, the only genuine trees we'd seen on our journey across Ward Terrace.

Across from what I will call Goldtooth School stood the only occupied residence, a Navajo hogan with attendant sheep pen and storage shed. I walked over, hoping to find an occupant who could tell me something about Goldtooth, but no one was home except a large dog, resting in the shade by the hogan doorway. He showed the courtesy so typical of the Diné, rising to his feet to smile at me as I approached. But he also did his guard dog duty, and the smile began showing teeth when I got too close to the door.

... the quiet, silent, empty world as it was before sloppy, careless humanity invaded it.

WITH GOLDTOOTH ADEQUATELY EXPLORED, the question became “Where next?” with the only choices being back where we had come from or onward. Onward on the only Goldtooth road takes you 10 miles south to a junction. There, another dirt road leads 11 miles northward to reconnect you with 264 at Coal Mine Mesa if you don't wish to continue southward another 26 silent miles across the Hopi Reservation to Indian Route 2. We chose southward.

As a footnote, I might add that we did finally meet the only resident of Goldtooth. He was repairing a fence

about 4 miles from his hogan and stopped work long enough to tell us that the nearest place on the road ahead that could offer us either gasoline or water was Leupp, which was about 50 miles away. If we needed same, we should take the shorter route to Coal Mine Mesa.

“How did my dog treat you?” he asked.

When I reported it had been dutiful but polite, he nodded, smiled and said, “A Navajo dog.”

Tony Hillerman originated in 1925 as an Oklahoma farm boy, got his early education in an Indian school and discovered the West in 1945. A World War II veteran, he has been a police reporter, newspaper editor and journalism professor, and he has had more than 30 books published. He lives in Albuquerque with Marie, his wife of 45 years.

YAVAPAI COUNTY

The Ranch-shaped Heart

BY TERRY GREENE STERLING

In 1951, my parents and I moved from Los Angeles to a remote cattle ranch in Yavapai County. I was 2 years old. My mother and father were in their early 40s and had never lived on a ranch. Our new home was a redwood-framed island in an ocean of grama grass. The house had a stone fireplace in each room, a library with Errol Flynn's *My Wicked Wicked Ways* hidden on the top shelf, a living room with flagstone floors and a dining room with a lasso glued around the perimeter of the ceiling. Besides our house, there was a bunkhouse for the cowboys, a foreman's house, a maintenance shed, a commissary and a shipping corral.

We had no phone, no television and often, when the Kohler power generator acted up, no electricity. Our nearest neighbors lived more than 10 miles away, and the nearest town, Seligman, sat about 40 miles to the northwest on Old Route 66. To get there, you had to take a dirt road formerly used by stagecoaches. The stage stop, a cabin made of crudely hewn logs, still stood beneath an oak tree; my father used it to store salt licks for the cattle. To visit a doctor, we didn't take the stagecoach road. Instead, we drove our wood-paneled Ford station wagon some 50 miles on a bumpier dirt road to Prescott.

Our ranch spanned grassland, juniper-sloped hills and pine-forested mountains. It was a wild place. Coyotes caroled on our front lawn, bulls bellowed and pawed dust in the pasture, mountain lions screamed from the rim rocks. The land nurtured generations of fine Hereford cattle and strong quarter horses. It also nurtured me.

The only child on the ranch, I played outside whenever I could. I fed frijole sandwiches to my paint pony, Robin, built forts in oak groves, explored rocky Indian ruins scattered along the creek beds, on top of hills, on the sides of mountains.

There was no school bus for the two-hour ride to town and back, so when I was old enough, I attended boarding schools. I couldn't wait until summer, when I got to hang around the cowboys. Some of these men were in their 60s and 70s and fussed over me like grandmothers. They taught me to see the beauty in all wild creatures, even the ones we had to kill. They protected me—just as my parents tried to protect me from their own stresses—dry years, rising costs, low cattle prices, family fights over managing or selling the ranch.

My father officed in faraway Prescott. He would often go to town to negotiate cattle sales, pay taxes, make phone calls, buy groceries, buy horseshoes, buy pinkeye medicine and get the mail. The mail! I would wait by the back porch eating a home-grown tomato with salt. When my father's car rolled up the driveway, I couldn't wait for it to stop. I banged on the driver's

For years, I rarely spoke of the ranch, but I thought of it every day.

side until my amused father handed over the pillowcase-sized canvas mailbag.

The mail was my link to the outside world. I remember sitting by the fire and reading *The Arizona Republic*, starting with “Dick Tracy” and “Mary Worth” on the comics page. I also read as much of *Punch* magazine and the Sunday *New York Times* as I could understand. I read *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Life* and *Look*. These publications informed me about the world beyond the ranch.

The years passed.

My parents guided me away from the ranch life because they didn't think it had a future. I moved to Phoenix to go college, fell in love, married, had kids and stayed in the city. When I was 25, my father sold the ranch because he was dying. I raised my family in Phoenix. For years, I rarely spoke of the ranch, but I thought of it every day.

I could not forget the rhythmic clanking of the windmill when a breeze turned its blades, the raspy touch of an alligator juniper tree, the panicked whinny of a colt separated from a mare, the roar of the creek after a summer storm, the alfalfa-tinged breath of my pony trotting through the meadow, the pop of pine logs as I huddled near the fireplace reading *Life* magazine.

Of course, I became a journalist.

I wanted to emulate the writers who had informed me, the ranch kid, about the places I knew nothing about. Through the years, I have tried to give voice to those who have no voice—the misunderstood desert, the dying river, and, yes, the rancher struggling to stay on the land.

I will write until I can no longer write, because even though I have not seen it for 31 years, the ranch is the wild, quiet place that will forever guide my heart.

Terry Greene Sterling of Paradise Valley remains a ranch girl at heart, exploring and writing about Arizona's wild places for publications across the nation. She is a three-time Virg Hill journalist of the year, a contributing editor to PHOENIX Magazine and a faculty associate at Arizona State University.

FLAGSTAFF

A Delicate River of Light

BY ROGER NAYLOR

Flagstaff nestles amid pine-crested hills about 7,000 feet above sea level, at the foot of Arizona's tallest mountains, the San Francisco Peaks.

Like all newly arrived freshmen attending Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, I was told the soaring mountains acquired their name because you could see the lights of San Francisco from the summit. I was also warned that on cold nights, packs of wolves loped down the slopes and prowled the streets in search of meat. I later discovered these were outlandish falsehoods, but to a gullible Ohio boy who had seen little beyond flat fields and farmland, anything seemed possible in this dramatic landscape.

The week before Christmas break, I spent long hours holed up in the campus library alternately cramming for finals and flirting with the girl working the returns desk. She possessed piercing hazel eyes and cheekbones so high I imagined teardrops evaporating before hitting the ground.

Just shy of midnight one evening, with synapses misfiring and

exhausted by rejection, I stumbled outside, smack into a breath-stealing, soul-waking winter scene.

Snow had fallen through the afternoon—one of those delicious high-country snows, a languid deluge with flakes the size of kittens. Snow clung now to every surface, bowing pine branches, mantling huddled aspens and smothering roads. A wallowing stillness cradled the campus.

Yet several minutes passed before I even noticed the snow. My eyes were drawn to the most delicate light imaginable. A sea of feisty, flickering flames stretched along the ground in all directions. Paper bags lined the sidewalks. Inside each bag, a fistful of sand secured a lit candle.

Elf lanterns, I thought. Hundreds of shimmering elf lanterns illuminated the edges of the night. What else could they be?

I snow-crunched back to the dorm over sidewalks lined by those magical and mysterious lamps, like wading in a river of light, afraid to exhale lest the moment somehow be snatched away, until halfway there, when I stopped in my tracks. A bone-jiggling wave of joy suddenly welled up inside me, and I did the only thing I could. I danced like the characters in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

With riffs of Vince Guaraldi's piano erupting in my head, I cut loose, all floppy and free and fearless. When teenage hormones are afoot, emotions bubble just below the surface, uncensored and vibrant. Joy means joy. Bottom of the heart, Cheshire-cat grinning, up on happy feet joy, I indulged.

I found out later the lights were luminarias, a holiday custom in the Southwest. Luminarias began as a Spanish tradition of lighting bonfires along the roads to guide people to Midnight Mass on the final night of Las Posadas, which commemorates the Christmas story of Mary and Joseph's search for a room in Bethlehem.

The tradition continued into modern times with the decoration of rooftops, walls and sidewalks as a way of guiding travelers to their destination.

Thirty years have passed and luminarias are more commonplace, but for me they've lost not a molecule of their magic. Every Christmas I take out that weathered college memory, shaking it like a snowglobe until it transports me back. I relish the stillness, the lights and the wonder of it all, and relive that sense of profound calm, followed by a geyser of joy. That is Christmas.

Now if you'll excuse me, I feel a dance coming on.

If Roger Naylor learned only one thing in college, it was that he belonged in Arizona. After traveling the country as a stand-up comedian, he settled into the life of elegant leisure enjoyed by all freelance humor writers. Today he lives, and dances, with his wife in Cottonwood.

Elf lanterns, I thought. Hundreds of shimmering elf lanterns illuminated the edges of the night. What else could they be?

NOGALES WASH

Memory of a Summer Snow

BY ALBERTO RÍOS

The Nogales Wash is a dangerous place now. An innocuous arroyo, it occasionally carries water through a part of the Santa Cruz Valley that the Santa Cruz River itself, farther east, doesn't catch at first. Starting in Mexico, the wash crosses underneath the border, heads north and eventually joins with the Santa Cruz River in southern Arizona.

As a north-flowing wash, it mimics something of the movement and practices of people in the area. People have tried to use its tunnels underneath the two adjacent border towns to cross over to this country.

Moreover, border factories have perhaps been lax in what they've let settle into its water. On a recent visit, I threw a rock into the water causing a drop to splash onto my wife's jeans—the droplet left a white bleached mark.

Signs everywhere caution not to drink the water that in years past we used to swim in. It stank even back then—or rather, it had a distinct scent of its own. I did not find it altogether displeasing, as it was the smell of adventure itself.

I lived about 4 miles outside town, in the rolling hills of gentle horse and cow country, in a fabled pass known for centuries as the Pimería Alta. From the beginning, the wash was the one place I was never supposed to go because it was across the highway. So, of course, it's where I spent most of my time.

The flash floods and sewage effluent filled the wash with the detritus of two cultures, so many small things that made up daily life—the straw hats and cigarette packs and small, flattened balsa wood *cajete* candy boxes from the Sonora, Mexico, side, the beer bottles and car-part packages and throwaway pens and lighters from the Arizona side, and the things that joined them, the things that everybody had, everybody used, the dolls and the shoes and the colored bits of plastic from all manner of containers. All of this mixed into the mud of the banks, decomposing, all of it like a big loam fruitcake.

For me personally, the wash came to hold the chronicles of a boyhood, and was in that way a personal library, if not of ideas then certainly of the things from which ideas later spring.

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON, but not so close to dinner that I had any worries about being whistled home by my father. The afternoon was still mine.

I rode my red Western Flyer bike farther than normal on this summer day, just for the enjoyment of seeing what would come next. When I got to the barbed-wire fence that guarded the

arroyo this far north, I hid my bike then walked until I found a turn, an elbow in the direction of the wash. It was sharp enough that a bank had formed, with enough of a mix of earth and Johnson grass and debris to step firmly on. As I walked to it, I began to take notice of something changing. Old cottonwood trees, in all their gray and brown and arthritic postures, surrounded the wash at this juncture. The water in the wash was moving along. I could hear its ease. The sun was warm.

Then suddenly, the air filled with the white seeds that cottonwoods drop. They were everywhere, and made a filtered light. Perhaps they had been in the air all along and I had simply been at the wrong angle to see them. Now I saw them, and everywhere. These were more than the flotsam and jetsam of airborne dusts and curled fronds. I stood there, *struck*, though I did not know that word. What I thought of at that moment was snow. And I still do—but it was Arizona snow, summer snow, this place's snow. It was falling all over me, all around, onto everything. It had the color and the quiet and the embrace I would indeed later understand snow to have. But this was something of its own.

In that moment I remembered Christmas cards with snowy houses I had seen, and thought of Christmas itself. Snow equaled Christmas—curiously, even here in the Arizona desert, where nothing was further from the truth.

Christmas. I made the connection to snow more than to something religious. The moment was so clearly one of what I would call *well-being*, and I was in its thrall. I had walked without plan, I had found this place by surprise, my shoes fit, my pants fit, nothing hurt, I wasn't breathing hard. The moment held me, enough so that I felt myself not as myself but as instead one more part of this place at this moment, one more cottonwood seed wafting in the afternoon, one more branch, one more glint of light. For a split second, I was part of something greater than I was. I felt smooth and fitted and light and perfect.

I certainly didn't stand there thinking all this. But I did feel it. I felt it so deeply I have never forgotten.

Moments of pure well-being do not present themselves to us often. I can only think of two or three times where I felt this sensibility so wholly. They are a momentary portal, through which for that instant we take a step or two, showing us something perfect. They shore us up for the rest of our lives and are our secret bones.

Christmas itself in this small postwar suburb was a magical event, with paper bag luminarias throughout the neighborhood, and all the decorations one could imagine. But this was public Christmas, everybody's Christmas. My personal version came in summer, and only to me. My thanks for all things springs from something palpable in that moment. Christmas, of a sort, was where I found it, not where I was told to find it, and it has lasted beyond so much else.

