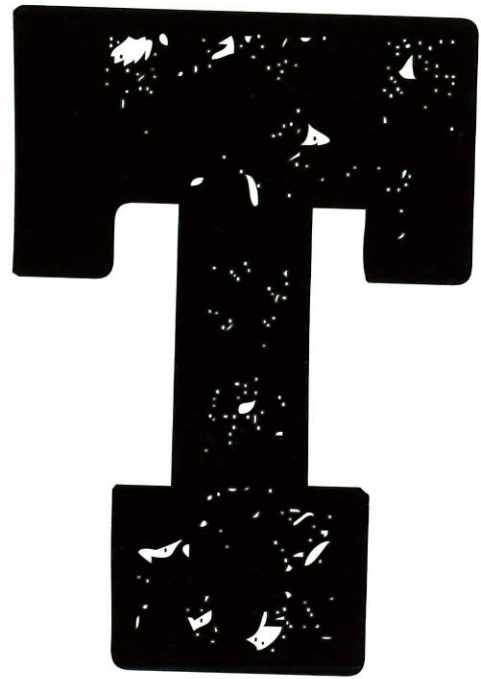


A hiker explores the signature cacti in Saguaro National Park's Tucson Mountain District.

# PRAISING ARIZONA


THE ROAD FROM TEMPE TO TOMBSTONE REVEALS THE MANY SIDES OF DESERT CHARM

By *HALEY SHAPLEY*



THE MOST FAMOUS SHOOT-OUT in the American West took place in Tombstone, Ariz., in 1881, when a long-simmering feud between the town's lawmen and a group of outlaw cowboys boiled over into a deadly showdown. Immortalized in books and films, the gunfight at the O.K. Corral represents an era when the West really was wild—a period of time that's been romanticized for its ruggedness and unpredictability.

Not everything is as it seems, though. Visit Tombstone today, and you'll learn that the shoot-out wasn't really at the O.K. Corral at all, but several doors down. The participants stood closer together—and exchanged bullets for a much shorter period of time—than Hollywood movies would have you believe. And even though we love to have heroes and villains, the line between the good guys and bad guys is pretty fuzzy.

All this makes Tombstone a fascinating place to visit and a perfect example of how there are many sides to every story—something I learned about Arizona itself on my weeklong road trip across a nearly 200-mile stretch of the state last winter. 

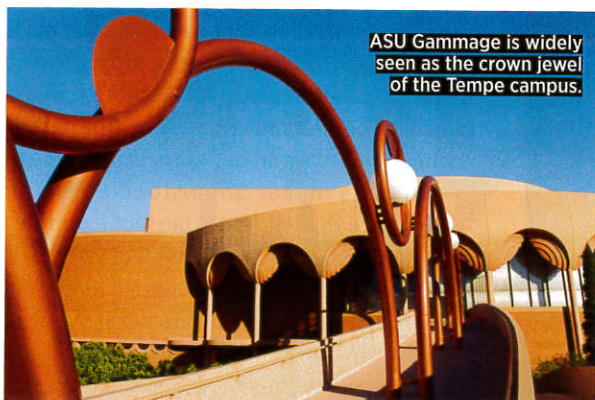
## KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

It all started just outside of Phoenix in Tempe, the home of Arizona State University (ASU). You'll find plenty of opportunities to soak in collegiate-inspired revelry along the main drag, Mill Avenue, but there are plenty of other ways to occupy your time. You might begin like I did, by renting a pedal boat to explore Tempe Town Lake. At first glance, it seemed like a glorified bumper boat pond, but its beauty came into view as the scenery transitioned from the shiny blue reflections off the windows of downtown's mid-rise office buildings and condominiums to the surreal, watercolor hues emanating from the nearby mountains. I later hiked the short, steep trail from Mill Avenue to the top of "A" Mountain to further orient myself with the layout of the ASU campus and its surroundings.

On a stroll through campus, my curiosity prompted me to visit ASU's Center for Meteorite Studies, where displays include a tiny H4 chondrite discovered in 1955 by a farmer in Mayday, Kan., and pieces of the Putulsk meteorite, named after the Polish town where it landed in 1868. I filled my head with more fun facts at ASU Gammage, the Frank Lloyd Wright–designed theater that's outfitted in every shade of terra cotta you can imagine (27 of them, to be exact). The round venue features no hard edges; instead, columns and curved lines and semi-circles all blend together to create a pleasing package that's something like a tiered cake meets curtain valance.

## AN INTRIGUING LANDSCAPE

After a Green Bowl—a dish combining gelato-like acai and flaxseed granola with berries, banana slices, and toasted coconut strips—at The Normal Diner, I was ready for the drive to Saguaro National Park near Tucson, a little more than 100 miles southeast.



