



NEXT WEEK: KEY WEST, FLA.

Exchange Rates ..... **D13**

MARCH 26, 2006

**GOING PLACES**

**Albuquerque marks 300th anniversary**

Albuquerque is incorporating music, history and fitness into its April 20-22 Tricentennial Birthday Weekend.

Although the city is celebrating its 300th anniversary all year, the official birthday is April 22.

Among the activities in La Entrada, an April 21 procession re-enacting the arrival of Spanish colonial settlers in the area.

"Time and Again Barrios," a new opera commissioned by the New Mexico Symphony to commemorate the anniversary, will be staged April 20-22. And a new racing event, the Fiesta de Albuquerque Marathon, will be April 22. It will start with a launch of hot air balloons.

Information: (800) 284-2282; www.visitabq.org and www.albuquerque300.org

— The Dallas Morning News

**THIS & THAT**

**Spring skiing**

If you are a skier who doesn't want the season to end, five Western resorts — Breckenridge, Vail, Beaver Creek, Heavenly and Keystone — will have spring snow along with five-night packages ranging from \$279-\$607 a person.

Information: (800) 642-6002; www.snow.com/info/specials1.asp

— The Boston Globe

**CLOSE TO HOME**

**Coachella Festival**

Never have the words Madonna and camping been so closely associated as they are this year, thanks to Madge's just-announced appearance at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio. The massive campout and rock fest begins April 29 and features a rare Madonna set in the dance tent on April 30. Also headlining this year are Depeche Mode, Tuli, Franz Ferdinand, Sigur Rós, James Blunt, My Morning Jacket and the Yeah, Yeah, Yeahs. Tickets are \$85 for a single day, \$165 for a two-day pass. Camping costs an additional \$20 for the weekend.

Information: www.coachella.com (Flash 6 required).

**Visitors guides**

They're free; just ask:  
● Anaheim and Orange County (714) 763-8888; www.visitanaheim.or.org  
● Costa Mesa: (800) 398-5488; www.visitcosta-mesa.ca.com  
● Sacramento: (800) 290-2334; www.visitgold.com  
● California: (877) 115-4387; www.visitcalifornia.com

— Staff and wire reports

**ARIZONA**



STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTOS

The winter sun sets over the Hassayampa River's dry riverbed in Wickenburg, Ariz., a desert town about 50 miles northwest of Phoenix.

**Wickenburg weekend**

Once faded Cowboy Country hamlet now trades on its Western past

By ANNE Z. COOKE  
and STEVE HAGGERTY  
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENTS

At first glance — a hasty one — the place looked like a Western movie set. Or a candidate for Arizona's next best ghost town.

Maybe it was the saloon-style storefronts and peeling wood-frame houses baking in the July sun. Or the sloping hacienda roofs, hanging long and low over the sidewalks, propped up by rows of posts. It could have been the two leathery-faced cowboys lounging in the shadows, having a smoke. Or the stifling 106-degree heat.

Right or wrong, that's how we remembered Wickenburg from our first trip through Southern Arizona in 1973, not long after Interstate 10, linking Phoenix and Los Angeles, bypassed the town. After that, the traffic went south, and Wickenburg, miles to the north on Route 60, was robbed, remaindered and left to blow away.

But Wickenburg was tough as a stockman's saddle. A Western town, it was founded in 1863 by ranchers and gold miners who earned their spurs in the dry Sonoran Desert. Over the years, they stuck it out through droughts, locusts, bandits, rustled cattle, hoof and mouth disease, dried-up wells, flash floods, ruined crops, a broken dam upstream and the Depression. In comparison, the interstate was a mosquito bite.

Recently, we spent a few days in Wickenburg — this time in February — meeting longtime friends from the snow belt. And what a change. The big-rigs are gone, the streets are cleaner and (except for a



Wickenburg's historic Santa Fe railroad depot now houses the Chamber of Commerce.



Downtown Wickenburg is near the junction of Highways 60 and 89.



TOM DE WALT / NEWS-PRESS

**RELATED STORY**

■ Two options for train travel to the Grand Canyon from Williams, Ariz. **D16**

Please see **ARIZONA** on **D16**

**LIST DU JOUR**

Ten noteworthy locations that champion the chow-chow way of life. From True West magazine:  
Chama, N.M./Antonito, Colo.  
Durango/Silverton, Colo.  
Guthrie, Okla.  
Heber City, Utah  
Kansas City, Mo.  
Omaha  
Sacramento  
Spokane, Wash.  
Virginia City/Carson City, Nev.  
Williams, Ariz. (see Page D16)

— Chicago Tribune

# Rustic Wickenburg a good place to cowboy up

## ARIZONA

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lot of gas-sucking late-model SUVs), quieter. Residents have painted their houses and, if you believe those full-color brochures on every street corner, the real estate brokers are hitting pay dirt.

The historic downtown has three traffic lights now, and the 21 oldest buildings (six built before 1899) are listed historic structures. These have been restored, repaired and repainted, and their ground-floor spaces are rented to businesses, attractive shops and inviting restaurants.

For the first time we noticed that Wickenburg sits in a basin — the Hassayampa River Valley — surrounded by purplish brown low peaks, with scenic views in every direction and a rocky landmark called Vulture Peak. No wonder millionaires are building lavish homes with mountain views. This was all ranch land, but people are subdividing and selling up. For an instant, the idea of moving here seemed inspired to us.

When the moment passed, we put on our coats — it was a chilly 37 degrees at dawn — and headed over to the Gold Nugget, on Wickenburg Way, for an early breakfast. In the front, still wearing the same straw cowboy hats they'd been wearing the day before, sat four grizzled old-

timers drinking coffee.

