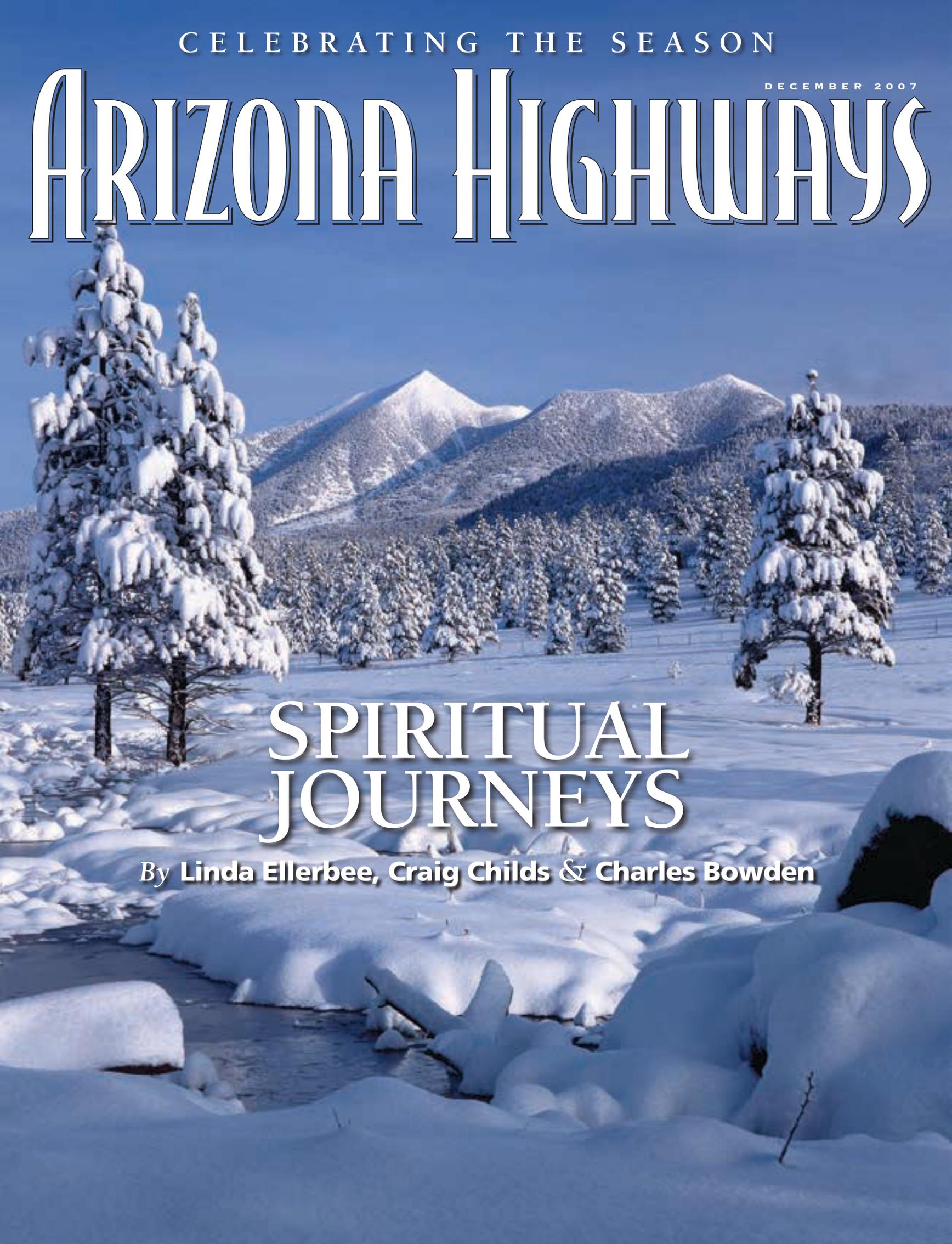


CELEBRATING THE SEASON

DECEMBER 2007

# ARIZONA HIGHWAYS



## SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

By **Linda Ellerbee, Craig Childs & Charles Bowden**

# Spiritual Journeys

## 10 Coming to Arizona

Chicago is a great city, and life at one of its universities is safe and relatively sane. So, why would somebody chuck it all to become a writer in a place where everything that matters is in peril? Only the writer knows for sure.

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Scenic beauty, thrilling adventure, a sense of accomplishment . . . rafting the Colorado River has a lot to offer, but there's more than the obvious. There's also a lesson in life, and whether you're young or old, the Grand Canyon forces everyone to learn it.

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Special places hold special memories. For one writer, the place was Canyon Creek, and the memory was of his father. It was their place, and when it came time to say goodbye, they went together one last time.

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## 44 After-Christmas Special

With the holiday season come the holiday sales. And while department stores have a lot to offer, they can't match what you'll find on the Navajo Indian Reservation, where the art is spectacular and the lines are a lot shorter.

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The restoration of Fossil Creek is the main event on this scenic drive in Central Arizona.

## Photographic Prints Available

■ Prints of some photographs are available for purchase, as designated in captions. To order, call toll-free (866) 962-1191 or visit [arizonahighwaysprints.com](http://arizonahighwaysprints.com).

**online** [arizonahighways.com](http://arizonahighways.com)

Simply put, the landscapes of Arizona inspire, and there's no better time than December to take a moment and enjoy nature's gifts. This month we offer our gift to you—a slideshow of awe-inspiring landscape photographs at [arizonahighways.com](http://arizonahighways.com), where you'll also find some of the state's most unique shopping venues and a host of holiday happenings in our *Online Extras*.

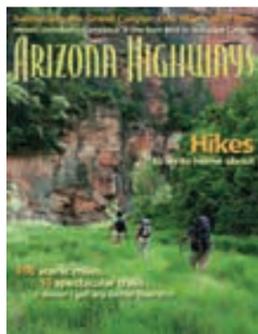
**WEEKEND GETAWAY** Enjoy the spirit of Christmas in the frosty mountain retreat of Flagstaff.

**EXPERIENCE ARIZONA** Plan a trip with our calendar of events.

**FOGGY FOOTHILLS** Snow-tipped saguaro cacti thrust upward into rare winter fog settled around the foothills below Finger Rock in the Santa Catalina Mountains near Tucson. See story, page 10. ROBERT G. McDONALD  
■ To order a print, see information on this page.

**FRONT COVER** Stillness reigns over virgin snowfall in ponderosa pine forestland near Northern Arizona's San Francisco Peaks. DAMON G. BULLOCK

**BACK COVER** Flocked with snow, ponderosa pine and Douglas fir trees in the Coconino National Forest near Flagstaff wear winter well. TOM BEAN



**Homesick in Omaha**

My husband and I grew up in Arizona, and went to the University of Arizona. Unfortunately, after college we moved away, but every year my parents give us a subscription to this beautiful magazine. I think they're subtly trying to lure us home, and your amazing photos and great articles do make it tough. Someday it would be wonderful to take just one issue and spend a month going to all of the beautiful and interesting places in *Arizona Highways*. Thank you.

*Heike and Adam Langdon, Omaha, Nebraska*

**Lip Service**

The September 2007 article about Willow Valley ["Narrow Passage"] was very nice. However, I must point out that the "water hemlock" plant pictured on page 11 is toxic from top to bottom, not just the roots. I might be wrong, but it seems that several years ago someone hiking in West Oak Creek Canyon used a piece of water hemlock to make a reed whistle and died from touching it to his lips. The plant is very toxic, and hikers need to be able to identify it and all other poisonous plants in the wild.

*Dave Rudolph, Portola, California*

**Kind of Ironic**

I really enjoyed Jo Baeza's article ["Soul of the Mountain," July 2007] on the White Mountains. Having moved to Anthem from Park City, Utah, I'm always ready to get back up into the high country. However, I couldn't help but note that near the end of the article, one paragraph read, "... the top of Baldy is closed to all but native people," and the next paragraph read, "to native people, no one owns the land." Perhaps there should have been some verbiage in between to help attenuate the irony.

*Jim Puckett, Anthem*

**It's Cold Here**

This is just a quick note to thank you for a fine magazine. I participated in the [online] voting for the cover of your August issue, because as a 62-year-old Cochise County native (and current resident of cold Vermont), I wish I were home. Soon, I hope!

*Jim Stone, St. Johnsbury, Vermont*

**It's Cold Here, Too**

I was recently looking at the July issue of *Arizona Highways*. As always, I read the magazine from cover to cover, starting with the first pages and reading all of the stories, all the way to the end. This issue is wonderful, with such incredible color pictures and such good stories. I'm a

winter visitor and have traveled all over Arizona during the past 12 years, and I can always find another place to visit by reading your magazine. I've even found your gift shop on Lewis Avenue. So, congratulations to all of you at *Arizona Highways* for this superb issue.

*Francis W. Warren Jr., Stow, Massachusetts*

**That's Bisbee**

As Richard Shelton wrote in his excellent memoir, *Going Back to Bisbee*, an often-used local saying ("That's Bisbee") is perhaps best exemplified by Greg Pike and his loveable dog, cat and mouse that were featured in your September issue ["Caught in the Act on Bisbee's Main Street"]. No tourist comes to Bisbee that doesn't go back home without favorably commenting about our many unparalleled attractions, including Greg and his friends. All I can say is, "That's Bisbee."

*PJ. (Pete) Herrmann, Bisbee*

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	July '06-June '07 Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months	June '07 Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date
A. Total number copies printed	232,203	223,211
B. Paid circulation		
1. Outside-county, mail subscriptions	202,980	196,531
2. In-county subscriptions	706	533
3. Sales through dealers, carriers, street vendors, counter sales and other non-USPS paid distribution	11,400	11,714
4. Other classes mailed through the USPS	0	0
C. Total paid circulation	215,086	208,778
D. Free distribution by mail		
1. Outside-county	282	332
2. In-county	0	0
3. Other classes mailed through the USPS	34	30
E. Free distribution outside the mail	0	0
F. Total free distribution	316	362
G. Total distribution	215,401	209,140
H. Copies not distributed	16,802	14,071
I. Total	232,203	223,211
J. Percent paid circulation	99.85%	99.82%

I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.  
Win Holden, Publisher

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**highways on tv**

*Arizona Highways* magazine has inspired an independent weekly television series, hosted by former Phoenix TV news anchor Robin Sewell. For channels and show times, log on to arizonahighways.com; click on "DISCOVER ARIZONA"; then click on the "*Arizona Highways* goes to television!" link on the right-hand side.

When we asked Charles Bowden to write about his most memorable journey in Arizona, it led straight to the Sonoran Desert, not far from Tucson Mountain Park.  
RANDY PRENTICE



BRANDON SULLIVAN

**CHARLES BOWDEN CAN WRITE.**

Exhibit A: "This part cannot be slighted or the blackness will take over, and then the reel begins playing in the mind, that hideous tape that nothing seems to erase or edit or alter, the tape that zooms in and out of scenes so swiftly the body feels vertigo, and the eye

focuses in disbelief on a pin, a small metal grenade pin, and the entire universe — yes, all of it — wrenches to a halt to consider one simple question: Is that pin straight, or is that pin bent?"

That's a sentence from a piece Chuck did for *Esquire* in 1999. A few years later, when *Esquire* was digging through its archives to come up with the "70 greatest sentences" in the magazine's illustrious history, that sentence made the cut, along with lines by guys named Steinbeck, Fitzgerald and Hemingway.

Yes. Charles Bowden can write.

Exhibit B: "And then one night there is a grinding sound, some loud cracks, and with dawn the river is opening up and within days and weeks the snow goes out — though there are always those late storms — and leaves emerge, scent fills the air and birds missing for long, gray months suddenly appear at the feeder in the yard."

That's a sentence from this month's cover story. It's one of 71 remarkable sentences in an essay by Charles Bowden titled "Coming to Arizona." By the way, if you're doing the math and thinking 71 sentences sounds like a short story, keep in mind that Chuck's sentences tend to be pretty long (see Exhibits A & B).

"Coming to Arizona" is part of a package we're calling "Spiritual Journeys." In addition to Chuck's essay, we also have essays by Craig Childs, a wonderful writer and longtime contributor to *Arizona Highways*, and Linda Ellerbee, a self-described "recovering journalist" whose writing will inspire you to throw out the remote control and start a book club.

When we assigned the essays, we asked the writers to share their most memorable excursions in Arizona. We were looking for life-changing experiences — stories that were poignant, prominent and powerful. Turns out, they got the message.