Alberto Rios spent his first 25 Christmases on the border, where rich tradition reflected the ready confluence of cultures. The borderland holiday season, from December 12 to January 7, presented itself best, Rios says, on the kitchen table, everything tasted by the tongue and, to this day, told by it.

The moment held me, enough so that I felt myself not as myself but as instead one more part of this place at this moment.



FOUR PEAKS WILDERNESS

Quiet Contrasts

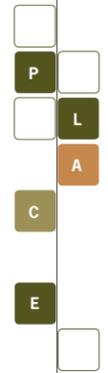
"Four Peaks Wilderness is one of my favorite landscapes. I come here to embrace its solitude and the peaceful feelings it evokes. As I made this photograph, I was inspired by the contrast between the vast, arid Sonoran Desert and the snowy peaks. I have many fond memories of this area and the people who have hiked it with me. Its beauty has drawn me back again and again. Every time I return, it is like seeing an old friend."

'I come here to embrace its solitude and the peaceful feelings it evokes.'

morey milbradt

Morey Milbradt lives in Tempe with his wife, Nancy, and their four pets. He has been photographing the West for 14 years, often working with his panoramic camera to capture the broad expanses of the Western landscape.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



WHITE MOUNTAINS

Field of Dreams

"While photographing in the White Mountains for a book on Arizona, my wife and I came upon this fabulous field of blooming thistles draped in spider webs. The evening light wasn't quite right, so we returned the next morning to find dewdrops still clinging to the delicate webs. We called our friends, the late Bob Clemenz and his wife, Suzy, and insisted they join us. We met early the next day and wandered the fields together, shooting in the morning light, experiencing the spirit of friendship. It's a memory that makes this place so special for us."

larry ulrich

With his wife, Donna, Larry Ulrich has been traveling and photographing for more than 30 years. They live in a redwood forest next to the ocean in Trinidad, California.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



GRAND FALLS

Seasonal Sight

"The first time I glimpsed Grand Falls, I was shocked to find it bone dry. I didn't know then that to see Arizona's largest waterfall in action, you must arrive during the spring runoff in March or April. While I could only imagine the floodwaters of the Little Colorado River cascading into the nearly 200-foot-deep canyon, I clearly saw where dark lava from a nearby volcano had changed the course of the river and created the falls. Few places so plainly reveal their geologic story. When the falls are flowing, it is a miracle in the desert."

ralph lee hopkins

Ralph Lee Hopkins of Santa Fe, New Mexico, published his first images in *Arizona Highways* while still a geology graduate student at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. A description of the creation of Grand Falls is included in his popular guidebook, *Hiking the Southwest's Geology*.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



EGGSHELL ARCH

No Bridge Too Far

“As a lover of natural arches, discovering a new one is great fun. I first saw Eggshell Arch through binoculars. I used Internet technology to plan my approach by road, an advantage not available to earlier generations of photographers. While similar to Canyonlands National Park’s landmark Mesa Arch, the much thicker Eggshell Arch on the Navajo Indian Reservation extends farther out from its canyon rim. My hiking buddy had no qualms about walking across this little-known treasure of the Colorado Plateau. The span is a natural wonder, bridging a sea of canyons and mesas.”

‘The span is a natural wonder, bridging a sea of canyons and mesas.’

tom till

Although he photographs landscapes around the world, Tom Till prefers the light and land of the American Southwest. He chooses to live in Moab, Utah, very close to the natural arches of Arches National Park.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.

CABEZA PRIETA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Dry Tranquility

BY CRAIG CHILDS

There is a desolate place in the heart of the desert covered with rough urchins of stones. A dry wind sails among its cacti and broken ranges of rock. It is perhaps not an attractive place, ugly in some eyes, terrifying in others. There is very little water, and even now people walk into it and often do not return.

But when you hear that the desert is tragic and that its innermost reaches are meant for nothing but anguish, do not believe what you are told. Go and see for yourself. Stand on the parched ground of Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, looking across brittle mountains that rise like icebergs in the distance and you may be struck by an inalienable sense of tranquility offered by no other land. The dome of sky feels like a shelter, and the ground is laid bare with the cleanness of a prayer. This is the deep desert, a place with a sharp sort of peace, a beauty that comes only when we open our eyes to these long and desolate miles.

Once on foot out there, I came upon a block of white granite 600 feet tall. After a day of carrying my camp on my back, I slipped into this first shade. I had pulled off my shirt and was resting against the granite when I noticed a low humming from nearby. I stood and followed it, realizing there were bees in the rock. Bees meant water. I found them in a crack where they busied themselves in and out of a deeper, shadowed cavity. As I came closer, these commuting insects thudded into my bare back and chest.

I had not seen water for seven days other than what I carried with me. In this hole, however, I could see a smooth, shaded mirror vibrating slightly against the wing beats of several hundred bees. The color quieted me, like a purple dusk sky suddenly masking the hot white of noon. I bunched my shoulders and squeezed in as far as I could, reaching until my fingers touched water. Circles spread over the barely lit surface. The circles fell back on themselves.

This was not the kind of water that could make war on the desert. It was a secret, spoken so softly that the surrounding desert could not hear.

This was not the kind of water that could make war on the desert. It was a secret, spoken so softly that the surrounding desert could not hear. If the sun ever found it, it would vanish in days. This was an artifact of the last rain, which had sheeted over the face of this isolated hunk of granite and caught in this dark place where a block of stone had fallen, leaving a hole like a pulled tooth. Bees had come seeking the only water in their range. They dis-tended their abdomens with water to carry back to cool and moisten their hive.

In this guarded hole were about 20 gallons of rainwater. As I looked in, bees started bottlenecking against my body, troubled by my movements. Nervous, I pulled my head backward into the light.

This particular island of granite was so heavy and white with quartz that it was hard to look at in the middle of the day. After I found it, though, it became a landmark for me, a place I could rely upon for water when traveling through here. I came back later, on the morning of a crescent moon and again in the last light of evening, climbing and drinking just enough fresh water begged from these bees to keep walking, refreshed.

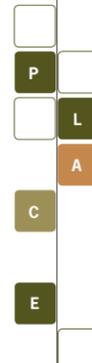
This is startling country, full of secrets, yet utterly exposed. Naked ridges stand high over broken-down cliffs. I remember once setting a camp along one of these ragged mountains around Cabeza Prieta, getting up on a tightrope ridge and dropping my gear. It was sunset and the molten light broke through gaps and notches, sending shadows for miles. I could see far south, into Mexico, the crescent shapes of great dunes, while all around me were seas of desert broken by arid mountain ranges. I arranged my belongings carefully, making sure nothing came too near the edge to my left or right where a cup or a pen would fall a thousand feet from my reach, twanging against rocks, sailing into the air and vanishing into the desert below. I stayed tight, my knees drawn up to my chest. There was just enough room to lay down a sleeping pad and my bag.

That evening I watched the sun clip out behind the horizon, and after the royal colors of twilight passed, stars swamped the sky. There was no moon, and so the land beneath me was black. I felt as if this mountain were holding me up in a realm of oblivion, lifting me like a newborn into this great and perilous world. Above me were stars. Below was a darkness deeper than space.

Maybe this sense of desert is truly terrifying, where you find yourself pitched into the void. But at that instant also comes a calm like no other. Infinity saturates the dry air. It feels like flying, like floating out of this body to touch a place some call heaven and some call hell. You realize here that it exists beyond heaven and hell, a place so perfect and endless that such labels do it no justice.

It is desert, a truce made between day and night, between dry and wet. It is a peace that comes from before time and will last far beyond our final memories.

Craig Childs, now of Colorado, is an Arizona native and author of 11 books of natural history and travel. He is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times and a commentator on National Public Radio’s “Morning Edition.”



The Great Snowstorm of 1967

BY BETTY REID

I weep when I dream about Sagebrush, a place known to my Navajo family as Tsaa Tah.

While the country fought about civil rights and the Vietnam War, my family, the Manygoat and Bitter Water clans, lived in hogans made of stone, canvas tents and a house built by my father at Sagebrush. Our winter sheep camp in the arroyo cradled three flocks of sheep next to a corral made of limestone. Sage grew tall in the deep ravines. Shorter sage covered the mesas and rock outcroppings. Trees were nonexistent, except for a lone piñon or juniper every few miles.

My family held tight to their earth-based faith and strived to live in harmony with the land. But sometimes we had to fight the elements to keep our animals and ourselves alive.

In the winter of 1967, a giant snowstorm hit the Navajo Nation and buried Sagebrush and my family. Then-Navajo leader Raymond Nakai called it the “worst weather disaster in modern Navajo history.” While my relatives were marooned at Sagebrush, I was a 9-year-old second grader stuck at Tuba City Boarding School, a military-style residential hall and elementary school.

I had barely learned to recognize shapes—what the teachers called numbers—and utter a few words in English. I lived in TC-7, a tan building with an orange belly.

When the winter holidays arrived, the entire campus shut down and the Navajo children went home for the break. So on the Friday before the Christmas holiday, I joined friends near the picture window of the TC-7 living room, anxious to spot our parents walking into our dorm.

I longed for home. The faint scent of sage, greasy mohair, wet earth and human sweat screamed “home” to me. I especially missed my father’s dusty black felt cowboy hat with the silver band and his slight smile when he teased me about my mud-covered face after I played hard in the wash.

“*Asdzá ah Binií’ Likizh,*” he would say affectionately, meaning “The Woman with Grime Splattered on Her Face.”

I also missed the feel of my mother’s layered velvet shirt pinned together right below her chin with a large safety pin and the three bobby pins she placed at the nap opening of her shirt. And when I needed my nose cleaned, my mother would use the tip of her long calico skirt and called me “*Yuhzhee,*” which meant “A Twig of a Girl” or “Shorty” in Navajo.

But going home meant breaking ties with Tuba City Boarding School and its running water, electricity, warm bunk beds, clean sheets, fleece pajamas and three square meals. It meant leaving ABCs and 1, 2, 3 lessons, and the church lessons—a confusing instruction in religion for me because my own Navajo faith believes in the powers of Mother Earth, Father Sky.

Sagebrush beckoned my little heart, as the parents of my friends trudged into the dorm and signed them out. My little

eyes strained to imagine my parents walking up the concrete basketball court.

Snow began to fall. The heavens seemed to explode in giant flakes that swirled and danced and blinded me by the window. Mrs. Green, our residential aide, ordered us to “get into the wings,” sit down in rows, knees flush with the straight lines of the square linoleum floors and arms folded across the chest. She ordered us to sing jolly Christmas songs.

We bellowed holiday carols without understanding their significance until our throats hurt. When Mrs. Green took a break, we changed the English lyrics to “Up on the Housetop” to words in Navajo about an amusing imaginary elderly white-haired grandfather falling head-first into a stove pipe, for our hogans and canvas tents lacked chimneys. When Mrs. Green reappeared, we quickly switched back to English.

No one came to pick me up that Friday or the next day or

My relatives came out of their homes and watched. For too long, they had watched snow fall out of the sky. This time it was hay.

the next as the snowdrifts collected below the large picture window.

I felt abandoned. I conjured explanations. Maybe my father forgot me. Maybe he made a detour to a Yeibichei dance, the nine-day Nightway healing ceremony common in winter. He was a dancer. Maybe no one reminded my aunt or my dad to fill up the gas tank at Gap Trading Post.

My tears fell as I watched snow blanket the playground. No sign of my father.

The days seemed like months. One morning, I quit my vigil at the window and started an assigned chore of buffing the floor with the monster of a pol-

isher with its long cord and puffed-up belly bag.

Suddenly, I saw movement out of the corner of my eye. Was that a glimpse of my father’s hat? I flung the buffer aside as the hat moved and the silver band emerged. It was Dad!

An electric shot of happiness raced through me. I ran and collected my jacket and stood by my father, who I thought was tall and handsome. I noticed he wore the black rubber garden boots lined with plastic bags that had held the powdered milk given to my family by the U.S. government. He looked exhausted.

I was going home to Sagebrush. When I reached my aunt’s black GMC truck, the cab was full. My cousins were wrapped in layers of quilts and tucked into the truck bed like a can of packed sardines.

We left the paved road 2 miles past The Gap Trading Post. The truck crawled up a ridge and traveled west in the vicinity of

the confluence of the meandering Little Colorado River and the roaring Colorado River. We made our way through the snow to my late maternal Grandmother Jane’s hogan, which my family called the “Flying Hogan.”

My father checked the chains on the tires for the descent into a deep ravine that entered Sagebrush from the east side. That dirt road was clogged with snowdrifts. Everything was covered in a white blanket, and an eerie silence hung in the air, broken only by the sounds of the truck’s engine.

It took all day to reach Sagebrush camp. The next day I learned why my family was late picking me up at the boarding school. They were buried in snow.

Snow powdered every inch of Sagebrush. A thick fog cloaked the camp, and the sheep had not grazed in days.

My parents, my brother Eisenhower and my two cousins had earlier waded 2 miles through hip-deep snow over and down hills to find a clearing to send a distress signal. Through the portable radio, Navajo Chairman Nakai said he would send a bulldozer if the isolated sheepherders would walk to the nearest land clearing or main road, build a fire and use a mirror to signal the moving machine.

But the bulldozer never came and the group returned to Sagebrush. Then a transport plane appeared, looped around the camp, found a clearing and dropped bales of hay. My relatives came out of their homes and watched. For too long, they had watched snow fall out of the sky. This time it was hay.

My Aunt Jeanette and late Grandmother Edith and my father watched as the dry, square alfalfa exploded after hitting the snow. My father, intending to gather the hay in a blanket and deliver it to the flock, began to trek to the clearing.