"Morning ma'am," they chorused politely. In the dining room at the rear, already crowded with people, Donna, the waitress — short, cheery and white-haired — bustled over to take our order.

"It's always busy on weekends," she said, pouring the coffee. "Who's here? Well, some travelers and some ranchers. A few retirees, snowbirds down for the winter. Phoenix people here for the weekend. Me? I love it. Beautiful sunsets, fresh air, nice people. Wait until May, when it gets hot. Then the streets are dead. A few people leave. But everybody else goes indoors."

After breakfast, we drove to the edge of town to hike through the 660-acre Hassayampa River Preserve, created in 1966 to save one of the last of the Southwest's rare cottonwood-willow riparian forests.

The Hassayampa River, which rises in Prescott, actually runs underground for most of its length. When it reaches Wickenburg, it reemerges to flow above ground, nurturing the forest and creating a refuge for 656 identified species of birds, animals and plants.

In the early days, this was also a stagecoach stop, and afterward, in 1865, the Brill Ranch. The docents will show you how the present Visitors' Center incorporates portions of both the stagecoach office and the ranch house.



STEVE HAGGERTY PHOTO

A visitor views period cowboy gear at the Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg, Ariz.

We stopped to talk to volunteer ranger Dave Bradford, who identified some of the birds we'd already seen and handed out a trail map, pointing us to the River Ramble Trail, the shortest way to the river itself.

As we walked, the sun rose higher and buds showed on the cottonwood trees, a hint of the coming spring. Birds twittered overhead, and my

boots crunched through a scattered layer of dry leaves, accumulated over the winter.

Soon the rustling triggered another memory, a warning. The last time I'd heard that shush-shushing sound we were hiking in open desert, not a tree to be seen for miles. By the time I figured it out, I was one step away from a sandy-colored rattlesnake lying motionless

on the trail. I remember he was completely camouflaged, except for his tail vibrating like an aspen leaf in the breeze, warning us to keep off.

The rustling near the Hassayampa River was harmless, just a lizard in the leaves. But I was glad I'd worn my boots.

"It's a little early for snakes," said Mr. Bradford when we returned to the Visitors' Center. "But it's always a good idea to keep a look out. You're much more likely to see birds, which is what most people come for. They're easy to spot because they stay close to the water."

The biggest surprise in Wickenburg, however, was the Desert Caballeros Western Museum. We expected a cramped, poorly lit venue filled with treasures from grandmother's attic. Instead the museum, housed in an elegant, contemporary adobe, contains 10 galleries with a small but impressive collection of paintings, bronzes and crafts.

Though only part of the collection is shown at any one time, the permanent exhibits were chosen to reflect the various cultures that shaped Western history. And their special genius is to bring coherence to each display. At the same time, the museum is small enough so that you can spend two very concentrated and unhurried hours looking at everything, and leave both informed and entertained.

"We don't have many Native American things," said docent Sandy Butterworth, when we asked for directions to the Pueblo pottery. "But that's intentional. We can't compete with the Heard (in Phoenix) or

the Museum of Northern Arizona (in Flagstaff), and we don't really want to. We're focusing instead on art that reflects all the Western experience, the cowboy culture, ranch lifestyles and the gold miners."

The largest gallery contains paintings and bronzes by Frederic Remington, Charles Russell, Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt. The Hall of History, near the entrance, shows Wickenburg's history in a series of 20 dioramas, just the sort of display that I've always tried to avoid. But these are as intricately designed as any dollhouse or miniature railroad layout, and as compelling.

But my favorite gallery contained the "Spirit of the Cowboy Collection," assembled and donated by Arizona residents Abe and Lalla Hays. This collection contains, among other cowboy paraphernalia, spurs.

One pair of spurs doesn't mean much. To see 100 pairs displayed together, each one cleverly designed and hand-forged, and each unlike all the others, is a tribute to the creativity that finds its way into the most ordinary, workaday items.

When we left, I decided that Wickenburg would be a good place to make a cowboy movie after all. The spirit is there, there's plenty of room in them thar hills for a posse to chase the rustlers, the cowboys needed as extras are waiting at the Gold Nugget and the downtown looks the part. Just don't come in July.

Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty are Marina del Rey-based freelance writers.

## IF YOU GO

Play cowboy at one of these three dude ranches, all close to Wickenburg. All double rooms are priced for two people, and include three meals daily for two.

● Rancho de los Caballeros, now in its 59th season, is a luxurious ranch and resort. The restaurant has a reputation as one of Wickenburg's best. Activities include guided trail rides, "team penning" sessions and chuck wagon cookouts. Double rooms for two start at \$370. Riding and other activities are extra. (800) 684-5030; www.SunC.com.

● The Flying E Ranch is an authentic working ranch on 19,000 acres of virgin desert. Guests don't ride with the cattle, but can join twice daily guided trail rides on which you may see some of the herd. Double rooms for two are \$264 per day. Riding is priced separately. (928) 684-2690; www.flyingeranch.com.

● The Kay El Bar Ranch, an adobe lodge built in 1926, is no longer a working ranch with cattle, but nonetheless focuses primarily on horseback riding, which is included in the room price. Double rooms start at \$340. (928) 684-7593; www.kayelbar.com.

**Travel tips:** For more options, contact the Wickenburg Chamber of Commerce at (928) 684-0977, or visit www.outwickenburgway.com.

The Hassayampa River Preserve is at Milepost 114 on Route 60, east of Wickenburg. (928) 684-2772; search "Hassayampa" at www.nature.org.

The Desert Caballeros Western Museum is at 21 N. Frontier St. (928) 684-2272; www.westernmuseum.org. Its "Cowgirl Up!" exhibition features female artists of the West and runs from April 7 through 30.