In Chuck's essay, he writes about his transition from the comfortable world of teaching history at the University of Illinois in Chicago to the harsh realities of being a writer and wanderer in the Sonoran Desert. Although there's a literal element to the essay — his drive from the Midwest to Arizona — his piece is more about the figurative transition from feeling trapped to coming alive. Or, as he writes, doing "something that matters to me rather than something that matters to a world I want to leave." Linda Ellerbee's journey is along the same lines. It's an awakening, of sorts.

The literal expedition is a rafting trip with six kids through the Grand Canyon. The figurative journey is the change in attitude experienced by the children after 226 miles in a world as foreign to them as the surface of the moon. Among other things, they learn there's more to life than lip gloss; and life, like the Canyon, is bigger than all of us. As you'll see, that's the main point of "Canyons Don't Care," which is one of the best things you'll ever read — in this magazine, in *Esquire* or anywhere else. It's that good. Thank you, Linda.

"Farewell to Canyon Creek" by Craig Childs is another essay that gets very high marks. Like the others, it has both a literal and a figurative thread. The trip itself is about Craig's trek into the Arizona wilderness to sprinkle his father's ashes in a creek they'd explored so many times as father and son. The spiritual journey, of course, goes much deeper than the depths of a canyon.

It's a journey that most of us will make, one way or another, at some point in our lives. And this time of year — whether you celebrate Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah or the start of the NFL playoffs — it's a good time to reflect on family or friends or whatever matters most to you.

What matters most to me right now is finishing this column. If I were Charles Bowden, I'd end with a brilliant string of words that would be echoed by editors, English professors and literary junkies for years to come. I'm not Chuck, though — not even in my wildest dreams — so I'll simply end with this: Happy holidays, and thanks for spending another year with *Arizona Highways*.

— Robert Stieve  
rstieve@arizonahighways.com

## Visual Icons

### Waterfalls of the Havasupai

I'VE RESISTED GOING INTO HAVASU CANYON since first arriving in Arizona 30 years ago. My reason was simple: I didn't want to join the long line of photographers to re-record the turquoise pools and iconic waterfalls. I felt there was nothing new to discover.

I was wrong.

In early May, I was tapped to lead a photography workshop into Havasu Canyon with my longtime friend Jeff Foott. He urged and cajoled me until I relented and signed on.

If you choose, you can hike into the Canyon "self-contained," schlepping all manner of photographic equipment for 10 miles on the Havasupai Trail, descending 3,000 vertical feet below the Canyon Rim. Ours, however, was a different kind of trip. We were to be instructors for a group of serious "older" photographers (including me) not ready for that much adventure. So, we boarded the helicopter that also transports supplies to the tribal village of Supai in the heart of Havasu Canyon.

The chopper leaped off the rimrock and dropped into the chasm. In a mere eight minutes, we landed in Supai, ready to begin the 2-mile hike to our base camp. With mules carrying the heavy equipment, we were free to dance down the trail with cameras, water and light clothing in our daypacks.

Although I was expecting disappointment from the stereotypical, ubiquitously photographed waterfalls, I was blown away. Nothing prepared me for the sinuous, erratic, travertine-terraced formations with otherworldly azure-colored water falling everywhere.

Our camp reverberated with the flowing water's sweet music, and I saw potential photographs everywhere I turned. What truly amazed me was the incredible diversity in compositions that appeared like magic.

Okay, I'm a professional photographer, and I'm supposed to "see" images everywhere, but what about the Average Joe?

Well, I am the Average Joe, and I'll let you in on my photography secret. Start small. Simply concentrate on details when you arrive at a place that overwhelms the senses with sheer beauty. Start small by finding intricate patterns to



photograph. If I'm really smitten by those details, I try incorporating them as foregrounds for grander compositions.

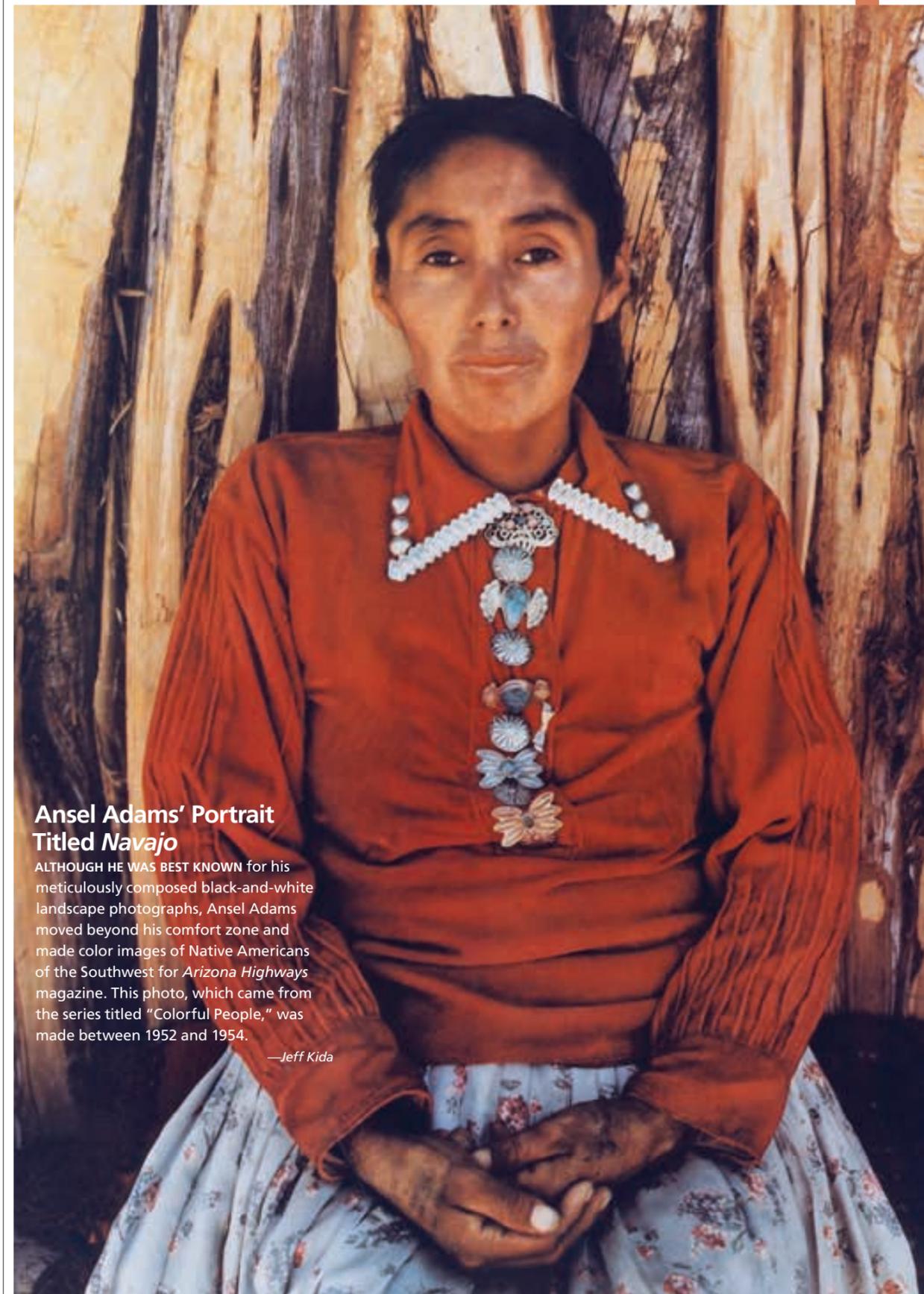
Having settled on a foreground, I move around my little detail until I can line it up with an equally amazing background. Next, I try photographing with wide-angle lenses and experimenting with telephoto lenses. My feeling is this: If I really want to capture a scene, I should work hard at it until the composition pleases me.

When I select a wide-angle lens, I'm consciously emphasizing the foreground. When I select a telephoto lens, I'm compressing the scene, bringing the background and foreground closer together in the camera's finder. Before long, I'm using my equipment to "carve out" compositions within the grand landscape—and it all begins with simple details that look interesting.

Based on all the published work I've seen over the years, I typically have a mental inventory of possibilities before arriving in a place. But discovering different places, combined with my personal way of seeing compositions, taught me that there's always a new way of seeing, even when the subject is a visual icon like Havasu Canyon.

At the end of the trip, the hike out was easy. Sure, my pack was jammed with exposed film, but everyone knows that exposed film and filled flash cards weigh a lot less. Right? ■

**TRIPS AND FALLS** After some resistance, photographer Jack Dykinga finally made his first trip to Havasu Canyon to photograph its iconic waterfalls. Instead of disappointment, he found the travertine-laden creek, terraced spillways and diverse compositions inspiring. JACK DYKINGA

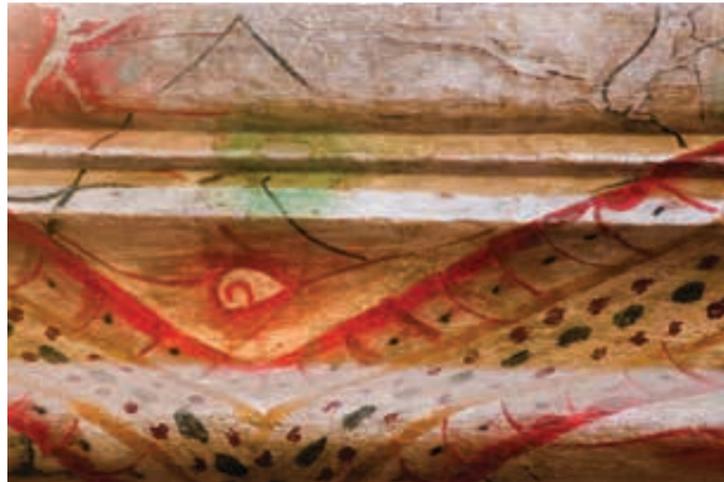


### Ansel Adams' Portrait Titled *Navajo*

ALTHOUGH HE WAS BEST KNOWN for his meticulously composed black-and-white landscape photographs, Ansel Adams moved beyond his comfort zone and made color images of Native Americans of the Southwest for *Arizona Highways* magazine. This photo, which came from the series titled "Colorful People," was made between 1952 and 1954.

—Jeff Kida

ANSEL ADAMS



### Saintly Safari at Mission San Xavier del Bac

CHILDREN SOMETIMES SEE THEM right away, the animals—critters of Mission San Xavier del Bac. But adults don't.

The mission, located 9 miles south of Tucson, has earned the accolade of being the finest example of Spanish Colonial art and architecture in the United States. Amid the interior wall art, the paintings of religious events, the statues of saints, the carvings of angels, hide desert creatures painted by the native people of the land. This art may be one of two instances, when, unsupervised, they worked their designs in among the motifs of the artists brought up from the interior of the Spanish New World empire. The line drawings of mice, rabbits, snails and a rattlesnake hold their own places of honor in the 200-year-old structure.

Woven into the complex motif of the cornice sets on the left and right sides of the main altar (above) are four characters: a snail, a snake, a rabbit and a human (top).

For a sighting of these tiny church dwellers, visitors should look to the left and right of the altar area. If you still have trouble, ask a child—they always look up.

Information: (520) 294-2624; sanxaviermission.org/.

—Kathleen Walker

### A Country Kitchen

FOR A COUNTRY EXPERIENCE in the middle of Phoenix, stroll under the 60-year-old pecan trees at The Farm at South Mountain on your way to Quiessence Restaurant & Wine Bar. One of three restaurants situated on 10 lush acres, Quiessence shares The Farm with a naturopathic doctor's office, a day spa and an organic garden.

Quiessence serves dinner Tuesday through Saturday evenings. But if you're looking for a unique culinary adventure, reserve the "Brick Oven Table," which sits outside on an intimate patio surrounded by a vine-covered lattice and romantic lighting. The chefs will create a multicourse dinner for up to four people based on your preferences. Dedicated to using only the freshest local and seasonal ingredients, Chef de Cuisine Greg LaPrad and staff promise a garden-to-table dining experience. In fact, Maya's at The Farm, the organic garden bordering Quiessence, supplies a lot of the produce for the kitchen. It doesn't get much fresher than that.

Information: (602) 276-0601; quiessencerestaurant.com or (602) 276-6360; thefarmatsouthmountain.com.