Suddenly, another aircraft that made loud clapping sounds appeared out of the western arroyo. It startled my father. The downdraft of the helicopter spun him, and the blanket blew away.

Grandmother Edith hollered at my father, “*Tsi’ biyaa’ anilyed,*” or “Run under the rock ledge,” as the helicopter circled above the camp. The Sagebrush arroyo had caves and rocks that looked like awnings. Jeanette, now in her 80s, laughed about that memory.

The helicopter dropped food rations and canned food in bur-lap sacks.

Armed with shovels, my father, brothers and cousins scooped a well-defined path up a hill south of our camp and then onto Sagebrush. Sheep and goats were unleashed on the trail days later.

My cousin Rose, then 19, today remembers the cold that followed the storm. It was so cold that when the flock moved away from their resting spot, they left behind tufts of wool and mohair frozen to the earth.

The elders later marked December 1967 as the winter when hay was delivered from the sky. It’s a time and place I will not forget because the arroyo covered by Sagebrush offered a haven for my extended Navajo family, and it remains a place I visit in my dreams.

Betty Reid has been a journalist for many years and writes for The Arizona Republic. She grew up on the western edge of the Navajo Nation, a stone’s throw from the Colorado River, and now lives in Phoenix.

And the Winner Is . . .

BY JERRY E. AIRTH

Under a cold desert moon, on Christmas Eve, I took a walk around my desert subdivision in Picture Rocks, 2 miles from Saguaro National Park, 15 minutes’ drive from Tucson’s western boundary.

It was approaching midnight. All the presents had been opened. Most of my neighbors’ houses were dark, except those in the decoration contest.

On every side, plaster coyotes arched necks to bay the moon, hanging forever in the night sky; real coyotes yipped—somewhere west—out in the night, chasing who knew what. Not cottontails or jackrabbits; they were in their burrows, I was sure.

Plastic deer muzzles bobbed—driven by invisible motors, powered by secret batteries—on desert acre lots of premium manufactured homes.

On the industry-sculpted eaves, ceramic doves hung suspended by steel wires, amid fragmented aluminum icicles.

And, over all, lights of every size, every description, every color—red pinpoints to blue spotlights—were strung on every thorn, every prickly pear cacti spine. No desert form left out.

I hunched down in my coat, wondering what the real coyotes, deer and doves thought of this maelstrom of man-driven competition.

A shadow ghosted over me—a barn owl, judging by the wingspread—hunting a last partygoer mouse.

In the welter of lights and images beating at me, I felt everything blurring into one, creating patterns of light—meaningless—splashing behind my eyes.

It was cold. Late. I should be getting home.

Yet I kept walking, and at the end of one loop of decorated houses I saw rising from the moon haze a three-story cathedral of light—a modern steel-beamed farmhouse Notre Dame with strings of lights strung to outline every door, window and peak of roof. This was it. The sure-fire winner!

I took one more long admiring look at the cathedral of light and started back home.

I reached the end of my street. The moon still hung, a cold eye, above my hat and all the hard, sparkling roofs.

Then I saw something that halted me in my boots.

On an unsold, far-corner lot, a giant saguaro cactus loomed over the desert floor, lifting huge spined arms, casting a benediction of beauty and serenity on all, making the desert animals—coyotes, rabbits, even the ghosting owl, and me—the true winners on this desert Christmas Eve.

Jerry E. Airth still lives in Picture Rocks, and continues to take moonlight walks through his desert neighborhood, even on Christmas Eve, seeking inspiration for poems, stories and essays.

COLORADO PLATEAU

Lessons From Camp

BY CHARLES BOWDEN

Here's what I've learned: Stay off the summits, steer clear of the water holes, avoid the big walled canyons with those Hollywood colors. Keep going. The place is always the same—the wind comes up from the beginning of time, the night falls like a hammer and when I look down there is more dirt than green, more love than dust. Someone will want to make a fire—stop them if you can. The flame beats back the night and robs the sky of stars. Of course, there is no tent. You eat, sprawl out on a bedroll and talk flows, at first fast, that city beat to the conversation. You half-listen, but really all that matters is the night breeze coasting through the creosote, the soft swishing coming off an ironwood that first poked up from the Earth about the time Columbus set sail in the deep waters that became us.

But slowly the talk falters, not so much ceasing as ebbing. Then the real words appear because the silence makes it safe for meaning. I've found this place on the Colorado Plateau, under the brow of desert mountains, on the flats where the heat soaks the soil and fries the world deep into the night. By dry rivers, in the lightning flashes and blows of summer monsoons. But it is always the same place, that patch of earth where resistance and acceptance mix and blend into some state where words fail and yet the heart begins to speak and we hear a tongue we had all but forgotten.

The old man insisted on a fire, had to have his steak, but now the flame has died down and there is nothing but a few embers among the ash on the desert floor. He's been coming here for decades, knows every ancient trail and he's mapped hundreds of miles of them, footpaths lost to all but his keen ancient eyes. He's mired in the archaeology of early man, those ancestors we hear as whispers when we pick up an old scraper or hammer on the rock litter of the sites. For years he had a day job, then on the weekends hit the desert and did his collecting on his own. By the time he finished he fit the ground better than anyone had in maybe a century.

We'd camp, do nothing and then when the heat left the air and dusk arrived, sip a little mescal and wait for the ghosts to come. Sometimes the ghosts were thousands of years old as he conjured up stone-age folk who'd shared the same ground and sometimes the same campsite. He could imagine their hungers and late at night—not always but sometimes—he could whisper their very dreams. Of course, all of this was privileged, nothing like what he put in his scientific papers. And all of these whispers were gospel truth and I felt the shrouds of time fall down and the cool stare of the past in my eye.

All around was rock, often basalt. Dunes slowly loped across

the land in places and wildlife was scarce as was water. In those nights, the stars hung low, barely clearing a man's head. I'd look up and catch a bat hunting maybe 8 feet off the ground and worry that it might bang into a constellation. This is the kind of country some call godforsaken and some of us find hard even to speak of without feeling we are violating some trust. Much of western Arizona falls into this realm of being godless to some and all but sacred to others. Low mountains, wide sprawling valleys, rivers empty of water, the sky too big for a soul to bear.

He's standing now, the air still warm, the moon not yet up, stars singing overhead. His face is lost in the blackness, that fine carved face with skin like leather, full thatch of gray hair as he bumps up against 80, the body lean, all these features bearing the sign of the desert days and nights that fashioned them.

He's inventoried some of his losses, the beloved wife gone too soon, friends missed around the campfire, kids grown and out in the world. He's good with these things, after all he studies the dreams and loves of the long dead and digs up their bones and their tools and tries to slip inside their minds. And he knows at his age he cannot go on forever and this he accepts without complaint. But suddenly, out of nowhere, he lurches into this other thing. He's still standing, head slightly cocked back

as his old eyes take in the stars and he says, "There's got to be more than this, something else, something the old boys who left their stone-age litter around here knew, something. Religion, immortality, not the right words for what I feel. Just something. I can feel it out here. I know it exists whatever it is."

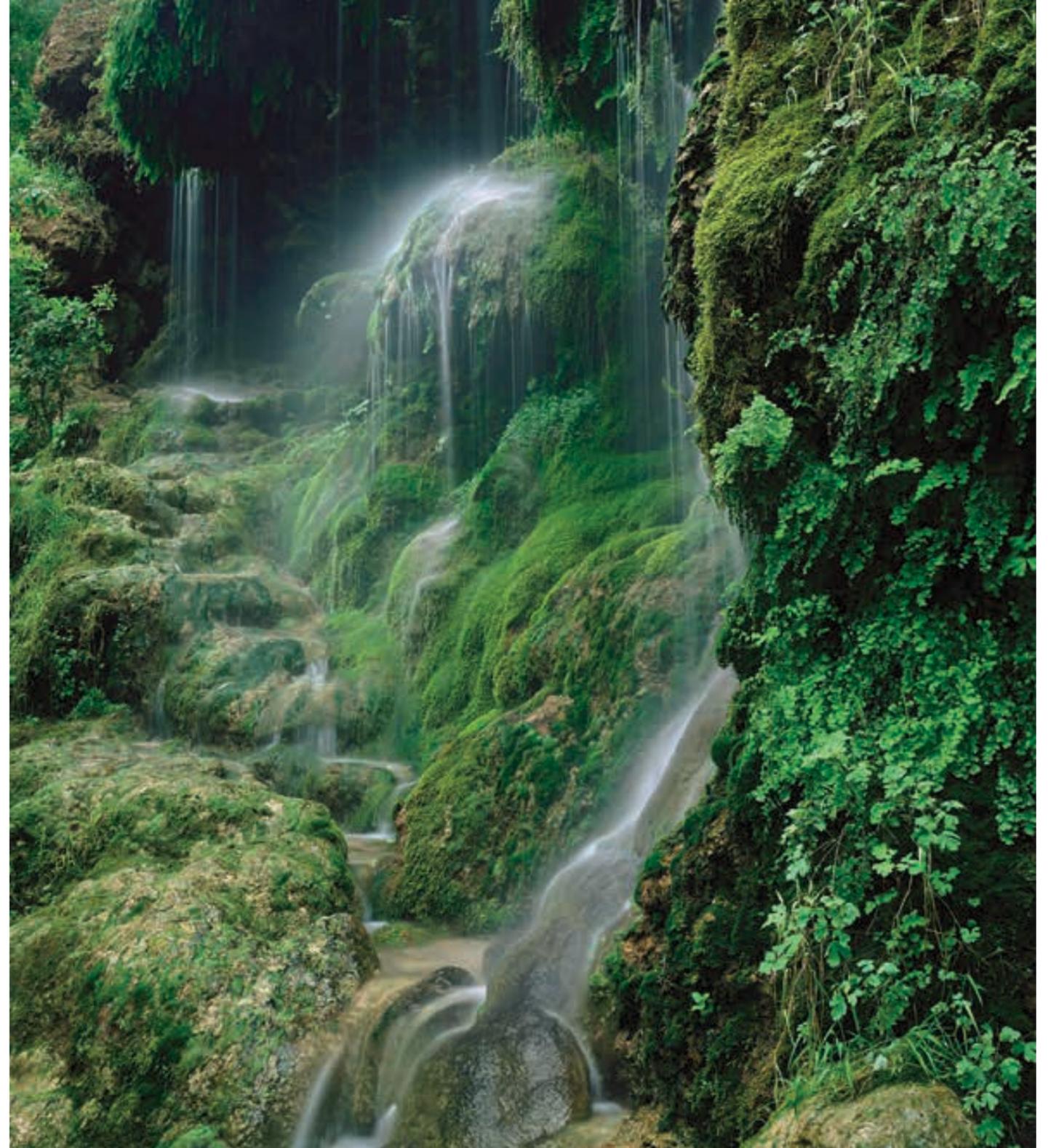
I know it also. We were friends and like all friends we did not question each other on matters of faith. But I knew where he was headed that night even though I can't put a word on the matter myself. Just a place. That's why I go to that place, though that place can shift, be in different places at different times, still it is out there. It is hardly scenic, seldom noted, almost always beyond the normal campground and if I took a photograph of that spot in

the morning, no one would pay much attention to the image I brought back. The day has been sweat, the dinner good, the night a blessing and then the stars and the feeling of being alone vanish and the dreams seem to walk the Earth close by the cooling ash of that fire.

Always the coyotes cry out, and this feels good and right. Part of the place, part of what I can't put a name to, and neither could my late friend. But it's there, and can be known and felt. Over morning coffee, none of this is ever mentioned. That's the way of the place when you finally get to it.

Charles Bowden walks the line, whether it runs between a man and a beast, a city and a desert, the quick and the dead. Or the Grand Canyon that bedevils the human heart. His most recent book is A Shadow in the City: Confessions of an Undercover Drug Warrior. He hunkers in Tucson with a malevolent tortoise, a witch and a poodle. He has lived in the Sonoran Desert since age 12, and, of course, has never recovered.

I felt the shrouds of time fall down and the cool stare of the past in my eye.



PINE CREEK FALLS

Enviably Green

jerry sieve

Jerry Sieve of Carefree feels honored to have spent the past 28 years exploring Arizona and discovering special landscapes. Photography has helped make it possible.

"Is this scene of greener-than-green mosses and lush ferns clinging to moist rock really Arizona? Arizona is known for desert. It can't be green like this, can it? But, yes, it is Arizona. This incongruously verdant spot offers a special moment in a special place. Pine Creek Falls ranks among the myriad intimate landscapes that make exploring Arizona such a joy."

