



The Great Escapes

THESE ARE THE PLACES OUR PEOPLE
HAVE BEEN DREAMING ABOUT.

Edited by Robert Steve

Changing course at *Arizona Highways* isn't easily done. So much of our photography is seasonal, meaning it has to be shot a year in advance. And our writers are usually given eight to 10 months to compose a story. A lot of planning goes into the production of our mothership. That's why making changes is so difficult — more like turning an aircraft carrier than performing a triple axel. Sometimes, though, there's no other way. Trails wash out, roads close, restaurants go out of business. When those things happen, it's a single story, here or there. When a pandemic hits, everything can change.

By the time Arizona's stay-at-home executive order went into effect on March 31, most of the words and photographs for our July issue were already in the queue, awaiting their turn to tell the Arizona Story. The decision to supersede the entire issue meant we had to pull off a triple axel, something we couldn't have done without our remarkable writers and photographers, who turned around their assignments in a week or two. Even photographer Bill Hatcher reached out, despite his circumstances.

"When I got the request," he wrote, "I was in the Australian Outback trying to figure out how to get out of that desert and back to my own in Tucson. Our plane tickets had been canceled, state borders were closing and we were in an old camper van with 300,000 kilometers on the odometer — still four days from Sydney. I'm sure your deadline is long past, but my answer would have been Salt River Canyon."

We asked Bill, and all the others, about the first place in Arizona they planned to visit after the lockdown. That was in April. In the meantime, some of their great escapes — the places they've been dreaming about — may have reopened. And some might still be closed. Right now, we just don't know, so please call ahead before you make any plans to hit the road, especially to places like the Navajo Nation, which, at press time, is under extreme lockdown. Be safe, be smart and be respectful.

— R.S.

The East Fork of the Black River winds through an evergreen-lined meadow in the White Mountains of Eastern Arizona. To learn more about photographer Joel Hazelton's love of this place, turn to page 24.
JOEL HAZELTON

BLUE CANYON

BY MATT JAFFE, CALABASAS, CALIFORNIA

We're always being told to live in the moment, but lately I haven't had an opportunity to do much of anything else. Actions that not so long ago were reflexive and unconscious have, by necessity, become deliberate and measured — every touch of a door handle or press of an ATM keypad the subject of an instantaneous risk analysis.

The present is fraught, while tomorrow seems even more unknowable than when a wise person somewhere articulated, "It's difficult to make predictions, especially about the future." With the world feeling so small and this moment we're all living in so stifling, I'm craving landscapes and sky and something ancient. I'm dreaming of Blue Canyon.

A branch of Moenkopi Wash on Hopi Tribe land northeast of Tuba City, Blue Canyon is such a distinctive landscape that it inspired what amounted to a flight of poetry in the otherwise earthbound prose of a 1917 U.S. Geological Survey document titled *Geology of the Navajo Country*.

"At Blue Canyon," it reads, "the delicacy of coloring and intri-

cacy of carving in the McElmo formation combine to produce a landscape not exceeded in beauty by any other scenic feature of the Plateau province." That's no small tribute, considering that "Plateau province" refers to the Colorado Plateau region, which encompasses the likes of the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley and Canyon de Chelly.

Blue Canyon is a much more intimate place. There, sculpted by erosion, are turrets and towers, hoodoos and arches. Some are capped with dabs of coppery orange, as if they've been dipped in paint. Others are banded or crosshatched with a creamy white. There isn't much blue in Blue Canyon.

Balanced rocks rest like abstract sculpture on plinth-like pedestals of stone, while a few outcroppings have well-defined, tapering domes that resemble the spindle of a toy top. Many formations appear to be melting, as if they're dissolving back into the earth. This is where Hopi meets Dalí.

Until about four years ago, I didn't know Blue Canyon existed. We were up on the Hopi mesas and heard that a traditional Katsina dance was underway on First Mesa. We drove over from Tsakurshovi, on Second Mesa, then climbed a ladder to a rooftop for the best view of the plaza. The rhythms and movement

and color were positively hypnotic until the dancers suddenly took a break and everyone began dispersing.

We were conspicuous as outsiders, and while we waited our turn to go back down the ladder, a guy in mirror sunglasses asked, "Been to Blue Canyon?"

"No, never been."

"How long you here for?" I told him we were leaving soon. Stepping onto the ladder, he said, "Next time, you should go." That night, when I looked up pictures of Blue Canyon, I understood why.

In good times, it's easy to remain complacent and put things off for another day — under the assumption that the days will, in fact, keep coming. But all this living in the moment means I'm a lot less complacent about my tomorrows than I was a couple of months ago. When the time comes — when it's safe again to travel, when I won't add to the health risks for the residents of the mesas — I want to see Blue Canyon for myself. To be reminded that "now" is only a moment, but some places last forever.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Visiting Blue Canyon requires an authorized Hopi guide.



CHEVELON CANYON

BY CLAIRE CURRAN, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

Chevelon Canyon, for the solitude and silence of the canyon's tranquil creek. The healthy beauty of this canyon is life-affirming.

Why is this place special to you?

I was looking for a different type of photograph on the Mogollon Rim. Reflections in still water are a favorite subject of mine, and I was thrilled to find beautiful, colorful reflections in the waters of Chevelon Canyon.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

It was autumn on the Mogollon Rim, and the maple trees were in full fall color, but I just couldn't find a meaningful composition that would draw in the viewer's brain. A quiet creek with large pools of water for fall reflections was what I was looking for. A quick study of the map pointed me to Chevelon Canyon. I arrived at the trailhead, and no one was there. Peak fall color beckoned in the still pools and magnificent beauty of the canyon walls, laced with solitude and tranquility. For three days I hiked this wonderful, fall-colored canyon and never saw another human being. That was a special gift.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

Chevelon Canyon, because of its healthy flora, long stretches of still water and striking rock walls, affords the photographer the opportunity to photograph it during any season. Winter, with ice forming in the pools, might be the best season.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

I love reflections, particularly Rorschach-type reflections.



Striated boulders and hoodoos congregate in Blue Canyon.
GEORGE STOCKING



The view from Government Prairie includes Kendrick Peak (left) and the San Francisco Peaks (right).
SHANE McDERMOTT

GOVERNMENT PRAIRIE

By ANNETTE MCGIVNEY, FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

Too often over the past few weeks, during what everyone now refers to as “these times,” I feel like I can’t get enough air. There’s the fear of literally not being able to breathe if I am unlucky enough to contract COVID-19. But anxiety about everything from the status of my pantry to the future of the world economy sits heavy on my chest.

There are the petty worries, such as running out of dark chocolate and hand sanitizer. But it’s the tidal wave of virus-induced suffering washing over humanity that really weighs on me. Life in my beautiful mountain town has become dark and dystopian. The neighborhood playground is wrapped in yellow caution tape to keep children away. I take my dog, Sunny, on walks along Flagstaff’s urban trail and hold my breath as I smile politely at unmasked people passing too close.