—Marilyn Hawkes



### Riordan Mansion Christmas Celebration

PUT ON YOUR BEST HOLIDAY ATTIRE and get ready for a turn-of-the-century Christmas party at the Riordan Mansion (left) in Flagstaff. Built in 1904 by brothers Timothy and Michael Riordan as a home for their families, the mansion is a quintessential example of the era's Arts and Crafts-style architecture.

Festively decorated for an old-fashioned Christmas all month long with evergreen bows, pinecones, candles and a towering fir tree trimmed with ornaments handmade by fourth grade students at St. Mary's Catholic School in Flagstaff, mansion tours showcase original artifacts, Stickley furniture and Riordan family mementos.

On December 15, a free day-long event will include a children's party from 9 A.M. to 11 A.M. including arts and crafts and a Santa meet-and-greet. Mrs. Claus will read Christmas stories to the children. Hot cider and cake will be served as partygoers listen to Christmas music and enjoy the north-country good cheer of the holiday season.

Information: (928) 779-4395; pr.state.az.us.

—Ashley Macha



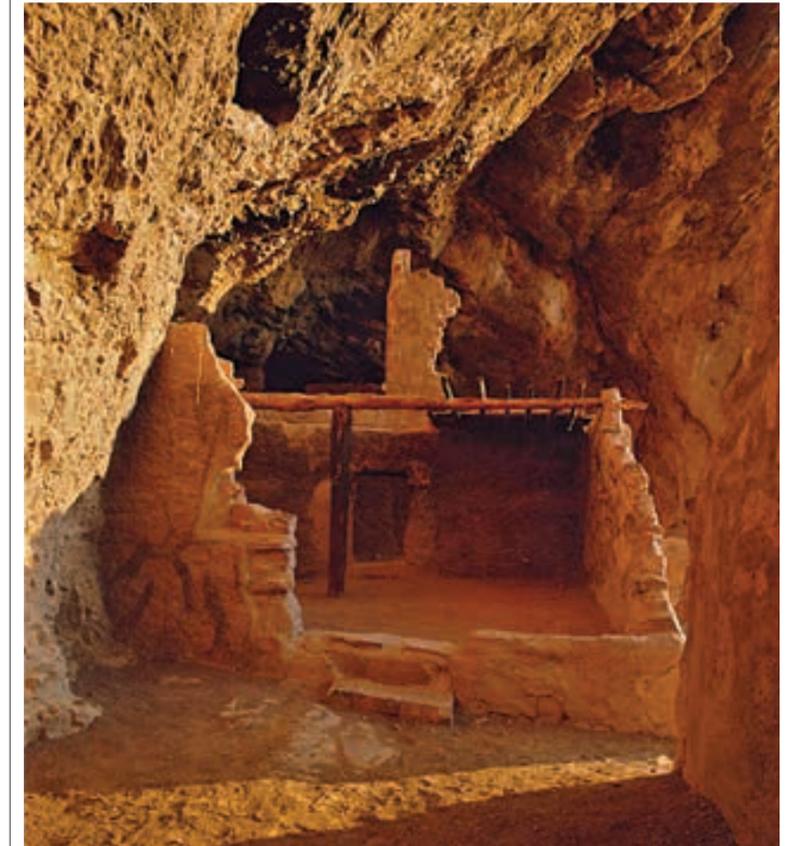
### Arizona Cardinals

IF YOU SEE A CARDINAL at your birdfeeder, more than likely it makes its home close by. The cardinal is a nonmigratory bird that usually lives within a mile of where it was born. Most often spotted in the Midwestern and Eastern United States, the cardinal's song also can be heard in Arizona.

Associated with Christmas because of its vibrant red color, the cardinal got its name from the crimson robes of the Roman Catholic cardinals. But only the male sports bright-red feathers. The female is clad in a dull, olive-brown plumage with a spray of red on the crest, wings and tail only.

When a male cardinal finds a suitable mate and settles down to nest, he will aggressively defend his territory, which can be up to 4 acres. The male cardinal is so protective that he has been known to attack his own reflection in a mirror or window.

—Marilyn Hawkes



### Monumental Centennial

*"To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed."*

—Theodore Roosevelt, December 3, 1907

SINCE ITS BEGINNING IN 1907, when President Theodore Roosevelt dedicated 640 acres for conservation, the Tonto National Monument (above) has preserved cliff dwellings and other remnants of ancient cultures that attract scientists and visitors from around the world. Situated within the Sonoran Desert's Tonto Basin in Central Arizona, the monument celebrates its centennial anniversary on December 19, 2007. The commemoration will include a fee-free day, reservations-only backcountry tours to two masonry sites, as well as a centennial exhibit at the visitors center and even a cake in honor of the 100 years that the monument has prospered.

Information: (928) 467-2241; nps.gov/tont/.

—Ashley Macha



### Let's Hear It for Talking Books

HEARING AN EXCITING NARRATION of the popular Beatrix Potter stories or listening to the latest issue of *National Geographic* magazine are just a few of the many offerings of the Arizona State Braille and Talking Book Library.

Located in Phoenix, the library operates as a division of the Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records agency, and provides a full range of material to anyone temporarily or permanently visually challenged. The formats include audio film descriptions, Braille magazines, cassette novels and even a telephone newslines available each morning.

The cassette magazine catalog also offers *Arizona Highways* magazine issues dating back to 1975.

Information: (602) 255-5578; www.lib.az.us/braille.

—Carley Partridge



About a year ago, we asked some of our favorite writers to share their most memorable excursions in Arizona. We were looking for life-changing experiences — poignant, prominent and powerful. Well, they didn't disappoint. What follows are the memories of Charles Bowden, Linda Ellerbee and Craig Childs, all of whom write with such descriptive language that you'll feel as if you were right there with them. Along with their words, of course, are some of the most amazing photographs you'll ever see. Beautiful words, beautiful photos . . . this is our gift to you. Happy holidays.





SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

## Coming to Arizona

Chicago is a great city, and life at one of its universities is safe and relatively sane. So, why would somebody chuck it all to become a writer in a place where everything that matters is in peril? Only the writer knows for sure.

By Charles Bowden

T

THE PINES OF THE PLATEAU GAVE WAY AT THE MOGOLLON RIM, and then came the cottonwoods of the Verde River, the climb up to the grasses and junipers of the bench at Cordes Junction and, finally, the slide down Black Canyon to the burning desert floor of saguaros, creosotes and mesquites. Somewhere in that strand of earth, I decided to toss aside my life as I'd been living it, come back to the hot ground and be a writer. I remember staring out the windshield of an International Harvester pickup into the glare hour after hour, my mind slowly tumbling half-formed thoughts like rocks in the barrel of a mineral-polishing machine.

I can remember the low roar of the engine—a six-cylinder with four in the floor—the pitted glass, the brown of the ground as I slipped down the Rim to the river. The days before are hazy, something about the ponderosa forest around Flagstaff, a walk down into the wilderness of Sycamore Canyon, that large elk antler I spied on the ground with its whiff of lust and freedom. Here was the deal: I'd had my ticket punched and could not live with my sentence.

I was teaching American history at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle Campus. I'd gone to a national meeting of historians in Boston and the ratio of applicants to jobs was around

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**EPHEMERAL GOLD** Sunlight sneaking beneath low-lying clouds on a wintry daybreak in Grand Canyon National Park casts Vishnu Temple's sharp shadow against the Walhalla Plateau's snow-dusted cliff face (preceding panel, pages 8 and 9). RANDY PRENTICE

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

**PRISMATIC ARCH** A rainbow arcs to earth at sunset in the Pusch Ridge Wilderness north of Tucson (top). JACK DYKINGA

**FROZEN MOMENT** Wind-whipped snow adds a chilly cover to an otherwise placid view of the San Francisco Peaks north of Flagstaff (right). ROBERT G. McDONALD

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





50-to-one. Somehow, I'd lost and gained steady work. There'd been a spring some years earlier when I was wrapping up my undergraduate degree at the University of Arizona, an obligation to my parents who had never had the pleasure of college life. All those last months, I dreamed of taking my finals and hitting the road. My plan at that time was to hitchhike with a friend to Veracruz, ship out on a freighter to Europe and then either find life or have life find me.

But just before my escape, a letter came offering me a full ride plus living expenses at any university in the United States. I lacked the moral fiber to say no. So for six years I'd been either a serf of graduate school in Madison, Wisconsin, or writing my dissertation in Massachusetts, or for the past year, living in a basement in Chicago with a Newfoundland dog and teaching.

The dog had been part of my survival scheme: I figured I could not live in a bad place with a huge black dog. I was wrong. My other tactic was a 17-foot fiberglass canoe I'd bought in Wisconsin on the assumption that it would force me to stay near

**FRESHLY FALLEN** Undisturbed snow coats ponderosa pine needles near the Mogollon Rim (above). JERRY SIEVE

**BEHIND THE SCENE** Framed by ponderosa pines, the San Francisco Peaks rise majestically near Flagstaff (right). LAURENCE PARENT

wild rivers. This tactic also had failed, though I'd fled from time to time to free-running streams and cold nights and dawns as fresh as Eden as I paddled down rivers out of dreams.

So now it is summer, I am scheduled to return to Chicago and my career, and all I want is flowing past the window of my truck as I speed from the plateau to the desert. I dream of starting a magazine to capture it all, or maybe writing a book to capture it all, to do something that matters to me rather than something that matters to a world I want to leave. Arizona and the Southwest tells you one sure thing: Everything that matters is here and it is in peril. I felt I'd somehow faltered and gotten shanghaied into a dead zone called *(Text continued on page 17)*







*All in all, the trip took days and something ended out there, and began.*

*(Continued from page 12)* the American university. And the work was easy—I taught only 10 hours a week on three successive days and then promptly fled to a cabin in Michigan by the lake—dunes and endless waves.

In novels and the movies, there is always this moment when everything becomes crystal clear, a decision is reached and suddenly the music comes up with heroic resolve. Life, in my experience, is not like that. It's more like the ice going out on a river come spring. Day after day the huge jams seem immobile, the ground remains frozen and finally anyone standing on the bank gives up all hope, decides there will never be a thaw or one more flower and resigns himself to permanent winter. And then one night there is a grinding sound, some loud cracks and with dawn the river is opening up and with days and weeks the snow goes out—though there are always those late storms—and leaves emerge, scent fills the air and birds missing for long, gray months suddenly appear at the feeder in the yard.

So I decided to leave a safe and sane job and become a writer in a kind of staggering way. There is the ride from Flagstaff down to the lower desert, those hours with things shape-shifting in my mind, the beckoning of the land and the sense that I was wasting my life with a job I did not want. I am crossing Dry Beaver Creek, and off to the south and west rises Mingus Mountain, the Verde flows, and I realize no one in my family is a writer, that I have no background in this business, no English beyond the freshman requirement, no journalism school, nothing but a history of sitting under a tree with a book, spellbound. I've never met a writer or a reporter. Well, at least I'm pure, I decide.

But I hear things in my head and I don't find these things in newspapers and magazines. And so I decide I must find a way to put them down on paper.

That was the first phase of this staggering move toward a new life. I got to Tucson, picked up a phone, called the chairman of my department and told him I was walking out on a three-year contract. Then for some years, I did odd jobs like mowing lawns and trimming trees and picking up little editing stints here and there. Somewhere in there I had a book published. Finally, I talked my way into a job with a daily newspaper (I was down to less than 50 bucks at the moment) and stayed three years, although to be accurate I quit three times.

To stay somewhat balanced, I'd disappear at times and walk the western deserts of the state, a hundred to two hundred miles at a crack. That was my cure for covering murders and other mayhems and that was essentially the undoing of me, also. About 75 miles out of Rocky Point, *(Text continued on page 21)*

**WINTER WONDER** In Tucson Mountain Park, a saguaro cactus with multiple uplifted arms is surrounded by a surprising blanket of snow in the Sonoran Desert (preceding panel, pages 14 and 15). RANDY PRENTICE

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

**HOME SWEET PONDEROSA** With the ponderosa pine tree its source of nourishment and habitat, an Abert's squirrel has no need to store food for the winter. TOM BEAN



**LATE BLOOMER** Waxy, white saguaro blossoms (above), Arizona's state flower, have a ripe-melon fragrance and appear on cacti that have reached about 8 feet in height. GEORGE RAYMOND

**CLEARLY SHARP** Late-afternoon sunlight following a storm over the Santa Catalina Mountains brings crisp clarity to prickly pear and saguaro cacti amid the grasses and shrubs of Catalina State Park north of Tucson (right). JACK DYKINGA





**FLORAL SEA** The Sierra Pinta Mountains rise out of a sea of white dune primroses and vivid pink sand verberna in Southwestern Arizona's Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. ROBERT G. McDONALD

(Continued from page 17) Sonora, I was in the Growler Valley of the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge when I realized something had to give. The newspaper was my life, but my life was not enough. This part was hard for me since—then and now—I've never had a single complaint about the newspaper business. A part of me was born for such noise. I remember sprawling under a creosote bush in the heat of a late April afternoon and reading a memoir of the Mexican Revolution. Pancho Villa roared through my head and behind me lay at least 20 miles of a greasewood flat, ground I'd walked without seeing a single human footprint.