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



SAN FRANCISCO PEAKS

The Snow King

"When I shouldered my camera pack in the dark that frigid morning, the temperature hovered near 10 below. Laboring up a steep hill through fresh snow, I paused to catch my breath and look back at my tracks—postholes in the drifts. Setting up to shoot, my fingers went numb fumbling with my tripod and camera. I intently watched the sunlight work its way down from the top of the San Francisco Peaks and tinge the tips of snow-covered pines. Momentarily forgetting the cold, I exposed several sheets of film before allowing myself to study the spectacle in front of me. Snow-laden tree limbs bowed to the mountain like subjects to their king. As I hoisted my pack to leave, I felt the subtle warmth from the rising sun and mulled the privilege of walking this Earth—even in 2 feet of snow."

robert g. mcdonald

A self-described "youthful geezer," Robert G. McDonald, 68, of Flagstaff, thinks he can shoot winter shots for a few more years by donning arctic clothing with hand warmers in the pockets. He dreams of hibernating in a warmer climate in future winters.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



WEST CLEAR CREEK

Clearly Paradise

"We all hold an image of paradise in our imaginations, of a place so full of grace we doubt it can ever exist except in our dreams. For me, West Clear Creek is the realization of that dream—the embodiment of the Lost Eden. Like any mystic land, it is hidden and hard to reach. For 40 miles it follows a journey of spring-born water, shut in by soaring, golden walls. Surprises await me at every turn. A travertine-mound spring that forms hanging gardens, lush canopies of alder and willow and waterfalls galore, from dancing plunges to ozone-producing torrents."

nick berezenko

Nick Berezenko considers himself blessed to live in Pine, only 15 miles from West Clear Creek, which he calls a pure and elemental world of its own.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



SUNSET CRATER

Young Love

"I love Sunset Crater because it's so young. The volcanic eruptions that made the crater were among the last verses in the incomprehensibly long and eventful saga of Arizona's creation. Less than a thousand years old, this landscape is a work in progress. Scattered shrubs and trees mark the nearly empty canvas of raw lava and reddish cinder dunes as Nature continues filling in the blanks. It's our privilege to watch the composition take shape."

'Less than a thousand years old, this landscape is a work in progress.'

david wentworth lazaroff

David Wentworth Lazaroff is a naturalist, writer and photographer living in Tucson. He has been visiting Sunset Crater for more than a quarter-century.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.

WHITE MOUNTAINS

A Blue Christmas on the Mountain

BY JO BAEZA

From alpine forests of spruce, fir and aspen to stately stands of ponderosa pine, the White Mountains are a land of eternal Christmas.

The mountains are sacred to the N'dee, the Apache people. They are sacred to all of us who live here. We call our home "the Mountain." It gives us beauty, peace and wisdom for the asking.

In Arizona's high country, all seasons have a splendor of their own, but the Mountain shines brightest at Christmastime. Fifty-foot ponderosas outside businesses are draped with lights. Families go to the forest to cut trees for their homes. People from Mexico open up their condos for a week of skiing and shopping. Communities produce electric-light parades, Christmas pageants, home tours, crowded stores and Santa Claus in a helicopter. A jet flying over sees little towns blinking like stars in the darkness. Nowhere is the Christmas Spirit more joyfully observed than here.

But for many years in the midst of all this goodwill, the Spirit of Christmas was lost on me. I dreaded Christmas. I just wanted it to be over. I wanted to sleep through it. Christmas only made me think of all the people I loved who were gone.

When my kids were growing up, I did my best to get into the spirit of things. When they were grown and I was alone, I stopped pretending. Even though the old boxes came down from the attic and I tacked up pine boughs and strung lights across my porch, my heart wasn't in it. To make matters worse, friends and relatives kept inviting me over for Christmas dinner so I wouldn't be alone. But I wanted to be alone, to spend the day quietly waiting for it to pass. My dogs and cat didn't care if I wasn't cheerful as long as they had toys in their stockings.

About 10 years ago, God gave me an attitude adjustment for Christmas.

No matter how blue I felt, I always went to church on Christmas Eve. Our little church was packed shoulder-to-shoulder for Midnight Mass. I was singing in the choir. Candles glowed, incense wafted, poinsettias circled the altar. A big Douglas fir glittered with lights beside a creche of the Nativity. The Light of the World slept in his mother's arms.

After Mass my daughter's in-laws invited me over for tamales and posole, the traditional Christmas Eve feast in the Spanish Southwest. They had a big, happy, rowdy extended family and lots of friends. I usually joined them, but that night I was too depressed. I told my daughter I wanted to go home and go to bed.

It was about 1:30 A.M. when I left the church. A calm snow was falling. The bars were closed, and most of the Christmas lights were out around town. My neighborhood was dark except for my porchlight. When I was almost to my driveway, I noticed a lump covered with snow in the middle of the road. I thought it

had dropped off somebody's truck, so I got out to move it. I brushed off some snow and saw long black hair. I stopped breathing. The lump groaned. It was a young woman all curled up. I tried to lift her up.

"Leave me alone. I want to die," she slurred.

I drew a deep breath and grabbed her arms again. "You picked a bad place," I said. "The highway is back there."

She opened her eyes. She wasn't very big, so I grabbed her around the middle and manhandled her into my warm pickup. "I'll take you home," I said. "Where do you live?"

"Whiteriver," she said. She fumbled in her jacket, brought out a pack of cigarettes and lit one, then dropped it on the floor.

I picked it up. "You're gonna burn up my truck," I said.

I turned around and headed down the road toward Whiteriver. It was snowing hard. About 2 miles past Hon-Dah Junction, she started laughing. "I don't want to go to Whiteriver," she said.

I pulled over. "Why did you tell me you live there?" I asked. "It's just part of the little game I'm playing," she said, and laughed again.

"Okay. No more games. Where do you want to go? I'm tired."

She stared straight ahead for a while, then said, "Do you know Kaia?"

"I know her. Do you want to go there?"

"Sure. Take me to Kaia's," she said.

The lump groaned. It was a young woman all curled up. I tried to lift her up. 'Leave me alone. I want to die.'

We crept along on the snowy road all the way to McNary. She'd sobered up enough to give me directions. I drove up to the house and honked. The porchlight went on and a woman came out.

"She was passed out on the road in front of my house," I said. "I almost ran over her. Can she stay here?"

"Yes. Thank you. I'll take care of her," Kaia said.

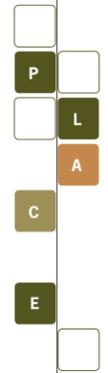
We got her out of the truck and into the house. When I got home, it was 3:30 A.M. and my fire was nearly out. I built up the fire and sat in the recliner a while, petting my cat. A smile came over my face.

The sun on fresh snow was dazzling the next day. I drove to McNary to see how the lump was doing. Kaia came out and thanked

me again. She said, "I've known this girl a long time, and I've never known her to drink. She broke up with her boyfriend."

I never knew the name of the woman who cured my Christmas blues.

Jo Baeza has lived in Arizona's White Mountains for 40 years as a teacher, editor, freelance writer, and reporter and columnist for the White Mountain Independent. She lives in a woodsy old house with two dogs and a 17-year-old acrobatic cat.



SCOTTSDALE

An Airplane in the Hay

BY RON CARLSON

If you look carefully, you can see the site just north of Scottsdale Community College, near the baseball diamond and adjacent to the great green alfalfa fields on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. Thousands of cars a day fly past the area on State Route 101 without noticing the six sun shelters and the bladed gravel that mark the Scottsdale model-airplane airport. It is a strange little emplacement populated by ardent model-airplane folks every weekend, when their colorful aircraft fill the blue sky.

One of the good moments of fatherhood for me was when I bought my son Colin a remote-control airplane six years ago, and we spent two years assembling the thing, getting help when we could from guys at the airport. It is a red and blue and white plane with a 4-foot wingspan and a little gas engine that whines until your hair stands up. We finished construction when Colin was in high school, after dozens of Sundays in our garage, gluing this, adjusting that. He's a scrupulous kid, and we got it all just right. We joined the Scottsdale model-airplane club, and the day that plane took flight was quite a day for us.

Two years ago, Colin went to college. He's in Boulder, Colorado, and loves it there. This year, he came home for a week, and we stole the last afternoon of his visit to dust off the plane and have an adventure.

To reach the airport of the Scottsdale Model Flyers, you drive through the far parking lot and slip onto a gravel road that runs along the cotton field there and through the community garden plots, and then you come to the gate for the airport and the combination lock on the gate. Remembering the combination was a clear pleasure.

We had the airport to ourselves. Flying the airplane, we've learned, is an enterprise full of checkpoints. We had the rubber bands to attach the wing. We had the glowplug and the plane and the controller charged. We had our tools and tape. We had the battery and the starter. The runway is bordered by an orange safety fence. They've erected six large frames with canvas roofs for shade, and the preflight area is covered with yards and yards

I . . . looked back and saw the beautiful sight of my son on the silver ladder in the green alfafa. His shadow ran a quarter-mile.

of old carpet to keep the dust down. We had a cooler with bottles of water, and we had our baseball caps.

The plane started on the first crank, and Colin ran the rpms up and then down. What you try to do is listen to the high whine, and you try to adjust the fuel feed so that it doesn't run too lean or too rich. Colin has a good ear for this, and he is fussy about getting it right. I was thrilled that the thing was roaring, and I watched his adjustments with interest.

Then the plane died and would not start. We removed the glowplug (the tiny sparkplug the size of a pencil eraser), and saw that it was burned out. In the toolbucket, we have a plastic jar full of all sort of tiny parts, and Colin said to me, "Look at this." He held it up and I saw that the superglue bottle had leaked. All the parts in the jar were glued into a strange and useless block. "It's a paperweight now," he said. But, a few pieces were loose, and one of those parts was our extra glowplug. It was wonderful to be so lucky. While we worked, we could hear the aluminum bats pinging west of us on the baseball field where they were practicing. Colin screwed the new plug into the top of the engine, and we were again good to go.

We attached the wing, and Colin got the engine rpms where he wanted them. Then we had that sweet moment when the plane crept forward in the dirt, and Colin turned it with the controller and it began to roll down the runway and suddenly, sweetly into the air.

It was beautiful there in the back edge of the campus, nothing in the world but the alfalfa fields and the blue sky and our red and blue and white airplane. Colin said, "I remember why I like this so much." Like all guys his age, he has amazing eye-hand coordination (video games), and he flew the plane low and high, in loops and turns, upside down and straight up. At one point he handed the controller to me, and I turned the plane once to the right and handed the damn thing back to him in, I guess, 10 seconds.

He landed the plane perfectly, taxied over, and we refueled it. Ten minutes later, way out over the farm fields, the plane banked and we heard the engine quit. It wasn't particularly worrisome because Colin can glide it very well, and the plane drifted slowly toward us in a soft and steady decline. A few seconds later, it disappeared in the alfalfa field across from the airstrip.

Colin said, "I'll get it," and he took off running, long strides. He's 6-foot-2. I made a mistake by going to the car to get some water, and I lost the sight line. When I joined him in the alfalfa field, we could not find the plane. The field was 10 or 12 acres, and the deep green alfalfa plants were all over knee-high. We tried to walk carefully through the crop.

I retrieved a stool from the airfield and we stood on that. Nothing. We searched for two hours in the heat of the day.

Dispirited and cooked, we packed up and drove home. There we lay on the cool floor and drank water. "What do you want to do?" I asked him. We had lost the plane and were trying to be logical.

"Let's go back before dark and look again."

I called my friend Scott. He had a 10-foot ladder that I wanted to take with us. Back in the green hayfield, Colin and I carried the ladder into the last daylight. I held it, and he climbed way up there and scanned the area. "I should be able to see it," he said. We set it up four more times around the field. I went across

to the road and looked back and saw the beautiful sight of my son on the silver ladder in the green alfalfa. His shadow ran a quarter-mile.

The next morning, Colin flew back to college. My only plan was to call the tribal offices and find out whose field that was and go see the man so he didn't ruin any farm equipment while accidentally harvesting aircraft. But at home I got a phone message: "Yeah, say, Ron Carlson, this is Dave, and we've got your plane. Harry's got your plane, and it's a funny story how we found it. It was the Channel 3 helicopter that spotted it."

I didn't know who Dave or Harry were, except probably pilots at the Scottsdale model-airplane field, the kind of helpful guys you meet in the model-airplane world.

Colin arrived safely back in Boulder and was glad to hear about the airplane. Ten days later, as I drove by on the freeway, I saw the field had been cut and the green bales lay in a rich array. It was strangely easy to imagine one with red and white wings coming out of each side.

Ron Carlson of Scottsdale loves to seek adventures all over Arizona, but he finds it especially sustaining to visit unusual places in and around Phoenix—like the model-airplane field. His most recent book is his story collection, A Kind of Flying. He teaches writing at Arizona State University.

GILA RIVER

Peace in a Shady Grove

BY GREGORY MCNAMEE

Not far from the spot where it leaves San Carlos Reservoir at the Coolidge Dam, the Gila River enters a steep, volcanic canyon, its bottom strewn with fallen boulders and flanked by thickets of salt cedar. The canyon runs for just a few miles, descending through the Granite Mountains at a steep grade. If it is a year of sufficient rainfall, the river runs swiftly through it, reveling in the plunge, before finally making a big bend just outside the little mining town of Winkelman.

There, below a low granite cliff, the river forms a sandy beach lined by tall trees whose branches stretch across the water, sheltering the stream from the hard sun. The natural arcade makes a little miniature environment all its own, cooler in summer than the surrounding desert by a dozen degrees or more, frost-free in winter, pleasant almost anytime.

For years, I have been escaping there, taking soda breaks on the way from Tucson to the Mogollon Rim, watching birds, working over notes, taking advantage of the river's generosity to dangle my feet in the cool water, read a book, eat an apple and hide out, far from ringing telephones and insistent computers. Close as it is to what we like to call civilization, the bend of the river seldom sees visitors; at least I've never felt crowded there, even on the hottest days.

Quiet and solitude are commodities not so easy to come by these days, and for that reason alone the place stands tall on the

checklist of magical spots that I keep in my mental atlas-cum-medicine bundle against the day when escape seems advisable. Call it a holdover from an early life spent along great rivers such as the Rhine, Potomac and Missouri, but rivers rank very high on that list—especially those that, strange though it may be for an Arizonan to imagine, flow all the year-round.

