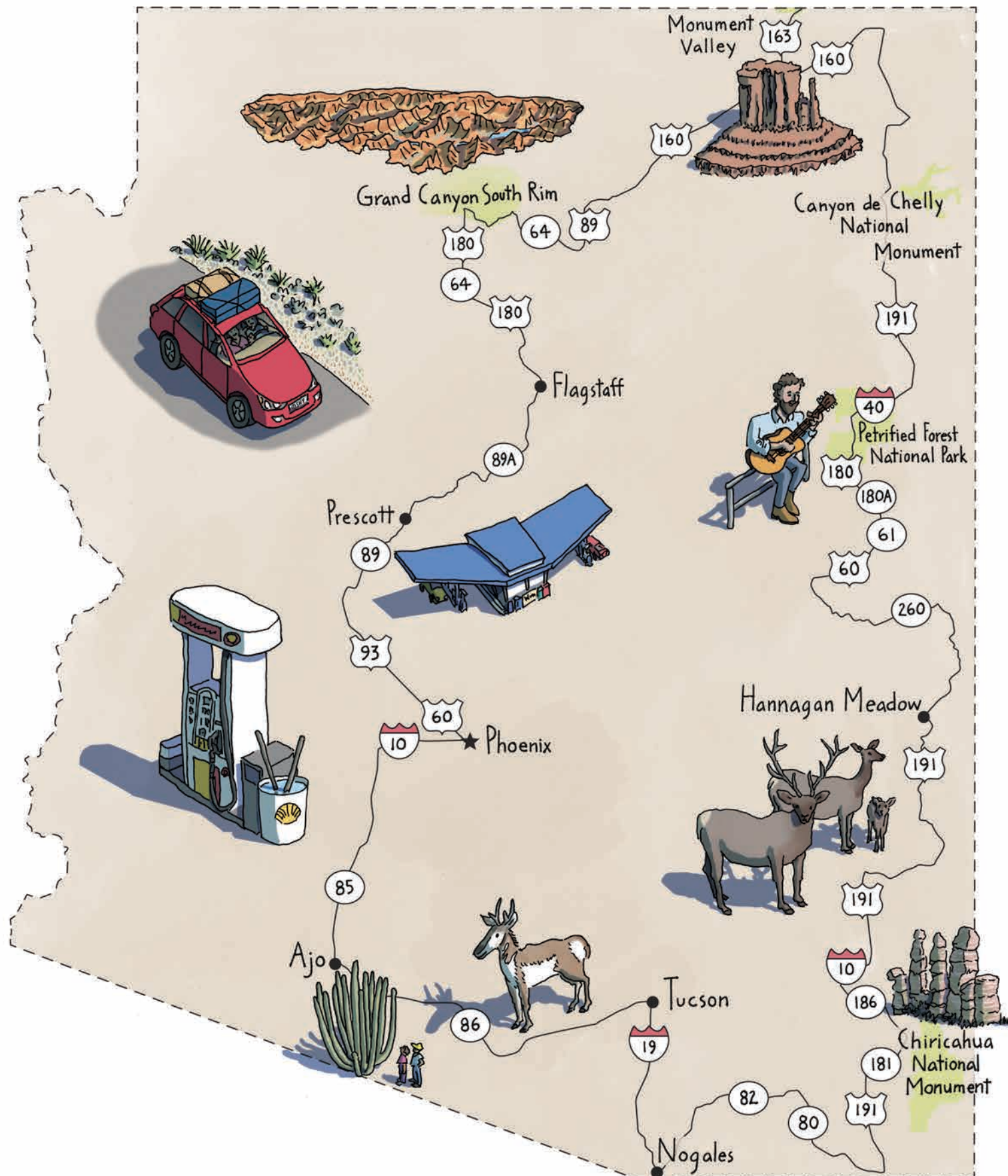


THE ULTIMATE ARIZONA ROAD TRIP

BY MATT JAFFE

U.S. Route 191 curves into the pines near Hannagan Meadow in Eastern Arizona's White Mountains. This section of U.S. 191 is known as the Coronado Trail.
📷 RANDY PRENTICE



EDITOR'S NOTE: It's been almost 60 years since we first did a story like this. The original, which was titled *When the Open Road Calls*, ran in our September 1960 issue. The tour that year began in Monument Valley and ended at Gila Bend. It was a 10-day trip, and we gave it 20 pages. This time around, we've set aside the entire feature well — 36 pages — for Matt Jaffe's re-creation of the ultimate Arizona road trip. Although many things have changed since Joyce Rockwood Muench and her husband, Josef, made their journey, the theme remains the same: There's nothing like a summer road trip in Arizona. So, throw the kids in the station wagon, buckle up and hit the road.

Rolling down U.S. Route 60, past the old gem store and an abandoned two-story building in Morristown, my wife, Becky, and I recognize the mix of wistfulness and exhilaration coming over us as the Arizona outback gives way to Outback Steakhouse and the other unsurprising franchises of suburban Surprise.

It's the end of a 12-day, 2,100-mile road trip up, down and across Arizona. The inspiration for the drive came from a September 1960 *Arizona Highways* article by Joyce Rockwood Muench about an epic journey through the state that she and her husband, acclaimed photographer and magazine contributor Josef Muench, took six decades ago.


Becky and I were born to the road trip. She used to come to Arizona in a two-tone Oldsmobile Super 88, her mother behind the wheel and chain-smoking Newports, during annual 2,500-mile summer drives from New Jersey to visit grandparents in Prescott. Starting when she was 8, Becky kept a detailed ledger of gas purchases, hotel costs and spending on meals. She still writes the checks in our household.

With destinations from Colorado to Quebec City, my family would set out from Chicago, first in a series of battered Buicks, then in a Ford Galaxie 500 (Dad was auto agnostic). I was packed in the back seat with my brother and sister, while Mom rode shotgun. She was a fine woman but the world's worst driver, and in an era when kids actually walked to school, she took an extended driving hiatus, leaving my father to cover the hundreds of daily vacation miles by himself.

Becky and I didn't set out to retrace the Muenches' route, but we hoped to recapture the spirit of their adventure by sticking to two-lane highways whenever possible as we hit icons such as the Grand Canyon and traveled to obscure pockets of the state. Roughly six times as many people live in Arizona now as lived here in 1960. But plenty of other things just don't change within a lifetime.

ILLUSTRATION BY SUSAN HUNT YULE

Part 1: The Borderlands

Morning light warms a group of mature saguaro cactuses amid the rounded buttes of Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. The 860,000-acre refuge is along Arizona's border with Mexico.  RANDY PRENTICE



DAY 1: SQUEEGEES, UFOS AND A MINING TOWN

The outskirts of Phoenix skirt a lot farther out than they once did, and we don't fully break free of the city until we turn south onto State Route 85 past Buckeye. It's a familiar road: the bypass around Phoenix on the drive to Tucson from Los Angeles. So we tick off the landmarks: the broad, tamarisk-clogged channel of the Gila River (we always check for stream flows); the state prison, a little farther south; and Holt's Shell, in Gila Bend.

We so love this gas station.

People rarely rhapsodize about gas stations in their odes to the romance of the open road. But when you're traveling, there is poetry in the practicalities. At Holt's, the bathrooms are spacious and clean. The squeegees, their rubber blades eternally firm, are attached to extended rods for easier debugging of windshields. The squeegees wait at the ready in buckets perpetually filled, as if directly fed by upwellings from an aquifer of Windex.

