



Arizona's

# Scen

"In Arizona,  
the journey  
is the  
destination"

OAK CREEK PHOTO COURTESY OF SEDONA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.



# Scenic Byways:

Road Signs  
to

# Wonder

by David M. Brown

**P**ATHS CUT BY THE AREA'S EARLIEST NATIVE AMERICAN INHABITANTS and their pioneer successors; a trail of the conquistadors seeking golden cities in the north; scenic roads that celebrate eons of uplift and erosion in canyons, spires, turrets, buttes, monoliths and mesas — in Arizona, the journey is the destination. Getting there is at least as significant as where you're going, and the downside of driving is that you have to keep your eyes on the road and not on the glorious roadside.

Although Arizona's burgeoning metropolitan areas are frenetic with opportunities for entertainment, dining, and shopping, give yourself and your loved ones until high noon and get out of town. Head out on the extraordinary roads that make the Arizona experience so multi-textured and fulfilling.

Since 1982, the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) has

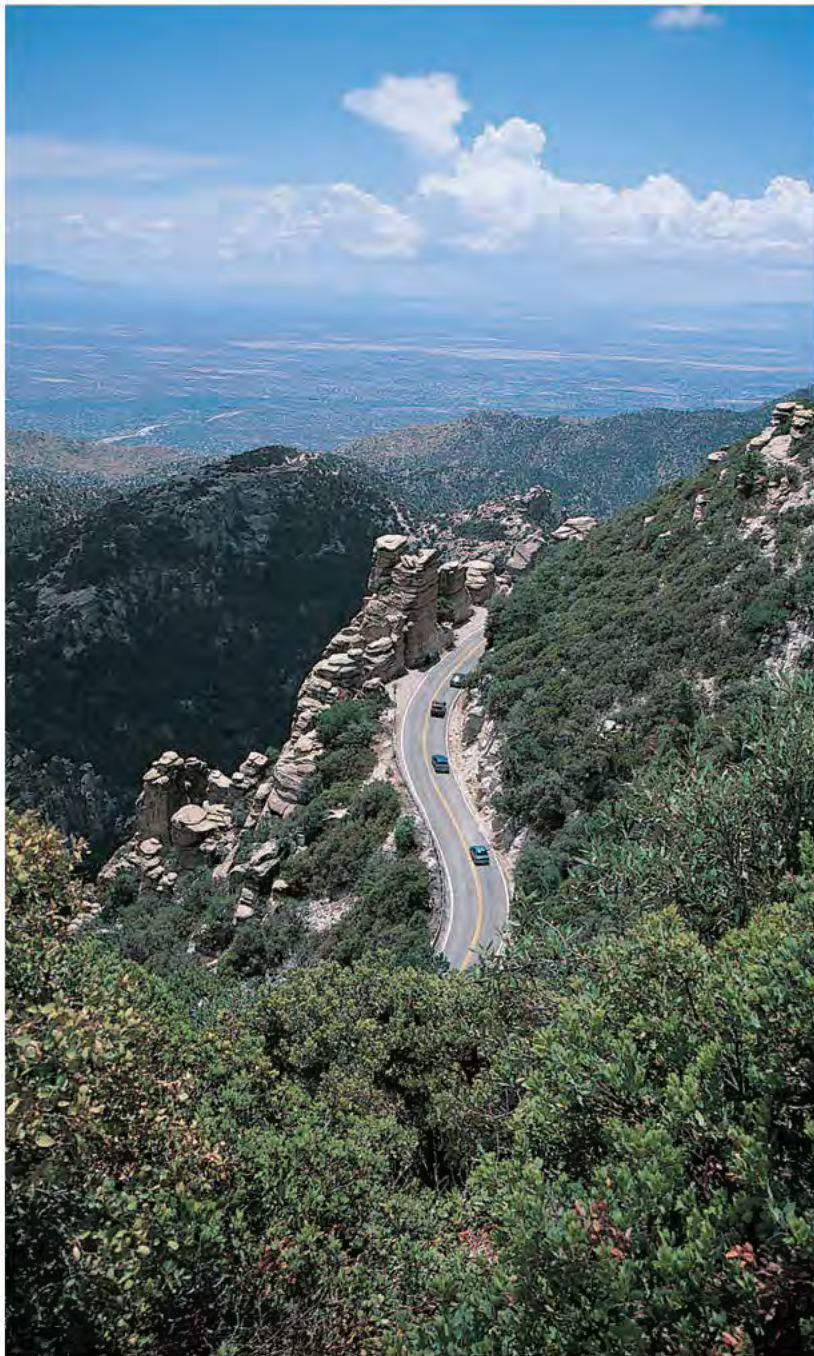


maintained the Scenic Byways program, which so designates 24 roads because of their aesthetic and historical significance. Four have attained more widespread attention through the National Scenic Byways Program, and Arizona's program recently won the 2007 Scenic Byway Award from the

American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials.

To get your engine running, here are some of these remarkable day trips — starting with a road that leads out of the concrete and steel of Phoenix into the mystery and legends of the high desert. Then, head south and end up





north, visiting an idyllic stretch leading to the grandest of all places on Earth.

### **Apache Trail Historic Road**

Once the Tonto Trail, State Route 88 (MP 201.0 to MP 242.5) is sensuously rich in textures and colors, and magical, too, with legends and tales of gold- and adventure-seeking. This is a biology lesson as well — a 42-mile long

trek into the plant- and wildlife-rich Sonoran desert, the planet's most biologically diverse. It's history, too — back to the once thriving Salado and Hohokam civilizations.

Originating in the town of Apache Junction in Pinal County, the Apache Trail begins as Idaho Road, an exit of the Superstition Freeway (State Route 60), and continues, for the most part,