My adult son, Austin, and I are rationing. We sparingly dole out our food and our hope. And we cautiously anticipate when we will allow ourselves to visit Government Prairie. This sprawling grassland northwest of Flagstaff has long been a favorite place for both of us. It is an undulating expanse where the earth ripples in soft waves of grass extending like an ocean in every direction. It is where we go to revel in the brightness of our lives.

When Austin was little, we often visited the prairie for summer picnics. After parking at the end of a bumpy dirt road, we’d get out and survey the surrounding hills. Austin always had the honor of picking which hill we would scramble up. When we got to the top, we’d pull out our sandwiches and breathe in the view: a sea of endless possibility and a few cows. We would marvel at the solitary aspen that claimed the top of the neighboring hill. Year after year, it managed to thrive despite hurricane-force winds and drought.

Over the past two decades, we’ve made a tradition of venturing to Government Prairie as a way to celebrate. We visit over New Year’s and my Fourth of July birthday. In 2015, we did a special send-off hike up our favorite hill before Austin left home to attend college. From the top of that sun-kissed vantage point, where a wonderland of light and shadow unfurled at our feet, we could see the promise of our futures.

Now, we are holed up in a fearful, constricted world I never could have imagined just months ago. I am frozen in place, as if waiting for a tornado to pass over our house without touching down. Meanwhile, I dream of Government Prairie. We will go there when the weight of the world has lifted, not just for us but for all of humanity. Maybe in the fall. We will hike to the top of a hill that is crowned with a determined, solitary tree. Everything will be golden — the grass, the aspen and the late-afternoon light. I will breathe it all in and then let it go. With one long exhale, all the anxieties will release like autumn leaves cartwheeling in the wind.

KOFA MOUNTAINS

By DAVID MUENCH, HARRISON, MONTANA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

The Kofa Mountains, west of Phoenix.

Why is this place special to you?

It's remote and, at the same time, intimate. Not many people go there, but if you hike a side canyon, such as Palm Canyon, you feel an intimacy with the earth and the planet. To be honest, it's good for my head.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

To the best of my recollection, the first time I visited was probably in the early 1960s, after I'd finished school. I don't recall exactly, but I either read something about the Kofas, or I might have seen a magazine article. I don't think my father, Josef, ever made photos there. This was a place I discovered. When I first arrived, no one else was there, and I liked that.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

Making photos there, I started working with the desert plants as strong elements in my foregrounds, juxtaposing their shapes against the irregular horizon created by the Kofas. Both the flora and the mountains have such unique forms.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

This is one of those images that's an interaction between the plants and the mountains. The closest ocotillo is showing red leaves and blooming at the same time, making the viewer wonder if this is a spring shot or one made in the fall. I'm not sure exactly why ocotillos behave this way, but it fascinates me. The sunlight coming from the back and right adds some lovely highlights to the cactuses and grasses. This creates separation between them and the shadowed parts of the frame, adding dimension.



ARAVAIPA CANYON

By JEFF MALTZMAN,
TUCSON, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

The Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness.

Why is this place special to you?

Aravaipa is a true oasis in the Sonoran Desert, one of the few places in the state with perennially flowing water. Cut through the Galiuro Mountains southeast of Phoenix by Aravaipa Creek, this 12-mile-long riparian wonderland provides a habitat for numerous species, both flora

and fauna, that would otherwise not survive here. The canyon is run by the Bureau of Land Management, which limits visitors to 50 per day, making Aravaipa the perfect place for a peaceful day hike or a multi-day backpacking journey. Whether alone or with friends, I'm always able to relax and enjoy nature without the crowds of other popular Arizona destinations.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

I vividly recall my first visit to Aravaipa, a day hike with friends in the early summer. I'd lived in Arizona only a short time and was amazed that a place like this existed in the middle of the desert. It was early summer and quite warm, yet

the creek provided all the cool water necessary. I immediately knew that I'd return, and I have done so many times over the past decade to hike, camp and photograph.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

The creek twists and turns as it makes its way from east to west, with numerous side canyons joining along the way. The geology and flora of the canyon vary over its course and between each tributary, and the light changes around each corner and throughout the day, making every visit to Aravaipa a unique experience photographically. The creek always provides a dynamic focal point, light reflecting off canyon walls and

surrounding trees coloring its flow. Come autumn, cottonwoods, Arizona sycamores and other species shed their summer green, revealing bright shades of yellow and orange. There are few places in the state that offer this variety of photographic subjects in a single location.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

Rounding a bend and seeing these towering cliffs bathed in the morning light, I was struck by how perfectly this beautiful view represents the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness. While the saguaros solidly anchor the scene in the Sonoran Desert, the lush vegetation and water below promise a unique and exciting journey ahead.



GYPSUM REEFS

By COLLEEN MINIUK, CHANDLER, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

The Gypsum Reefs, near Bonelli Bay on Lake Mead.

Why is this place special to you?

After a failed attempt to cross Lake Powell in 2015 after a traumatic life event, I wanted to spend time with an old friend of mine, the Colorado River. I'd visited Lake Mead only once before, but in November 2018, I decided to ride a stand-up paddleboard 60-plus miles across the country's largest reservoir, from the confluence with the Colorado River east of South Cove to Kingman Wash.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

Yes. It was an experience I'll never forget. (See below.)

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

Its uniqueness. There are few, if any, places in the Southwest where you can see water-carved gypsum in the shapes and formations you see at Lake Mead. Plus, it's not an easy place to get to. It's at least a 12-mile run by boat to the nearest marina. It's even longer on foot: about 18 miles round-trip, requiring route-finding in a backcountry setting.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

For the first three days of my crossing, from South Cove to Temple Bar, my friend and I had ideal conditions for paddling: no wind. On the fourth day, which was also the first day on my own, things changed. Shortly after I left Temple Bar Marina, I battled a fierce headwind until I reached North Point. I turned south toward Bonelli Bay, in search of a protected beach to camp on overnight. After another 8 long and hard miles, I turned a corner at the head of a small bay and saw a fantastical landscape I'd never seen before. Brown and white jagged ledges, layers upon layers of hardened gypsum sculpted into curves and arches — even dragons! I pulled up to the nearest stretch of sand to explore, even though I was exhausted, both mentally and physically. A few minutes after the sun went down, the overcast sky unexpectedly exploded into fiery colors. I couldn't contain my excitement. I grabbed my camera and bounded from ledge to ledge, making photographs. I thought, *How delicious! How delicious this sunset. How delicious this chance to be in such a magnificent place in this exact moment. How delicious to feel so alive right now. And how delicious brownies would be right about now!* This moment felt like the universe's way of saying everything was going to be fine amid the uncertainty of my paddle, and in my life. Better than fine, in fact. Beautiful. Serendipitous. Breathtaking. For that reason, I can't imagine a better spot to celebrate the end of quarantine, in a place that will reassure me that everything is going to be better than fine.

RED ROCK STATE PARK

BY AMEEMA AHMED, MESA, ARIZONA

Red dirt. It lingers. On your shoes. On your tires. On the floor of your car. On that water bottle you set down without thinking about it.

And it lingers in your heart. Once you've had a dose of the red rocks, the yearning for the feeling they give you never quite goes away. Like the first exhale after an ocean wave takes you over. That relief. That freedom. *That* feeling.