Then there's the art. Near the gas pumps, oxidized metal sculptures of velociraptors stand next to life-size replicas of the famous Western statue *End of the Trail*. Look around and you'll find perfectly decent Mexican pottery and copious Kokopellis, too. But it's the sheer randomness of the collection that proves positively hypnotic as your eye scans from shelves of Bud Light-swilling chimpanzees wearing cowboy hats to a beatific Our Lady of Guadalupe, and finally to lifelike iguanas gazing from rocks alongside beaming Minions.

Still far from the end of our trail, we quickly return to the road, bound for the old copper mining town of Ajo. The drive south across the creosote flats is largely uneventful, except for a brief passage through the craggy volcanic spires of Crater Range at Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. Becky has never been to Ajo, but I have a special affection for it. Back in March 1997, I experienced maybe the most cosmic 12 hours of my life when I witnessed the Phoenix Lights, the UFO phenomenon observed throughout the state, then Comet Hale-Bopp at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument south of town.

Q: Favorite hotel/lodge?

A: Hacienda Corona de Guevavi, Nogales

Q: What books did you take along?

A: *Travels With Charley*, by John Steinbeck; *Finders Keepers: A Tale of Archaeological Plunder and Obsession*, by Craig Childs; and *Capirotada: A Nogales Memoir*, by Alberto Alvaro Ríos.

Things are decidedly more earthbound as we slowly orbit Ajo’s Spanish Colonial plaza. Ajo certainly has the dusty margins of a mining town, as well as an ample selection of places selling Mexican auto insurance. Its center, however, embodies grander ambitions. With its whitewashed arcades, palm trees and broad green lawn, the heart of Ajo is as romantic a small-town setting as you’ll find in Arizona.

Mining towns are not typically thought of as beautiful cities. But Ajo has roots in the City Beautiful movement, the philosophy that emerged in the 19th century and sought to uplift the lives of residents through planning that emphasized public spaces and inspiring architecture. It was John Campbell Greenway, a mining manager and member of Theodore Roosevelt’s Rough Riders, who, along with his wife, Isabella (founder of Tucson’s Arizona Inn), encouraged the development of the town center as the nearby New Cornelia copper mine boomed.

“The concept in Ajo was that you would come in to the train depot. That was the moment of arrival,” says Aaron Cooper, executive director of the International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting economic development in the area. “Then you would walk out and see shopping and the churches and the schools, all in one vision, and think, *I could see having a family here*. As opposed to most of the mining communities at the time, where you would arrive and think, *There’s the bar, there’s the brothel, and there’s the bunkhouse*. All of those things were still in Ajo. But at least you wouldn’t see them right away.”

When the mine and smelter closed in 1985, Ajo pretty much shut down with them. After peaking at around 10,000, the town’s population dropped to around 2,000. By the early 1990s, the Curley School, the grand cupola-topped structure built as part of the original town design, was shuttered and began deteriorating. What becomes of a mining town when there is no mining?

Cooper gives us a tour of the old school, where, as part of a \$9.6 million renovation project, the ISDA converted classrooms into 30 artist spaces for living and working. We’re staying at the Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center, which has stylish, contemporary rooms that open onto a courtyard with a community garden. With mining long gone, the idea, Cooper says, is to find a future for Ajo centered on its Sonoran Desert setting, the creative energy of an emerging arts community, and the intersection of rich cultural influences — American, Tohono O’odham and Mexican — in this part of Arizona. In September, the ISDA sponsored Ajo’s annual International Day of Peace, a celebration that included a parade featuring *folklórico* dancers; a cheerleader troupe from Puerto Peñasco, Mexico; and federal Border Patrol agents.

“It was a celebration of being good neighbors and sharing the same desert,” Cooper says. “I always tell people that the farther you are from the border, the more black and white it is. The closer you are to the border, the more nuanced the issues become. It’s not a simple challenge.”

DAY 2: A GLORIOUS STRETCH OF NOTHING AND NO ONE

The coyotes howl through the night, and in the morning, we take a meandering walk around town, past the old hospital and the mine overlook, then back to the plaza. A block away, we wander into Artists’ Alley, where vibrant, socially conscious murals, many created during a 2015 weeklong paint-in, adorn the walls.

Establishing a pattern that will increasingly haunt us as the trip progresses, we get off to a late start, forcing us to forsake Organ Pipe. Passing U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s Ajo Station as speeding Puerto Peñasco-bound traffic continues south, we follow the signs for Tucson, heading east on State Route 86 and into the Tohono O’odham Nation.

If you want to imagine yourself in the Arizona of 1940, albeit while driving an SUV with keyless ignition and satellite radio, then this is your road. Between Why and the edge of Tucson, it’s a glorious stretch of nothing and no one, through desert sufficiently isolated to support a population of Sonoran pronghorns, one of North America’s rarest mammals.

We pass an intersection — Hickiwan to the left and Gu Vo to the right. The mesquites and creosotes are leafed out, while the ocotillos, their leaves glowing gold, offer a bit of fall color, Sonoran Desert style. A few westbound cars roar by, but no one appears in our rearview mirror for a good 45 miles.

The road runs beneath the observatories high on Kitt Peak before we fight our way through construction on the edge of Tucson, a shock to the system after so much emptiness. So is southbound Interstate 19, although the 70-mile drive to the border is one of the more intriguing sections of interstate in Arizona.

In a bit more than 40 miles, you can go from the grandeur of an 18th century altar, at Mission San Xavier del Bac, to the front lines of the Cold War, inside a silo at the Titan Missile Museum. Then you can time-travel back to the arrival of the

Spanish at Tubac and Tumacácori National Historical Park as the highway signs count down the distance to Mexico in both miles and kilometers.

South of the town of Tumacacori, we stick to the frontage road, the old Nogales Highway, and travel past ranches as we parallel the Santa Cruz River. It’s almost dark by the time we rejoin the interstate. First, a coyote dashes across the lanes. Then, a mile up, we see an unfamiliar silhouette: an animal low to the ground, with a long snout and tail. The surprisingly fast coati sprints in front of us.

In the hills outside Nogales, we cross the sandy channel of the Santa Cruz and climb to our inn, the Hacienda Corona de Guevavi. Arriving after dark is hardly ideal, but it adds to the dreamy feeling as we enter a courtyard where delicate frescoes adorn adobe walls nearly 2 feet thick. There are scenes of Mexican village life — women in embroidered peasant dresses, men wearing sombreros and serapes. One man leads a burro; another balances on his head a cage filled with green parrots, some fluttering freely, as the women sell calabacitas, flowers and a basket of doves.

We’re greeted by owner Nisa Stover, who shows us to the John Wayne Room, which the actor used as a getaway after discovering this part of Arizona while filming *Red River*. Wayne befriended and went into business with Ralph Wingfield, whose ranch here was one of the most historic in Arizona.

Stover puts together an impromptu dinner, its centerpiece a crusty loaf from Tucson’s Barrio Bread, and does her best to convey both the ranch’s long history and the events that led to her unlikely move to the Arizona borderlands. Originally 2,000 acres, the ranch dates to a Spanish settlement at the end of the 17th century. It was here that Father Eusebio Francisco Kino established his first mission in the present-day United States. The site later became one of Southern Arizona’s most influential cattle ranches.

While her parents had deep ties to Arizona, Stover mostly grew up in Connecticut. Her mother, Wendy, worked for Orion Pictures in New York City, while her father, Philip, at one time an aspiring singer-songwriter, owned a restaurant. The Stovers had always wanted to operate a bed and breakfast, and as they looked for an opportunity on the East Coast, her mother heard the Guevavi property was available.