I decided I had to roll the dice, give up my day job as it were, simply write and live with the consequences. Of course, there'd been nudges. By this time, I'd met Edward Abbey and we'd become friends, had those long lunches where little seemed to get said and everything I needed seemed to be communicated. Ed was a kind of living reprimand to me. He'd simply gone and done it, lived hand-to-mouth for years, and moved through all the places I loved. I remember the hot, dry wind blowing through, the slender lines of shade from the greasewood and then the long walk out, going up to Charlie Bell Well, and then heading east until finally, at Ajo, I wandered into the world of cars and electric lights. All in all, the trip took days and something ended out there, and began.

One fall day I went into the Huachuca Mountains and spent a long afternoon with Bil Gilbert. He'd first stumbled into that border range when he was writing the book on coatimundis, *Chulo*. But I'd met him when he was touring *Westering Man*, his biography of Joe Walker, possibly the least-known and most significant mountain man of the early West. The book had become living tissue to me and told me what I'd failed to do with my life and what I must make amends for in the future. Walker was the ultimate lover of the West, and like all of us who become bewitched, he'd helped destroy it.

We whiled away the afternoon with Bil hearing me out and giving advice, and me ignoring everything but the whisper through the oaks of the mountains and the blue sky screaming over my head. Once Bil had tracked a coyote in the snow of the mountain and this trail led to a roadrunner with broken wings and a coyote blinded in both eyes by the bird. He had to destroy them both, but still that memory of his tracking lingered in my mind as we talked.

I remember this: a few weeks later putting on an old, green Pendleton shirt favored by my late father and walking into the newsroom, throwing down my press credentials and walking out.

I went up into the Santa Catalina Mountains and six months and hundreds of miles of walking later came out with a book about the range. Since then, it has been financial insecurity, words and ground. But at least I finally got started. It was a kind of three-part dance—plateau, desert and mountain.

Like everyone who comes to this place, I've hardly scratched the surface. This last part is, of course, the blessing. ■■

*Charles Bowden lives in Tucson, writes books and magazine stories and thinks June is the finest month of all in the Sonoran Desert.*



SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS

## Canyons Don't Care

Scenic beauty, thrilling adventure, a sense of accomplishment . . . rafting the Colorado has a lot to offer, but there's more than the obvious. There's also a lesson in life, and whether you're young or old, the Grand Canyon forces everyone to learn it.

S

By Linda Ellerbee

SOMEBODY SAID ZEN TEACHES US THAT ONCE WE OPEN UP TO THE POSSIBILITY, INDEED THE INEVITABILITY OF OUR OWN DEATH, WE can begin to transform that situation and lighten up about it.

Wrong.

We may, on recognizing the truth of what is, lighten up about it, but we don't transform life and death. They transform us. You don't need to understand Zen to understand this. Getting cancer teaches you the same thing. And so does paddling the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon—only in the Canyon the lesson is swifter, wetter and a whole lot more thrilling.

This is my third time rafting the 226 river miles from Lee's Ferry to Diamond Creek. The first time I was still mentally recovering from losing both of my breasts to cancer, and then putting myself through nasty months of chemo in hopes of not losing the rest of me. The second time I went down the river as part of a group of women writers who'd contributed essays to a 1998 book titled *Writing Down the River*. This time I'm taking the journey with six children, not my own.

We're making a television program.

My company, Lucky Duck Productions, has produced *Nick News*, a children's television news and documentary series, since 1991. We cover the behavior of nations, not how crayons are made, which means we've produced shows for American children about the hopes and fears of kids from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe—topics such as AIDS in South Africa and America, terrorism in the Middle East and in America, caste discrimination in India, racism in America. But our series airs on Nickelodeon, home of *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Dora the Explorer*, and so sometimes we make shows that are more about

having adventures—learning while *playing*—than they are about fear, loss, disease and death. That, at least, is the theory.

This is supposed to be one of those shows.

*A Nick News Adventure: The Great Wave Train!*

It's probably come to your attention that in life, there's the change you choose, and the change that chooses you. Each of the six kids with whom I will be rafting the river has chosen to come on this trip, ready, they believe, for whatever changes the river might choose for them.

But they don't understand. Not really. Neither did I in the beginning. I remember my own first trip, when, sitting in the front of the paddle raft, my stick in the water, I tried not to whimper as I watched a 15-foot high wave heading directly at me. I remember spending a long rainy night on a rock ledge, 20 of us lined up like sardines in sleeping bags, wondering why on earth I was there. I remember the paddle raft flipping, vertically, throwing us into that icy water, instantly robbing me of my breath and any remaining illusions of control.

I also remember being swallowed up by beauty: crayon-colored days and star-littered nights, the gift of seeing a tiny soft blossom grow out of hard rock, the astounding awe I felt every time I looked up those red- or black- or sand-colored walls, or tried to climb one of them. If the Grand Canyon is all about wonder, it's also a constant, eternal reminder of our relatively swift-passing human lives. This is nature, magnificent and uncaring. That's the scariest truth of all. The river, the Canyon, they don't care. They do what they do, and we humans either adapt or perish.

"Can you breathe?" Julie, our paddle captain, has just finished cinching Natasha's life preserver tighter than the girl can do it for herself.

"Only a little," Natasha says.

"Good," Julie says, giving the final strap one more mighty pull. "Only a little is all you need."

**LOOK OUT** Toroweap Overlook towers 3,000 vertical feet above the Colorado River where boaters brace themselves for the drop into Lava Falls Rapids (left). GARY LADD

**CANYON VISTA** Clouds gather at sunrise (above) over the Grand Canyon at Lipan Point. GEORGE STOCKING

**THE MIGHTY COLORADO** A prickly pear cactus emerges from rocky granite on the banks of the rushing Colorado River near the Diamond Creek confluence. The Grand Canyon's first hostelry, the Farlee Hotel, operated from 1884 to 1889 about a mile from the river's edge along this stretch. RANDY PRENTICE

The kids are about to paddle their first rapid.

"I was your age the first time I went down this river," Julie tells Natasha. "My father brought me."

At 14, Natasha is a California girl, all long hair, long legs and lip gloss, a girl who's never paddled, never hiked, never slept outdoors. Something about Natasha, probably the lip gloss, reminds me of a young woman I met on my first Canyon trip. She must have been 25 or so, but I'll never forget our third night on the river, watching her sit on a sandy beach, unpacking her gear. She reached into her dry bag, pulled out the totally useless electric hair dryer she'd brought with her, stared at it, and then burst into tears. I'm hoping Natasha won't be like that young woman.

Indira, also 14, is from Tennessee and has camped before, though she hasn't been to the Grand Canyon. None of them has. "It will be great to live in nature," Indira says. "It will be like Woodstock. I just hope I don't drown."

Justus is from Ohio. At 15, he's the oldest kid. No, that's wrong. At 61, I'm the oldest kid. The youngest is Nicole, from San Diego. She will turn 12 during our time on the river. Nicole wasn't supposed to be here at all. Derek, her 13-year-old brother, was.

But there was a problem.

When we take kids on these adventures—whether it's down the Amazon and into the rain forest, on safari in Kenya, herding cattle in Colorado, living in an elephant sanctuary in Thailand, or rafting the Colorado—we always take along a parent or guardian for each kid. We do this, not for the kids' or even the parents' comfort level, but for our own. If we're going to put your kid in even the tiniest bit of harm's way, we feel better if you're there, too. However, we always explain to the parents that they won't be *with* their kids, only nearby. We're making a television show—and parents aren't part of it. Most understand, although, there was one father who turned indignant when told he couldn't spend the day in the small boat with his son, fishing for piranha on a tributary of the Amazon. Silly fellow. He seemed to think we'd paid several hundred thousand dollars to put together a world-class vacation expressly for him and his kid. After I explained the facts of television to him, he spent the day with the other parents in another boat down another tributary, but he wasn't happy about it.

Derek's mother isn't like that; she was thrilled her son was going on a Grand Canyon adventure. However, her husband was in the military, serving in Iraq, and given the circumstances, she didn't feel right leaving Nicole, Derek's little sister, with *no* parent to take care of her. We agreed, and invited Nicole along for the ride.

Mike, the final member of our group, is 13 and from Pennsylvania. He says he's looking forward to seeing stars unpolluted by light, and making new friends.

Aren't we all?





**HOLD ON** Rowers navigate Hermit Rapids (top) on the Colorado River as their boat lurches in the churning water.

**SPLISH SPLASH** A boatman steers into the fifth wave at Hermit Rapids (above), which can rise as high as 20 feet.

**FREE FALLING** An oarsman rows into Upset Rapids (right) as a passenger tumbles from the boat. Col. Claude H. Birdseye named the rapids in 1923 after his expedition experienced its only serious upset there. PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELIAS BUTLER

**W**e have three big motorized rafts—one for the camera crew and their gear, one for the parents, one for the kids and me—and the paddle boat, which we (Julie, the kids and I) will unpack, inflate, put in, use, take out, deflate and put away many times before we reach Diamond Creek. After we paddle our first rapid, the kids are feeling fearless. Sort of.

Indira: “In the big boat, you could hold on. In the paddle boat, you had to push the boat through the water by hanging onto nothing but your paddle.”

Natasha: “I was scared. Now I want more.”

Derek: “We got soaked. That was so cool.”

Mike: “It wasn’t *that* big a rapid.”

In the evenings, on the small beaches that line the river, we form lines to haul gear, then set up camp, help make meals, clean up our mess and try to clean up our bodies, learning what we can live without: running water, indoor toilets, mirrors, electricity, air-conditioning, automobiles and, of course, television.

We also learn what we can live with.

Indira: “Fire ants? Nobody mentioned anything about fire ants.”

The kids put up their tents, but like me, rarely sleep in them. Instead, they leave tents to parents, choosing to throw their own sleeping bags onto the sand in a loose group. They are becoming a gang. This is good. I think about what Mike said about making new friends. All the kids are friendly, but as usual, some are closer than others. For instance, Mike and Derek haven’t especially gravitated to each other. I think about my own belief that one of the gifts of travel is the possible discovery of yourself through other people. I don’t know it then, but Mike and Derek are about to learn this truth for themselves, the way most of us learn anything worth knowing: the hard way.

We’re several days into the trip, and we’ve come to Hermit Rapids, a.k.a. *the great wave train*. Julie decides we aren’t qualified yet to paddle Hermit. We will run this rapid in one of the

motor rigs. The kids decide this means a wussy ride, and behave accordingly. But the river doesn’t care what the kids think, and will take all of three seconds to prove this to them. We set off through Hermit. More happens after that. At the end of the rapids, we talk about it.

Mike: “I just sat up front and didn’t hold on.”

*You know, like on a roller coaster.*

Derek: “I happened to look back and Mike had slipped or been knocked out of the raft. I didn’t even think. I just grabbed at him. I got hold of his life jacket and dragged him back in.”

Mike: “Now I understand it’s not a joke.”

Derek and Mike are friends now—no, more than friends. One believes the other saved his life. So do the other kids.

They are becoming less a gang, more a team.

The river has made them so.

Every day we hike at least once. Of course we hike up to the ancient Puebloan granaries. It’s one of *(Text continued on page 31)*





**HIDING PLACE** The ancestral Puebloans built granaries high above the Colorado River for secure storage of their seeds (preceding panel, pages 28 and 29). RANDY PRENTICE

**STONE WALL** Muav limestone (left), formed more than 500 million years ago, lines the sheer walls of National Canyon in Grand Canyon National Park. ELIAS BUTLER

**WHAT'S UP?** A salmon-colored chuckwalla (above), peeks out from a crack between two rocks. DAMON G. BULLOCK

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(Continued from page 27) the high spots of the trip. Literally.