My first visit to Red Rock State Park was as a preteen, new to Arizona. It was the first time I felt OK calling this state home. The desert could be beautiful, I learned.

It became a refuge from the stresses of life. Just the simple act of driving into town and seeing those iconic red rocks come into view was enough to forget about whatever was bothering me. The red rocks were my place.

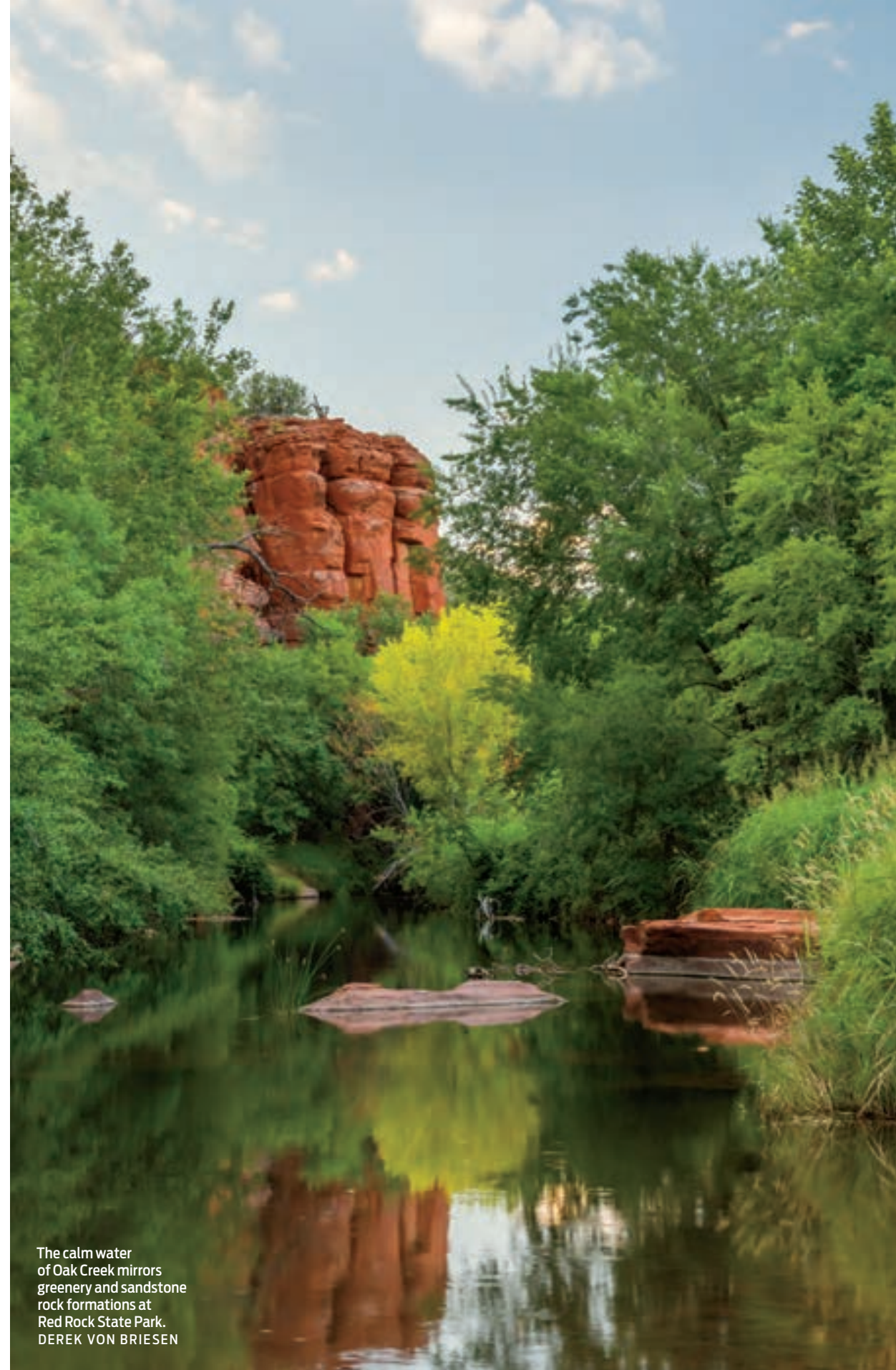
More than a decade later, I went back to Red Rock State Park with the man who will soon become my husband. We hiked the Kingfisher Crossing Trail, traipsing over Oak Creek and enjoying the sound of running water in mid-July — isn't it odd that just that sound can be cooling? Later, we weathered our first monsoon storm together, listening to the roaring thunder and watching how the rain intensified the red-orange of the sandstone, almost as if it was cleansing the rocks of any traces of human contact. There was *that* feeling again.

We've been back to the park numerous times since that summer day. After I broke my foot in 2017, we hiked the Eagle's Nest Loop when I was free from the boot. Despite the ease of the trail and the fact that it's only 2.4 miles, my foot was aching when I reached the top. But I was rewarded by fair-weather clouds accentuating the deep hue of the surrounding formations. The feeling returned.

We were at the park just a few months before things changed. This time, we hiked the Apache Fire Loop and speculated about what was left inside the House of Apache Fires. We talked about the people who used to live there and the place they called home — not knowing then how much time we'd soon be spending in our own home.

During these times of isolation and distancing, Red Rock Country has been on my mind. Mainly as a mental escape, but also because it wasn't far from Red Rock State Park that we decided on "forever." And it was amid the fiery sandstone that we planned to say, "I do." But that was before. Before "social distancing" became a part of our vocabulary. Before uncertainty and isolation were the norm.

So, we postponed "forever." Because I know we will return to that place. And the red rocks will be there, as they always have been. And we will say those two words, and I will have that feeling. And this time, it'll mean that much more, because the world will be different, and better. And I think everyone there will understand *that* feeling — the one I've known since my first dose of the magic that lies in those red rocks.



The calm water of Oak Creek mirrors greenery and sandstone rock formations at Red Rock State Park. DEREK VON BRIESEN



ANGELS WINDOW

BY ADAM SCHALLAU, FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

An unnamed overlook on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. I'll begin with a sunrise below Angels Window, and then I'll go for a walk along the rim.

Why is this place special to you?

There's so much about this place to love, and so much to see and take in. From this vantage point, you can see across the Canyon to the South Rim and all the way to the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff. Out in the Canyon beyond Angels Window is Vishnu Temple. Looking to the east, you can see across the Canyon to Desert View and the Palisades of the Desert, and down to the bottom of the Canyon at Unkar Delta and the Colorado River. In the morning, the only sounds to be heard are the wind through the trees, the occasional bird chirping and, when the air is still, the soft roar of the river far below.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

I do remember my first experience here. I was awestruck at the majesty of my surroundings, and I immediately felt at peace.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

I love this scene because Angels Window rises high above the surrounding terrain and juts out toward the Canyon like the bow of a ship, and it takes on a commanding presence within the Canyon. At sunrise, the light kisses the cliffs and the window begins to glow, and in that moment, the cold morning air gives way to the warmth of the sun.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

I made this photograph during one of my many trips to the North Rim. I had photographed this scene countless times, and I had captured it in some very dramatic light and weather, but I had not yet made a photo of the scene that represented the feeling I wanted to convey, which is a sense of peace and tranquility. I needed some wispy clouds and a touch of atmosphere to give the scene a softer, and perhaps a more painterly, quality. This atmosphere provides a sense of distance through the scene, and if you look closely, you can see the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff on the horizon.