She went to Arizona and sneaked onto the property to make pictures. “My mother came back and said, ‘Look at this gem!’” Stover says. “It was not a gem. But a few weeks later, my dad came out and said he thought it was all just meant to be. I thought they had lost their marbles — that this is what a midlife crisis looks like.”

The Stovers bought the house in 2002. Wisteria grew across the walkway and up the walls of the entrance, and when the couple began pulling away the vines, they began to realize how extensive the murals were.

An artist named Salvador Corona began painting the murals in 1944. Corona longed to be an artist but planned to go into bullfighting. Fate, in the form of a bull’s horn, intervened when Corona was gored in the leg. “His father really encouraged him to pursue art, because he knew it was something that Salvador

liked and that he would be good at,” Stover says.

After extensive work on the house, the Stovers opened the hacienda within a year and a half. They designed a brand for the property that captures the ranch’s history: A cross, symbolizing the old mission, sits atop a crown honoring Corona, which rests on a curved line representing the ranch’s hills.

Stover, who had moved to the San Diego area to work in high-end interior design and be within driving distance of her parents, never expected to live out here. But following her father’s death, and with her mother ill with cancer, she moved to the hacienda and stayed for more than two years. When Wendy passed away, and with foreclosure looming, Stover made the quick, life-changing decision to take over the historic hacienda.

“No way in hell did I think I was going to be in Nogales,” she says. “But this place is a gift that my parents left to me and my girls, and to my brother and his children. I can watch my kids running around and catching frogs and riding horses. And the most important thing is, I wanted my kids to know who my parents were. What it means to have a vision when everybody else says you’re nuts. To work really, really hard to achieve that goal, and for each other. To hold on to what you’re given. And there’s just something about this property that draws people at different times, for different reasons.”

DAY 3: A STAGECOACH ON A SIDE STREET AND A HARLOT ON A HARLEY

State Route 82 travels past the turnoff for the terminal building and lone runway at Nogales International Airport, the Sky Harbor of Santa Cruz County, on its way to Patagonia, 17 miles from the hacienda. With our night’s destination, the Dreamcatcher Bed and Breakfast near Chiricahua National Monument, 200 miles away, we move into trip triage mode, trying to plan a manageable day during a drive packed with destinations.

On the edge of Patagonia, the highway reaches Sonoita Creek’s cottonwood bosque, the first real forest we’ve seen during the drive. The trees are just beginning to show their fall hues, but the play of colors is more vibrant outside Sonoita. Billowing, fast-moving clouds cruise the cerulean sky, casting shadows that race across the golden rangelands stretching east, toward the Huachuca Mountains.

SR 82 drops to the San Pedro River on the approach to Tombstone. Confession: Although I’ve watched John Ford’s Tombstone classic *My Darling Clementine* multiple times, I’ve never actually gone to see the re-enactment of the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral (which actually happened a few doors down, but “the Gunfight in a Vacant Lot on Fremont Street” doesn’t quite have the same ring).



I'm also more intrigued by a gunfight's coda than by its forensics: Wyatt Earp outlived the Clantons, the McLaurys and Billy Claiborne by more than 40 years. In 1929, the 80-year-old Earp finally rode off into the sunset, in Los Angeles of all places, before the onetime Dodge City lawman's ashes were interred at a Jewish cemetery outside San Francisco.

Earp stuck around long enough to see stories like his inspire dime novels, then silent movies. He even went to Hollywood himself and worked as a technical adviser on some early Westerns, befriending movie cowboys William S. Hart and Tom Mix (killed in a 1940 car accident outside Florence), who served as Earp's pallbearers. When the legend becomes fact, film the legend.

We won't make it to the shootout today. High noon has already come and gone, and after getting stuck behind a stagecoach on a Tombstone side street, we leave town, continuing south and through the looking glass of the Mule Pass Tunnel, with Bisbee waiting on the other side.

I'm from Chicago, but Bisbee is my kind of town. It's all brick and stone walls, with staircases climbing toward hills so red, they appear to have rusted. Faded advertising signs cover the sides of buildings, while inlaid tile mosaic entryways for long-forgotten businesses survive as ghostly reminders of Bisbee's boom days. Legend has it that Bisbee was the biggest city between St. Louis and San Francisco, which isn't true. But considering the productivity of the local copper

State Route 82 cuts through a rolling grassland east of the Sonoita area. In the distance, to the northeast, are the Whetstone Mountains. 📍 AMY S. MARTIN

mines and the solidity of Bisbee's architecture, it's easy to see how that myth took hold.

Becky and I walk around Bisbee, then up to the courthouse area to see the heroic "Copper Man" statue, before meandering back to the car. There's a woman wearing a period bordello costume and riding on the back of a motorcycle — a harlot on a Harley — and musicians carrying guitars and rolling a drum set through an alley. Something's happening in town. Or maybe it's just another Friday afternoon in Bisbee.

Q: What snacks did you keep in the car?

A: Lightly salted almonds, apples, oranges, pecan bars from Gathering Grounds in Patagonia, Barbara's Morning Oat Crunch cereal, Clif Builder's protein bars and Luna bars.

Past Pirtleville (for the record, named for founder Elmo R. Pirtle), we turn south, down Pan American Avenue in Douglas, toward Mexico, then drive along International Avenue, which parallels the border and might be the southernmost city street in Arizona. The avenue's modest homes look toward a mesh fence, a trench and a higher iron barrier with tightly spaced vertical slats. Through the gaps, we catch broken glimpses of the trees and buildings in Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico.

Pan American Avenue is lined by the greatest hits of U.S. franchises: first O'Reilly Auto Parts, then AutoZone, Carl's Jr. and McDonald's. After this anonymous Americana is the downtown's Gadsden Hotel. Opened in 1907 and older than the state of Arizona itself, it offers some welcome Douglas history. It's the old smelter town's most famous landmark, and while I had expected the faded glory of past visits, as we enter the lobby, the hotel is alive with the sounds of *norteño* music.

A local family has rented the entire hotel for a weekend party to celebrate the matriarch's 95th birthday. She's retired from her job working for the justice of the peace, but we're told she still likes to get out on the dance floor. The band — sharp-dressed men out of Agua Prieta, three in white cowboy hats and two in black, but all wearing boots tapering to points that could cut diamonds — rehearses a set of standards.

We walk up the white marble staircase, the only surviving feature from the original hotel after a fire in the late 1920s, and listen from the mezzanine, where sunlight pours through a 42-foot-long stained-glass mural depicting a Sonoran Desert panorama of saguaros, ocotillos and prickly pears.

The musicians step down from the stage with their instruments, the drummer with just his snare, and launch into Ramón Ayala's *Que Me Lleve el Diablo* ("Let the Devil Take Me") for three family members sipping beer while lounging on sofas set between the lobby's pink marble columns.

North of Douglas, on U.S. Route 191, the late-afternoon sun shimmers on the silver grain silos outside Elfrida as a flock of sandhill cranes, in their "V" formation, wings overhead, bound for the wetlands at Whitewater Draw. A few miles from the inn, a ringtail runs across the road. We're happy to settle in just before dark, even though a planned hike in Chiricahua National Monument will have to wait until morning.



Part 2: Into the High Country

DAY 4: BALES OF COTTON AND COCONUT-MILK MACCHIATO

You can't expect solitude in a national park on a holiday weekend. Even so, my reflexive grumbling begins as we pull up at Chiricahua's Echo Canyon Trailhead and find a full parking lot.

