

When last you heard from us, we were in Apache Junction, Arizona. As the clean, crisp air in Apache Junction deteriorated and the weather became warm, we elected to head back up into the mountains. We cut a trail for **Camp Verde, Arizona**. Camp Verde is a very small, but historic town in the Verde Valley. It is likely that most of you have never heard of Arizona's Verde Valley, but if you get the chance, it's an extremely interesting place to visit. It is interesting because of the spectacular terrain and interesting because of its history. The altitude at Camp Verde is 3250 feet which made the weather in mid March a little cool, but quite delightful. We got to Camp Verde by leaving Phoenix and heading north on Highway 17. We were at Verde River RV Resort (one of our Western Horizon parks) for 19 days and it was barely enough. Camp Verde and the surrounding area is all very rural and it was perfect for us. We didn't like the crowds or traffic of Mesa and Phoenix, and getting to Camp Verde felt like getting home.

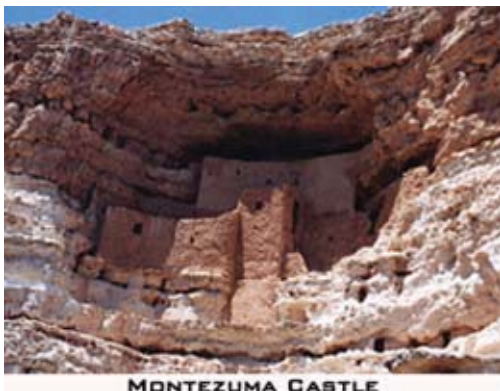
We were lucky enough to meet a very interesting local couple, **Don and Ida**, who have a lovely horse ranch complete with a roping arena. Don and Ida are both retired, but Don is still active as a roper in professional rodeo. They also put on their own roping competitions at their home. They have carved out an interesting lifestyle in a beautiful area and it was a real treat to spend time with them. They live in a beautiful green valley on a creek with irrigation provided by an artesian well pouring out 800 gallons of water an hour. A true oasis in the middle of high desert.

A very interesting tourist attraction in this area is the "**Out of Africa Wildlife Park**." The staff and the tours are fabulous. They get you very close to the animals. You can hand feed the giraffes who are extremely gentle. Giraffes have 12-15 inch tongues that are very soft. When you get kissed by a giraffe, it's a memorable experience. If you want to know more, go to <http://www.outofafricapark.com>.



Another interesting tourist spot in the Verde Valley is **Montezuma Castle**. Over 600 years ago the Sinagua Indians built a 5 story, 20 room dwelling in a cliff recess about 100 feet above the valley floor. This is now a National Monument and definitely worth a visit. The entrance fee is only \$5. This five-story, 20 room cliff dwelling nestled into a limestone recess high above Beaver Creek served as a "high-rise apartment building"

for prehistoric Sinagua Indians over 600 years ago. It is one of the best preserved cliff dwellings in North America. Why the name? It certainly isn't a castle and, in fact, Montezuma was never closer than 2,000 miles. The early Spanish explorers were astonished by the elaborate construction and made the false assumption that the Aztec Emperor, Montezuma had constructed it. Thus, they named it Montezuma Castle.



MONTEZUMA CASTLE

Very near Montezuma Castle is **Montezuma Well**. The well is actually a large limestone sinkhole in a dry and desolate desert. One and a half million gallons of warm, carbonated water enters the well daily and outflows into a small creek. There are also some small cliff dwellings above the well. It is an easy quarter mile hike to get to the well and quite a shock to see the water in an unexpected place. Montezuma Well is also a National Monument, but there is no charge to enter.