It wasn't always so quiet there in that dense thicket of cottonwood, velvet ash and willow trees, dark enough that ferns and grasses can grow, cool enough to make even the fieriest summer day survivable. A dozen years ago, a small frame house stood perhaps 15 yards from the stream, surrounded by mesquite trees in whose branches hung a couple of dozen red-and-yellow hummingbird feeders. The nectar they held drew scores of hummingbirds from the surrounding desert, so many of them that, approaching the house, you might think you were coming up on a great swarm of noisy bees. It was just the busy whirr of dozens of wings coming and going in that avian version of Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, a crowded airway that could be heard from a quarter-mile distant.

The place met all my standards of paradise, with its cool water, its grasses, flowers and trees, its abundant wildlife. I suspect it met the hummingbirds' idea of paradise, too, and that of the odd fish that floated by, and the odd eagle that lofted above and the odd mule deer that came to drink at riverside.

But times change, and so do places. For a few weeks in the winter of 1993, and again the following year, and again a few years after that, the Gila River, fueled by a strong El Niño weather pattern born in the western Pacific Ocean, came roaring down the steep-walled, steep-pitched canyon, pulling out trees, tearing the thin beach away, sending the house and its hummingbird feeders far downstream—and making the place altogether quieter.

Not long ago, though, on a warm weekend morning, I wandered up to the spot, parked myself under one of the trees that withstood the flood, and watched the river roll by. The bend remained quiet, and hummingbirds came not in squadrons as before but in twos and threes. They know a good thing. As long as the birds return, as long as

As long as the birds return, as long as the water flows . . . this bend in the river will remain a treasure, part of . . . our geography of hope.

water flows, fast or slow, this bend in the river will remain a treasure, part of what has been called our geography of hope—and just the place to find a moment or two of peace on Earth.

Gregory McNamee is the author of Gila: The Life and Death of an American River, and other books. A resident of Tucson since 1975, he grew up in greener and wetter climes and cherishes water when he can find it, collecting rivers and oases on his desert rambles and getting noticeably grumpy when the summer monsoon is late in arriving. He is now at work on a book about Arizona's San Pedro River.

WHITE MOUNTAIN APACHE RESERVATION

Down to the Cornfield

BY KATHY LACAPA

He turned west off U.S. Route 60 and wound his way down through the little community of Carrizo. Slowly, he drove past sleeping dogs, a white church and an old woman wearing a traditional camp dress. The pavement ended abruptly and with it, I later realized, my old life.

The Chevy bounced along the dusty road, until I quietly asked, “Where are we going?” I tried to make my voice demure in spite of the jolt that sent my head cracking into the passenger side window.

“Down to the cornfield,” he said with a sly smile. Little did I know it was a phrase I would hear for the next 29 years. It was our second date, and I was attempting to show him I could be rugged and tough, yet feminine and delicate—a difficult combination.

He eased the truck off the canyon road and headed straight for Carrizo Creek. Back then, the creek ran pure and deep. The Rodeo-Chediski Fire had not yet caused the devastation that would one day clog it with debris. He splashed the truck into the water yelling “Woohoo,” kicking his feet and throwing his “free arm” like a true Carrizo cowboy.

The truck hit a few large rocks, and I was certain my kidney had come loose. He slammed on the brakes and stopped in the middle of the running creek.

“Get out!” I looked at him with indignant eyes and mouth agape. “Put your feet in the water. Cool off.”

Wanting to impress, I jumped into the water and let it run around my calves. It was the purest sensation I had ever experienced: a cool, rushing creek on a hot, dusty day. He dipped his bandanna in the water and tied it around his head.

“Here!” He held out his hand and yanked me back into the cab. “Hold on!” he shouted as he shot the truck forward at an incredible speed. Up an embankment . . . around a curve . . . out on top.

In one swift motion, he cut the engine, swung his door wide and jumped out. Making a sweeping gesture with his arm he proclaimed, “This is my ranch. My grandfather gave it to me.”

I stood next to him beneath two massive cottonwood trees looking at the fenced cornfield. The swaying trees, cicadas clicking overhead and a welcoming shade stirred something in me. I was instantly and forever in love with this man and his Carrizo Canyon cornfield.

We walked the perimeter of the field while he talked about the creek and the land. He described the small ruin site at the western end of the field and warned me not to pick up anything because of the Apache belief that people must not touch “dead things.” He pointed to markings on the ground and declared that a bear and a coyote had come through recently.

Seeing the nervousness on my face, he explained, “Don’t be afraid of the black bears that roam this canyon; I am bear clan and they are my brothers.”

We returned to the truck where he pulled the tailgate down with a thud. We sat on the tailgate and swung our legs like little kids. We took turns gulping water from a gallon jug while the Oreos we ate left black rings of satisfaction around our lips.

I began to quiet the thoughts running through my head, and allowed the sounds of the canyon to take their place. The steep canyon walls echoed the sound of horses and cows tramping along the creek. Red-tailed hawks floated overhead searching for a sunbathing jackrabbit. Grasshoppers trilled their song in the heat of the day. A sense of stepping out of time began to embrace me. There were no car or airplane noises. No intrusions from

television or radio. No deadlines or assignments. No stress. Just the beauty of living in the moment.

Breaking the silence, I asked, “Can I come back?” Again, the knowing, sly smile, “Sure.”

I did go back. I married the amazing Mr. Michael Lacapa, and later our children also fell under the cornfield spell. The kids knew it would be a great day when Dad hollered, “Jump in the truck, we’re going to the cornfield.”

They stood up in the back and looked over the cab. Thoughts of softball games, food, cowpie wars, monsoon rains, fireworks and swimming kept them in eager anticipation. This unpretentious cornfield was far better than anything Norman Rockwell could create. It was a place where time did not exist and worries had no place to reside.

I still go back. The Apaches believe life is like a hoop, a never-ending circle. It’s true, for that is where my love for a person and place began, and it is there where the journey ends. With the scattering of his ashes under the cottonwoods, I drink in the peace that surrounds this place.

I listen to the wind in the canyon and hear his voice, “*Shi goshk an dasjaa*,” (the story ends here), down at the cornfield.

Kathy Lacapa has lived in the White Mountains of eastern Arizona most of her life. She co-authored with her late husband, Michael, Less Than Half . . . More Than Whole and wrote Curriculum Vocabulary for children with special needs. Her heart and mind are forever captivated by the springs, mountains, trees, creeks and people that form this wondrous portion of Arizona.

Our children also fell under the cornfield spell. The kids knew it would be a great day when Dad hollered, ‘Jump into the truck, we’re going to the cornfield.’



CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAINS

Monumental Memories

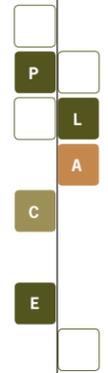
“The combination of broad vistas and intimate alcoves tucked beneath rock pinnacles has always drawn me to Chiricahua National Monument. Some of my earliest memories date to the years my father worked there as a ranger. Long after he had transferred to other parks, our family regularly returned to the Chiricahua Mountains. My father passed away a few years ago, but it wouldn’t surprise me if his spirit visits there still, along with the spirits of the Apache Indians who came before.”

laurence parent

A resident of Wimberley, Texas, Laurence Parent visits Arizona frequently to photograph and visit family. In addition to his magazine, calendar and advertising photography, his work has appeared in 30 books.

‘My father worked there as a ranger. Long after he had transferred to other parks, our family regularly returned to the Chiricahua Mountains.’

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



POINT IMPERIAL

Rimside Seat

"During one pounding summer thunderstorm on the Grand Canyon's North Rim, the lightning flashes prompted the few other visitors to flee. I waited among the ponderosa pines to share this view of a rainbow arching over Mount Hayden. Standing on the Rim with a camera on a tripod during a lightning storm is a bit crazy, but for me it's an annual spiritual event that brings me back to Point Imperial to witness one of Arizona's most remote and breathtaking views during summer's dramatic storms."

paul gill

As a large-format landscape photographer, Paul Gill of Phoenix loves witnessing Nature's raw power and capturing the emotional significance of special moments that lie on the edge of chaos. Photographing in stormy conditions provides that raw power and leads him to capture very dramatic images.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.

Drawn to the Light

"For me, the Kofa Mountains are all about the light, about the way the sun's rays slice around boulders and between buttes, caressing cholla and ocotillo. Because this range sits on top of high bajadas, it receives light so pure and clear it takes my breath away. I seem incapable of driving past these mountains without stopping in to behold another sunrise and sunset. Whenever I am near, the Kofas command my presence."

george stocking

George Stocking of Phoenix is a freelance landscape photographer, specializing in the western United States, Canada and Mexico. He and his wife, Mary, recently returned from a long journey through New Zealand, expanding his photographic coverage into the Southern Hemisphere.

■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.



SOUTH PHOENIX

The Star That Followed El Niño

BY STELLA POPE DUARTE

Christmas lights twinkled on chicken-wire fences and stars of Bethlehem shone over ragged front porches in my old Phoenix neighborhood, La Sonorita Barrio. The multicolored lights cast a warm glow over the harsh surroundings, making everything appear dreamlike and transforming the neighborhood into a fantasy world. It was Christmas Eve, and we were headed for St. Anthony's Church on the corner of First Avenue and Central in my father's old Nash sedan.

My sister, Lupe, and I jumped out of the car as soon as my father found a place to park along the curb and climbed the stone steps in front of the red-brick church. We took two footsteps for each wide concrete step, swishing our red-velvet Christmas dresses and showing off the shoes my mother had bought for us on special at Kress. Flickering candles, fragrant incense and Christmas trees set up next to huge statues of angels greeted us as we made our way over the church's creaky wooden floor. The big statue of St. Anthony at the altar, holding the "Christ Child" in his arms, held a new significance at Christmas, as usually he was known for finding lost items or securing a sweetheart for an ardent suitor.

To the right of the altar stood the manger, hewn of rough pine and filled with real hay, sheltering a doll dressed in a white garment, El Niño Cristo—"the Christ Child." Next to the Child was a statute of His mother, La Virgen, and her spouse, St. Joseph. Gathered all around them were angels, shepherds and farm animals, with the beaming white light of the star of Bethlehem overhead. It was the same Nativity scene year after year, but still it held us in awe as we knelt to pay our respects to El Niño.

The services started solemnly. The priests and altar boys dressed in red and white robes processed in, as the choir sang from the balcony, and the huge organ with its shiny brass pipes filled the church with rich, vibrant sounds. "*En Belén a media noche un niño nació,*" (in Bethlehem, at midnight, a child is to be born). We stared at people across the aisle, and they looked back at us. Together we created a small sea of brown faces, dressed in our Christmas finery, ready to greet El Niño.

My sister and I sat next to my mother on a wooden pew my father had helped build, the wood, smooth and shiny. My mother arranged us—one on her right side, the other on her left.

"So you won't talk," she said, "and don't you dare laugh—look there's El Niño, trying to get some rest."

"How can He sleep with all this noise?" I said.

"Never mind about that. He's God, He can do anything."

All through the services, Lupe and I struggled not to laugh

when a baby burped too loud or someone fell to their knees on the wooden floor with a plop because they'd forgotten to pull out the kneeler. All the while, El Niño slept under the holy gaze of La Virgen, known to all the women at St. Anthony's as the perfect model of motherhood.

At the end of the services, men, women and children moved in procession down the center aisle, waiting their turn to kneel before the simple manger and tell El Niño how happy we were to have him at St. Anthony's. We thanked him for being like one of us, not rich and bossy and disappointed with our failures, but an infant happy with a lowly manger who needed only to be fed and changed and carried about. No one could argue with a baby born in poverty nor demand anything in return except goo-goos, ga-gas and slurpy smiles. Being poor ourselves, we understood His plight. But unlike the wise men, we had nothing to offer except ourselves.

After Mass, we crowded into the basement around makeshift tables set with plastic Christmas tablecloths. My father bought us menudo, soup made of tripe and corn, which we spiced up with green onions, chile sauce, cilantro and a squirt of lemon juice. Then we ate red tamales, warm and tucked in moist cornhusks, and *pan dulce*—"sweet bread," soft and sugary. He bought us cups of hot chocolate warning, "Be careful. It's hot." And he looked at us, his brown eyes cautioning, but already I had spilled a few drops on the white bib of my red-velvet dress.

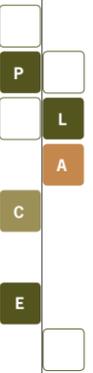
By the time it was all over, my parents had spoken to everybody in the place, and Lupe and I had run up and down the steps of St. Anthony's Church with other kids until our cheeks were bright red, sweating although the night was cold. At the top of the stairs, I peered through the big, wooden doors to the altar, admiring the star with its white light beaming over the manger.

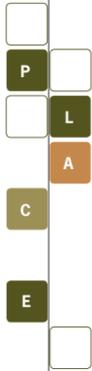
I wondered about all the trouble El Niño had encountered being born in a stable. Now the church was his home, old, wondrous and filled with flickering candles and statues of saints decked out in their bright Christmas robes. The church bell rang as we made our way back to the car. I looked up at the dark sky, and pointed to the bright North Star overhead.

"Look," I said to Lupe, "there's the star of Bethlehem!" And she believed me because she was younger than I and it was Christmas, and we had seen El Niño resting peacefully in His humble manger. It was only right that the star of Bethlehem had followed Him to St. Anthony's Church.