Ask Becky: I can become a surly hiker when we can't get far from the nattering crowd on a trail. Up ahead, there's a large group chattering away as they pose for selfies — which, truth be told, break the spell Chiricahua's hoodoos can cast. Frosted with lichen, the clusters of rhyolite towers create one of Arizona's most surreal landscapes, as if you've stumbled into a mosh pit of *moai* from Easter Island.

But the mood on the trail is every bit as festive as the day is beautiful, and the good vibes wear down even a curmudgeon. A boy, maybe 11 or 12 and wearing an immaculate white button-down and a black fedora cocked just so, has worked his way into a narrow alcove in the side of a hoodoo, creating a composition worthy of a fashion shoot.

We eavesdrop on bits of conversation: "Every time I'm here, I'm reminded of the love of my life who left me: Shelley Jewell." Then, as we return to the car, a woman approaches, her eyes red. She's desperate to talk and tells us she recently moved from Allentown, Pennsylvania. The words pour out of her: "I've just never seen any place like this! I just cried. I've hiked all over the country, and I've never shed tears anywhere else. You can't take pictures — they don't do it justice. You

Rhyolite hoodoos guard the hillsides of Southeastern Arizona's Chiricahua National Monument at sunset. The hoodoos formed as a result of frost wedging, in which ice enlarges cracks in rocks over hundreds of thousands of years.

📷 SEAN PARKER

just have to keep it in your heart."

Back on the road, on State Route 186, we catch a glimpse of the dry lake at Willcox Playa before dropping into the town of Willcox, where it's too early for wine tasting or a Blizzard at the old Dairy Queen. Following Haskell Avenue out of town, past the livestock auction pens, we catch up to and pass a freight train before hopping onto Interstate 10, our last stretch of interstate for 350 miles. We then head north on U.S. 191.

Puffs of cotton fleck the croplands of the San Simon Valley southeast of Safford, while huge bales, round and tightly wrapped in yellow polyethylene, rest on the ground in fields already harvested. During lunch at Casa Mañana in Safford, we watch as two ambulances race past on Fifth Street, and later, we come upon a downed motorcycle, no motorcyclist in sight, as emergency teams search the ravine below the road.

The highway crosses the Gila River, then passes the abandoned drive-in movie theater at Three Way, named for the junction of highways here. U.S. 191 continues through the ominous-sounding Buzzard Roost Canyon and Rattlesnake Canyon before reaching Clifton, an old copper mining town in a flood-prone canyon along the San Francisco River.

The 1913 Mission Revival train depot is impressive, while weeds clog the infield of the old high school ballpark, home of the mighty Trojans, where there's still a scoreboard at the top of the golden grandstand. Although 37 acres are encompassed in the Clifton Town-site Historic District, most of the town's buildings are awaiting a fuller restoration that may never come. It's a kind of buzzless Bisbee.

The action around these parts is to the north, in Morenci, the modern company town for operations at the Morenci Mine, which employs more than 3,000 people. Thanks to one of Arizona's most isolated Starbucks locations, Morenci is also your last chance until Pinetop-Lakeside, 161 miles away, for that hazelnut mocha coconut-milk macchiato you've been craving.

Even after seeing major digs in Ajo and Bisbee, we're totally unprepared for Morenci's scale. From Clifton, it takes 14 twisting miles and nearly 30 minutes just to get

past this terraced gouge in the Earth’s crust. It’s a battered landscape that would give Mad Max pause. The mine, one of North America’s largest, produced nearly 750 million pounds of copper in 2017. We pass a cascade of rock coming down a conveyor, with road signs warning of an “Acid Truck Route” and that “Blastings Can Occur Daily.” The wind whips up dust, and as things begin feeling especially apocalyptic, a massive bighorn ram slowly crosses the road, then effortlessly ascends the opposite slope. His bearing conveys a message: *This still belongs to me.*

Becky and I lost a huge amount of time in Clifton. Despite my vow to arrive at Hannagan Meadow Lodge before nightfall, we still have two hours of mountain road to cover in the dwindling light. This was not the plan: The temperature plunges, and the road starts endlessly switch-backing through the White Mountains’ pine forests. I’ve never driven this stretch, and I get the distinct feeling that I am not of this country.

About 20 minutes past Sardine Saddle, where one speeding southbound car nearly skids off the road, the highway briefly straightens out and drops from the mountains to Four Bar Mesa, a hanging valley of grasslands and junipers that glows pink with the setting sun. It’s a nice reprieve, but we’ve lost elevation and soon start climbing again.

Having seen a dead mountain lion on I-10, javelinas rooting around just off highway shoulders, and an assortment of jack-rabbits and roadrunners playing chicken with the car, all creatures, great and small, are no longer a surprise. But the final miles to Hannagan Meadow have a *Where the Wild Things Are* spookiness to them, as shadowy mule deer and elk move through the trees just off the road.

At Hannagan Meadow, elevation 9,100 feet, temperatures have already fallen to the mid-30s. We’ve seen three cars over the final 60 miles, an indication that most everyone else knows better than to drive this highway in the dark. So, it’s a shock to walk into the lodge restaurant and find other people.

Four hunters in camo gear sit quietly in a corner, while a more boisterous party of 10, an extended family of three generations, banter with the waitress. One of the 20-something sons, after a few too many beers the night before, walked into the unlocked restaurant at 2 a.m. (things are pretty casual at Hannagan Meadow), then brought seven uncooked chicken cordon bleus, a frozen mac and cheese, and a pie back to his cabin.

He says he was hungry.

From what we can gather, he cooked up a few of the chickens, plus the mac and cheese, but passed out before slicing into the pie. Pleading his case to the skeptical waitress, he says he planned to pay for everything in the morning and offers to return the still-uneaten pie. She stares at him, saying nothing.

“What are you looking at?”

She points to her eyes, then back to him, and says: “I’m lookin’ at you, buddy. That’s who!”

New Mexico locusts (*Robinia neomexicana*) bloom along a forest road near U.S. Route 191 in the White Mountains of Eastern Arizona. The trees are found in mountainous regions throughout the American Southwest.  NICK BEREZENKO

Q: Did you ever think, *Boy, it sure would be nice to have a C.B. right about now?*

A: Maybe at Sardine Saddle, between Morenci and Hannagan Meadow. We were really ready to get off the road and we didn’t have any service, as I remember.



DAY 5: PHYTOSAURS WRESTLE NEXT TO A TROPICAL SWAMP

A veil of mist hugs the ground at Hannagan Meadow as we load the car before traveling beneath slopes of blackened ponderosa pines, victims of the 2011 Wallow Fire. The day quickly clouds up, and over 23 miles, the highway loses nearly 1,000 feet of elevation before reaching Alpine, where we pass a taxidermy shop and a Confederate flag whipping in the wind.

Farther north, near Eagar on State Route 260, I'm surprised to see a sign for the Little Colorado River. Here, the river is just a meandering creek flowing across a pasture, not set deep

within the gorge I'm familiar with near the Grand Canyon. But the Little Colorado is a reminder that we've crossed a divide in the mountains, and now every creek and arroyo is, like us, flowing inevitably toward the Canyon.

We're not catching this stretch on the best day. The heavy overcast has drained the color from the landscape. The aspens have already dropped their leaves, and the snow fences along the highway, along with the downhill runs etching the slopes at Sunrise Park Resort, still await the first storms of the season. The drive through Pinetop-Lakeside to Show Low seems long and, after so much emptiness along the drive, bustling.

Becky takes the wheel after lunch in Show Low as we leave the mountains, moving from the pine forest into stands of junipers, where a large herd of pronghorns thunders up a rise. A cottonwood blazes with full color in Concho, where State Route 180A passes the old adobe San Rafael Catholic Church, its New Mexico style reflecting the community's historical ties

Q: Did you see any wildlife?