through the Tonto National Forest, passing by the Superstition and Mazatzal mountains.

As it sinuously follows the course of the Salt River, the road passes Goldfield Ghost Town, a reconstruction of a quick-to-be-built and quick-to-die town of the 1800s; Lost Dutchman State Park, recalling Jacob Waltz, the German (not Dutch) miner who left ornery clues to where his gold cache could be found; challenging Fish Creek Hill; and two marinated lakes, Canyon and Apache.

The road terminates at Roosevelt Lake, created by the 357-foot-high Roosevelt Dam. In 1996, the dam was raised to its current height and a 1080-foot-long bridge was added — the longest, two-lane, single-span, steel-arch bridge in North America. To dedicate the original structure in 1911, President Theodore Roosevelt made the rough ride along the trail, built to supply construction materials for the dam.

At the dam, travelers can also enjoy boating and fishing out of its marina or proceed on State Route (SR) 188 north toward Payson and the Mogollon Rim communities, or continue along SR 88, with a stop at the ruins of Tonto National Monument. From Globe, pick up the complementary 39-mile Gila-Pinal Scenic Road (SR 60, MP 214.5 to MP 240.5), which loops back to Phoenix through high-desert vistas, and, in well-irrigated springtimes, past wildflowers such as Mexican gold poppies and lupines.

### **Sky Island Parkway National Scenic Byway**

Built by Tucson prison laborers in the 1930s and '40s, U.S. Forest Service (FS) 833 (MP 0.0 to MP 25.0) is variously aliased. Some call it the Catalina

ROAD TO MT. LEMMON, PHOTO COURTESY OF LORRAINE DARCONTE, TUCSON CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU.





SPRINGTIME IN THE CATALINAS. PHOTO COURTESY OF GILL KENNY, TUCSON CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU.

Highway, as it switchbacks up the southern side of the Santa Catalina Mountains, from the high-desert floor of cactus and sagebrush to cooler upper stories of grasslands, aspens and pines.

Still others know it as Mount Lemmon Road or Highway, for its 9157-foot peak and the southernmost ski resort in the North America. Still others refer to it as Hitchcock Highway, for Frank Harris Hitchcock, the local newspaper editor who inspired its construction.