Stella Pope Duarte is an author and educator, born and raised in South Phoenix. She wrote Let Their Spirits Dance, a novel portraying an Arizona family's transformational journey to the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Duarte's literary career began in 1995 after she had a dream in which her deceased father related to her that her destiny was to become a writer. One year after the dream, she signed her first book contract for Fragile Night, a collection of short stories.

We thanked him for being like one of us, not rich and bossy and disappointed with our failures, but an infant happy with a lowly manger.





SABINO CANYON

The Canyon That Broke a Fall

BY LAWRENCE W. CHEEK

On the August night of the annual Perseid meteor shower, we tucked pillows under arms and ambled over to our neighborhood canyon, where we lay down in the road to watch the pebbles carve white streaks in the sky. I remember being disappointed by the celestial show—we want meatier meteors, and more of them!—but feeling unexpectedly comfortable lying on the still-warm asphalt, the charcoal-dark canyon walls rising around like the sides of a battered and broken bowl. In that rocky cradle, I felt fully at home, embraced in a way that no house has ever quite managed.

Our “neighborhood canyon” was Sabino Canyon on the northeastern edge of Tucson, one of half a dozen immense cleavages yawning out of the southern slope of the Santa Catalina Mountains. For seven years we lived a 10-minute walk away, in a location that violated my own environmental conscience—someone should have drawn a national park border around the whole range and its foothills and locked them away from development forever. But who manages a life immaculate of hypocrisy? As long as I had stumbled into the neighborhood, I intended to take full advantage of the canyon.

In fact, Sabino Canyon is almost an environmental showcase in an age when success stories are hard to come by. There is a paved road in, but in 1973 the Forest Service temporarily closed it and suddenly everyone noticed how much cleaner the canyon seemed when free from the clamor and aroma of cars. It remains closed. In 1936, the canyon barely escaped with its life after Tucson summoned the Army Corps of Engineers to drown it with a 250-foot-high concrete dam and lake. The scheme folded only because Depression-crippled Pima County couldn't come up with the money for its share of the tab.

All the canyons of the Catalinas are seductive places, but Sabino is the crown jewel, thanks to its perennial stream. Although in a dry season it's barely a gurgle—the Corps' dam might have had little more than a puddle to show for its mighty effort—the desert responds exuberantly.

There's a tangled riparian forest of ashes, cottonwoods, walnuts, sycamores and willows, lush in summer and resplendent in fall. On some mornings, the birdsong is bedlam, the result of some 200 species in residence or layover. I've enjoyed my most prolific Arizona wildlife encounters in near-urban Sabino—Gila monsters, rattlesnakes, coyotes, javelinas, bobcats and on one occasion a great blue heron that looked big enough to stalk over and stab me in the eye with its stiletto beak had the idea occurred to it.

On my most recent return to Sabino there were lurid orange signs warning of “high mountain lion activity—enter at your own risk.” After a small flurry of sightings in 2004, the Forest Service closed the canyon for several days, and the Arizona Game and Fish Department trapped and removed one cat. Protests poured in. Expert opinion on whether the risk had been overblown was perfectly divided. *The Arizona Daily Star* consulted seven wildlife biologists: Three said the cats indeed threatened public safety, three said they didn't and one took neither side.

My inexpert opinion is that the less we try to reconfigure nature, the better. Science has a lousy record of predicting unintended consequences, and I wouldn't be surprised to learn that a campaign against cougars had somehow triggered a plague of locusts. For my own sake, I like knowing there are potentially unfriendly creatures prowling Sabino: It heightens my respect and deepens my humility.

It wasn't difficult to convince myself that these daily hikes were a legitimate piece of my workday.

When I lived in the neighborhood, I walked over to Sabino nearly every morning and hiked 3 to 9 miles on its network of trails. My favorite was the Phoneline Trail, a man-made ledge chipped out of the south wall 400 feet above the canyon floor. It was an intermediate step between land and sky, a part of each realm. I worked at home, and it wasn't difficult to convince myself—I didn't have to justify it to anyone else—that these daily hikes were a legitimate piece of my workday. I carried a notebook and scribbled ideas or solutions that sometimes occurred almost effortlessly. The hiking seemed naturally to untangle problems. I've never understood how or why, although Thoreau, who obsessively walked

four hours a day, believed the practice invested “the more air and sunshine in our thoughts.”

When I bought a laptop computer, I had the idea to colonize a shady spot under a sycamore and dilute the pain of writing by doing it in a beautiful place. It didn't work for a practical reason—I couldn't stuff my library into my pack, and there were always books I needed to paw through for reference. The canyon also put up a fierce and intangible resistance that I couldn't explain, but I distinctly felt. It seemed to resent the intrusion of this infernal artifice, the computer. In two hours I struggled to write three sentences. I never brought it again.

But when I taught classes at the University of Arizona, I could walk in the canyon early in the day, rehearse in my mind and later that morning give a lecture laced with oxygen and sunshine—at least it seemed so to me. And on a December morning in 1995, when a knot of worried friends and family confronted me about my drinking, I walked alone over to Sabino to sit on a rock and think hard about my life, whether I could try to face it without the fog of vodka.

Ten years later, I wondered whether I could find that exact rock, and how it might feel to sit there again. I found it easily: a distinctive club sandwich of gray-and-white banded Catalina

gneiss, conveniently poking out of a slope above the Phoneline Trail where the canyon begins tightening into a parade of offset V's. There was a four-armed saguaro on the slope below, its appendages swirling outward like a spiral galaxy, and below that the whispered fugue of the creek's miniature rapids. I sat there again, and pondered what this canyon had meant in my life.

I sensed the same benevolent embrace I had felt the night of the meteor shower.

Aldo Leopold, the ecologist and writer, argued for seeing the land “as a community to which we belong,” after which we may “begin to use it with love and respect.” Belonging to the community of saguaros and great blue herons and mountain lions and yes, *Homo sapiens*, demands a sound mind and a fully functioning sense of responsibility. Anything less and we're on the way to destroying that community, along with ourselves. Even on that fuzzy winter day of 1995 I understood this.

A canyon in the neighborhood—what a gift.

Lawrence W. Cheek lived in Tucson from 1973 to 1995, when he moved to Seattle. He now puts off writing by kayaking in Puget Sound and hiking the North Cascades. He frequently returns to his native Southwest to report on its cities and natural environment. His newest book is Frank Lloyd Wright in Arizona, to be published in January by Rio Nuevo Publishers of Tucson.

OUTBACK ARIZONA

Mapping the Way to Self-reliance

BY BILL BROYLES

The winter holidays at our house were festive with cookies, decorations and guests, but not too gift-y. We'd wrap modest gifts for each other and enjoy the season's cheer. Sometime in my late teens, maps started arriving from Santa.

Fascinated by unknown places, I was lured to see the other side of the mountain. I was amazed to learn that peaks and ridges I could see from home had names—names that I'd never heard. Maybe it was the echoing voice of Mr. Woodruff, geography teacher, or the effect of our family's cross-country summer vacations, or just some inherited wanderlust, but something inside wanted this young man to go west, and east and north and south.

Like most teens, I wondered where I fit in. Pulling petals off flowers, I asked: Will I pass? Will I make the team? Does she love me? What's it all mean? I wasted a lot of energy worrying, moping and acting bored. I needed a map. My folks didn't presume to offer me a guidebook; they were too subtle for that. Instead they nodded and gave me keys to an old car. Maps in hand, my buddies and I started exploring.

With Gerry, a teammate on the track squad, we found great spots along the Black River to throw down our sleeping bags and catch trout. Kurt and I camped in an abandoned ranch house below Mount Fagan, though we never quite mastered the subtleties of getting biscuit batter to bake evenly. Somehow a group of us survived five days of tubing on a stretch of the upper Salt River during monsoon rains—we'd ride several muddy rapids and then walk back for another run. At night we slept in soggy sleeping bags beside the roaring water.

On a map of Cochise County, I stumbled upon the name Paramore Crater and drove down one Saturday. The hole's not nearly as impressive as some others in the state, but to this day I

can picture the rancher leaning on the gatepost and chatting about horses and movies for an hour.

In Pine Canyon, a blacktailed rattler gave me due respect and slithered out of sight. At the confluence of Havasu Creek and the mighty Colorado, I once met river hero Ken Sleight. On another

This gangly city kid might eventually fit in. The world was willing if I was.

trip, pioneer rafter Georgie White winked and tossed Lothar and me a can of peaches. I delighted in sharing my maps with friends.

The skunks at a campsite below Barfoot Spring licked my carelessly unwashed supper dishes, but they didn't spray me—even though their tails brushed my head as I hunkered motionless inside my sleeping bag.

At Big Lake, an old-timer saw our futile casts and gave Dick and me one of his favorite lures. Carol

and I hiked to Lemmon Creek and marveled at trout in the pools below massive boulders. Near Cibecue one day I caught a ride in Joe Black's logging truck—on a whim I asked him as he waited to load. He didn't know me from a tree stump, but said, “Sure.” After all that, I began to see that this gangly city kid might eventually fit in. The world was willing if I was.

With a topo map in my pocket, I could go at my pace, follow a trail or make my own way, flail the stream with a trout fly or crouch beside an anthill to see what the endless lines were bringing home. And I found I could endure sitting on unpadded rocks, sleeping on bare ground and carrying all I needed in something the size of a grocery bag. Wind felt good, things glowed at sunrise and the world didn't end at dusk. Sometimes I came home with a bruised knee or bloodied elbow, but that happened in town, too. Somehow my folks trusted me in the world and assumed that the world would teach me whatever I needed to know.

But if the great outdoors is a beautiful, patient teacher, it's also a demanding taskmaster. First I had to learn how to read a map and tell directions. Then, to reach someplace up the trail, I had to rely on my own two feet. Juvenile whining, wishing, cussing or charm couldn't make it one step shorter. When rain fell, I had to put up my shelter or get drenched. The skillet didn't wash itself, and the price of clumsiness was pain, so I learned to laugh at myself instead of cry. The gift of self-reliance must have been in that roll of maps, too, though I hadn't noticed it at the time.

Maps got my nose out of a book, lured me out of my room and dragged me outside of myself, out where Earth's enormity, majesty and many kindnesses both humbled and strengthened me. Maps led me to see my state, Arizona, and the state helped raise me.

Imagine. All that in a simple roll of maps.

As a college freshman, Tucsonan Bill Broyles fell under the spell of Professor Byrd Granger, who loved Arizona's funny, poignant, revealing place-names. Now, with three friends, Broyles has compiled a catalog of southwestern Arizona place-names that will appear as a chapter in Dry Borders, to be published in January by the University of Utah Press. He is a research associate at the University of Arizona's Southwest Center.

GRAND CANYON

Death, Dreams and Fishing Poles

BY PETER ALESHIRE

He sat on a boulder beside a small stream just off Bright Angel Trail near the bottom of the Grand Canyon, looking frail, oddly content and out of place. A fly fishing rod jutted crookedly from his pack, which was brand new. A sleeping bag was lashed lopsidedly to his pack frame with twine and his hiking boots were barely scuffed. A curious combination of weariness and joy struggled for dominance on his finely etched features.

I stepped off the trail and walked over to the stream beside which he sat, drawn mostly by the sound of the water. I lay flat on the sun-heated rock and plunged my head into a clear pool until coolness seeped to the roots of my hair.

He watched me with gentle amusement, a man in his early 20s with tangled blond hair and keen, somber eyes. He focused on the two fishing poles projecting from my pack—a fly rod and a spin caster.

I sat on the rock beside the stream, torn between my appointment on the Rim and a tug of curiosity about this misplaced stranger. I hadn't much time to waste. I'd just come off the river at Phantom Ranch after a four-day run down from Lee's Ferry with a research team counting the last few native fish in a river conquered by trout, catfish and carp.

I'd wanted to stay, for the river had begun to weave its spell. But I couldn't stay. I had played hooky from my life too long already. I had no more time to drift down that hypnotic river.

But I could sit there a minute beside the stream. After rummaging through the fishing tackle in my pack, I pulled out a bag of trail mix. He watched me, his eyes flicking to my fishing pole. Wordlessly, I offered him a handful of gorp.

"Thanks," he said.

"Going fishing?" I asked.

"Yes. Yes, I am," he said with a curious finality.

"Good fishing down there," I said, remembering the big rainbow's effortless undulation after I'd let him off my hook.

"Really?" he asked hungrily. "I've never been fishing before," he confessed. "And I'd always heard that the Grand Canyon had some of the best fishing in the world."

"It's better up by Lee's Ferry," I said.

His face fell.

"But it's still wonderful fishing down here," I added hastily. "I caught a 20-inch rainbow last night."

"You did?" he asked eagerly.

So we fell into a discussion of fish, hooks and fake flies. He'd never fished, but had studied books. We talked about eddies, undercut banks, flies and nymphs. He took it all in so eagerly, I begin to feel guilty, since I don't actually know much about fishing.

The stranger lapsed into a sudden fit of coughing. I noticed

again how gaunt he seemed. He had been energized by our conversation. Now he had a translucent quality. I felt a sharp stab of fear for him. After the coughing passed, he fumbled with a pocket on his backpack, pulled out a small bottle of pills, and shook one into his hand.

I recognized by the label a prescription for one of the drugs used to hold the AIDS virus at bay.

A silence settled between us.

"When were you diagnosed?" I asked at length.

He glanced at me, storm shadows of yearning and nonchalant courage sweeping across his face.

"Two years ago," he said.

That used to be a long time for an AIDS patient to survive after diagnosis. I was a medical writer early in the epidemic and have interviewed a lot of young men dying by inches, much too soon.

"How are you doing?" I asked.