A: Elk, mule deer, desert bighorn sheep, coyotes, coatis, ringtails, sandhill cranes, a dead mountain lion, ravens, assorted lizards and red-tailed hawks.

with Zuni Pueblo across the border.

We cross the Little Colorado again, as it runs through an arroyo cutting through the red earth, before reaching Petrified Forest National Park. In the Rainbow Forest Museum, phytosaurs wrestle by a swamp in a 1936 diorama showing what the park landscape looked like 200 million years ago, when it was a tropical environment roughly near today's Costa Rica. Petrified Forest is a park that demands a leap of faith. How else can you grasp the amount of time it took for continental drift to transport a landmass a few thousand miles? Or for trees to turn to stone?

Becky and I, of course, are dealing with road time, and I ask park museum volunteer John Rutherford how long it will take to reach Canyon de Chelly. He offers an estimate, then strongly cautions against rushing through Petrified Forest. "I know what I do," he says with emphasis. "There are things here you won't see anywhere else in the world."

And so, we slow down, strolling first among the logs of petrified wood near the museum, then through the rounded hills along the Blue Mesa Trail. The sunlight is muted, casting soft shadows, while alternating bands of gray, white and dusty violet stand out against a nearly purple sky.

We listen as a distant freight train rumbles across the Painted Desert, the engine whistle calling. Then, much closer, there's the sound of off-key singing and the strumming of an out-of-tune guitar.

*Makes me shiver to my toes
Things ain't going well in Santa Fe, oh, no
Make them two tacos to go, señor
I've got teardrops in my tequila*

Am I really hearing this? Up at an overlook, near a parked van, the singer, a little bearded guy, has now clambered up on the guardrail with his guitar. He's absolutely singing his chubby guts out on Paul Craft's *Teardrops in My Tequila*. As intrusive as his "live at Blue Mesa" concert may be, I can't deny that he's feeling the moment as he launches into *Piece of My Heart* (best known for the Janis Joplin version) before closing with Lynyrd Skynyrd's *All I Can Do Is Write About It*.

Rutherford was right: There are things in Petrified Forest we haven't seen anywhere else in the world.

Our last stop before getting onto Interstate 40 for Canyon de Chelly is Newspaper Rock. Future park rangers will face two interpretive challenges: first, to describe the history of these petroglyphs, some of which could be 2,000 years old; and second, to explain what a newspaper was, unless perhaps the rock art site is renamed Meme Mesa.

I've been to Newspaper Rock several times before but suddenly understand where I first saw these petroglyphs. Back in 1950, my parents drove Route 66 from Chicago when they moved to California — the 20th century version of coming West in a covered wagon on the Oregon Trail. They traveled with another couple in a 1946 Chevy "woody," the front passenger door held shut by a clothes hanger and the radiator perpetually on the verge of overheating.

They took both color and black and white photographs of their adventure, the most famous a shot of my parents, in love, wearing their black leather jackets and rolled-up dungarees, with their foreheads pressed together as they stood on the South Rim. But it isn't until this moment, 67 years after my parents drove Route 66, that I realize I grew up looking at a picture, in our family album, of her standing right here, at Newspaper Rock. Mom on the Mother Road, age 22.

Long shadows form at sunset on the layered buttes of the Blue Mesa area of Petrified Forest National Park. An easy 1-mile loop hike offers excellent views of this part of the park. 📍 SU VON MAZO



Church Rock, which rises some 500 feet above the surrounding desert, is one of many spectacular sights along U.S. Route 160 on the Navajo Nation.
📷 MARK LAVERMAN

Part 3: The Navajo Nation

DAYS 6 & 7: CHICKEN FAJITAS AND RESTOCKING OUR FRUIT CACHE

I don't believe in packing light. The very suggestion is a form of "fake news," right up there with keeping your office clean and meeting deadlines, concepts designed to induce a sense of guilt in those of us otherwise too focused on life's rich pageant to wash socks and underwear in our hotel room sinks each night.

The temperature range so far has been around 70 degrees, and that prospect led us to prepare for the climatic equivalent of everything from a beach vacation in Mexico to fall in Fairbanks, Alaska. A tendency to anticipate any and all travel-related wardrobe malfunctions — combined with laptops, books made of real paper and multiple pairs of footwear — only added to our tonnage.

What I've realized is that unpacking light is more important than packing light. And yet, by morning, our hotel rooms look they've been hit by a haboob. Hence, an extra night at Thunderbird Lodge at Canyon de Chelly National Monument comes as a relief, especially with our driving limited to outings for chicken fajita dinners at the Junction restaurant and restocking our fruit cache at the Chinle Bashas' supermarket.

I visited Canyon de Chelly most recently in early spring — or, based on the near-blizzard conditions along I-40 between Gallup and Sanders on the drive in, more like late winter. Despite her many trips to Arizona while growing up, Becky has never been to Canyon de Chelly, so we hire guide Adam Teller, whom I profiled in the October 2017 issue of *Arizona Highways*, to take us in.

For Becky, who loves everything about the Southwest, the chance to see Canyon de Chelly through Teller's eyes is an absolute treat. He tells stories of his ancestors and dishes about the National Park Service and Navajo politics. This is my fourth time in Canyon de Chelly with Teller, but I'm still hearing some tales for the first time as he leads us to places I haven't seen before, including a short but spectacular slot-canyon-like gap, barely a few feet across, in the red-rock cliffs.

The canyon feels very different than it did in spring. Back in late March, Chinle Creek was running high. Today, it's totally dry, and Teller works his jeep through the deep, soft sand. Instead of the high green of spring, many of the cottonwoods have already dropped their leaves, while others' leaves range from dull brown to the yellows and oranges that photographers dream about.

Later in the afternoon, Becky and I head down the White House Ruins Trail, the one access to the canyon bottom that doesn't require a Navajo guide. With its frequent switchbacks and a couple of tunnels along the roughly 600-foot



The steep sandstone walls of Canyon de Chelly National Monument cradle greenery and flowing water at the bottom of the canyon.
📷 SHANE McDERMOTT

descent, the path is like a shorter version of the Grand Canyon's Bright Angel Trail.

The canyon day trippers have left, and the trail reverts from a park attraction to a local spot. There are families with young children and lots of runners — from Chinle High School cross country athletes, breathing hard on the return climb, to their elders, who ignore the occasional drop-offs and race down the trail with surprising ease.

We linger at the cliff dwellings until the light fades.

Back at the laptop, I compare my iPhone shots to the iconic White House Ruins photographs taken by Timothy O'Sullivan in 1873 and Ansel Adams in 1949. A fence now protects the ruins, which have been stabilized. The vegetation is different, too. By our standards, O'Sullivan's image is ancient. In canyon time, the ensuing 144 years are but an instant. The stripes of the desert varnish on the cliff face look the same, and it's easy to track the same fissures and cracks that etch the rock.