BLACK RIVER

By JOEL HAZELTON, TEMPE, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

The Black River, in the White Mountains of Eastern Arizona.

Why is this place special to you?

I go on an annual summer trip to the Black River with my wife and our dog. It's perfect for all three of us — beautiful, wild, lonely, and a balance of rugged and moderate terrain. We backpack to a different area of the river every year, and it's always memorable. We've followed a coyote, been stalked by a bobcat, waded through poison ivy, bathed in the river, spent lazy days floating on inner tubes, watched burned trees topple right in front of us, been eaten alive by black flies, fallen asleep to the howls of coyotes and woken up to the bugling of elk. It rains almost every day during the monsoon, but we've learned to arrive early and hang a tarp between trees, so we can enjoy the storm while napping or reading a book, then explore under the dramatic light of the monsoon evening.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

My first visit was in the late summer of 2015. I backpacked a wide, grassy section of the upper East Fork of the Black River with my dog. It was during the peak of the monsoon, so the atmosphere was stormy and dramatic. The route to camp was a combination of elk trails and swampy cienegas hidden under tall grass. Since I had never been there before, I expected the hiking to be easier, but the uneven terrain and frequent marshy crossings presented a challenge. Fortunately, the constant scent of nearby elk kept the dog happy, while the beautiful scenery kept me distracted. I specifically remember the next morning: My dog was very displeased that she had to get up before sunrise with me and immediately cross the cold river so I could find my morning compositions.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

The Black River is incredibly unique in Arizona. The upper section doesn't lose elevation very quickly, so the river is calm and subtle as it winds through the wide, grassy meadows of the high country. This characteristic is very favorable for reflections, which is fortunate since a visit in July or August will almost always be accompanied by an afternoon full of heavy clouds and dappled light. Once the upper forks join and the main stem of the Black River descends past 7,000 feet in elevation, the canyon boxes up and frequent riffles become the predominant feature. The canyon is still wide enough to show a clear view of the sky, so photographers can get unique canyon images with a striking sunrise or sunset.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

This was on a June 2017 backpacking trip with my wife and our dog. We parked near an old, rustic cabin, then hiked a couple of miles cross-country and dropped into the river near its headwaters. This section of the river is calm and peaceful — mostly small pools, such as this one, connected by quaint trickles. The scenery is vast, open and conducive to landscape-oriented compositions. In addition to the wonderful sunset, I like how the blades of grass in the foreground break up the horizontal movement of the image and mimic the trees in the background.

AZTEC PEAK

By PAUL GILL, PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

The first place I'd escape to is the *Flintstones*-like "rock living room" on top of Aztec Peak in the Sierra Ancha Wilderness. This 7,694-foot peak towers above the pine forests of the Sierra Ancha and provides one of Arizona's best 360-degree views of Tonto Basin to the west, Salt River Canyon to the southeast and the Mogollon Rim to the north.

Why is this place special to you?

Solitude. It pretty much comes down to a lack of people on this dead-end, high-clearance dirt road. The only thing up there is Aztec Peak Lookout, which was erected in 1956 — it replaced a wooden structure that was built in 1925. The tower once was staffed by Edward Abbey, the noted Arizona essayist and novelist. I'm not sure if this lookout is still manned, but I've never seen any person or vehicle up there.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

Yes. A fellow nature photographer, Mark Larson, introduced me to the rock living room 20 years ago. I was immediately confounded by the boulders weighing tons. How someone could have constructed this without a crane, I have no idea. But the table can fit six people comfortably.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

Workman Creek, just below the peak. In July and August, the creek is lined with yellow columbines and purple myrtles. In October, maple trees that turn yellow, orange and red climb up to the 200-foot Workman Creek Falls. After a daredevil drive along a cliff over the falls, you'll start to see quaking aspens before the final drive up to the peak.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

I set up my camera on the table to get a better view of the rock chairs and fireplace. The view off the peak is overlooking the southern part of Tonto Basin. This would make a great place to photograph sunset, but I prefer to be in the forest next to the creek, so I've never gotten that late-light image. I can't wait to get back up there and catch some great light soon.



Shimmering reflections define a peaceful scene in Sycamore Canyon. GUY SCHMICKLE

SYCAMORE CANYON

By TYLER WILLIAMS, FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

My first camping trip was in Sycamore Canyon. I remember romping shirtless, with other 8-year-olds, through emerald-green grass and climbing strangely shaped trees while Mom managed the campsite. I'd already perceived a connection to nature before that trip, but the fact that we were maintaining a daily routine out there, eating and sleeping and actually *living* in this unusual place, made an indelible impression, and I was never the same.

The breadth of that first campout is comical when I look back. Our backpacking adventure forged a mighty half-mile into the wilderness. I don't think you're even permitted to camp so close to the trailhead anymore. Still, for me, it was a peek at the possibilities of nature, a universe that would expand

into a lifetime driven by the exploration of wild places.

Now, as I look more backward than forward on that adventurous life, I'm gripped by the struggle to accept that I've probably already had my greatest experiences in the natural world. I'll probably never have a closer grizzly encounter, or paddle a wilder river, or rappel a more clandestine canyon than I already have. But the nearby presence of Sycamore Canyon tempers that reflective mood, its enduring wildness providing salve to my middle-age melancholy. Because, despite the fact that I've lived in close proximity to this wilderness area for most of my life, I've still only nibbled at its periphery, barely probing its mysteries.

Upstream from the green idyll where I camped as a child, human traffic steadily diminishes as the cloak of streamside vegetation thwarts all but the fiercest efforts at trail maintenance. Four miles in, Parsons Spring is the last perennial water. The dry riverbed above here spoils the attraction of the place for some, but it creates an inhospitableness alluring to those seeking lonely escape.

Above that last good spring, red rock rims form an inner canyon cutting beneath tablelands of scrub junipers. These juniper flats are incised periodically by narrow clefts that hide unreliable seeps and trembling green cottonwoods — pure Southwestern solace. A quick map scan of this wide and sculpted canyon hints at a multitude of secret hideouts: Cedar Creek, Sand Seeps, Ott Lake, Geronimo Spring, Tule Canyon, Buck Ridge. The places are all different, but in concert, they create the whole: an undisturbed chunk of almost everything Arizona (the canyon is just beyond the reach of saguaros, but there are ocotillos). All of it begs for exploration.

A trail enters the canyon in its midsection, and an old miner's cabin even gives life to mountain-man fantasies, but these man-made curiosities are short-lived, and the canyon continues to snake along as we travel upstream, changing from red rocks to tan to white to black, from cactus to chaparral to oak to pine to fir. Springs come and go. Cliffs emerge and recede. Side canyons tease like doorways into the expanding labyrinth. It is a place where new adventure beckons still.