Natasha (puffing): “You told us it would be really steep, but short.”

Sorry, Natasha. Grownups lie.

Nicole: “Short? I’m so short myself I have to work twice as hard as the rest of you to get up this mountain.”

Justus: “Cliff. It’s a cliff, not a mountain.”

Mike: “No view is worth this.”

But when we get to the granaries, all of us are slam-dunked by this view. The Grand Canyon is below and around us, the river a small green thread at the bottom, and above us, all the sky there is. We are lost in beauty. Of course, the Canyon doesn’t care about that either.

One day, up the Little Colorado, we reverse our life jackets, wearing them like diapers, and then, forming our own wave train, each linking our legs around the person in front of us,

we hoot and holler our way down that smaller, friendlier, more shallow river. This is followed by a world-class mud fight. Kids love mud fights. I know. I tend to start them.

“This was my favorite day,” one kids sighs.

Derek tells us later that his favorite spot on the river was Deer Creek. “It was this beautiful pool of turquoise fed by a waterfall. We all held hands and walked into it together. *We walked into a rainbow.*”

Natasha: “I wasn’t *at* the end of the rainbow. I was *in* it.”

You see why I may be the luckiest journalist in the world. For 16 years I’ve been granted the opportunity to experience the world through new eyes, younger souls.

We swim in more natural pools, hike more cliffs, play more games and paddle more rapids. Their confidence builds. Then we come to Upset Rapids. Good name for it. On the 1-to-10 scale of difficulty and danger assigned to the rapids of the Grand Canyon, Upset is a 9. Julie tells us we have a 50 percent chance of flipping.

This is our big moment. If we don’t flip, if we paddle as a team, not a gang, if we get it right . . . then we (I don’t count me on this one) will become the youngest group ever to successfully paddle Upset. We will be *record-breakers*. Well, *they* will.

We hit Upset with all we’ve got.

Julie shouts commands. We follow them. We get slammed by walls of water. We breathe water. We survive. We triumph. Intact and in our raft.



**PEACEFUL PANORAMA** Grand Canyon high points form bright islands amid the shadows as day breaks at Lipan Point. A popular spot on the South Rim to view the Canyon, Lipan Point overlooks the Unkar Delta, inhabited by ancestral Puebloans from A.D. 850 to 1200. **GEORGE STOCKING**

“**T**hese kids?” Julie says, “They’ve earned the right to be here.”

By the end of the trip, each of the kids is, like everyone else who comes here, visibly or invisibly changed by the Canyon, the river, the experience of being part of them.

Derek: “I’ve learned no matter how old you are, you can do more than you think you can.”

Nicole: “I’ve got a lot of blisters and bug bites, but it was a wonderful way to turn 12.”

Natasha: “I’ve learned to roll in the mud, get dirty—and not worry about it.” Her lip gloss is gone.

Justus: “It was a test of strength and will.” His face says he knows he passed that test.

Mike: “In the end, even the hikes were worth the work.” He also has a new friend in Derek.

Indira: “I’ll miss everyone here. In the future I’ll appreciate my friends more.”

The future has a way of arriving unannounced.

One day after we leave the river at Diamond Creek, I’m in Houston, Texas, talking to an 11-year-old boy named Dewan. While we were experiencing the power and glory of nature in the Grand Canyon, that same nature, completely unbeknown to us, was showing another facet of its power to the Gulf Coast. We humans called it Katrina.

Dewan and his family lived in New Orleans. They got out at the last minute. Dewan persuaded his mother they had to leave, which means *he* may have saved *her* life. Their home in New Orleans is completely under water. Now they’re staying with relatives in Houston. I ask Dewan what he brought with him. He says he brought some clean underwear, that’s about it. I ask him what he left behind that he most wishes he’d brought.

“My friends,” he says in a quiet, sad young voice.

I ask him what he needs most right now.

“More friends.”

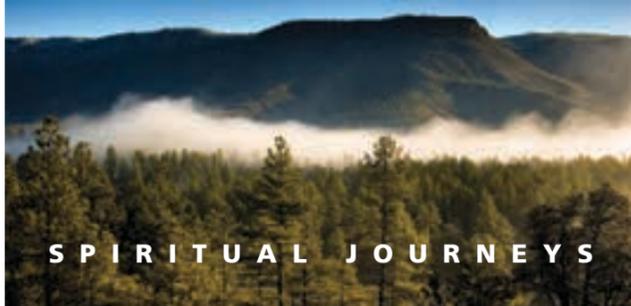
Life as Dewan knew it is over. He must find new friends, make a new home. It will take courage to release the familiar and embrace the new, but I’m betting Dewan will find that courage. I see it in the boy’s eyes.

We do not always grow chronologically. We grow when we need to, each of us as it comes our time to do so. This was true in the Grand Canyon. It is true in New Orleans. And in the end, it’s possible that we are not transformed by life so much as we are constantly transcending ourselves. It may be the most authentic thing about us.

At any age.

In any of life’s canyons. ■■

*Linda Ellerbee is a native Texan who took a wrong turn, ended up in New York City and now spends much of her time inventing reasons to change this. Or at least transcend it. Ellerbee, a former correspondent, reporter and anchor for NBC, ABC and CBS, owns Lucky Duck Productions, which produces “Nick News,” TV’s longest-running news show for children, airing on Nickelodeon.*



## Farewell at Canyon Creek

Special places hold special memories. For one writer, the place was Canyon Creek, and the memory was of his father. It was their place, and when it came time to say goodbye, they went together one last time.

*By Craig Childs*

I WAS 7 YEARS OLD WHEN MY FATHER TOOK ME TO CANYON CREEK. I HELD A FLY ROD IN TWO HANDS, CREEK WATER FLOWING over brown stones beside me. My father, in his 20s, tied a leader to my line, using a straight finger around which to make a nail knot. Some call it a blood knot, he said. I felt each of his tugs through the rod. When he finished, he expected me to tie my own fly onto the end, which took my small fingers about five minutes. He reached into the creek, lifting a wet stone, checking its underside to see what aquatic larvae were active. He gestured with the cobble, pointing downstream.

"It's called Canyon Creek because there's a deep canyon down there."

I looked downstream, between pines and cottonwoods. I glanced back at my father and he had this faraway look, somehow seeing the bowels of this creek 20 miles, 70 miles away. "All the way to the desert," he said. "Big cliffs and a narrow, dark bottom. Wild land down there." He picked out a fly for himself—an elk-hair caddis. "We'll go down some day, get inside that canyon."

I looked back down the creek and my imagination burst open like a magician's box. Shadows shifting against each other in the winding depths of cliff and creek. Madhouses of boulders and waterfalls. Somewhere down there.

WE returned and fished the head of Canyon Creek countless times over the next couple of decades, but my father and I never wandered farther down into the deep country below. That is why I went in my 30s, traveling with two friends, each of us wearing a heavy pack with two weeks' worth of food and gear. We were there to walk the canyon.

Meadows roamed alongside cold creek water, fringed by thick stands of ponderosa pine, white pine and Douglas fir. In the forests surrounding us, massive elk antlers lay discarded and cluttered with branches and rotted, fallen trees. We dropped our packs and I walked to the water where it ran clear and swift across a shield of bedrock. The lullaby sound of the upper creek

has always relaxed my muscles, made me close my eyes to listen more intently. The sound was not the roar of urgent water, and not the plucking of a tiny stream. It was the ornamental singing of an Arizona creek just beginning its way from the mountains to the desert.

In my right hand I carried a sack as heavy as a bag of granite—my father's ashes.

One friend, Keith Knadler, a river guide-turned-stock market day trader, read aloud from his journal, something about death and cycles. I listened, then reached out with the bag and poured the remains of my father into Canyon Creek.

Days after he died of a heart attack, I had sorted through his belongings where I found heaps of maps rolled, folded and stacked as if in obsession. Sometimes the same map had been purchased four or five times, folded and refolded until the paper turned soft as wool. He had pored over the topography of Arizona. One map was of the interior of Canyon Creek, a place he never went.

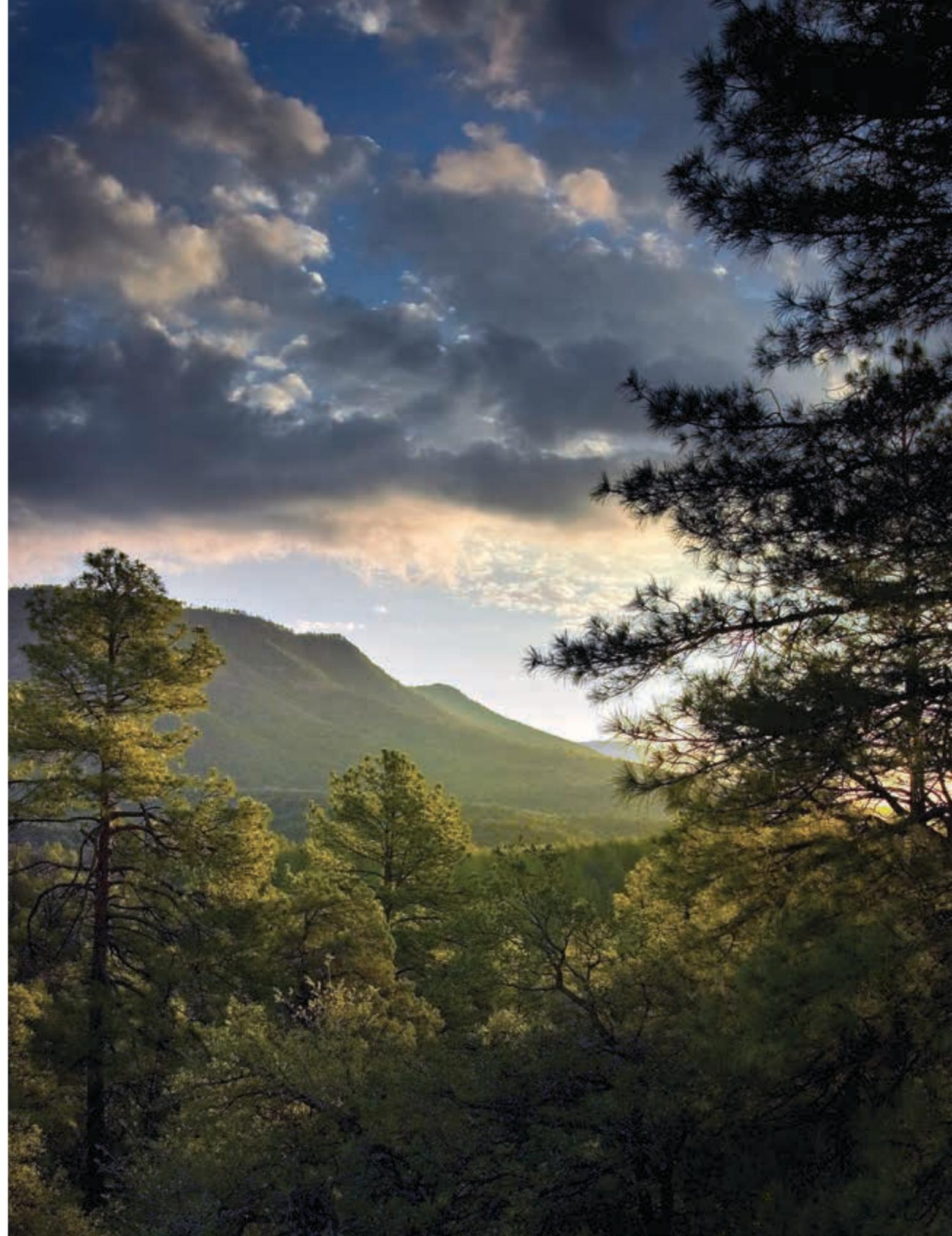
His ashes briefly clouded the downstream water. Currents sorted the fragments of bone, feathering my father into safe places—behind a rock, on the outside edges of a quick current, across fluted sand in a pool. The creek used his bones to spell out its intentions and directions. My father, now a subject of fluid mechanics, became more than ever a student of a creek he'd fished since before I was born.

"Done," I said, shaking out the last of the ashes.

My other friend, Irvin Fernandez, a federal wildlife biologist, said, "Just beginning."