"Oh, great," he said, with an utterly sincere smile.

"You going to be alone down there?" I asked.

"My brother was going to come," he said, wistfully. "But he couldn't get away. He's a lawyer, you know," he added with a note of pride.

We said nothing for a time.

"It's not so bad being alone—not out here," he added, with a gesture that encompassed the stream and the layer

upon layer of sandstone, schist, limestone. "Sometimes, it's a lot more lonely with people around."

"I guess that's true," I said, recalling my eagerness each night to leave camp and find a rock on the river.

"Kind of takes your mind off things, out here," he added. The silence settled, then he added, "When I was a kid, I saw an article in a magazine somewhere about the Grand Canyon. This guy had caught the biggest trout I've ever seen. Ever since then, I've had this fantasy about fishing in the bottom of the Grand Canyon. So I just thought I'd do it."

I groped for something to say. "No time like the present," I said, lamely.

"That's true," he said, with a small, secret smile.

Down in the brush and small trees along the stream, the cicadas started up. My ride waited at the Rim, to hurry me back to my jumbled life. I considered going with him back into the Canyon. But he seemed content to be alone with his dream of trout.

"Listen," I said impulsively. "I didn't catch anything on the fly rod. You need a spin-casting rig." I opened my pack, and pulled out my cheapo pole and my little plastic box of lures and hooks. "Here, take this."

"I can't," he said slowly. "It's yours."

"I don't need it," I said, setting it down and standing. "Good luck down there," I said, gripping his hand.

"Good luck up there," he replied.

I left him beside the stream, but turned, 50 yards up, at the next bend.

He stood where I'd left him, holding my pole, staring down into the Canyon that called us both.

Peter Aleshire is editor of Arizona Highways and the author of five books.

He'd been energized by our conversation. Now he had a translucent quality.



GRAND CANYON

Showtime

"For me, the power of light transforms one of Earth's great spectacles—the Grand Canyon. Here Nature unveils a work of art, an unpredictable natural performance. How do you show the great changes of the Earth in the single instant of a photograph? This is the work for me, the passion. These acts of Nature bring me to my highest level. In recording the timeless moment, I am transformed by it."

'Nature unveils a work of art, an unpredictable natural performance.'

david muench

With a career spanning a half-century, David Muench of Corrales, New Mexico, is recognized as the dean of American landscape photographers. He credits the tutorship of Nature for his greatest lessons in life.



CHRISTMAS IN ARIZONA TERRITORY

*Light and Joy
in a Lonesome Land*

BY LEO W. BANKS ILLUSTRATIONS BY BERNIE FUCHS

As newspaperman George Smalley rode along Big Bug Creek just south of Prescott prior to Christmas 1898, he saw the hillside above the camp come alive with light. The trails leading down from the mountains were thick with miners and their families heading to the community party at the schoolhouse, and each carried a lantern.

The glow bathed the fallen snow, broken only by the shadows of children dancing with glee at the thought of meeting Santa Claus.

The episode described in the *Arizona Republican* served as an eloquent portrait

of what Christmas meant to Arizona's resolute pioneers—light and joy in a lonesome land.

Every town, hamlet and tent camp celebrated the holiday, each in its own way. And they were very much frontier productions—small, unsophisticated and spare. If Apache raids were possible during a rendition of *Silent Night*, just post a guard and sing away.

In the late 1870s, Tucson's gamblers loaded a rented wagonful of food and gifts to distribute along with gold pieces to poor families. Late at night, when their cargo was gone, the "sporting men" stood

on the flatbed and threw change to kids in the street.

The *Arizona Daily Star* reported that Christmas Day for a typical Tucson family in 1889 included a big meal and a leisurely wagon ride to Fort Lowell or Mission San Xavier del Bac.

"At the university," the newspaper noted, "those of our local nimrods who were not after quail in the mesquite brush, displayed their marksmanship at turkey shooting."

The first Christmas celebration in Prescott was in 1864 at Gov. John Goodwin's log mansion. He opened his home to all the town's citizens, according to historian



After a final verse of 'Silent Night,' the families departed for their respective homes with at least one armed man accompanying each group.

Sharlot Hall. Hunter Sam Miller provided deer, antelope and wild turkey to supplement the beef barbecued in the governor's back yard.

Writer J. Ross Browne told of a Christmas party at Fort Yuma in 1864 at which the ladies broke eggshells containing dust—probably ashes—and gilt paper over the heads of the men, “in true Spanish style.” One of them was Browne himself. In *Adventures in the Apache Country*, he wrote:

“The mischievous beauty struck me exactly on the spot where time has already laid his relentless hand; and I was not surprised at the merry shouts of laughter that ensued; for if my head looked like any thing upon earth, it must have borne a close resemblance to a boulder surmounted by croppings of gold and silver.”

Some Arizonans spent their first Christmas huddled around a campfire. Pioneer Evans Coleman described Mormons traveling from Utah to Holbrook, stopping to mark the day amid a circle of wagons.

Kerosene lanterns lit the encampment as bells were tied around the necks of the horses to tell of approaching trouble. Each of the mothers hung wool stockings stuffed with piñon nuts, parched corn and candy sticks from the bows of her family's sleeping wagon.

Christmas dinner, served from a camp kettle, consisted of beans flavored with ham bone, fried potatoes and onions, salt-rising bread and pudding seasoned in vinegar.

After the family settled into their new Arizona home, usually a cabin with a mud floor and no windows because glass was so scarce, Christmas got a bit more elaborate. But not much more, especially in the Territory's early years.

Children's gifts were rarely store-bought. A boy might have received a whittled top or a homemade ball consisting of a chunk of rubber wrapped with string and bits of rag. Mother would have provided the finishing touches by covering it with deer hide. His sister probably got a small knitted handbag, or a rag doll that hung from the tree on Christmas Eve.

Frontier deprivations mothered ingenuity in other ways, too.

When it snowed in the southern Arizona town of St. David, writer Olive Kimball Mitchell's father would harness two of the family horses to a sheet of iron, fasten bells to it and load the children on board. Off they'd go, caroling across the San Pedro Valley on their homemade sled.

Another family tradition was cutting the

tree. Mitchell's father would load some beef jerky and a few slices of bread and honey into a wagon before heading with the children for Cedar Hollow, where the best ever-green trees grew.

At home the tree was placed in a big can of sand in the parlor and trimmed with cookies, tufts of cotton to represent snow and red-paper chains glued with paste made of flour and water.

Prescott's first tree was in the home of I.N. Rodenburg in 1865. He and six others, well armed against Indians, went into the woods to cut a fir tree, after which residents helped provide decorations, according to Orick Jackson, in his 1908 book *The White Conquest of Arizona*.

Women searched their trunks for bits of ribbon. Tallow candles were cut in half and tied to branches with bits of string. Candy was made from brown sugar and put into manila bags sealed with flour paste.

Rodenburg and his friends searched the town and found only one musical instrument—a battered old fiddle, minus one string, played by a man who knew only one song—“The Arkansas Traveler.”

The partiers got around this humiliation by ordering the fiddle's owner to play the song halfway through, then start at the beginning and play it again in a different cadence.

In 1893, at the mine settlement of Tip Top in the Bradshaw Mountains, residents planned a celebration ball without liquor. This prohibition drew an editorial gasp from the *Prescott Morning Courier*, which likened a dance without booze to “a jackass without a voice.”

But the newspaper promised that “feminine loveliness will be there to scatter cheer and peppermint lozenges,” and hoped everyone would turn out to see Little Bare Feet, the finest round dancer in Arizona, “sling his extremities” on Christmas Eve.

Then, in a nose-in-the-air swipe at the prevalence of rodents in mine towns, the *Courier* suggested everyone tote their own poison: “Come one, come all, and bring a box of Rough on Rats.”

Saloon pranksters didn't halt their activities on such a religious day. Newspaperman and historian J.H. McClintock recounted an incident in Holbrook in 1890, when a group of drunks set out to rob Santa Claus during his appearance at the schoolhouse.

Kind elves brought word of the impending stickup, allowing Santa to greet the four masked robbers with a big revolver pulled from his buffalo robe overcoat. He fired four shots at the men's feet, sending them

scampering into the darkness, then walked serenely into the back door of the school and went about his business.

“But just think of Santa with a .45 Colt six-gun in his pocket,” McClintock wrote.

He told of another incident, perhaps true, but unprovable, that occurred in a mining camp saloon on Christmas Eve.

In walked a slender, white-haired old man, apparently sick. He sat by the pot-bellied stove to get warm, then moved to the piano, where his playing and singing brought tears to the bystanders.

Many bought drinks for him. At closing time, the bar owner didn't have the heart to turn the visitor out, so he gave him a blanket and allowed him to sleep in the saloon. Next morning the owner found the old man gone and the safe open, a white wig on the floor next to it.

Trouble of a different kind threatened Bisbee's first community Christmas party in 1881, according to a collection of stories on file at the Bisbee Mining and Historical Museum.

Apaches were spotted in the hills during the day, and as night approached, the men of the camp grabbed their rifles and headed to the schoolhouse on Brewery Gulch.

Inside, around a tree decorated with chains of red and green paper and strings of berries and popcorn, Santa Claus handed out bags of candy, nuts and fruit. The men with children stayed inside, close to their rifles, while those without agreed to keep watch outside.

The party ended when a figure appeared in the doorway and silently signaled that Indians were nearby. After a final verse of “Silent Night,” the families departed for their respective homes with at least one armed man accompanying each group. They all arrived safely.

The worst trouble of the night occurred as Santa was giving the children their presents. He leaned too close to a candle and his imitation beard caught fire. He jerked it off, smothered the blaze, and continued his merry work.

The kids were so caught up in the joy of Christmas that none of them seemed to mind that their hero's face was now as smooth as their own. ■■

Leo W. Banks of Tucson looks at Christmas and Arizona history in the same way. He sees both as special gifts.

Bernie Fuchs is a fine-arts painter and illustrator from Westport, CT.



Poinsettia Poinsettia Poinsettia Poinsettia Poinsettia



Colors of Christmas Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) range in hue from deep red to pale pink, peach, white and marbled hybrids, and have showy names like Jingle Bells, Candy Cane, Monet, Fire and Pink. PETER ENSENBERGER

Spirit of the Poinsettia: A hint of holiday meaning in multiple colors

by CARRIE M. MINER

I WENDED MY WAY THROUGH ROWS of evergreens to the tune of “White Christmas” as I approached the annual Poinsettia Festival at Gardener’s World with my twin boys, Blake and Hayden. I chuckled at the lyrics since I hadn’t had a white Christmas since moving to Phoenix in 1987. But my amusement turned to awe as I stepped through the candy-striped tent into a wonderland of red and green.

I don’t remember when I lost my love for one of America’s favorite holidays—maybe when I discovered Santa Claus was a costumed fabrication or when I fully understood credit card bills. I drifted off into the singles scene and left the hubbub behind—until my boys were born. Suddenly, I was compelled to cooperate in the mass madness of the holiday season. No longer satisfied with a little plastic tree, my boys decided they wanted to fill the house with color, music and gifts.

So there we were trying to find the perfect Christmas tree and a poinsettia to brighten up the house. Thrilled with the riot of color, Hayden bent to smell the bright flowering plants. Disgruntled, he looked up at me. “Mom they don’t smell so good,” he said. But disappointment devolved to delight when he spotted Santa under a towering tree made of tiered poinsettias. And off they went.

Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are tropical Mexican shrubs that the Aztecs dubbed *cuetlaxochitl*, or “false flower.” The warlike Aztecs in the 15th century considered the red and green plant a symbol for blood sacrifices. They also used the plant to treat skin infections, cut fevers, stimulate circulation and make red dye. In the 17th century, Franciscan priests near Taxco noted that the plants bloomed at Christmas and so shifted the symbolism to represent the death of Christ.

One charming story told in Mexico attributes the origin of the plant to a young girl named Pepita. The girl’s one wish was to give a gift of great beauty to the Christ Child on Christmas Eve. But the poor child had nothing of her own to give and so gathered a bouquet of weeds plucked from the side of the road—which made her even more sad that she had nothing beautiful to give. Nonetheless, she entered the village chapel and placed her weeds and wishes at the foot of the manger in the Nativity scene. And then a miracle happened in that village chapel—the withered weeds transformed into a

bouquet of brilliant red blooms. Those who witnessed the miracle christened the blooms *Flores de Noche Buena*, or “Flowers of the Holy Night.”

Despite the plant’s popularity south of the border, it didn’t emigrate to the United States until the early 1880s after Ambassador Joel Roberts Poinsett discovered it during a Christmas season expedition into Mexico. Poinsett, an amateur botanist, cultivated the red blooms in his South Carolina greenhouse. Years later, horticulturist William Prescott named the plant for him.

Today, more than 100 varieties of poinsettias range from the classic red to the marbled hybrids. At the festival we saw red, pink, white, peach and cream in the poinsettia palette.

We spent the morning listening to local choirs and nibbling on tasty holiday treats. The boys had their faces painted, and I purchased some crafty Christmas ornaments at one of the many booths. Together we picked out a Christmas tree and then grabbed a wagon to take our pick of poinsettias.

One of the on-site gardeners gave us a few pointers on plucking the perfect poinsettia. He told us to check for still-closed buds among the flowers in the center of the bright red leaves, or bracts. He also cautioned us against excessive leaf drop. When selecting a traditional, full-leafed variety, find plants with large bracts extending over the lower green foliage.

