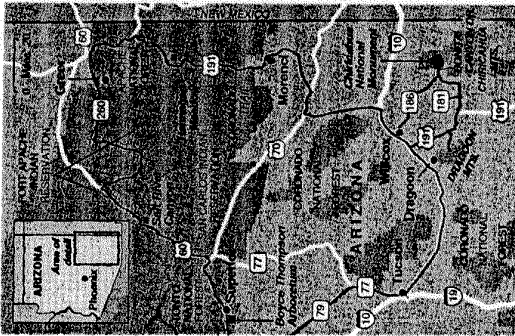


# A SOOTHING JAUNT IN RUGGED ARIZONA

Tracing the paths of Coronado and Cochise lifts the spirits of a city dweller



**By JUDITH ANDERSON**

**T**WO things I truly appreciate about the southeastern corner of Arizona: it's not crowded and it's not cute. I can get out of town — any town — with ease, and when I do, the Great Outdoors is open, unpredictable, dispassionate. I feel free.

Last month, I longed for that feeling: I hungered for big sky, desert mountains and grasslands. Happily, my friend Artt had the same hunger. He also had three days off and a Suzuki Vitara, a vehicle with a bit more clearance than my Honda Civic. As we left Tucson, heading north on Highway 79, I could feel my spirits lift and unfurl, and I remembered a favorite line from Robert Browning's "Last Ride Together":

*Then we began to ride. My soul Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll Freshening and fluttering in the wind.*

Within a couple of hours it was my legs that were cramping, so we stopped to stretch at Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park. Situated in Queen Creek Canyon, 3 miles west of the town of Superior and about 60 miles east of Phoenix, it is Arizona's oldest botanical garden, comprising 323 acres (35 of which are gardens), all devoted to the mystery of arid land plants. Even the Smith Interpretive Center, a lovely old 1920's stone-and-glass greenhouse, snow-cases only cactuses and other succulents.

We walked the Main Trail, a loop linking forests, groves and gardens below the lithium-stained backdrop of Magma Ridge. Though the loop is only a mile and a half, it took us two hours to see everything, including 67 massive stone carvings along the trail. They are part of a traveling exhibition from Chapungu Sculpture Park in Harare, Zimbabwe, on display through April.

After a quick lunch of Mexican food in

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scenes were pastoral. Streams meandered through forested hills and buff meadows. Horses bent their necks to graze, sharing pasture with small herds of elk.

In late afternoon, after driving more than 280 miles, we reached the first day's destination: Greer, year-round population 134. The old lodge where I had made reservations was disappointing: Our room was dim and a little sad, and nobody offered cookies, as promised in an outdated guidebook.

We set out on a brisk walk before dinner, but after less than 100 yards I discovered two things simultaneously: at 8,500 feet, I couldn't breathe without squeaking, and I'd have given anything for a room at the inn right in front of me.

The Red Setter Inn is an Adirondack-style lodge of hand-hewn-pine tucked into a bend in the west fork of the Little Colorado River. The moment we stepped into the living room, with its soaring 18-foot ceiling and river rock fireplace, I coveted a handsome silver fruit bowl with stag-head handles gleaming on a polished table. Always a good sign.

The innkeepers, Jim Sankey and Ken Conant, described themselves as refugees from the corporate world. Mr. Sankey said that he had supervised the selection of every log in the lodge and that Mr. Conant had chinked them himself for three months. They decorated together, with style and wit. Images of Irish settlers are everywhere — in photos, sculptures, magazine covers and framed prints. (The inn was named for the owners' last dog, Shillelagh McFann, an Irish setter.)

They've done her proud. Guest rooms and cabins have views of the river, private decks, down comforters, easy chairs with footstools and good reading lights, fireplaces, whirlpool tubs and fluffy, thick robes. Trays of homemade cookies, cakes or brownies really do appear in late afternoon.

Of course, we had already given \$127 (an off-season discount) to the old lodge, and the inn was full, anyway. So, we trudged back down

the hill and found the cheerful dining room at the Molly Butler Lodge, even older than the place where we were staying. After sharing big, rich meals of prime rib and buttery scallops, we barely managed to stay awake until 9.