From there we left, starting a journey from Canyon Creek's

**MORNING MIST** Early morning fog (above) drifts along the base of a prominent buttress on the Mogollon Rim in North-central Arizona. A Rim Country sunrise imitates art as watercolor clouds float above Milk Ranch Point near Pine (right). BOTH BY NICK BEREZENKO





*Lightning continued into the night—crisp,  
blue flares of electricity burning the air.*

origin at a cleft in the Mogollon Rim to its confluence with the Salt River more than a hundred miles below in the Sonoran Desert.

The weather on this February day was warm at 7,000 feet. Banks of snow dirtied with pine and spruce needles had been whittled down, left in only the most shaded places. On the third day down Canyon Creek we crossed fallen bridges of Douglas fir, sinking between steep walls. Timber rose densely up the canyon sides, occasionally revealing streaks of cliffs. This site was below the places my father and I had once fished. New country. Bigger boulders and sharper drops presented as meadows surrendered and swirled into short waterfalls.

Smells billowed into the air—the musk of animals and the heavy scent of garden loam. Wrinkled, dried canyon grapes released a sweet, fermented odor. A storm arrived in the late afternoon while I fished for dinner. A throaty boom of thunder struck the forest followed by echoes testing themselves through the canyon, rounding into smaller side canyons, rattling into the trees. A sheet of hail immediately followed. The stream bubbled with impacts, and I held my rod still. No sense in fishing, or moving. Water braided off my hat brim.

I had stood like this so many times in the past, shrouded in rain on Canyon Creek, motionless, my rod in my hands. Usually at these times my father had been a mile or so from me, alone on a creek boulder doing the same thing—listening to the graciously violent sounds of a storm, smelling the air, waiting.

When the storm subsided, I cast, sending out arcs of line. I cast below damming rock piles, into the good places where my father taught me that trout feed. The thunder became guarded with distance, grumbling away. Now drenched and darkened by clouds, the forest was opulent in shades of green.

Night came and brought heavy rain. The three of us set a tarp and crowded beneath it with our sleeping bags. With hiking boots stowed, turned upside-down so they wouldn't collect water, we sank into our bags. Lightning continued into the night—crisp, blue flares of electricity burning the air. Strokes of thunder lulled me to sleep, and I didn't wake again until dawn, when remnants of the storm drifted through the forest like ghosts.

We walked for several days into canyon after canyon. Tones of running water deepened and hissed as the landscape tightened. Penned by cliff walls, the creek became more resolute and turbulent.

**THROUGH THE VALE** Canyon Creek flows through an idyllic mountain meadow on the journey to its confluence with the Salt River. JEFF SNYDER

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

Morning came cold with beads of ice around the cavernous entrance to my sleeping bag. Sunrise was hardly warm. Irvin coaxed a fire out of damp pine needles and rain-wet twigs. A little flame came of it. Mostly smoke. We stood and crouched around it, letting the smoke permeate our hair and clothes and fingernails. We were deep into the White Mountain Apache Reservation. We had permission to be here, but there was no one to see our papers. The land felt empty. Yet it was full, rich, weighted with forest and eroded stone.

Day after day the forest changed. Heavy conifers gave way to oaks, and then to sycamores. We found our first sotol, a studded ribbon-leaved plant similar to an agave, and a gangly cactus called Whipple cholla, *Cylindropuntia whipplei*. The desert was coming.

The walking was hard with no trail to follow but the meandering path of the creek. At times I envied my father, turned to elemental pieces, flowing easily where I fell and pushed and clawed. He was free, and I imagined his bones spread over miles, tumbling through riffles, sinking to the bottom of pools under the belly-shadows of trout, catching among broken alder branches and stacks of waterlogged sycamore leaves. I thought of him as playful and ecstatic with the water. The finest dust of his ashes flushed into the dizzy bubbles of waterfalls.

Meanwhile, we set up camp in the narrow tumble of the canyon where Canyon Creek poured and leaked between half-cocked boulders three and four stories tall. I slept on sand, atop the tracks of a mountain lion that had walked past that morning.

We saw our first mesquite trees and bushes of cliffrose. Pine forests on high rims thinned into junipers and oaks and piñon pines. The canyon cut down into the salt-and-pepper granite floor of the desert, the rock carved by water into hooks and curves as elegant as whale flukes. Waterfalls stacked into each other over olive-green pools of unknown depth. Keith tested one, dropping his pack and standing naked on a polished granite promontory 25 feet above the water. He dove and the white flash of his body sailed underneath, into the dim, deep water. He emerged with a gasp.

Passage through the granite turned out to be more difficult than we had planned. The rock was beautiful and sleek, but relentless. Sheer domes had been smoothed by running water. Handholds were difficult to find. Along certain passageways, the entire creek became a deep flume a foot-and-a-half wide. After a couple of days, I had dislocated a number of ribs in a fall, and a couple of my fingers were broken from another fall. I wrote in my journal with big, sloppy letters.

Finally, the first saguaro cactus, green (Text continued on page 43)





**SOFTENED EDGE** At dawn, the Mazatzal Mountains provide a tranquil backdrop for a dramatic Coconino sandstone rampart at the edge of the Mogollon Rim (preceding panel, pages 38 and 39). NICK BEREZENKO  
■ To order a print of this photograph, see page 1.

**STILL LIFE IN BLOOM** Claret cup cactus blossoms (above) punctuate an otherwise monochromatic composition of ponderosa pine cones and lichen-covered stones. JACK DYKINGA

**CANYON COUNTRY** Flowing over large boulders, Canyon Creek travels through the upper Salt River Canyon on the White Mountain Apache Reservation (right). JEFF SNYDER





**DESERT REFLECTION** Higher elevations give way to Sonoran Desert flora and fauna in a canyon studded with carved boulders and giant saguaro cacti at the confluence of Canyon Creek with the Salt River. JEFF SNYDER

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(Continued from page 37) and heavy with arms, appeared like a gateway. We had reached the desert floor. In the final miles before the confluence of Canyon Creek and the Salt River, we found canyon ragweed and desert lavender woven into the granite cracks. Bristling teddy bear cholla grew on the slopes. Morning troops of javelinas, wild desert pigs, skirted out from under mesquite and paloverde trees. The larger gorge walls, thousands of feet above us, detached into buttes and pinnacles, releasing Canyon Creek. Still, in the bottom, the granite held on, white in morning light, the water clear, ethereal. Shallow with sand, the creek hummed and swirled.

The seasons of life had changed inside my body. Alone, I rested on a boulder in pure, hot sunlight, far beyond the dark timber and snow banks of the Mogollon Rim. I was now a desert dweller.

As I had walked from high country to desert it was not the tangible land that I felt change. It was my emotion. Every shift in color, temperature and plant life caused a transition in my blood, in every thought. There was, of course, the quantifiable: physical geology and botany, scientific nomenclature, laws of hydrology that now governed my father's bones. But more than anything, there was emotion. I could feel the change in the land, having for two weeks walked across one of its more striking transition zones.

Walking alone—we each found our own routes down—I arrived at the confluence of Canyon Creek and the Salt River among great, carved boulders. There was no banner, no fanfare. The creek flowed unguarded into the deep-voiced Salt River. Water boomed into rapids. I took off every last piece of clothing and walked into the creek along its final yards. Where waters met, a sliver of a boulder stood out. I climbed onto its back and sat, bringing my knees to my chest. Next to the clean rock, my skin was pale, bloodied, scraped. I sat and listened to the changed tone, to the sheer volume of the Salt River.

The movement of a creek, cutting open the earth, is as simple an act as I could imagine, like a song or a story. I did not think of my father and his ashes as a traveler, ceaselessly flowing from one confluence to the next. Instead, I thought of him as a process. A story being told. I thought of him as a raw, deep canyon heaped with boulders and mazes of creek passages—the canyon he had once promised me. I thought of him as the beginning and the end at once.

I whispered, "Of course I don't understand all of this, Father. I'm still alive. You're dead." I brought my head to my knees so I looked more like a boulder and less like a person. The Salt River split around me, sailing through the desert. ■

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*Craig Childs is native to Arizona and grew up fishing the creeks of the Mogollon Rim with his father. He has written several highly acclaimed books, his most recent, The Animal Dialogues: Uncommon Encounters in the Wild.*

With the holiday season come the holiday sales. And while department stores have a lot to offer, they can't match what you'll find on the Navajo Reservation, where the art is spectacular and the lines are a lot shorter.

BY ROSEANN HANSON  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JERRY JACKA

Made by Navajo silversmith Perry Shorty, this squash-blossom necklace set with Lone Mountain turquoise substitutes cornstalks for the customary squash-blossom tips. Early Navajo squash-blossom necklaces were originally made mostly of silver—turquoise was added in the 19th century.



Michelle Begay (top) displays some of the exceptional turquoise jewelry sold at the Hubbell Trading Post.



Navajo artist Perry Shorty's intricate silver work (center) complements numerous shades of turquoise. Perry hand-fashions stamps to imprint the silver.



Traditional Navajo cluster bracelets (left), made by Jimmy Yellowhair during the 1970s, feature brilliant turquoise set in silver.



A hand-woven rug at the Hubbell Trading Post features the whirling-log symbol of Roman Hubbell Navajo Tours, operated by trader John Lorenzo Hubbell's son during the Depression. On the wall hang paintings of motifs sent to J.L. Hubbell by traveling artists to inspire local Navajo weavers.

My idea of a winter white sale isn't the kind where you stand in line for the opening of Macy's after-holiday blowout. In fact, the only line I've ever encountered on my annual trek is a small herd of sheep filing across the blacktop of a narrow road heading north into the heart of the Navajo Nation.

It happened inadvertently one year, the trip that began my semiannual winter pilgrimage. The day before Christmas, my husband, Jonathan, and I decided to flee the frenzy of the commercial holidays in Tucson.

But where to go? To find an answer, we grabbed an Arizona atlas and a couple cups of coffee. Our fingers slid over the familiar bumpy terrain of the Mogollon Rim, the White Mountains . . . no, somewhere different. Drawn even farther north, our fingers sought out that huge, almost blank northeastern quadrant of the map—no cities, few roads and beckoning names like Black Mesa and the Painted Desert.

We exchanged looks and grinned. Snow in sagebrush-and-mesa country. No tourists. Navajo and Hopi country it was.

Crossing our fingers, we called La Posada Hotel & Gardens,

the Mary Colter-designed 1930s railroad hotel in Winslow. Someone had just canceled, leaving our favorite room available—the Roosevelt (as in Franklin D.), which is tucked into a quiet corner with a door to the patio and garden.

La Posada is a historic landmark, and has been restored and updated during the last 10 years. When you stay there, it feels as if you're the guest of a wealthy eccentric tycoon—precisely the feeling Mary Colter intended with her design. It's been called her masterpiece.

Our plan was to go forth each day from La Posada, exploring out-of-the-way trading posts, pawn shops and galleries looking for classic—as well as contemporary—Navajo, Hopi and Zuni art, rugs, pottery, kachinas, paintings, sculptures, silverwork and bead jewelry. We didn't really know what to expect; we didn't even know if they'd be open.

Not only were most of the shops open, nearly all of them were having 50-percent-off sales—real sales, not just exorbitant pricing cut down to standard retail, like many of the tourist spots along the freeways. It became a joke between us: We'd enter a little gallery tucked into a red rock canyon off a potholed side

road and admire some art or jewelry. Sure enough, the friendly salesperson would eventually chirp, "And everything's 50 percent off this week!"

We started calling them winter white sales because during the time we like to go—after Christmas and before New Year's—the sky is a sparkling lapis-blue and the red mesas and pale green sage deserts are dusted in the most perfect sugarlike snow.

Jewelry is my biggest weakness. In addition to being a writer, I'm a lapidary and metalsmith, cutting up pretty rocks and polishing them on grinding wheels, and then setting them in sterling silver and other metals. And beads . . . well, I can never resist them. Jonathan says I act like a raven around sparkly things. My eyes wander and dart, and my fingers twitch toward beads and rocks and baubles of all kinds.

So, I'm always on the lookout for special jewelry—classic old Navajo sterling silver and turquoise, beads or any work by contemporary new artists. During that first trip I bought two of my favorite winter-white-sale treasures. At the Keam's Canyon Trading Post (now McGee's Indian Art Gallery), 83 miles north of Winslow, I found a contemporary sterling silver bracelet with hand-engraved coyote and rabbit tracks.