At the summit, the road continues as FS 11, ending at the Mount Lemmon Ski Valley, and FS 10, which passes the town of Summerhaven to the Marshall Gulch Picnic Area.

Formations such as Goosehead and Inspiration rocks; turnouts for “ooh and ahh” photos of the desert vistas, gulches and canyons; picnic areas and campgrounds in the Coronado Na-

tional Forest; and the trout-stocked Rose Canyon Lake make this a road for all seasons. In the summer there’s a cool 30-degree drop in temperature and in the fall, reds and oranges ignite a desert mountain.

### **Patagonia-Sonoita Scenic Road**

Phoenicians, generally, gravitate north to find their state of beauty, but southern Arizona counties such as Cochise and Santa Cruz offer joys and adventures, too. A good primer is this road, really two: SR 82 (MP 4.5 to MP 32.0) and SR 83 (MP 33.0 to MP 58.0).

To get there (the road starts outside the border town of Nogales), you can enjoy the many opportunities south from Tucson along Interstate 19, itself scenic and historic: Mission San Xavier del Bac, Father Kino’s “White Dove of the Desert”; the Titan II Missile Mu-

seum, where a push of a button 40 years ago might have launched us into apocalypse; 9453-foot-high Mount Wrightson and neighboring Madera Canyon; arts town Tubac and, just down the road, the glorious mission ruin of Tumacácori.

A relaxing pastoral mix of mountains, small canyons, ocotillo and grasslands, the road is a quiet star. In nearby Elgin, Arizona became turn-of-the-century “Oklahoma” for the 1955 big screen version of the stage hit.

Ghost towns lurk enticingly on back roads here: Washington Camp, Harshaw and Duquesne. Patagonia Lake State Park has camping and pretty good fishing for crappie and bass and catfish, and the 320-acre Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve is a lush riparian area. The town of Patagonia is serene, with bed and breakfasts, shops and country-style dining.





This is an intoxicating road, too, as many of the state's young wineries are easily accessible from it. If you have a glass, give someone else the wheel.

### **Coronado Trail National Scenic Byway**

Reportedly, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado's lieutenant didn't think grandly of the Grand Canyon when he encountered it in the 1540s, and for sure, the conquistador would certainly not have kvelled at every bend of U.S. 191 (MP 172.0 to MP 253.74) and U.S. 180 (MP 406.0 to MP 426.93). The explorer was looking for the riches of the Seven Cities of Cibola. Oh my, was he upset when he found sublime canyons and poor Native Americans rather than caches of gold.

You'll enjoy the riches, though, of this 123-mile journey, which twists through wilderness and primitive areas, national forest, meadow and mountain, past junipers and piñon pine. Because of the topographical variety, this is a good place to spot wildlife such as mountain lion, javelina, whitetail deer, black bears, elk and birds (spotted owls, bald eagles, goshawks and mountain blue birds).

Start just north of Clifton, not too

far from the Morenci Mine, which is hardly scenic but, as the world's second largest open-pit copper mine, is very much a part of Arizona's heritage. From approximately 4800 feet, Coronado's camino winds up through green Hannagan Meadow, at 9100 feet one of the highest inhabited areas in the state, to 8000-foot Alpine, with hiking and biking and even high-country golfing. Before arriving just outside of Springerville, you and your adventuring group will also pass over the Mogollon Rim and through the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest.

In Springerville, make sure to see one of the pueblo ruins at Casa Malpais or Raven Site — communities that flourished and perished before Coronado made his less scenically minded journey.

### **White Mountain Scenic Road**

This 85-mile trip begins at Hon-Dah on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation on SR 260 (MP 360.77 to MP 393.03) and loops south through SR 273 (MP 377.46 to MP 393.8), with about 16 miles of improved gravel that's fine for normal vehicles except in the snow. The road returns north to SR 260 along SR 261 (MP 393.8 to MP 412.5) and ends, if you wish, in well-

amenitied Pinetop-Lakeside.