Unaccustomed to such gentle hours, we were up and out early next morning, back on Route 260 and heading for the Coronado Trail, a twisting strip of U.S. 191 that would take us south along the New Mexico border. Legend says it's the oldest roadway in Arizona, the route followed by Coronado in the summer of 1540. Somebody told me there are 90 hairpin turns in a 105-mile stretch, and I have always believed it.

**B**EFORE we attacked that stretch, however, we planned to get a little exercise at Haunagan Meadow, a grassy clearing bounded by towering ponderosa pine, aspen and blue spruce forests. "Climb the mountains and get their good tidings," the conservationist John Muir wrote. "Nature's peace will flow into you." And so it did, but we were now at 9,200 feet, and my energy flowed out.

Giving up on the hiking idea, we pattered around another great old inn, Haunagan Meadow Lodge was established in 1926 as a rest stop for travelers making the two-day trip over the steep, narrow road, which was dirt then. The last owners of the lodge won a lottery and spent some of their jackpot refurbishing the guestrooms with charming antiques, according to the brand-new innkeeper, David Davenport.

He enthusiastically showed us the rooms and cabins, as well as the sunny dining room and convenience store. Though it hadn't snowed yet, he outlined opportunities for renting snowshoes, snowmobiles or cross-country skis to use on their eight miles of groomed cross-country trails, as well as downhill skiing at Sunrise Park Resort, about 90 minutes away.

A few miles down the Coronado Trail, we picnicked at Blue Vista, gazing out over

tiers of mountains falling away in the mist like a scene in a Japanese watercolor. Only foot or horseback travel is allowed in the Blue Range Primitive Area and the Bear Wallow Wilderness below.

The trip down the twisting switchbacks was slow but spectacular. Muir was right. Occasionally, we paused to examine other points of interest, like an 80-foot lodgepole pine shot full of arrows, perhaps a hundred of them, fletched in many colors.

The precipitous Coronado Trail finally decanted us onto the lip of a massive open-pit copper mine at Morenci. The Phelps Dodge Corporation has built overlooks at various vantage points, but the zigzags of the mine tailings and leaching beds fall into the not-scenic category for me, so we drove on through.

Then, just over the hill from this noisy devastation, a mountain sheep buck and some of his does calmly crossed the road. We gazed at them and they gazed back, and nature's peace flowed into me.

We pressed on, moving from mountains to the grasslands of Cochise County, following Route 191 south past its confluence with Interstate 10. At this point, family obligations called me home to Tucson, about 60 miles away, but the next morning Artt and I drove right back down Interstate 10 to Exit 331, to explore yet another attractive lodging place we didn't get to sleep in.

About 15 miles south of the Interstate, off Forest Service Road 84 in the Dragoon Mountains, the Cochise Stronghold Bed and Breakfast occupies one of a few private properties in Coronado National Forest. Co-owners, of course, was the great chief of the Chiricahua Apaches who fiercely resisted the incursion of Anglo settlers. This was his territory.

In 1862, the United States launched a systematic war against the Indians, but for more than 10 years, Cochise and a band of 200 followers fought a guerrilla war, raiding and melting into the Dragoons. After he died

Continued on Following Page



Photographs by Monica Almeida/The New York Times

ABOVE Hannagan Meadow on Coronado Trail. LEFT Statue of singer Rex Allen, Rex Allen Museum, Willcox.

## Rough roads, comfy lodges and nature's glories

### Getting Around

We made this trip in a small S.U.V., a Suzuki Vitara, but a passenger sedan with radial tires should handle these roads comfortably. Occasionally, in February or March, heavy snows will close Route 191 at Alpine, 22 miles north of Hannagan Meadow, and travelers are diverted to Route 180, just over the line in New Mexico. So far, the Forest Service is predicting a light snow season. For statewide road conditions, call (888) 411-7623.