ECHO CANYON

BY NOAH AUSTIN, TEMPE, ARIZONA

Seven years ago, when we moved into our house in Tempe, we had to deal with two dead pine trees on the edge of our property. They were those big Afghan pines that somehow endure summers in the Sonoran Desert, but these two apparently could take only so much and had begun leaning toward our house. We hired a guy who clambered up each tree with a running chain saw dangling from a rope around his waist; he sliced off branches as he ascended and let out a Tarzan yell when he reached the top. Then he made his way down, lopping off sections of the trunk along the way. He left the stumps, just below the surface. And things got back to normal.

I had just started working at *Arizona Highways*, and I didn't know anything about evergreens. Now, I know slightly more than nothing. I can tell a ponderosa from a piñon (and, thanks to our eagle-eyed readers, a piñon from a juniper). I know many of the trees we call spruce aren't actually spruce. And I know forest fires, which I always had seen as unquestionably Bad Things, are actually good for pine forests.

Which brings me to the pines at the bottom of Echo Canyon.

I first visited Chiricahua National Monument with my wife in the spring of 2017, when we were on our way home from an assignment in Bisbee. Photos, as spectacular as they are, don't do justice to the hoodoos of the Chiricahuas. In person, they seem otherworldly — like Mother Nature wanted her own version of Easter Island's moai, but got distracted halfway through. On a breezy, overcast day, we hiked the Echo Canyon Loop — a 3.3-mile circuit that combines the Echo Canyon, Hailstone and Ed Riggs trails. We wandered through the "grottoes," a cluster of massive hoodoos that form the backdrop for many an Instagram post. It looked like rain but didn't rain, and we felt lucky. These days, "lucky" has a whole new meaning.

At the canyon's bottom, in a place called Echo Park, were the spindly remains of pines that burned in the Horseshoe 2 Fire, which devastated parts of the Chiricahuas in the spring of 2011. It was one of Arizona's largest fires on record. A Bad Thing. But just six years later, all around those blackened snags were young, immaculate evergreens rising to fill the void. They're bigger now, I'm sure, nourished by the same soil that nourished their forebears — the ones that died so these could live. Nature has a way of making sure things get back to normal.

About a week into physical distancing, and sensing the onset of cabin fever, I went for a long run in our neighborhood. When I returned, I noticed that dozens of flat white mushrooms were growing out of those old pine stumps. Mushrooms and I have a fraught relationship, and if you remember our October 2013 issue, you'll understand why. But in that moment, I saw them for what they are. Life from death. The end of a Bad Thing. Nature getting back to normal.

If the trees and the mushrooms can do it, so can we.



Sunset lights the hoodoos of Chiricahua National Monument's Echo Canyon. JACK DYKINGA

OBSERVATORY MESA

BY TOM BEAN,
FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

Observatory Mesa Natural Area, which is along the western boundary of Flagstaff.

Why is this place special to you?

It has a wonderful view of the San Francisco Peaks, and it's right on the edge of the city. However, I'd never been there until I'd been living in Flagstaff for 30 years. It's wonderful to discover new places in an area you thought you knew so well. I had no idea there was this open grassland vista amid the ponderosa forest that covers most of the lands here.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

I first visited this place when I realized it was land the city of Flagstaff was considering acquiring as open space. Which it did, and made into the Observatory Mesa Natural Area. On that first visit, I shot some views that were used in the effort to preserve this area as open space. I've been back many times since.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

I especially enjoy going there late on a summer afternoon when thunderstorms produce a fabulous cloudscape that can be viewed in all directions from this high, open landscape. Often, around sunset, I've seen herds of elk, deer or pronghorns grazing on the open grasslands.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

This photo was made August 23, 2013, around 6:20 p.m. The prairie grass is green at the end of a wet monsoon, and the sky is a mixture of many different cloud types, including some thunderstorms with falling rain and the very slightest of rainbows — it's just visible on the far right horizon.



COLORADO RIVER

BY AMY S. MARTIN, FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

The backcountry of the Grand Canyon, specifically back onto the Colorado River. Sadly, but understandably, I have had to cancel three trips into the Canyon recently, and my soul is aching to reconnect with it. This will be the longest stretch in 10 years when I haven't been in the Canyon.

Why is this place special to you?

The Grand Canyon has held a magnetic pull on me for most of my life. In my early 20s, I worked for six seasons as a park ranger at the Canyon (after initially saying I would only do one or two seasons). I left the Canyon for a few years after that but couldn't get it out of my dreams. I finally gave in and have been guiding on the river, doing biological conservation work and photographing it for the past 10 years. I've learned that there are places in this world that can hold all that you need. These are the places you go back to time after time to fill your cup. The Grand Canyon is that place for me. It has given me a home to keep going back to — one that inspires, that challenges, that centers me and gives me purpose.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

My mom hiked me down to the banks of the Colorado River at Phantom Ranch when she was six months pregnant with me, and then again when I was 6 months old. My uncle was a park ranger, and both he and my aunt were river runners. Our family had many trips into the Canyon when I was very young. I can't remember these experiences firsthand, of course, but I am able to experience them through old photographs of my sister and me in my mom's and dad's back-

packs at various places along the trail and at the bottom. I get nostalgic for this time I can't even remember. I think this is one of the powers of photography: an aid to memory.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

When you distill photography down to its core, what remains is the element of light. The Grand Canyon, specifically the river corridor with its reflections and refractions, is one of the most sublime and complicated canvases for light to play. Sunlight and moonlight are constantly shifting, seemingly every minute throughout the seasons. The saying goes that you never see the same Canyon twice. You really have to fully embrace being an intent observer to capture it when the moment presents itself. These characteristics also make it a very challenging place to photograph. At any given moment, you can have the lightest lights and the darkest darks, which technically is very challenging. Then it will all change in the blink of an eye. The Grand Canyon is a masterful, albeit strict, teacher. I credit much of my growth in photography to having her as my muse.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

On this late-summer morning, early light filtered down in distinct rays and the Canyon walls had a warmer tone than usual due to forest fires on the North Rim. Safe in the inner Canyon, our river trip was filled with anticipation of the new adventures that waited around each bend of the river. I hope this image helps viewers connect with the beauty and peace of our natural world and take solace in the fact that it will be there for us when this time passes.



WHITewater DRAW

By JACK DYKINGA,
TUCSON, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

Whitewater Draw, in Southeastern Arizona.

Why is this place special to you?

It's a place I go to witness the migrating sandhill cranes every fall. The ancient ritual of their return is, for me, the ultimate uplifting celebration of life.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

Yes. When I first experienced the cacophony of thousands of cranes lifting off and landing, I was hooked.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

It's a place unique on the high-desert transition between the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts, where birds can find a watery overnight roost, so the bird population is dense in the autumn.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

Usually when I head to Whitewater, I'm photographing birds. So, imagine my surprise when a very wet winter transformed Whitewater into a collection of mirrors reflecting the sunset light and my subject became the landscape, not the birds. Beautiful places tend to capture a fickle photographer's eye.