Later that day at a dusty trading post, we were poking around the back room when I found an old pawned Navajo necklace with 10 strands of heishi, and nuggets of turquoise, spiny oyster and coral. The original *joclas*—long, beaded hoop earrings—were still tied to the front of the necklace where the owner often stored them, and it was well-worn with several repairs. I knew it was old because it also had a single bead of turquoise woven into the strap at the back of the neck—usually a bead blessed by a medicine man, and uncommon today.

Certainly, the thrill of getting good deals is hard to beat, but the real treasure remains the experiences we've had just by turning off the freeway and heading down dirt roads, lured by hand-painted "trading post" or "pawn shop, 3 miles" signs.

We discovered shops whose front room was part deli, part video store and part minimart, and whose back room was a dusty treasure trove of old pawn and new art, where owners weren't as harried as they are during the summer tourist season, and where we listened to early trading tales. How so-and-so's grandfather brought in German yarn for the weavers, silver for the smiths, buying and trading turquoise from veins long gone. I was in heaven. That's the part of art that you can't buy off the Plaza in Santa Fe or in a sparkling halogen-lit gallery in Scottsdale. Sure, I had to blow the dust off my necklace and *jocla* set, but the stories it tells me, the memories it stores . . . that's the real bargain. ■■

*Roseann Hanson, a native Tucson writer and jewelry artist, still has her first jewelry purchase—a tiny sterling silver bracelet made in classic Navajo style with a simple turquoise cabochon and three silver bars, bought in 1973 at Window Rock.*

*Jerry Jacka's first photograph published in Arizona Highways in 1958 led to a 45-year career photographing Native American people, their land and their art. He and his wife, Lois, recently retired to their historic ranch near Heber. Their daughter, Cindy, now manages Jerry's vast photographic files.*

Navajo artisans used a combination of turquoise and shells to create these necklaces made in the 1920s and 1930s (above, right).

Bruce Burnham looks at jewelry in his pawn vault at the R.B. Burnham Trading Post & Co. in Sanders (right).

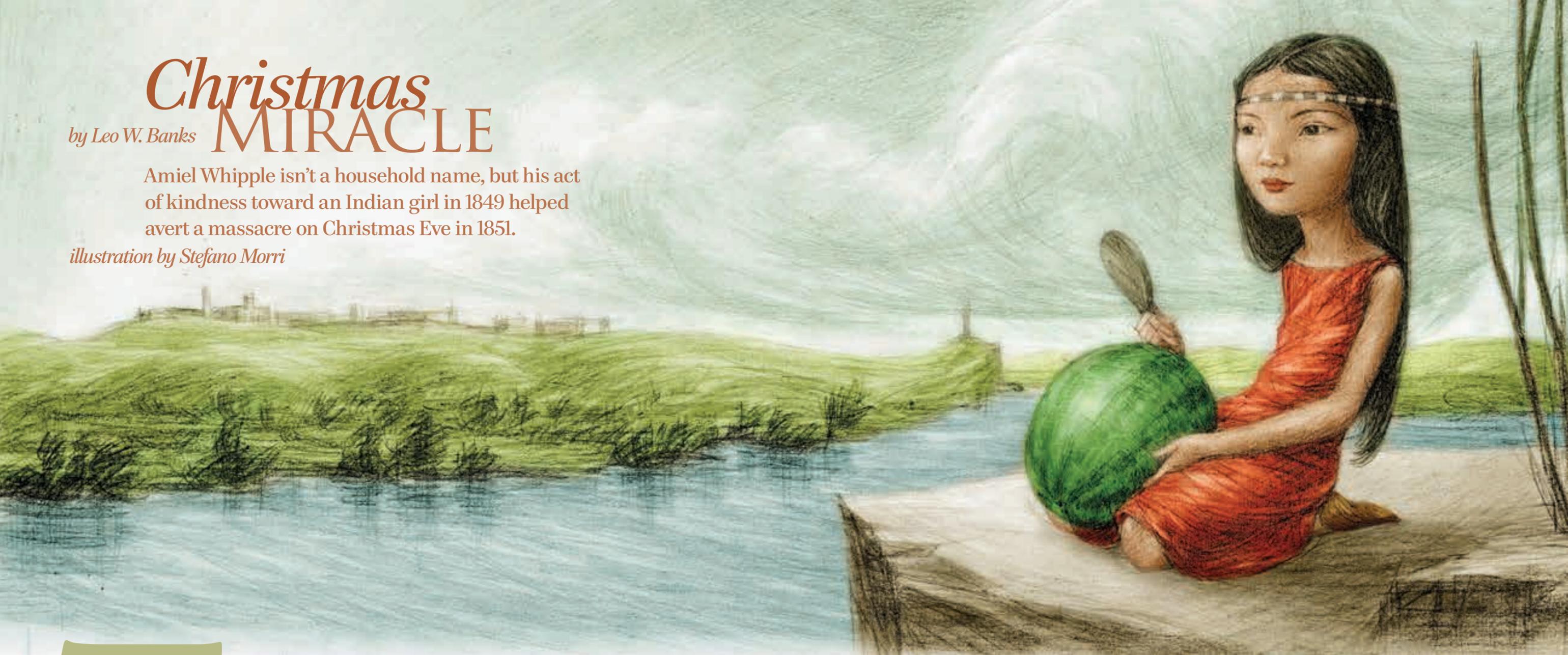


# Christmas MIRACLE

by Leo W. Banks

Amiel Whipple isn't a household name, but his act of kindness toward an Indian girl in 1849 helped avert a massacre on Christmas Eve in 1851.

illustration by Stefano Morri



The stage was set for a Christmas massacre. It seemed inevitable as the party of American boundary surveyors, escorted by 25 soldiers from the Third Cavalry, came face to face with 1,500 Yuma Indians at the Colorado River. The year was 1851.

When the Yumas refused to allow the travelers to cross the river, breastworks were formed and weapons were readied for what the troops expected to be a pitched assault on their camp.

No doubt, with such lopsided numbers, the battle would have been a disaster for the Americans. But bloodshed was averted, thanks to something rarely experienced among Indians and whites in the early West—an act of kindness.

The man responsible was Lt. Amiel Weeks Whipple, a quiet, aloof, industrious topographical engineer who possessed little of the brash and daring that made celebrities of other frontier military men.

A fellow soldier once described him as “a Washington City dandy with white kid gloves” who disliked roughing it.

“Take him away from his books,” said Lt. Cave Johnson Coutts, “and he’s not worth a tinker’s damn for anything under God’s heaven.”

Whipple was born in Concord, Massachusetts, in 1817. After graduating from West Point in 1841, he worked as a topographical engineer in the East and the South, and in 1849 was assigned to survey the boundary between the United States and Mexico.

The war between the two countries had just ended, and much of what is now the Southwestern United States was ceded to the U.S. under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Whipple’s involvement began with his departure from San Diego on September 11, 1849. His assignment was to locate and survey the mouth of the Gila River, near its junction with the Colorado. After three months of work, the lieutenant and his escort of dragoons—led by the opinionated Coutts—returned to California.

That surveying trip set the stage for the near-massacre two years later. It also produced two excellent journals—one by Whipple, the other by Coutts—that historians have consulted for decades. The journals show a hard split between the two men in their view of the Yumas, who are identified in some accounts as Quechans.

Coutts, a man of action, worried the Indians would violate

their vow of wanting peace with American visitors. Turns out, they had good reason to annul their promises.

In those days, the trail through the desert was bustling with gold rushers, forty-niners bound for California. Many arrived at the river famished, weak and lacking clothing and supplies. They replenished their stocks by stealing from the Yumas and leaving the Indians in the same desperate straits.

Whipple and his party camped near the Colorado River for more than a month in the fall of 1849—a time of heavy traffic and great tension between the two groups.

“I have been on thorns since my arrival at the Colorado,” wrote Coutts, who described the Yumas as impudent and insolent.

In his diary, *The Journal and Maps of Cave J. Coutts*, Coutts claimed the Yumas’ frequent declarations of friendship were sprinkled with “rascality on the one side, and common Indian treachery on the other.”

If trouble broke out, Coutts wrote, “God only knows what Whipple would do!” Coutts couldn’t understand the trust and confidence Whipple had in the Yumas.

In his journal, *The Whipple Report*, the lieutenant wrote

extensively and admiringly of the Yumas. In early November, he made this entry:

“One month has now elapsed since my arrival at this place, and I have spent all my leisure moments in studying the character of the Indians.

“I have visited their ranchos; I have daily admitted them freely in my tent; upon the table are always many little things curious and valuable to them; and men and women and children are permitted to examine and pass them from hand to hand without being watched, and never to my knowledge, have I lost the value of a penny.”

Whipple’s faith in the Yumas was a dangerous gambit, but it paid off two years later when he returned to the same spot with a group from the John Russell Bartlett Border Survey Commission.

The party of nearly 40 men, including an escort led by Col. Louis Craig, arrived shortly before Christmas 1851. They had marked the Gila River for some 350 miles, from San Carlos west to within 60 miles of the junction of the Gila and the Colorado.

The work was halted, however, on Christmas Eve, when chief

surveyor A.B. Gray ran out of money to pay his men, and was dangerously low on supplies.

That night, after the work was stopped, the party pushed west to the junction of the two rivers, expecting to find a military outpost. However, Fort Yuma had been abandoned a short time before. And instead of finding U.S. soldiers, the exhausted party was met by 1,500 hostile Yumas, who announced that the Americans wouldn't be allowed to cross.

Earlier, in April 1850, the Yumas had risen up and killed a gang of 12 men at the crossing. The gang, which included Thomas Glanton, had attacked Indian men and raped the women. Accounts say they did this to secure the exclusive right to ferry travelers across the river. After the killings, the Indians took possession of Glanton's two flatboats, and with them, control of the crossing.

Although Whipple left no extensive written record of the encounter that followed, the story was recounted in 1895 by Frank Wheaton, who, at the time, was an Army general. In 1851, however, he was an 18-year-old chain-bearer for the Bartlett Commission.

At around 4 P.M. on the afternoon of their arrival, the survey party heard what sounded like chiefs addressing their people.

### Soon, a large group of Yumas assembled, with each Indian fixing his gaze on Whipple.

The whites could tell the news wasn't good by the looks on their interpreters' faces. "The enemy had decided we were not to be permitted to leave the spot, and be massacred before morning," Wheaton remembered.

The Americans prepared for a desperate resistance, drawing all their wagons, equipment and property into a circle. Every man had a good rifle, two pistols and ample ammunition.

At nightfall, Juan Antonio, the Yuma chief, and Colonel Azul, his leading warrior, approached the camp asking to see the commanding officer—they wanted to know how much money the Americans had, and where they kept it.

The physical appearance of the warriors surely added to the tension. Although Wheaton didn't describe their attire in his recollection of the encounter, which was published in the *Rocky Mountain News* on June 30, 1895, Whipple did write about their appearance in his 1849 report. Presumably, their fighting attire in 1851 was similar to what it was in 1849.

According to Whipple's earlier account, the large, well-muscled warriors wore white breechcloths, and their faces were dyed jet black with a red stripe from the forehead to the nose, and then across the chin. Their hair hung to the middle of their backs—the length of it adorned with eagle feathers and the rattle of a rattlesnake. In addition, many had rings in their noses and wore strings of seashell necklaces.

On the night of Christmas Eve, Whipple received Chief Antonio and Colonel Azul with courtesy, giving no indication that he was aware of their plan.

Whipple offered \$2 apiece for every man the Indians would ferry across the river, and \$1 for every horse and mule.

"The proposition was in accordance with plans previously decided upon, as it was thought best to put on a broad front," Wheaton recalled.

As the meeting progressed, the families of the two Yuma lead-

ers entered the camp. The women peered into the tents of the Americans, then drew back behind the warriors and sat on the ground.

Shortly thereafter, an Indian girl, about 15 years old, left a group of Indian women and children and moved forward to Chief Antonio.

She was his daughter, and according to Wheaton, she was the beauty of the tribe—she was dressed in a short red skirt reaching to the knees, a handsome beaded waist and leggings, and exquisitely ornamented moccasins.

After whispering in her father's ear, the meeting with the Americans ended abruptly. Juan Antonio called his attendants aside and sat down under a tree. Soon, a large group of Yumas assembled, with each Indian fixing his gaze on Whipple.

Then the interpreter addressed the lieutenant, informing him the warriors found him familiar, and wanted to know if he'd come to the river two years earlier and camped on a hill opposite the present camp.

Whipple said he had, explaining that he'd done several weeks of survey work. As soon as the lieutenant spoke, the chief's daughter stood up, took her father by the hand, and led him to Whipple's side. She touched him on the arm and said something to her father.