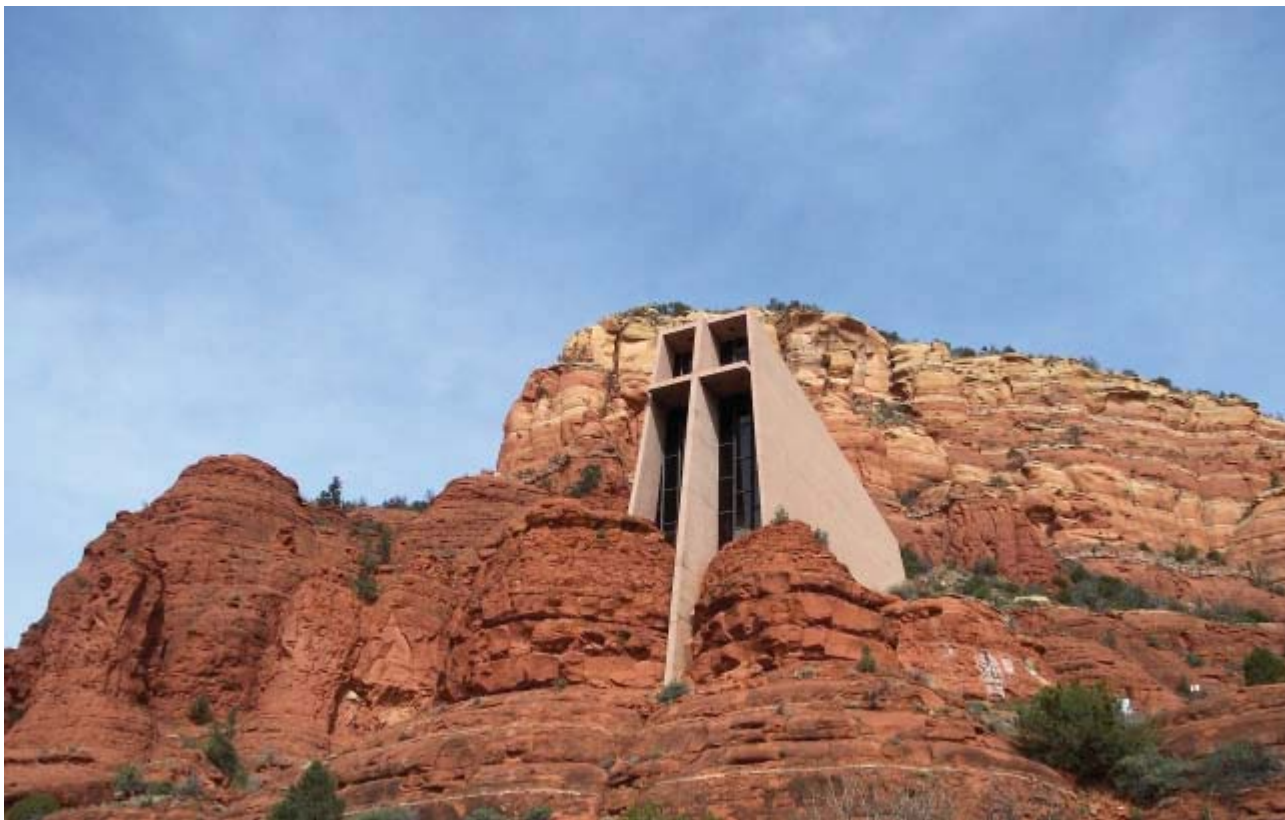
Montezuma's Well is a sinkhole.

There is still a third National Park in the same area called **Tuzigoot** which is Apache for "crooked water." It is the remnant of a Sinagua village built between 1125 and 1400 A.D. The original pueblo was 2 stories high in some places and had 77 ground floor rooms.

On Saturday, April 1, we got another special treat when our old friends, **Bonnie and Al** from San Jose, California, flew into Phoenix, rented a car, and came to visit us. Donna stopped doing taxes for a few days and off we went with Bonnie and Al. Our first adventure was to drive to **Sedona, Arizona**, which is only about 30 minutes from Camp Verde. The red rock canyons in and around Sedona are nothing less than spectacular! Sedona is about 3300 feet in elevation so the air was crisp and clean.



## Soldiers Pass, Sedona

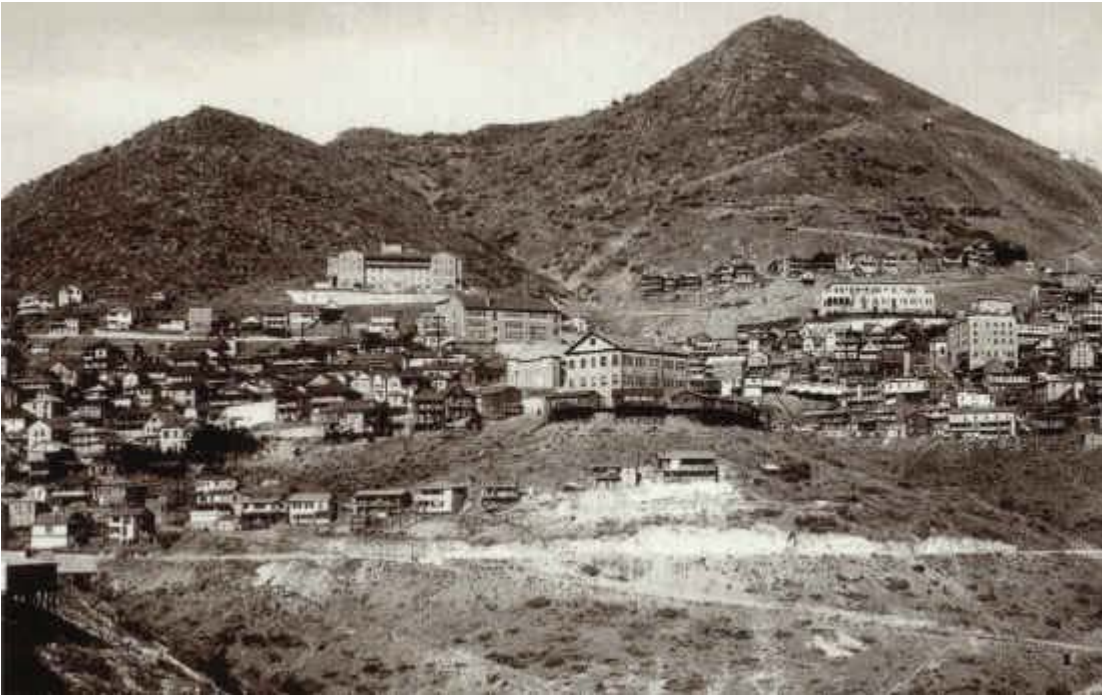


Some of the architecture in Sedona is also quite spectacular, but nothing can match the Church of the Holy Cross which was built by a Frank Lloyd Wright disciple in 1956.