### Where to Stay

**Red Setter Inn**, 8 Main Street, Greer, Ariz. 85927, (888) 994-7337, fax (928) 735-7425, [www.redsetterinn.com](http://www.redsetterinn.com), has 12 rooms in two buildings, with fireplaces and some with spa tubs. Doubles from \$135, including breakfast. There are also two private cottages, from \$220. No smoking, no children under 16 — and despite the décor and name, no pets.

**Hannagan Meadow Lodge**, Post Office Box 335, Alpine, Ariz. 85920; phone and fax (928) 339-4370, [www.hannaganmeadow.com](http://www.hannaganmeadow.com), is 22 miles south of Alpine on Route 191. It has eight lodge rooms with antique furnishings and modern baths, and seven rustic log cabins sleeping up to six, with fireplaces and kitchenettes. Doubles from \$70, including breakfast buffet. Cabins, \$90 to \$150.

**Cochise Stronghold Bed-and-Breakfast**, Post Office Box 232, Pearce, Ariz. 85625; (877) 426-4141, fax (520) 826-1421, [www.cochisestrongholdbb.com](http://www.cochisestrongholdbb.com). The Agave

Room, which has a king bed and queen sofa sleeper, kitchenette, patio and barbecue, costs \$125 for two, \$20 for each additional adult. The Manzanita Apartment accommodates six with a full kitchen; \$135 double, \$155 for four. With either, the tepee can be rented for \$50 double, \$70 for three. Cars with low ground clearance may have trouble with the rutted dirt road.

### Where to Eat

**Los Hermanos Restaurant**, Highway 60-70, Superior, Ariz., (520) 689-5465, offers authentic Mexican food with Formica ambience. A meal for two with beer runs less than \$20. Open daily 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

**Molly Butler Lodge**, 109 Main Street, Greer, Ariz., (928) 735-7226, is a cheerful, slightly ramshackle old wooden inn serving dinner daily, and breakfast and lunch Saturday through Tuesday. Breakfasts range from \$3 to \$7; lunch of a salad, fish and chips, or burger basket and drink, around \$8. The dinner menu includes lots of fish, fried chicken and steak; a meal for two with wine, dessert and tip, \$50.

**Rendezvous Diner**, 117 Main Street, Greer, (928) 735-7483, offers home-style cooking with great desserts. Breakfast and lunch costs \$3 to \$6; dinner for two with beer, about \$25. Open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday through Sunday, until 4 p.m. Monday and Wednesday; closed Tuesday.

**Sunsites Cafe**, 137 Frontage Road, Sunsites, Ariz., (520) 826-3887, is a real roadside gem. A breakfast of eggs, sausage or bacon, potatoes and toast is \$1.50, and a steak din-

ner (with live music to boot on Thursday) \$11.95. Open 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, to 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday.

### Things to Do

**Boyce Thompson Arboretum**, 37615 U.S. Highway 60 (at Milepost 223), Superior, Ariz.; (520) 689-2723; Web site, [arboretum.ag.arizona.edu](http://arboretum.ag.arizona.edu). Open daily except Christmas from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. General admission: \$6.

**Wings Over Willcox**, the sandhill crane celebration to be held Jan. 18 to 20, will include birding tours and excursions focusing on geology, photography and ecology. Information: [www.wingsoverwillcox.com](http://www.wingsoverwillcox.com) or Willcox Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, (800) 200-2272.

**Chiricahua National Monument**, 13063 East Bonita Canyon Road, Willcox, Ariz., (520) 824-3560, [www.nps.gov/chir](http://www.nps.gov/chir), is open every day but Christmas. There are 17 miles of trails and 25 campsites (\$8 to \$12 a night) with restrooms that have running water but no showers. Admission is \$6 a car. No food or gasoline is available near the monument.

**Amerind Foundation**, 2100 North Amerind Road, Dagoon, Ariz., (520) 586-3666, [www.amerind.org](http://www.amerind.org), displays both anthropological and art exhibits relating to the Indians of the Southwest. It is open daily except major holidays and Monday and Tuesday in the summer. General admission, \$3.

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