

If you're looking for Arizona's version of "the long and winding road," this is it. And like the Beatles' song, this is a classic.

Designated a scenic drive in 1989, the Coronado Trail winds for about a hundred miles from the twin cities of Eagar and Springerville ("the gateway to the White Mountains") in the north to the mining towns of Clifton and Morenci in the south. But it's not just any drive — the four-hour route follows the trail used in 1540 by Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado as he searched for the fabled "Seven Cities of Gold." He never found 'em.

From the rolling grasslands of Springerville, you'll climb into the spruce-fir forests near Alpine, a "Swiss-like" village settled in the late-1870s. Just south of Alpine is Hannagan Meadow, named for Robert Hannagan, a Nevada miner who did some cattle ranching in the area. Hannagan Meadow and the nearby Blue Range Primitive Area offer some of the most incredible scenery in Arizona. There are three beautiful rivers nearby — the Black, the Blue and the San Francisco — and the surrounding mountains reach heights of more than 11,000 feet.

As you cruise along, keep your eyes peeled — within a stone's throw of the road are more than 400 species of fish and wildlife, including elk, deer, antelope, black bear, squirrels, bald eagles, and 160 other kinds of birds. The fishing is great, and the vast stands of aspen, oak, maple, fir, spruce and juniper will make the Valley seem a million miles away.

Best of all, the Coronado Trail is a four-season wonderland. Fall colors are incredible. Spring wildflowers are spectacular. Winter snows make the area the state's cross-country skiing mecca. And summer's cool temperatures speak for themselves.

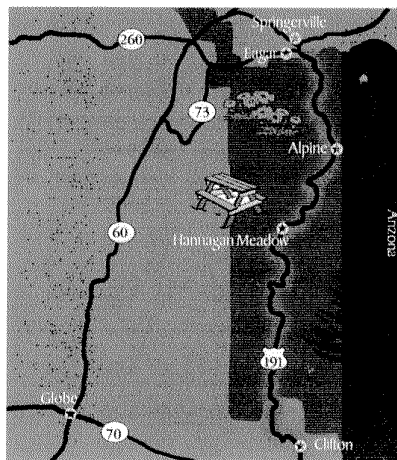
The rest of the drive is a trip, too. Heading south from the meadow you'll come to the Blue Vista rest stop at the edge of the Mogollon Rim, which allows you to see forever. From there, the road works its way south to Clifton and Morenci, and tests your nerve with some hair-raising curves — if you're afraid of heights or allergic to Dramamine, watch out.

Clifton and Morenci are a little depressing, considering it's tough to overlook those giant strip-mined holes in the ground. But, if nothing else, they'll make you appreciate the rest of Arizona's long and winding road.



Mark Miller

## Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest



**Directions:** From Phoenix, take the Beeline Highway north to Payson and head east on Highway 260 to Eagar. The Coronado Trail follows Highway 191 from Eagar to Clifton, through the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. There are several sharp curves and steep drop-offs along this narrow road — in some cases, there are no guardrails, and in some areas, speeds may slow to 10 mph. Length: 123 miles

**Season:** Year-round, with occasional winter closures for snow removal.

**Elevation:** 4,700 feet to 9,400 feet

**For more information:** Alpine Ranger District, 928-339-4384