"I saw by the expression of delight on the face of the interpreters that the danger was past," Wheaton recalled. The reason for the change in the demeanor of the Yumas was soon explained.

Two years before, the Indian maiden was extended a kindness by Lieutenant Whipple. She was hungry and suffering at the time, and the lieutenant had called her to his tent and given her a watermelon and a small round looking glass.

"The chief's daughter recognized her former benefactor, and the sequel proves that an Indian never forgets a kindness," Wheaton wrote. "Within an hour the two boats were carrying our party across the river, and we found ourselves surrounded by friends who spared no effort for our comfort and safety."

Whipple's party reached San Diego on January 8, 1852.

The teenage Wheaton went on to a distinguished military career, retiring as a major general in 1897. He saw action against the Cheyenne, the Modoc Indians of Oregon and Confederate troops in the Civil War's Shenandoah Valley campaign of 1864.

Despite those battles, Wheaton said the "John Smith-Pocahontas-like" standoff with the Yumas was one of the closest calls he'd ever had.

As for Whipple, he went on to lead another dangerous expedition—the location of a transcontinental railroad line from Arkansas to the Pacific. He also became the namesake of Prescott's Whipple Barracks—later known as Fort Whipple—a key outpost during the Apache Wars.

Whipple rose to become a major general by the time of the Civil War. He was wounded at Chancellorsville while commanding a division of the Army of Potomac, and died May 7, 1863. He was 45.

Although his life was short—even by 19th century standards—the legacy of Amiel Weeks Whipple includes a Christmas miracle and a story worth remembering. ■■

*Whenever he visits Yuma, Tucson-based Leo W. Banks thinks of Whipple's experience in those early days of Southwest settlement—especially his kindness.*

*Italian artist Stefano Morri studied engraving at the Institute of Art in Urbino, and his illustrations appear in magazines around the world. He lives in Rimini, Italy.*

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# Where Explorers Roamed

The Anza trail in Southern Arizona offers hikers a chance to walk in the footsteps of a Spanish captain.

WE'VE ENJOYED THE Santa Cruz River all afternoon, crawling down embankments to get to it, hanging off bridges to touch it, and listening to its melodic rush through land once called New Spain.

The explorer Juan Bautista de Anza II opened this part

of Southern Arizona for us latecomers. In December 1759, he became captain of the Tubac Presidio, a southern Spanish outpost in the New World, and later he headed a momentous expedition west that led to the founding of San Francisco. The trail we're following

**ANZA HIGHWAY** The Santa Cruz River ripples alongside the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail between Tubac and Tumacacori. The full trail stretches 1,210 miles from Nogales to San Francisco, tracing the route Anza traveled to found the city in 1776.

this day bears his name. It begins at Tubac Presidio State Historic Park and proceeds 4.5 miles along the river, ending at the ruins of the 200-year-old Tumacacori Mission.

The trail's first leg is wide, dusty and hardly remote. It parallels the back walls of luxury homes in the Barrio de Tubac development, and, at times, depending on tree cover, we can hear the hum of traffic along Interstate 19 farther west.

But civilization eventually recedes, and we find good shade walking beneath the branches of willow and cottonwood trees, and through thick mesquite bosques.

We find adventure, too. Behind a tangle of brush, we explore an abandoned building, probably a long-ago cowboy bunkhouse. It has about 15 attached rooms set in a row with a collapsing roof, cracked adobe walls and the permanent whisper

of wind through its gaping windows and doors.

My 11-year-old son, Patrick, steps inside and says, "Hey, Dad, it's pretty spooky in here." He pokes around with saucer eyes. I see those wonder-filled eyes again a short distance down the trail as he stands over the sun-bleached bones of a cow. The remains lie at a sharp bend in a sandy wash, making it likely the poor critter got caught up in a monsoon flood last summer.

But the Santa Cruz River is the real star of this hike. It flows year-round along this stretch of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail—strong enough in a couple of places to form minirapids. We encounter three river-crossings, the first coming after about 1.5 miles, and consisting of logs and wood slats over marshy ground.

Here, we also play sneak-up on a flush of ducks that gather on the blue water just ahead of us, then wing off in mad escape as they hear us

**ANYTHING BUT DRY** Author Leo W. Banks and his son Patrick, 11, trek through a dry branch of the river between Tubac and Tumacacori, the most popular section of the Anza trail in Arizona.

**BOARDER CROSSING** Garrett Wiese ambles over one of the footbridges that crisscross the Santa Cruz River, a riparian playground for several rare bird species.

approach, only to land again downstream to begin the game anew.

The first real bridge comes immediately after this crossing, and there's a second one about 2 miles beyond, just after passing through the gate into Tumacacori National Historic Park. The bridges are made of ropes and planks that shake and rattle as we walk over them, but they're well-built and good fun.

We turn the crossings into play areas. Patrick lies on his stomach on the bridges and dangles his hand in the cool water. Then he crawls out onto an overhanging tree stump, tempting a good soaking if the brittle branch snaps.

We may be many lifetimes

away from New Spain, but with water rushing under the towering trees and birds lighting on sandbars in the sunshine, the beauty of the Anza trail helps us imagine what it must have been like. **AH**

## trail guide

**Length:** 4.5 miles one way.

**Elevation Gain:** None.

**Difficulty:** Easy.

**Payoff:** Running water, shade trees and history.

**Location:** Tubac Presidio State Historic Park is 43 miles south of Tucson; Tumacacori National Historical Park is approximately 46 miles south of Tucson.

**Getting There:** To Tubac trailhead, drive south of Tucson on Interstate 19 and take Exit 34 to Tubac Presidio State Historic Park. The trailhead lies south of the museum. To reach Tumacacori trailhead, drive 46 miles south of Tucson on I-19 and take Exit 29. The trail begins at the northwest corner of the national park property.

**Additional Information:** Tubac Presidio State Historic Park, (520) 398-2252; [pr.state.az.us/Parks/parkhtml/tubac.html](http://pr.state.az.us/Parks/parkhtml/tubac.html). Tumacacori National Historical Park, (520) 398-2341; [nps.gov/tuma](http://nps.gov/tuma).



**online** Before you go on this hike, visit [arizonahighways.com](http://arizonahighways.com) for other things to do and places to see in this area. You'll also find more hikes in our archive.

# Creek Revival

The restoration of Fossil Creek is the main event on this scenic drive in Central Arizona.

**THE FIRST TIME I DROVE** to Fossil Creek, I counted the cars that had tumbled down the steep drop-off into Hackberry Canyon. I imagined the unseen scenarios that sent them swirling into the depths of rock, juniper and manzanita—maybe they

took a corner too fast or met an unfriendly patch of ice. I'll never know for sure.

Today, as I travel the same road and look into the same canyon, I can't help but do the same thing. Axles, hoods and wheels are scattered on the downward slope. The count reaches four, but I

know there are others out of my sight, where trees and shrubs hide the mangled, rusted metal.

But the broken cars aren't the reason we venture into these rugged hills. We have come to see Fossil Creek, which now flows freely after recently being

**HAIRPIN HIGHWAY** Forest Service Road 502 provides visitors with far-reaching views as it winds from the Verde River toward the Rim town of Strawberry.

restored. Lifted from its bonds in the summer of 2005, the warm-water creek that spurts from springs at an inviting 70 degrees no longer feeds the pumps of the Irving Hydroelectric Facility. Although Fossil Creek is only a sliver of the

Southwestern riparian areas that have vanished in the last century, its return to nature can definitely be seen as a considerable achievement.

For 14 miles, the creek now drains its section of the northwestern Mazatzal Mountains, uninterrupted, all the way to the Verde River.

The restoration has changed not only the outlook of Fossil Creek, but the entire area. Man-made remnants, such as the flumes and pipes that crisscross the hills, will be removed by the year 2009. One spot that's already undergone a drastic change is Stehr Lake, a century-old retention pond built as an impoundment for water feeding the plant. The lake has been drained, and as I stand on the breached dam looking out at the cracked lake bed, I remember having camped in this same spot.

Although once a beautiful little lake lined with majestic cottonwoods, the scar that

**PIPE DOWN** Flumes that once carried water from Fossil Creek now stand idle against the scenic landscape.

remains may also be seen as a benefit. Along with the restored water, Fossil Creek is welcoming back its native fish.

With the help of Northern Arizona University and a conglomerate of government agencies, native Arizona fish, some endangered, will swim once again in the travertine pools of Fossil Creek.

A leading facilitator of the restoration project, Dr. Jane Marks of NAU's biology department, says changes can already be seen. "Overall, the project is going very well," she says. "Native fish appear to be recovering, and so far, exotic fish have stayed away." But projects like Fossil Creek take time, according to Marks, who says, "We don't know how long it will take for the



river to fully recover, but we expect that within a decade, it will be well on its way."

A large part will be left to the public, who must help maintain the health of the creek. "Our biggest concerns are how to make sure that as visitation increases, there's a management plan in place so that we don't love this ecosystem to death," Marks says.

After leaving my memories behind at Stehr Lake, my companions and I head toward the Verde River. As we drop into the Verde Canyon, the river appears as a green ribbon. From this height, one can see why the Spanish

named it as they did. At the bottom of the canyon, a ford crosses the river to the Verde Hot Springs, where, if so inclined, visitors can bathe with the ghosts of Native Americans who traveled to the springs for medicinal purposes.

From the river, we backtrack up and over toward Fossil Creek, past Stehr Lake in the direction of our eventual destination, the

**WILD FUTURE** Storm clouds gather over the Verde River near Childs. The Verde River, Arizona's only federally designated Wild and Scenic River, offers thrill seekers Class II and Class III white-water rafting.



**GENTLE FLOW** Cottonwood trees line a calm section of Fossil Creek where a travertine shelf sits just below the water's surface.

small town of Strawberry.

On the way to Strawberry, we stop at a stone bridge that crosses Fossil Creek. The water here maintains a turquoise hue similar to the Caribbean Sea, and a dunk of the head reveals a lukewarm temperature—even in mid-February. Small fish dash and dart through a deep pool, and a canyon wren sings from a perch above.

From the creek, we climb the winding road toward Strawberry. The chaparral forest changes to a mix of



#### travel tips

**Vehicle Requirements:** Two-wheel-drive, high-clearance vehicle recommended.

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

**Travel Advisory:** Allow three hours minimum for this 44-mile drive. The primitive dirt route is bumpy and contains hairpin turns with steep drop-offs. Check road conditions before starting out; these roads are slippery when wet, and may become icy and snow-covered in winter.

**Additional Information:** Prescott National Forest, Verde Ranger District, (928) 567-4121; [www.fs.fed.us/r3/prescott/about/verde.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/prescott/about/verde.shtml).

juniper and pine, and snow starts to appear. The road then becomes muddy with snowmelt, and as we reach the pavement in Strawberry, we look back with an appreciation for the beautiful drive. We're also grateful that we didn't end up in the depths

of the canyon as another distorted chunk of steel.

We end our journey with meatball subs at Giuseppe's Restaurant, and keep our fingers crossed that the restoration of Fossil Creek will be a success. Although it's only a small waterway in

Central Arizona, Fossil Creek can serve as a shining example for future projects, and a great escape for future generations. **AH**

**SHADES OF BLUE** The aquamarine waters of Fossil Creek rush over boulders at a rate of 410 gallons per second.



#### route finder

Note: Mileages are approximate.

- > **Begin at the Prescott National Forest Verde Ranger Station**, 300 E. Highway 260 (State Route 260) in Camp Verde, which is 3 miles east of Interstate 17 Exit 287, about 87 miles north of Phoenix.
- > **Drive east on State 260** 6.5 miles to Forest Service Road 708 (Fossil Creek Road), .4 of a mile beyond Milepost 228 at Fossil Creek/Verde River sign.
- > **Turn right** (south) onto FR 708 and drive 13.7 miles to Forest Service Road 502.
- > **To go to the former Stehr Lake** and the Verde River, turn right onto FR 502 and drive 3.2 miles to the dry lake site and another 3 miles to the Verde River.
- > **From the Verde River**, backtrack to 708 and turn right (east) toward Strawberry. Another 2.5 miles will bring you to the Irving Hydroelectric Plant, and 9 miles beyond is Strawberry and the junction with State Route 87.
- > **Turn left** (north) on State 87 to return to 260, or right (south) toward Payson.