This is a road for those who love trout lakes and fall color. Remember, though, that all recreation is subject to tribal permits. East of McNary are Big and Little Bear lakes, A-1 Lake (named for Alchesay, the decorated Apache Army scout), Horseshoe Lake and, about eight miles south on SR 473, Hawley Lake. There you can rent cabins, go camping and, in the winter, experience some of the state's lowest mercury. Farther on, along SR 273, are Sunrise Lake and the Sunrise Park Resort, the tribe's skiing recreation area. Just south lies 11,590-foot Mount Baldy, queen of the White Mountains.

You can also enjoy fly and lure fishing at the Lee Valley Reservoir. Crescent Lake is at the junction of SR 273 and SR 261, Big Lake is just south, and the 150-acre Mexican Hay Lake is just south of Eagar at the return to SR 260. On the way back, take SR 373 to beautifully green Greer, alongside the Little Colorado River.

### **Kayenta-Monument Valley Scenic Road**

Monument Valley. Yei Bichei. Black Mesa. Keet Seel. Betatakin. The Kletthla Valley. Agathla Peak. Goulding's





Lodge. Scenic Road U.S. 163 and U.S. 160 (which feeds it about 16 miles north of Cameron at U.S. Route 89) are mystery, poetry and beauty.

On the 25,000-square-mile Navajo Indian Reservation — the largest Native American nation in the United States — this is a road into history and pre-history. Here, the normal movements of the land give way to rock formations in red and ochre and brown. Take this road and land doesn't flow as much as it proudly pops up: buttes, rock totem poles, spires, volcanic necks and peaks uplifted and magnificently eroded away.

Before reaching Kayenta on U.S. 160, turn north on Indian Route 564, which takes you to the Navajo National Monument. Two Anasazi ruins, Betatakin and Keet Seel (which requires a 16-mile ranger-led journey by foot or on horse) date back to the 13th century. A third, Inscription House, is closed to visitors.

You twist into Utah to enter the Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park. While state-hopping, Goulding's is a great stop for an hour or overnight. Harry Goulding asked John Ford to visit in 1938, and he brought a young

John Wayne with him to film "Stagecoach." Other films followed in those large wheel ruts.

### **Kaibab Plateau-North Rim Parkway National Scenic Byway**

This is a little-traveled road from Jacob Lake to the North Rim of the 277-mile-long Grand Canyon (SR 67, MP 580.0 to MP 610.3). Carved and uplifted for more than two billion years, the Canyon's North Rim is not so often enjoyed because it is so far away from everything.

The 8200-foot North Rim is about 1000 feet higher than the South, ably served by U.S. Route 180 from Flagstaff (31 miles of which is a Scenic Byway) and U.S. Route 64 at Valle Junction.

From Jacob Lake, named for Mormon pioneer Jacob Hamblin, this great road passes through extraordinarily lush meadows, forests of pine, spruce, aspen and fir, and valleys with mule deer, elk, black bear and the Kaibab squirrel. This road is only open May through October as the heavy snowfall makes it impassable in the winter.

The snows also close the vintage

Grand Canyon Lodge, built in 1937 of native wood and stone after the original lodge burned. This is a great stay, and the restaurant sits in grand style overlooking the canyon's temples and spires and sunsets. How about dining on the rim at twilight, watching California condors spread eight-foot wingspans over the greatest of places? Book as much as a year in advance as the Grand Canyon is the most visited natural site in Arizona and one of the most visited attractions in the world. **H**

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## IF YOU GO

An expanded version of this article with even more scenic roads can be found at [AAA.com](http://AAA.com); click on *Highroads*. For more on Arizona's Scenic Byways, visit the award-winning [ArizonaScenicRoads.com](http://ArizonaScenicRoads.com).

Other areas that shouldn't be missed include spectacular Cochise County and Texas Canyon, the Chiricahua Mountains and Rucker Canyon. For more information, call the Arizona Office of Tourism 866-275-5816.