We began our search. Despite their lack of a showy scent, Hayden began to fill our little wagon with one of every kind—one for his teacher, one for home, one for Granny, one for Dad. Then Blake got in the giving mood and we went back for more—Red, White, Pink, Jingle Bells, Marble, Peppermint, Monet, Snowcap, Fire and Pink.

Although my pocketbook was decidedly lighter, my boys’ beaming faces also lightened my heart. And as we headed out to our car with our wagonful of flowers, I decided that maybe this Christmas thing wasn’t so bad after all. ■■■



CARRIE M. MINER



PETER ENSENBERGER

Even though properly tended poinsettias can bloom again year after year, Carrie M. Miner of Glendale struggles each holiday to keep her Christmas plants alive through the holiday. This year, Carrie says she’s asking Santa for a green thumb.

online

Find a complete list of holiday events at arizonahighways.com (Click on “Holiday Guide”)

The Perfect Gift: An Indigo Sky, a Rainbow and a Family's Love

SPECTACULAR SKIES HAPPEN so often in Arizona one could almost become blasé. When I see people trudging with their heads down while vivid beauty blazes above, I want to stop them, tilt their chin up and say, "Look what you're missing!" I haven't ever done it, but I have become a sunset collector, a connoisseur—storing images away in memory to share judiciously like succulent tidbits with family and friends who live elsewhere.

I try to exercise discretion—I don't want to brag since I don't make the sunsets, but sometimes you can't help sharing something extraordinary. If they've never been to the Southwest, it's hard for people to believe. My brother-in-law from the Midwest once said doubtfully, "I don't think the sky can

do that." But it does, and our family will drop everything to run outside and admire a superb show. It takes just one experience to make a believer of you.

I was 8 years old when a sunset first reverberated through me like a great, silent bell. That afternoon I had roamed the desert hills above our farm in northwestern New Mexico, come home for dinner and stepped outside into a soft breeze. The sun was just setting behind our house. In the east, above the green valley floor and golden cliffs, a huge, cumulus cloud formation billowed nearly to the zenith of the sky. It glowed against an indigo heaven, a tumbled melange of pink and gold and lavender so glorious it made me ache. I stood, filling myself with it, stunned by the power of its beauty. That was the beginning of my collection. The crown jewel came years later.

It was my birthday. The year had been a hard one with many challenges, including my extended illness. My husband and children had said nothing about a celebration; I felt sad and neglected. I came downstairs to prepare dinner. Suddenly someone wrapped a pair of arms around me from behind, and with much laughter I was quickly blindfolded by several

pairs of hands. "Okay, Mom, we're going for a ride. Birthday time!"

They hustled me out the door and into the waiting car. I could smell fried chicken. Away we went, with exclamations and a running commentary of exaggerated near-disasters such as, "Watch out for that big car—hold on, Mom!" Slam on the brakes. "Man, it nearly hit us—that was close!" A squeal of tires, quick cornering and a fast sideways weave—"You nearly hit that little kid!" I gasped appropriately, but of course could see nothing.

Eventually we arrived—somewhere. They escorted me out of the car, still blindfolded, and holding my hands led me around, telling me to step up, duck under and so forth. Finally they guided me up a rocky incline, carefully positioned me, and with a flourish and a "Ta Da!" removed my blindfold. There spread before me was Tucson. The sun, setting behind jagged, deep-purple mountains, scintillated in a blaze of trailing clouds.

Tucson sits in a huge Sonoran Desert valley with craggy mountain ranges to each of the four directions. We stood near the entrance to Sabino Canyon at the foot of Mount Lemmon, the city's northern "sky island." Beside us the mountainside glowed with golden light against a backdrop of folded foothills blushing deeper and deeper rose. Behind them the sky was dark blue with storm clouds. Against that dark sky arched a radiant, full rainbow. I could only gasp.

Just then, a fine mist of rain began to fall. Each raindrop caught the sun and everything around us brightened with a shimmering veil of liquid gold. We stood speechless, surrounded by beauty beyond words.

I thought of the Master Artist, who must take great pleasure in creating beauty, and of how fortunate we were to experience this particular, exquisite moment. And I realized I would never in my life receive a more perfect birthday gift.

When I could speak, I turned to my children. Thinking of their efforts to make my birthday special, knowing that this glory happened only by some blessed coincidence, wanting them somehow to know what it all meant to me, I asked, laughing around the lump in my throat, "How did you do this?"

My daughter smiled into my eyes. "For your birthday, Mom."

My son put his arm around my shoulder, and grinning down at me said, "Connections, Mom. We've got connections."

I believe they do. **AH**



A late-afternoon rainbow descends into the Santa Catalina Mountains' Pima Canyon north of Tucson.



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ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

Prescott's Hassayampa Inn Radiates Historic First-class Charm

Handcrafted ornaments and elementary school students' decorations adorn the Hassayampa Inn's Christmas tree, below, which enlivens a lobby graced with two vintage Persian rugs.

Dating from the '50s, leather sofas, bottom, replaced the lobby's original embroidered furniture.

PRESOTT'S HASSAYAMPA INN debuted during the era of flappers, hip flasks and Lucky Lindy's solo transatlantic flight. But it became one of my favorite historic hotels just a few Decembers ago.

After getting in the holiday spirit at the Courthouse Lighting Ceremony, I walked a block to the Hassayampa to warm up in front of the lobby's huge fireplace, sip a hot drink and enjoy the display of Christmas trees decorated by schoolchildren. A guest, or maybe a passerby, started to play Christmas carols on the baby grand piano. In the middle of "Jingle Bells," a bunch of us rushed to investigate loud laughter outside. Some fun-loving folks were staging "ice races" on the slanting sidewalk. One would sit on a big block of ice and another would give a shove from behind. Whoever reached the finish line without falling off was declared the winner.

Back in the lobby, looking at the period furniture and the colorful Indian-motif ceiling design, I suddenly realized what the Hassayampa reminded me of—Prescott itself. Both town

and hotel offer picturesque architecture—a blend of Old West and Midwest—a lot of history and the chance to enjoy the simple pleasures of a friendlier and less-hurried time.

"Our lobby is Prescott's largest living room," Judith York, the Hassayampa's director of sales, said. "Locals stop in for complimentary morning coffee and to read the newspapers."

President George W. Bush once checked into the Hassayampa, one of the 500 or so Prescott buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. So did Hugh Downs, Loretta Lynn, Tom Selleck and Alec Baldwin. And in earlier years, Clark Gable, Will Rogers and Tom Mix signed the guest register of the hotel dubbed "The Grand Dame of Prescott."

Responding to a growing travel market, the first-class Hassayampa Inn opened in 1927 on the downtown corner of Gurley and Marina streets, in the middle of many of the attractions that lure today's tourists—the nostalgic Courthouse Plaza, once-notorious Whiskey Row, dozens of restaurants, hundreds of antique shops, a string of restored Victorian homes and Sharlot Hall Museum, a 3-acre tribute to Territorial Arizona. The hotel was named for the Hassayampa River, which, according to legend, renders those who drink from it unable to ever tell the truth again.

Most recently renovated in 2003, the three-story, 67-room Art Nouveau hotel (think Art Deco with a Western twist) stands out with its vibrant red-brick exterior, stately porte cochere, quaint gazebo and a rose garden patio that blooms red and yellow in season. The hand-painted lobby ceiling, Arizona wall murals, period lighting fixtures and furnishings highlight the interior, along with an old-fashioned gated elevator operated by a specially licensed hotel employee. A cozy bar serves patrons beneath the original tin ceiling. The casual but elegant Peacock Dining Room offers American-European cuisine with a French bistro feel and a unique concoction, the "Preskit Rub," which enhances various beef and chicken entrees (and echoes the



her ghost has been in residence ever since. Witnesses say lights and televisions in the rooms mysteriously turn on and off by themselves. A wreath flew off a door. And Faith makes occasional appearances. "Usually people describe an indistinct female figure," said York, "but they all say she was carrying a small bouquet of flowers."

Happier stories abound, though, she added. Men propose in the restaurant, sometimes with the ring arriving on a serving plate or in a glass of champagne. Couples marry in the gazebo and ride through the porte cochere in a horse-drawn carriage. Generations of families return year after year to celebrate holidays or special occasions.

The Hassayampa Inn provides a centrally located base for year-round visitors, but December remains my favorite time to enjoy its relaxed Old Arizona charm. And you never know who you'll run into then. Last year as I left, Santa swooped into the lobby and headed for some youngsters around the Christmas trees, handing out decorated cookies. **AH**

The hotel, above, still uses its original neon sign, although the name has changed from Hassayampa Hotel to Hassayampa Inn.

Each year, the City of Prescott celebrates the holiday season with a ceremonial lighting of the Yavapai County Courthouse, left.

proper pronunciation of the town's name).

The inn's rooms and suites reflect the same style and salmon-and-brown color scheme, but they differ in layout and furnishings, about one-third of which are original, with the rest being faithfully handcrafted reproductions. On a recent visit, my suite overlooked the gazebo and featured one of the eccentricities that make historic hotels fun: The sink, toilet and shower were each located in different parts of the room.

Guests sometimes request the Balcony Suite, No. 426. It's said to be haunted. Supposedly in the late '20s a young honeymooning man left on an errand and never returned. His grieving bride, Faith, hanged herself on the balcony and

HOLIDAY EVENTS in Prescott

NOVEMBER

- Holiday Light Parade, Gingerbread Village

DECEMBER

- Christmas Parade
- Courthouse Lighting Ceremony
- Frontier Christmas Open House
- Acker Musical Showcase

LOCATION: 122 E. Gurley St., Prescott, about 100 miles northwest of Phoenix. **GETTING THERE:** From Phoenix, take Interstate 17 north 50 miles to State Route 69 (Exit 262), then 40 miles west to East Gurley Street; turn right onto Marina Street to free hotel parking lot. **TRAVEL ADVISORY:** Make advance reservations, especially around holiday times. **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Hassayampa Inn, toll-free (800) 322-1927, (928) 778-9434; www.hassayampainn.com; Prescott Chamber of Commerce, toll-free (800) 266-7534; www.prescott.org.

The Other Painted Desert Trail to the West Traverses Special Geology

ARIZONA HAS TWO painted deserts—the official one between the Grand Canyon and the Petrified Forest National Park and the largely undiscovered one tucked away in the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge along the lower Colorado River.

Lots of people oooh and ahhh at the official painted desert—but the pigmented hoodoos, hills and hollows along the lower Colorado remain a largely undiscovered geological art treasure.

Fortunately, the Imperial refuge's Painted Desert Trail takes hikers on a relatively easy, 1.3-mile loop through geology as colorful and curiously eroded as anything you'll find in its better known sibling landscape.

Despite the similar color palettes, these two deserts have created their chromatic masterpieces using different geological

mediums. The famous Painted Desert around Holbrook is made of layers of sedimentary rock, weathered and rusted into warm reds, oranges, pinks and blues. But the Colorado River version acquired its unique geology by way of ash sprayed from volcanoes some 30 million years ago, scientists say. Multihued minerals colored the cooling rock—iron for the reds, copper for the greens, and aluminum for the pinks and purples. Wind, water and weather then carved the details.

The short Painted Desert Trail heads away from the river into a dry desert landscape that sees, at best, only 3.5 inches of rain each year. A handful of prickly pear cacti, ironwood and mesquite trees and brittlebushes offers a beleaguered token of vegetation. However, if enough winter rain falls, wildflowers miraculously cover the gravelly slopes.

In February, the trail comes alive with migrating monarch butterflies traveling north from

the mountains of Mexico. The monarchs head right for the yard-high milkweed plants that in spring grow along the trail. The butterflies live mostly on the milkweed's flowers, concentrating the plant's defensive chemicals to give themselves a bitter taste that repels most predators. The monarchs sometimes get so thick along the trail they land on hikers, especially those who look at all like milkweed.

With or without a show of butterflies or wildflowers, geology remains the trail's main attraction. During the first half-mile, the trail winds around ruddy mounds, passes a distinct hoodoo and then climbs a little hill that gives big views. Colorful ash mounds spread to the west. A bit farther westward, a sliver of the Colorado River shimmers.

A ridge full of buttes rises in the east. Made of hard, "volcanic plugs" stuck in the throats of vanished volcanoes and vents, the bizarre formations resist the erosion that removes the surrounding, softer ridgeline.

After another short climb, the path twists back down to the desert floor and enters Shady Canyon Wash. Animal signs and tracks show that this shaded segment makes a cool hangout for reptiles and mammals. Finally, an odd but beautiful assortment of colored mounds closes the loop.

So don't be satisfied with just one Painted Desert, all crumbly, soft and printed out on the map. You don't have to be a butterfly to appreciate an exotic splash of color in a strange and twisted landscape. ■■■

Barren, volcanic ash-covered slopes, left, characterize the beginning of the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge's Painted Desert Trail, recently designated a National Recreation Trail.

Farther along the trail, right, several geologic features of volcanic origin add variety to the rocky landscape.



LOCATION: 220 miles west of Phoenix.

GETTING THERE: From Phoenix, take Interstate 10 east to Interstate 8 to Yuma. Take the U.S.

Route 95 North exit and drive for 25 miles to Martinez Lake Road. Turn west (left) onto Martinez Lake Road and drive 10 miles to Red Cloud Mine Road; turn north (right) to the trailhead, located 2.8 miles north of the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters.

WARNING: Best hiked between November through March; summers have triple-digit daytime temperatures.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Imperial National Wildlife Refuge, (928) 783-3371; www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/arizona/imperial.html.



KEVIN KIBBEY



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