The Milky Way galaxy punctuates a starry sky above the silhouettes of Monument Valley's buttes. The valley is along the Arizona-Utah border, on the Navajo Nation.
📷 SHANE MCDERMOTT



WHEN YOU GO

Arizona Room at Bright Angel Lodge: 928-638-2631, www.grandcanyonlodges.com

Curley School and Artists' Alley: 520-387-8988, www.curleyschool.com

Desert View Watchtower, Grand Canyon National Park: 928-638-8960, www.nps.gov/grca

Dreamcatcher Bed and Breakfast: 520-824-3127, www.dreamcatcherbnb.com

Echo Canyon Trail, Chiricahua National Monument: 520-824-3560, www.nps.gov/chir

El Tovar Dining Room: 928-638-2631, www.grandcanyonlodges.com

Gadsden Hotel: 520-364-4481, www.thegadsdenhotel.com

Goulding's Trading Post Museum, Josef Muench Room: 435-727-3231, www.gouldings.com/museum

Granite Mountain Hotshots Memorial State Park: 877-697-2757, www.azstateparks.com/hotshots

Hacienda Corona de Guevavi: 520-287-6503, www.haciendacorona.com

Hannagan Meadow Lodge: 928-339-4370, www.hannaganmeadow.com

Hassayampa Inn: 928-778-9434, www.hassayampainn.com

Holt's Shell Gas Station: 928-683-2449, www.holtshell.com

Little Moo's Gourmet Market: 928-592-8705, www.littlemoosaz.com

Petrified Forest National Park: 928-524-6228, www.nps.gov/pefo

Sonoran Desert Inn and Conference Center: 520-373-0804, www.sonorancc.com

The Local: 928-237-4724, www.facebook.com/thelocalprescott

The View Hotel: 435-727-5555, www.monumentvalleyview.com

Thunderbird Lodge: 800-679-2473, www.thunderbirdlodge.com

Tuba City Trading Post: 928-283-5441, www.discovernavajo.com

White House Ruins, Canyon de Chelly National Monument: 928-674-5500, www.nps.gov/cach

Wildcat Trail, Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park: 435-727-5870, www.navajonationparks.org

DAY 8: A SACRED LANDSCAPE OF ROCKS

We're into serious red-rock country, first in Canyon de Chelly and now along U.S. 191 on the way to Monument Valley. Looking like the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, minus the Canyon, the Lukachukai Mountains rise to the east. There are Monument Valley-style buttes and mesas, along with low, rounded, brick-red hills, while Rock Point seems to have more than one pointy rock.

The clouds, reflecting the red earth far below, take on a pinkish cast as we drive west on U.S. Route 160, the most spectacular stretch of the trip so far. There are the hoodoos at Baby Rocks Mesa and the broken heights of Church Rock, a volcanic neck that by rights should be called Cathedral Rock, considering that it towers 500 feet above the surrounding desert. The tilted sandstone fins of Comb Ridge, that geologic *Cadillac Ranch*, reach the end of their 80-mile run from Utah, while another dramatic volcanic plug, Agathla Peak, stands sentinel on the approach to Monument Valley via U.S. Route 163.

Patience helps in Monument Valley, one of those places so familiar from movies, car commercials and screen savers that you need time to truly see it in three dimensions.

The Navajos call their sacred landscape of buttes, mesas and spires Tsé Bii' Ndzisgaii — “streaks that go around in the rocks.” But it was the images Josef Muench shot with his 4x5 view camera that brought this remote region to the world and helped reinvent it as the definitive landscape of the American West.

It has been said that Muench is to Monument Valley as Ansel Adams is to Yosemite Valley. Muench, the patriarch of a three-generation dynasty of landscape photographers that includes his son David and grandson Marc, was born in Bavaria in 1904. There's a legend that at a rally in 1927, he threw a tomato that struck Adolf Hitler, who then was rising in political power. Muench's rebellious act may have helped lead to his 1928 decision to leave for the United States, where he joined his brother in Detroit and went to work on a Ford assembly line. After two years, restless and eager for adventure, Muench saved up for a Model A, then took a road trip of his own, eventually arriving penniless in Santa Barbara, California.

Interested in photography since his childhood, in the mid-1930s, Muench drove to Arizona for the first of anywhere from 160 to 354 visits (accounts vary) he would make to Monument Valley in the coming decades.

Muench befriended Harry Goulding, founder of the valley trading post that bears Goulding's name. Between drought and the Great Depression, times were desperate in Monument Valley. So was Goulding. When he heard United Artists was looking for a location to shoot a Western, Goulding drove to Hollywood to pitch Monument Valley, one of the country's most remote spots, for the film's setting.

Without an appointment, Goulding managed to wrangle a meeting with John Ford. And it was Muench's photographs that convinced the director to shoot *Stagecoach*, his new film starring a

B-movie actor named John Wayne, amid the giant sandstone monoliths on the Navajo Nation. In 1939, *Stagecoach* earned Ford an Academy Award nomination for best director, and he ultimately filmed nine Westerns in Monument Valley. The valley came to symbolize the American West, and as Ford said, “I think you can say that the real star of my Westerns has always been the land.”

At Goulding's Trading Post, Becky and I pay tribute to Muench in the room dedicated to him in the museum. One black and white shot shows Muench shooting with his large-format camera as West Mitten Butte rises behind him.

Late that afternoon, West Mitten comes to life in full color. In Monument Valley, you want to shift the perspective, to get past the hundreds of images embedded in your mind and see the valley as something new. One of the best places to do that is the Wildcat Trail, where we hike down the slopes of the dunes, crossing washes and circling a rockfall that resembles a pedestal. Here, West Mitten loses the aloofness it has when seen from an overlook and becomes an overwhelming presence, towering above us, its furrows and textures revealed as the rock flares in the setting sun.

We're staying above the valley, in a cabin at the View Hotel. Before going to sleep, I frequently step out onto the deck to gaze up at the Milky Way, smeared against the blackness. Then, around 5:30 a.m., Becky and I awaken to as spectacular a sunrise as we have ever seen. The monuments stand out, silhouetted against bands of color along the horizon: orange, gold, red, peach. Above those bands, the sky darkens in gradations from lavender to indigo. Mars hangs above a crescent moon, with Jupiter and Venus hovering along the top of Merrick Butte. “It's like we're looking across the universe,” Becky says.

DAYS 9 & 10: EVERYTHING LOOKS LIKE A CONDOR

By now, the red dust of the Colorado Plateau covers our hiking boots. The tracked-in gravel collected along the floorboards crunches as we shift our feet, and a fine powder coats the car, giving it a pinkish cast. This is all as it should be in Navajo country.

Bound for Tuba City, we switch off satellite radio, tuning out Beltway pundits, talking heads and sycophants alike, and spin the dial for Navajo radio. KTNN, the 50,000-watt powerhouse, comes through loud and clear. The broadcast is as musical as it is incomprehensible, peppered in places with familiar words (“Flagstaff,” “Gallup”) and songs ranging from country standards to contemporary Navajo tunes.

While its population is overwhelmingly Navajo, Tuba City is another border town, bumping up against the Hopi community of Moenkopi along its southeastern edge. The Navajo Nation's boundary with the main part of the Hopi Tribe's land is less than 20 minutes away.

Intrigued by the Navajo Code Talker exhibit at the Kayenta Burger King, of all places, we stop at Tuba City Trading Post to walk through its museum dedicated to these World War II heroes. You won't find touch screens or interactive exhibits, but the old-school museum has some remarkable curiosities, from black sand gathered at a South Pacific beach to a Japanese soldier's hara-kiri knife.

Owned by the Babbitt family until 2000, the octagonal, kiva-like trading post building dates to the early 1900s. Light pours through clerestory windows and into a space dominated by nine ponderosa pine pillars that rise two stories to a tongue-and-groove ceiling. Restored in the 1980s, the trading post is filled with cases of fine turquoise jewelry, traditional baskets and a big selection of Navajo weavings.

We look through the blankets upstairs, then come down to the ground floor, where we meet a small woman wearing a white fleece vest embroidered with cardinals. Her name is Loy Coin, and when I ask about Navajo blankets made of wool dyed with natural pigments, she immediately guides us to some weavings, then offers a detailed explanation of the process.