As most of you know, Sedona is quite an artist community with lots and lots of elegant and expensive art and jewelry. There is something for everybody. You can look at the rocks that go on your fingers or take a jeep tour and look at the magnificent red rock formations. If you want to see a huge amount of the territory, you can take a 10 to 11 hour Pink Jeep tour from Sedona through the Grand Canyon National Park all the way to the Canyon itself.

After visiting Sedona, we took an alternate route to Camp Verde so that we could see the historic district of **Cottonwood**. In this little rural town there happens to be a wonderful restaurant named "Nick's Italian Steak and Crab House." What a great evening. Good friends, wonderful food, superb atmosphere, and great drinks. That was an evening to remember for many reasons.

On Sunday morning, after a waffle breakfast at our park, we headed off again to see the old, historic mining town of **Jerome**. Located high on top of Cleopatra Hill (5,200 feet) between Prescott and Flagstaff is the historic copper mining town of Jerome, Arizona. Once known as the wickedest town in the west, Jerome was a copper mining camp, growing from a settlement of tents to a roaring mining community.



The town of Jerome, Arizona, in 1927

Founded in 1876, Jerome was once the fourth largest city in the Arizona Territory. The population peaked at 15,000 in the 1920's. The Depression of the 1930's slowed the mining operation and the claim went to Phelps Dodge, who holds the claim today. World War II brought increased demand for copper, but after the war, demand slowed. Dependant on the copper market, Phelps Dodge Mine closed in 1953. (You may remember from our earlier narration that the copper mine in Bisbee, Arizona, was also owned by Phelps Dodge.) The remaining 50 to 100 hardy souls promoted the town as a historic ghost town. In 1967 Jerome was designated a National Historic District by the federal government. Today Jerome is a thriving tourist and artist community with a population of about 450.

Jerome sits above what was the largest copper mine in Arizona and produced an astonishing 3 million pounds of copper per month. Men and women from all over the world made their way to Arizona to find work and maybe a new way of life. Today the mines are silent, and Jerome has become the largest ghost town in America.

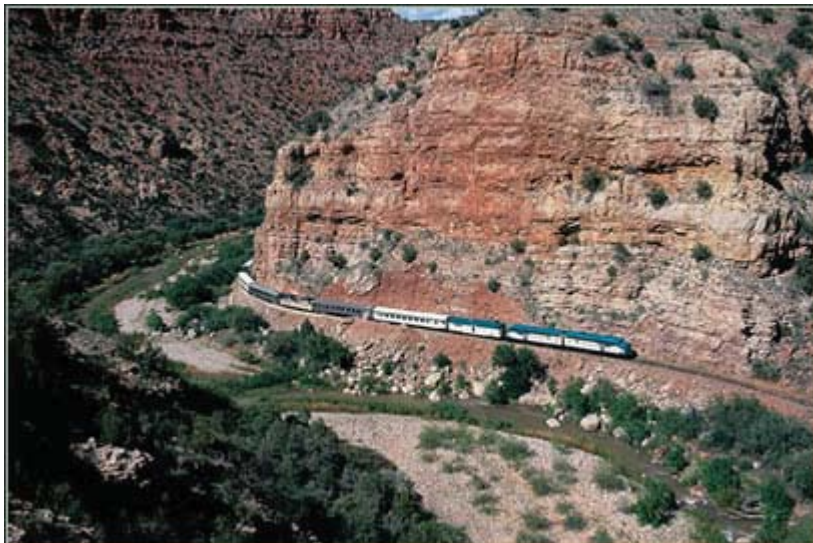
From the 5,000 foot elevation of Jerome we could look down on much of the Verde Valley and see the starting point of our afternoon adventure. We went down the mountain and headed for the nearby town of historic **Clarkdale**. Clarkdale is the home of the **Verde Canyon Railroad**. So at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, we boarded the train and began a lovely 4-1/2 hour roundtrip ride along the Verde River to the antiquated Perkinsville depot.



The train chugs along at about 8 miles an hour. You have a seat inside where there is a bar and snacks, but you can also go outside at any time and ride in the fresh air. There is so much to see and we had such great weather, that we spent most of the time outside.



We strongly recommend this excursion and if you want to know more, you can go to <http://www.verdecanyonrr.com>.



By the time we got a bite to eat at a local Indian casino near Camp Verde, we were all exhausted and ready to call it a day. We needed to go to bed early because we had to get up early Monday morning for the next grand adventure.

To be continued...

Until next time, home is where you park it.

Chuck & Donna