WHITE POCKET

BY SUZANNE MATHIA, SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

Although there are so many places that I want to get back to when this is over, I'm sure that I'll head up to the Colorado Plateau and Vermilion Cliffs National Monument, where I can camp and explore the area called White Pocket.

Why is this place special to you?

Because I know it so well: all the little nooks and crannies, outcroppings and unique features. It's like visiting an old friend. The terrain out there is otherworldly, vast and a visual playground for photographers and geologists alike. You can camp out and have the whole place to yourself. Even though I've been exploring this area for more than 12 years, I see and photograph things differently every time. And as I wander farther past the main complex, I discover even more geological treasures that have rarely been seen. Things that have hidden themselves from most visitors and remain in pristine condition. It's like stepping back in time.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

I first learned about this place from a well-known photographer. I saw his images and couldn't believe my eyes. I'd never seen a place like this before. It was fondly referred to back then as "Area 52": super-secret and really unknown. Finding the way out there was a real challenge with no GPS or internet maps to guide the way. The "road" was really gnarly, with deep sand. Excellent driving skills, a good four-wheel-drive vehicle and a sense of adventure were required. After a couple of hours on endless back roads, the complex appeared in the distance. Before we even set up camp, we wandered into the complex and I was in awe. There is no way to describe the preposterous undulations of stone that heave, dip, roll and swirl in myriad colors and patterns.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

Endless compositions and changing light and shadow. Sunrises and sunsets, moonrises and endless stars, as well as the Milky Way. You could photograph here 24 hours a day. Ever-changing light, cloud colors and weather. I use all of my lenses here, from an 11 mm for super-wide-angle shots all the way through 400 mm for the moon. Every scene can appear quite differently, depending on the lens choice, and I often shoot the same scene many different ways.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

This image was made in May 2019, on the first of three workshops I was leading that year to White Pocket. We hiked out to this spot just as the sun was rising and the first rays of light kissed the rocks and lit up the plateau to the north. This shot captures the first moments of a new day filled with exploration and wonder.



Ponderosa pines guard a secluded trail on the scenic Mogollon Rim in the morning sun. JOEL HAZELTON

CABIN LOOP TRAIL

BY CHELS KNORR, PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Several years ago, when my husband and I were new to Arizona, we ventured out on a backpacking trip on the Cabin Loop Trail System, northeast of Payson. Our plan was to take it slow: 24 miles in three days and two nights. Our guidebook, dotted with droplet icons, promised water throughout the hike, so we filled our CamelBaks and hit the trail. By the end of the first day, though, we were also near the end of our water supply.

As the trail paralleled the fire road, we diverted onto a short peninsula where we dropped our packs, and the hope of a refill, in exchange for a flat

plot to pitch our tent for the night. We found a camping spot, but we also found we were standing on the edge of the Mogollon Rim. We looked out to nearly 360-degree views of jagged limestone and sandstone, planar and infinite like an Ed Mell painting, rusty hues contrasted against the sky and washed out by sun rays. We'd been hiking around this all day, but dense trees and our focus on finding water had blocked our view.

In the morning, we skipped coffee to conserve the little water we had left. We passed some families riding ATVs on the fire roads and asked if they had any spare water bottles. They had one extra, and a few miles later, we came across a roadside puddle — pine needles steeping in clear rainwater. It wasn't a perennial

stream, but it would work. My CamelBak still offers a hint of Pine-Sol.

Several years have passed since that trip. Now, we know there's no such thing as a reliable perennial spring in Arizona, and that water on the map does not mean water on the trail. And now, we have a son. The first three months of his existence were fragile, and the second three have been spent in a world where every part of our lives is gripped by COVID-19. When physical distancing is no longer necessary and travel is normal again, I will take him camping at this lookout, but not just because of the view.

It seems it's the view that often draws us toward certain outdoor spaces — the summit of a mountain, the pinnacle of a climb, a cliff's edge or a scenic

pullout. This vista didn't disappoint, but it was more than eye candy. At the end of a long day, solace came from the idea that even though we were alone, we were together, we had a place to rest, and tomorrow we'd pick up our packs and start fresh.

I'd like for my son to experience this with all of the beauty and none of the danger. I'd like to spare him the thirsty evening, the uncaffeinated morning and the fear of unmet basic needs.

But even as a new parent, I know I don't have such control. There are so many unknowns for which the guidebook will be wrong and he'll have to fare without me. More realistically, I can teach him to look for kindness in others, a puddle on the roadside and light at the end of the trees.



MARBLE CANYON

By JOHN BURCHAM,
FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

I recently learned about a remote spot along the Colorado River that looks a lot like Horseshoe Bend. I'm not sure whether it has an official name or not. My buddy knew about it, and we drove out together.

Why is this place special to you?

I like going to remote places. It's something I've done my entire life, especially with my photography. Sometimes I just get on Google Earth and start looking for places I haven't been. My friends and I even do this when we rock-climb. Instead of taking an established route, we like to find unclimbed ones.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

This trip was actually the first and *only* time I've been there. To be honest, this was really more of a scouting trip. Now that I've seen this place, I have some ideas and definitely want to go back.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

The huge bend in the river is the visual draw for me. Because it's so remote, you can really work this location without having to deal with other people. This place is particularly interesting because the cliff face doesn't have a sheer drop-off like Horseshoe Bend. When I return, I'd like to rope up and drop down below the rim. I think this view would make you feel more a part of the place.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

After camping out and getting up early, my friends and I hiked to this spot for the first time. As the sun was rising fast and we were all amazed at the view, I quickly set up my tripod and composed this shot before the sun was too high. I'm looking forward to getting out and exploring more places like this with my buddies when it's possible to do so again.

GRANITE MOUNTAIN HOTSHOTS MEMORIAL STATE PARK

BY KATHY MONTGOMERY, YARNELL, ARIZONA

That old chestnut about small towns rolling up their sidewalks by 8 p.m. normally applies to Yarnell. Only now, the streets have rolled up, too. The library, community center and churches stand vacant. Community events have been canceled, along with book club, art group and tai chi classes. Only members of the community garden still gather in the open air, tending vegetable beds and volleying the latest gossip across social distance.

News travels mostly along the electronic grapevine these days. Shoppers at the Dollar General stand 6 feet apart in line, and people accustomed to greeting each other with hugs stand awkwardly at a distance.

It all feels a little surreal. Yet there's also a sense of déjà vu. The other small-town cliché that's true here is that people take care of each other. Folks still check on 98-year-old Dolores, who's been sheltering in place for years. Quilters have turned their hands to sewing masks, and the community center now serves curbside meals for people who lack transportation or don't cook.

Just as there was after the 2013 Yarnell Hill Fire — which killed 19 firefighters and destroyed much of the town — there is, again, the feeling that we're all in this together. That we'll get through this, too.

So I find myself thinking about Granite Mountain Hotshots Memorial State Park. When the park was proposed, I confess I didn't get the idea of building a trail to the site where 19 firefighters died. But the first time I hiked it, I understood.