Becky tells her we definitely asked the right person, and the 82-year-old Coin replies, “When I went to work here, my father told me that I should learn things, so if people ask a question, I would never have to tell them, ‘I don't know.’”

In her 47 years at the trading post, Coin has learned plenty, but she remains modest about her expertise, as well as her Hopi language skills. She explains that she grew up in the city, not on tribal land, so her Hopi isn't polished.

“What city?”

“Winslow.”

She tells us her family is part of the Hopi Bear Clan, but because she attended public schools, she wasn't as immersed in the culture as kids raised on Hopi land were. Her mother died when she was 12. And even though she didn't grow up in an especially traditional household, her father wanted his daughters to marry into Hopi families. Coin did, and she has lived in Tuba City since 1958.

Past Tuba City, we work our way through the Painted Desert to Cameron on an always-hectic stretch of U.S. Route 89, the main north-south route in this part of the state. The highway crosses the Little Colorado River, a ruddy, muddy flow beneath a 1911 suspension bridge, Arizona's oldest. Then we turn west onto State Route 64 for the final stretch to the Grand Canyon.

Coming up from Williams or on U.S. Route 180 from Flagstaff, there's nary a hint of the Canyon until you're literally at the South Rim. But long before you reach the national park, SR 64 offers tantalizing previews of what's to come at overlooks of side canyons.

Navajo vendors are selling jewelry in weathered sheds as we pull off for one final look at the Little Colorado, our fourth of the trip. The river channel cuts through a deep gorge of sheer sandstone cliffs, the highest section neatly divided into precise horizontal layers. It's difficult to imagine that the meandering creek we saw near its Baldy Peak headwaters could ever flow powerfully enough to cut through rock. It's also hard to fathom the millions of years it takes to carve a canyon that's hundreds of feet deep.

Continued on page 42



The South Rim's Mather Point offers an expansive view of the Grand Canyon at sunset. About 6.3 million people visited Grand Canyon National Park in 2017.
📷 ADAM SCHALLAU



Continued from page 39

After more than 300 miles, we leave the Navajo Nation, then briefly run through a section of the Kaibab National Forest before officially entering Grand Canyon National Park.

Among the Canyon “condescendi,” it’s always been fashionable to knock the South Rim — the crowds, the shuttles, the tour buses disgorging their walking dead. And there are certainly times when the maddening crowd ought to take the chance to bear witness to one of the world’s great places, rather than stamp a national-park passport and cross the Grand Canyon off a bucket list in less than an hour. Some take suicidal selfies inches from the void and don’t seem to appreciate that

an ice cream cone at Bright Angel Fountain tastes so much better after even a half-hour hike on the Bright Angel Trail.

Even though I’m a North Rim guy, I’ve mostly made peace with the South Rim. Becky, more tolerant than me, adores the South Rim. The Mary Colter architecture, the mule barn, the Grand Canyon Railway pulling into the station, dinner beneath the Native American-inspired murals at El Tovar Dining Room ... it all rekindles her childhood memories of the Southwest and a sense of what a classic national park should be.

I’m still working on it. But I do love that the world comes to the South Rim, and it’s probably the place where I’m proudest to be an American, especially when

Lookout Studio, perched on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, greets the rising sun. The building is one of several Canyon structures designed by prolific National Park Service architect Mary Colter.
📷 LARRY LINDAHL

Q: What music did you listen to?

A: I hate to say it, but we listened to a lot of talk radio. As for music, Linda Ronstadt, *Heart Like a Wheel*; Calexico, *Feast of Wire*; Buddy Holly, *The Very Best of Buddy Holly and the Crickets*; and Bruce Springsteen, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*.

someone asks me in broken English to take their picture. Or for directions. Then I discover that they’ve traveled from as far away as Kazakhstan or Burkina Faso just to be here.

By morning, a storm is rolling in and the South Rim is as quiet as I can remember. With the threatening weather, we skip a planned hike to Indian Garden and instead ride the shuttle bus toward Hermit’s Rest for a long walk along the rim.

We grab an empty seat behind a stocky guy with a mess of curly hair and a beard touched with gray. He’s sitting by himself and speaking loudly, to no one in particular, about South Rim shuttle routes and his plans for the day. And soon I’m besties with Bill.

Against the odds, we begin making connections. Bill and I were born in hospitals a mile apart in Chicago (his mother didn’t make it to the maternity ward), and during the 1980s, we lived in the same town on the Central Coast of California. A physicist by training, Bill worked in top secret weapons programs (“Even now, I shouldn’t say what they were”), and when I mention there were all sorts of Russian spooks around town, he quickly agrees.

Then Bill describes a den of spies from China who he claims operated out of the back of the town’s retro Chinese restaurant. I’m surprised they would choose a joint that couldn’t even make a decent egg roll: “I thought the most dangerous thing about that place was the sweet-and-sour pork.”

“Oh, yeah,” Bill quickly agrees. “The food was absolutely terrible.”

Someday, some way, I’m guessing our orbits will intersect again.

We bid Bill farewell and step off the shuttle at Monument Creek Vista for the hike back to Grand Canyon Village. Walking along the Abyss, where the curving Canyon walls plunge a few thousand feet, we pause to look for California condors. The most important rule of condor spotting is to understand that at first, everything — red-tailed hawks, turkey vultures, crows, ravens, the occasional Piper Cub in the distance — looks like a condor. Then, when you actually spot a condor, there’s no mistaking anything else for these giants, which look like they’ve flown straight into the Grand Canyon from the Pleistocene.

While we wait, two ravens put on a show in the void just off the trail. They surf the winds blowing up the side of the cliffs, thrashing and turning 360s and performing barrel rolls. Then the ravens manage to find the stillness in the swirling gusts, hovering directly in front of us, at eye level. But there aren’t any condors.

The subdued light is so spectacular over the Canyon that it hardly matters. The light reveals the reds and tans of the Canyon’s broken ramparts and etches the cross-section of layers with shadows as the cliffs step down to the Inner Gorge, where the Colorado River churns white with foam at Hermit Rapids.

There’s a whole subgenre of Grand Canyon literature that focuses on the futility of trying to describe its beauty, intricacy and scale. But one man, according to legend, did manage to capture the essence of the Canyon, and in just four words. After arriving by rail at the South Rim, President William Howard Taft is said to have looked out at the Grand Canyon and declared, “Golly, what a gully!”

Wilson Mountain, north of Sedona, presents a view of the San Francisco Peaks to the north. The Peaks include 12,633-foot Humphreys Peak, Arizona's highest point. Oak Creek Canyon is in the middle ground.

📷 SHANE McDERMOTT



Part 4: Beyond the Canyon

DAY 11: WE PUT GENE AND BOB IN MY BACKPACK

The forecast calls for rain and gusts up to 45 mph at the Canyon as we leave the South Rim, crossing the broad prairies and ponderosa pine forests of the Coconino Plateau. Clouds cloak the San Francisco Peaks. It's drizzling, and the car's outdoor thermometer reads 41 degrees. Bound for Prescott, we face an impossible day because of the weather and the sheer number of potential destinations on the 170-mile drive through Flagstaff and Oak Creek.

Upper Oak Creek Canyon is past its autumn peak, although fallen leaves line the banks of the creek with yellow and the brilliant crimson of bigtooth maples. But as we descend and get closer to Sedona, the colors start to intensify as cottonwoods and willows fill the canyon bottom with golds and oranges that stand out against the red sandstone walls.