From the moment I arrived at the park entrance, I was amazed by how the native, giant cacti from which the park takes its name and other prickly plants could look so inviting, combining beauty with a sense of danger. When the orientation video in the visitors' center ended, the screen rose to reveal dramatic, awe-inspiring views of endless saguaro forests stretching into the distance. To get a closer look, I set out on the dusty Bajada Loop Drive, stopping at a few of the trailheads along the route. At the top of Signal Hill Trail, I studied prehistoric petroglyphs, including spirals and animal figures carved onto boulders by the Hohokam people about 1,000 years ago. On the Hugh Norris Trail, I marveled at fields of saguaros that seemed to take on human characteristics—appearing to wave, dance or stand in groups.

## THE WILD WEST

Continuing southeast, I set my course for the site of the legendary shoot-out, about 70 miles from Tucson. At Tombstone Courthouse State Historic Park, I read part of attorney-turned-banker George Parsons' diary. In 1880, he wrote: "A man will go to the devil pretty fast in Tombstone," adding, in a later entry, "faro [a gambling card game], whiskey, and bad women will beat anyone." It made me wonder why the Old West held such appeal when it was undoubtedly a tough life.

The answer is complicated, but the Tombstone of today is not—it's just good fun. You can transport yourself back in time to the way things were, or at least the way we imagine things were, by watching a re-enactment of the gunfight, picking up a replica of *The Tombstone Epitaph* from the day after the debacle, and strolling by men in period cos-

tunes who tip their hats to women and call us ma'am. On the advice of a Canadian traveler who'd fully embraced the Tombstone lifestyle (with a newly purchased duster coat, cowboy boots, and wide-brimmed hat to prove it), I stopped at the Big Iron Shooting Gallery on Allen Street. Here, visitors learn to "point shoot," like gunslingers of yore, using a single-action revolver (loaded with paint bullets). Though it was my first time firing a real gun, I was proud to earn praise as best shot of the day.

There's no telling, though, if my sharpshooting would have kept me safe during the town's early days, when plenty of people—skilled gunslingers and others—met unceremonious fates. In Boothill Graveyard, one headstone sums up the fate of George Johnson, hanged by mistake after innocently purchasing a stolen horse: "He was right, we was wrong, but we strung him up, and now he's gone."

## HEADING FOR THE HILLS

A day trip to Benson, about 25 miles northwest of Tombstone, gave me a chance to explore Kartchner Caverns, limestone caves only discovered in 1974 at the base of the Whetstone Mountains. On our guided headlamp tour, our group marveled at soda-straw stalactites, fried-egg stalagmites and other formations created by mineral deposits. When we turned off our headlamps at the end of the tour, our guide gave us the choice of closing our eyes or keeping them open. Either option yielded the same result: all-encompassing darkness. The absence of even a speck of light was surprisingly peaceful.

A similar sense of peace continued on the drive along a sparsely populated stretch of Hwy. 80 as I neared what turned out to be the biggest surprise of the trip: Bisbee, nearly 30 miles southeast of Tombstone and only 12 miles from the Mexican border. Carved into a canyon, the former mining camp is now a haven for the arts. The small town center is filled with quaint antiques shops and local galleries, while steep streets leading into the surrounding hills are lined by numbered stairways and beautifully preserved Victorian and Art Deco buildings.

Just how hilly is Bisbee? Consider that each floor of the old four-story high school has its own ground-level entrance, and that the annual Bisbee 1000 race, a tradition for 25 years, features more than 1,000 steps across nine staircases. On a ride through the narrow, switch-backed streets with Lavender Jeep Tours, every change in elevation revealed a gorgeous glass mosaic, quirky house or charming view.

After I finished exploring the hills, I headed underground for the Queen Mine Tour. Our guide, Benny, began working in the mine in 1959, so he was able to provide firsthand accounts of how the men performing this dangerous job amused themselves while laying tracks



Mineral deposits take shape inside Kartchner Caverns.



The Old West lives on in Tombstone.

and digging out copper. He also recounted some of the colorful pranks that miners played on new workers, including a few involving the "sanitary car." Bisbee's mines, we learned, yielded more than 8 billion pounds of copper, nearly 3 million ounces of gold and more than 77 million ounces of silver between 1880 and 1975, when they were shut down.

## REFLECTIONS FROM THE ROAD

With a flight to catch back in Phoenix, I only had a limited amount of time to admire the gravity-defying rock formations in Chiricahua National Monument, northeast of Bisbee, and soak in the charm of Willcox. The latter, founded as a railroad stop in 1880, is the proud hometown of cowboy actor/singer Rex Allen and the center of Arizona's burgeoning wine country.

Quiet time along scenic highways on the drive back to Tempe offered a chance to reflect. We like to say that there are two sides to every story, but two sides are just the beginning. To really understand and appreciate a place, you have to explore and do a little digging. A full week is not enough time to fully understand an entire state, but I flew back home to Washington happy that I got to flip through a few more "pages" in the "book" of Arizona. **1**