It was early spring of 2017. The park had opened just a few months earlier. Nearly four years after the fire, charred trunks still rose from the grasses at higher elevations. The hike was strenuous enough, and the day hot enough, that I found myself imagining what it must have been like in triple-digit heat, dressed in turnout gear, humping 40 pounds of equipment. A chain saw buzzed in the distance, and a plane droned overhead. It gave me a chill to think the hotshots would have heard those sounds, too.

I took my time, stopping at every plaque to read the tribute to each firefighter. Until then, I had mostly read about the hotshots as a group. With so many, it was hard to consider them as individuals. On the trail, though, I could meditate on each life in turn as I climbed. By the time I got to the overlook, I had a better sense of each of them.

Looking out over the markers, I saw how the hotshots had arranged themselves as a unit, and how close they were to safety. My heart broke. It made their deaths more real, somehow. Then, a spot of color caught my eye: a cluster of three tiny yellow flowers, the first wildflowers of spring.

And so, when all this is over, I'll make the journey again. More than any other place, this spot reminds me that spring inevitably follows winter, and that even amid the darkest tragedy, things of surprising beauty grow.



A plaque along the trail at Granite Mountain Hotshots Memorial State Park honors hotshot Jesse James Steed.
REBECCA WILKS



Ponderosa pines and other evergreens blanket the rolling hills of the Blue Range Primitive Area.
GEORGE H. H. HUEY

BLUE RANGE PRIMITIVE AREA

By KELLY VAUGHN, PHOENIX, ARIZONA

The magnolia bloom in Phoenix is fleeting. White petals, moved by the heat of April, unfurl from conical centers. Quickly, though, those petals yellow and curl, wilting into summer the way shadows melt around corners.

There is one Southern magnolia tree in my neighborhood, down the street and around a corner, rooted on the edge of a yard so pretty, it seems painted on. When the season is ripe with the bloom, I remember to walk past that tree — it reminds me of time spent as a child in New Orleans, a town where the trees are indigenous. Monstrous. Many.

I realized I missed this year's bloom when I woke up one morning about an hour before the light did. The window was open, and I heard a car fly down the street, its stereo bass pounding from a quarter of a mile away, going *who-knows-where?* and *to-what-end?* in our collective time of isolation. The brain is a funny thing turned on before it is tuned in.

The car left a chorus of night birds in its wake, and I remembered how whole I felt when I listened to the night birds in the Blue, and felt what a thing it was to be lonely in the big city and longing for loneliness in wilderness, under a field of stars so thick it seemed to warm the Earth below it.

Technically, the Blue, which spans just under 500,000 acres in Greenlee County along the far eastern hem of the state, is the last primitive area in the national forest system. New Mexico and its own Blue Range Wilderness are just a sneeze away, and Arizona's Blue achieves many of the same protections as a designated wilderness area — with a few caveats. As with many things, those caveats are political and philosophical. And that makes them a story for another time.

But, oh, the Blue is wild. Terrain varied and unpredictable. Elevations ranging from 9,100 feet along its rim to 4,500 feet at its terminus near Clifton. It is cut by its namesake river, which runs nearly 51 miles, north to south, and that water nourishes a rich and motley plant life — gold and purple daisies, ferns with names I don't know, grasses, aspens, evergreens, fluffy pink New Mexico locusts.

It nourishes animals, too. When first I went there — on assignment for this magazine — in the fall of 2014, I slept in a tent between two packs of wolves. Their howls cut the night air like a sharp scissors blade through organdy cloth, and I wrote then that “people are the out-of-place things in the Blue.” I hope it's still true.

In other wild places, I've thought often about those wolves and their cries and that field of stars and that sense of being very small in a very big place — so much so, I wondered if they haunted me. Now, in isolation, I realize that they don't. They moved into my chest and live there now with the magnolias and a thousand other memories.

So, come summer, or as soon as we can find loneliness in wilderness again, my feet will find the Blue, where it's likely the locust bloom will have come and gone, wilting into summer the way shadows melt around corners.

LAKE POWELL

BY GARY LADD, PAGE, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

Because I live in a town surrounded on all sides by wonderful parks, I'm not sure where I would go first. But, of course, Lake Powell would be high on the list. Specifically, I would go where the landscape that surrounds the lake is most interesting — probably Padre Bay, the Navajo Mountain area or the Escalante River arm. It's the slick-rock wilderness — cliffs, slot canyons, cross-bedding patterns, desert varnish, arches and natural bridges — that makes the lake so much more than just a body of water.

Why is this place special to you?

Both the Grand Canyon and Lake Powell's Glen Canyon have given me the most wonderful days of my life. They have provided decades of exploration, interesting experiences and photography. I've been looking at old photos of backpacking from Page (literally starting at my apartment) to Rainbow Bridge, rowing the length of Lake Powell in my wooden dory, swimming through freezing pools of stagnant water, tiptoeing across narrow ledges. You can't beat these things.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

That would be rowing the length of the lake when I got to visit places in Glen Canyon that I had only read about ... and floated above many locations that had been drowned by the lake. (Lots to say on this topic!)

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

There's so much more around the lake than people know or can imagine. Most people stay on the water. Many of the real jewels are up in the tributary canyons and surrounding mesas. Plus, the lake continually changes its level, revealing or hiding beaches, alcoves, peninsulas, arches, towers, dinosaur tracks. The interaction of the fluctuating lake levels and the incredibly complex topography produces a nearly infinite range of compositions.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

A friend in Big Water, Utah, just across the state line from Page, introduced me to this location. I returned on the next full moon, hoping to photograph the location's impressive rock pinnacles, but found that they were just too close and too big to work with moonrise. My fallback idea was to reach out with a telephoto lens to use Lone Rock and Castle Rock as the major compositional elements, with the moon rising over the distant Arizona landscape.



ESCUDELLA MOUNTAIN

BY RUTH RUDNER, HARRISON, MONTANA

Escudilla is a wild mountain. Part of the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area, it is a place one might encounter wolves, the tracks of wolves, the sound of wolf song against a rising moon. Wolves and mountains are my measure for wildness, and wildness my measure for freedom — my breakout when we are released from the walls of COVID-19.

This mountain feels like home. I know its trails and meadows, its sheltering forests. Its summit offers me the world. For many of us engaged with wilderness, Escudilla is a site of epiphany. Presumably the mountain where Aldo Leopold shot a wolf — understanding, in the dying wolf's eyes, how all parts of the ecosystem are necessary to one another — it seems a timely insight into connection. With its massive presence always visible on the horizon, a lure from every direction, it is a place worth hungering for while trapped inside the incomprehensible.

And, yes, I know it is no longer the mountain I used to hike. Ravaged by wildfire in 2011, it was part of more than 538,000 acres burned in the Wallow Fire, the largest wildfire in state history. But fire is a force as wild and natural as wolves. It is rebirth, an experience I believe we'll all share when once more being able to move as we wish. That fire, symbol of regeneration, is a good part of my choice of Escudilla as the place I'll go at breakout.