The car labors as State Route 89A twists and turns up Cleopatra Hill and through Jerome, passing the brick buildings that step up the slopes. Past town, a gap in the mountains opens to a commanding view, with the bosque along the Verde River tracing a course across the valley and the Mogollon Rim rising in the distance.

We haven't been to Prescott in nearly nine years, and I've forgotten how serpentine the approach on SR 89A can be on the 3,000-foot climb from the Verde Valley and over Mingus Mountain in the Black Hills. During that most recent trip, we drove in from the southwest, through Yarnell and Peeples Valley, on a trip that came to be known as "The Last Ride of Gene and Bob."

Gene was Becky's mother, Bob her father. After Bob went into hospice, we had to ask him the tough questions, such as where he wanted his and Gene's ashes scattered. "Definitely not over the ocean," Bob said, but when we mentioned Prescott, he brightened and declared, "Oh, yeah!" in the Bronx accent of his youth, undiminished after more than 80 years.

So, a few months later, we put Gene and Bob in the back of the SUV and set out on a road trip from

California. It was a homecoming for Becky. Those summers in Prescott were the happiest times of her childhood, even though she also had memories of being a little girl in town for her grandfather's funeral and hearing of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy while in Prescott's Courthouse Square.

She couldn't remember the last time she had visited Prescott, but the details began to come back as we explored the area, hiking up Thumb Butte and wandering among the rounded boulders of the Granite Dells. We located her grandparents' house on Mingus Avenue, and when the time came, we put Gene and Bob in my backpack and hiked down a slope to a spot with a view of the Peaks in the distance. There wasn't much ceremony. Bob was an engineer by day and a jazz trumpeter by night, and as his and Gene's ashes swirled to the earth to become part of Arizona, Erroll Garner played *Misty* via my iPhone.

DAY 12: AFTER ALL THE PLANNING ...

When Becky and I got together, about 20 years ago, she was emerging from her mauve phase, and my late but emerging maturity found its expression in a move from a foam mattress on the floor to an actual bed.

As we began putting together our household, art played a major role. During a trip to Sedona, maybe in 2004, we purchased a watercolor, pastel and ink work, called *Rincon Road in the Fall*, by a Wickenburg artist named Myrna Harrison. Broadly speaking, it's a landscape depicting a stand of golden cottonwoods against a series of jagged mountain ridges. But her Abstract Expressionist style transcends more sentimental landscape approaches, and the painting's vibrant colors and simplified shapes reflect a distinctly modern sensibility.

We've often talked about meeting Harrison. Knowing that the drive would take us through Wickenburg, we decided to track her down. When I reached her, she sounded pleased and invited us



Oak Creek flows over smooth rocks along the Allen's Bend Trail. The trail begins northeast of Sedona, at the Grasshopper Point parking area along State Route 89A.  DEREK VON BRIESEN

to stop by her house on the final day of our drive.

The trip out of Prescott via State Route 89 is as winding as the approach from Jerome. The highway passes the gull-wing roofline of the Midcentury Woody's gas station before climbing to 6,100 feet. Prickly pears and pines dot the slopes before we drop into the high-desert expanse of Peeples Valley. There are signs for shuttles to Granite Mountain Hotshots Memorial State Park before we switch-back down the face of Yarnell Hill, where a red-tailed hawk soars in front of us, a snake dangling from its beak.

Harrison's directions are precise, and we cross

the Hassayampa River wash before arriving at her house. She walks out to welcome us, and we're immediately struck by one thing: Harrison looks just like my mother. Not so much her face. But the glasses, short white hair, and air of energy and intelligence mark Harrison as a member of the same species.

Harrison lives in a house designed by Arizona-born architect Bennie Gonzales in the 1960s. Like her art, the house, with slump block walls resembling adobe and resawn wood details, blends regional and modern sensibilities. From the top of the bluff, the arched windows take in big views of the surrounding desert and up to Yarnell, as well as the saguaros scattered on the property. "I've got some good saguaros," Harrison says with pride.

The house is filled with books and art, reflecting

Continued on page 50



Lichen-stained sandstone and prickly pear cactuses define a view of the Sedona area's Red Rock Country. Many of the area's iconic rock formations are protected by federal wilderness areas.

SHANE McDERMOTT

Q: Total miles?

A: 2,107.

Continued from page 47

both her years as a painter and her past as an English literature professor and college administrator. The daughter of a Screen Gems animator and a hat designer, Harrison grew up in Hollywood before the family moved to New York City. She came to Arizona in 1980 to serve as president of Rio Salado Community College. She bought the Wickenburg house in 1986.

By now, we’ve traveled all over Arizona. From barren expanses of creosote desert to the ponderosa pine forests of the White Mountains. Into scruffy small towns and hidden red-rock canyons still untouched by the modern world. Harrison has lived a fascinating life, from the Greenwich Village art scene of the 1950s to Berkeley, California, in the 1960s and summers in Provincetown, Massachusetts. So, I wonder: Why Arizona?

“I’m a landscape person,” she says. “I love landscapes, and I love the ocean. I’ve always been around the ocean. These years, I usually go back East, but I haven’t been consistently by the ocean since I’ve been in Arizona. But I often say that where I live is oceanfront property. It’s just that the ocean left a couple of million years ago.

“That’s because of the incredible expansiveness of the landscape, one of the things most true of Arizona. I get claustrophobic in the East. I now get claustrophobic in forests. Because I love being able to look out and see the horizon, 180 degrees — or 360 degrees, if you turn your head. That’s what’s extraordinary for me. This incredible expansiveness.”

Harrison just turned 86 and still hops in the car and goes out into the state, mostly on her own, so she can have time to draw and simply look. A lot of her work isn’t of a specific place, but “digested memories” that combine images in her mind with the sketches she does on the road. It’s what she calls “landscape recollected in tranquility.” She likes going out on the Apache Trail, for the grasslands, lakes and rock formations. Or west on U.S. 60, to places like Aguila, Salome and the Harcuvar Mountains. Or up U.S. Route 93 to Wikieup, into pockets of Arizona far removed from the state’s modern cities.

“I always drove the dirt roads by myself,” she says. “I figured I was a good hiker and could go 25 miles back out if I had to. Now I don’t feel as good on dirt roads. But age buys you a lot. There are all sorts of places I never would have gone as a young woman. Biker bars and things like that. Now, I think, *What can they do to me for a glass of water or a beer?* I go in and look so different from everybody else. I’m a woman, I’m older, I’m by myself. People will sit down and ask, ‘What are you doing here?’”

We say goodbye to Harrison, and several hours later, we arrive home. Becky falls asleep early, but my mind is racing with memories of the trip, still undigested. Harrison’s painting hangs in our family room, and I peruse a few vintage copies of *Arizona Highways* that I found at the Old Sage Bookshop in Prescott. One issue, from 1954, focuses on the Grand Canyon, while two from the 1960s feature Petrified Forest National Park and Santa Cruz County: Nogales, Patagonia and the mission at Tumacacori. There are countless Josef Muench photos and *The Fence*, a short article about the border.

After all the planning and anticipation, I’m sad the trip is over — sad, too, about the imminent return to my desk, where, at least until the next road trip, the world will come to me through my computer screen instead of the windshield of the car, where we came to relish the two sweetest words in the English language when they appeared on our phones:

No service. **OH**

Sunset colors the sky over the Granite Dells, which cradle the Prescott area’s Watson Lake. The rock in the Granite Dells is about 1.4 billion years old, and erosion has produced its unusual appearance.
📷 COLLEEN MINIUK-SPERRY