Escudilla shares with us reprieve from calamity. For millennia, its meadows and forests evolved from burn to new earth, its mineral-rich ash a regenerator of land, of healthy forests. When, in 1951, nearly 20,000 acres burned, aspens, one of the first trees to appear in a regenerating forest, took hold. Half a century later, I made my first Escudilla hike. It was autumn, and I entered a forest of shimmering gold.

The 2011 fire was fierce. The aspens at the bottom are thinner, scraggier now. Are they too thin to dazzle? Higher up, where the fires burned with intense, soil-scorching heat, soil quality may be altered beyond its ability to regenerate. I want to see that, too, the irreparable memorializing all that has been lost in the pandemic.

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests have done some trail cleanup since 2011, but this year, there is no budget for further work. Yet scorched trees continue to fall across trails. I have been told that even dogs hiking with their people come back exhausted from jumping so many logs. The fire lookout, also burned, is in dangerous disrepair. Surrounded by a fence, it is an eyesore too expensive to remove. (All this might be helped by letting our members of Congress know that trails matter, that few things surpass nature's solace.)

So, is my magnificent mountain now a mess?

No. A natural place regenerating naturally will, with time enough, quite literally rise from its ashes. In the meantime, it remains Escudilla, scarred and magnificent at once. Come breakout, I am on my way.



Escudilla Mountain rises 10,912 feet from a forested landscape, as viewed from a nearby reservoir. DAVID MUENCH



ELGIN

BY RANDY PRENTICE, TUCSON, ARIZONA

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

My favorite agave stand near Elgin, which is a few miles south of Sonoita.

Why is this place special to you?

When I found it, I felt like I'd found something awesome and unique — I had never seen photos of this particular stand.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

I do. I saw this stand from the road on my way to Parker Canyon, and I thought to myself, *I have to photograph that!* So I made a special trip later and was able to find a trail that led right up to the stand. When I got there, it was a wonderland of century plants. So many in such a small area.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

The otherworldly appearance of the dense stand makes for low-hanging fruit in terms of capturing interesting images.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

I spent the afternoon shooting a variety of angles and scenes. This image was the last one of the day. The pink dusk color in the sky, framed by agave stalks, is something no photographer would pass up.



BAT CANYON

BY SHANE McDERMOTT, BOULDER, COLORADO

Where's the first place you're going to go when you get out of quarantine?

I first discovered Bat Canyon on Google Earth about 10 years ago. I've since found access into the canyon and have had the good fortune of visiting it a couple of times now. It's a massive, sprawling canyon with very little access. Once I'm out of quarantine and can reopen my mind and heart to a great adventure, this will be the first place I visit.

Why is this place special to you?

Being a Pacific Coast guy from Canada, I find the canyons of the Southwest absolutely fascinating. While the iconic canyons of Arizona are great, it's the lesser-known remote canyons, such as Bat Canyon, that I find really inspirational. I like finding a place like Bat Canyon, then doing a Google search and seeing next to nothing come up except for photos of bats. It's the mystery of the unknown that lies at the heart of any great adventure. I love visiting locations I've never seen imagery from. It ignites my creativity and sense of wonder. In this way, there is nothing but my own direct experience to inform my creativity. The creativity that emerges from this space feels novel and original, which is rare in the world of landscape photography.

Do you remember experiencing it for the first time?

It's a wild and wondrous place. On my first visit, I was spellbound by all-colored striations of layered sediment. Towering white hoodoos with teetering, flat yellow caps seem to pop up around every new bend in the rim. Continuous ribbons of red, blue and yellow thread their way through these sandstone walls for miles and miles. It looks similar to the nearby Coal Mine Canyon, but the color striations are much more distinct and vibrant.

As a photographer, what makes this place a great place to make a photograph?

From a photographic perspective, the best thing about this canyon is that it's rarely been photographed. Every time I go there, I have no clue what I'm going to find. I have no one else's vision informing my experience. It's just me in the moment, seeing, sensing and feeling the canyon just as it is. Perhaps this is the cardinal quest for most serious landscape photographers.

Tell us about the image you're sharing with us.

There's an interesting half-mile, downhill approach to this canyon, and I could see the two hoodoos from about a quarter-mile away. My approach angle aligned them perfectly with the canyon maze just beyond them. Prior to even arriving at the hoodoos, I knew this would be the ideal composition. I just wanted it to be about the hoodoos and the canyon maze, because they are rarely found together in one scene.



Water cascades over rocks in Bear Canyon, part of Sabino Canyon Recreation Area. JEFF MALTZMAN

SABINO CANYON

By LAWRENCE W. CHEEK, WHIDBEY ISLAND, WASHINGTON

Ever since urbanization first festered at the foot of the Santa Catalina Mountains, Sabino Canyon has been Tucson's escape valve from the madness. When summer heat blisters the city, the canyon's riparian forest offers deep shade and the cooling patter of a creek. If the pressures of daily life — work, family trouble, financial worries — press onerously, a quiet walk in the canyon provides a perspective shift. Half a dozen hiking trails weave through it, ranging from casual and easy to strenuous and scary. On a pivotal day in my life, in 1995, when I had to decide whether to try to face life without the anesthesia of alcohol, I went to Sabino Canyon, sat on a rock and thought. Since that day, I have regarded it as The Canyon That Broke a Fall.

What is it about a canyon that gives us a different way of looking at ourselves, or the world, or our place in it? It may be that a canyon forms a world unto itself. We enter, and we're in a different place. A mountaintop may suggest infinite possibility, but that isn't always what a troubled mind needs. A canyon offers definition, containment, direction. It's an enclosure, albeit a big one with freedom to explore options. Sabino Canyon furnishes various ways out as well. There are trails up and over its walls, although they ask for considerable effort. A canyon bristles with metaphor.

In a threatening or discouraging time, I think it's useful for us to go to a place where we can observe the machinery of nature at work and thus better understand our place in it. Sabino Canyon is a microcosm where these elements are all laid out in comprehensible scale. We can watch predators and prey going about their lives and see that the death of a mouse is not a tragedy in nature; it's an essential for the nourishment of the rattlesnake or hawk that snatches it. We can observe saguaros shrinking ominously in the cyclical droughts of early summer, then fattening up when the monsoon arrives in July — although a few individuals may still die from the lightning strikes that punctuate the storm. There you go: a metaphor for even the travails of the stock market.

Emerson wrote, famously, "Nature, as we know her, is no saint." This does not provide a lot of comfort. More recently, a superb Southwestern essayist named Robert Leonard Reid offered a better thought: "Nature is baffling, but it is not cruel or evil or insane."

We may not achieve perfect serenity when we come to understand this, but we gain acceptance, which is a rest stop en route to it. We also see in Sabino Canyon's world that nature always finds ways to adapt, change, survive and thrive. Periodic floods rip through; the debris biodegrades, and the canyon benefits. We humans mess things up, then learn better and repair the damage. Until 1973, cars were allowed on the canyon road; then, less obtrusive diesel trams came in; and just last fall, even quieter, non-odorous electric shuttles replaced them.

The canyon has not only survived; through intelligent human intervention, it has become a better place.

We might just sit on a rock and think about that. [AH](#)