

THE RALLY IS BACK IN PHOENIX! | RV REVIEW: TIFFIN'S ALLEGRO BREEZE | RESORT UPDATES

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FALL 2014

## Phoenix VALLEY OF THE SUN

**Historic Natchez Trace Parkway  
MEANDER A MISSISSIPPI ROADWAY**

### **STAY & PLAY**

Briarcliffe RV Resort  
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Cascade Meadows RV Resort  
La Pine, Oregon

Yuma Lakes Resort  
Yuma, Arizona



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**Volume 33, Number 4.** *Coast to Coast* (ISSN 1093-3581) is published quarterly for \$14 per year as part of annual membership fees, by Coast to Coast Resorts, 64 Inverness Drive E., Englewood, Colorado 80112. Periodical postage paid at Englewood, Colorado, and additional mailing offices. Registration Number 558028. Publications Mail Agreement Number 40012332. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 875, Station A, Windsor, Ontario N92 6P2. U.S. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Coast to Coast Resorts, P.O. Box 7028, Englewood, CO 80155-7028.

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COVER PHOTO:  
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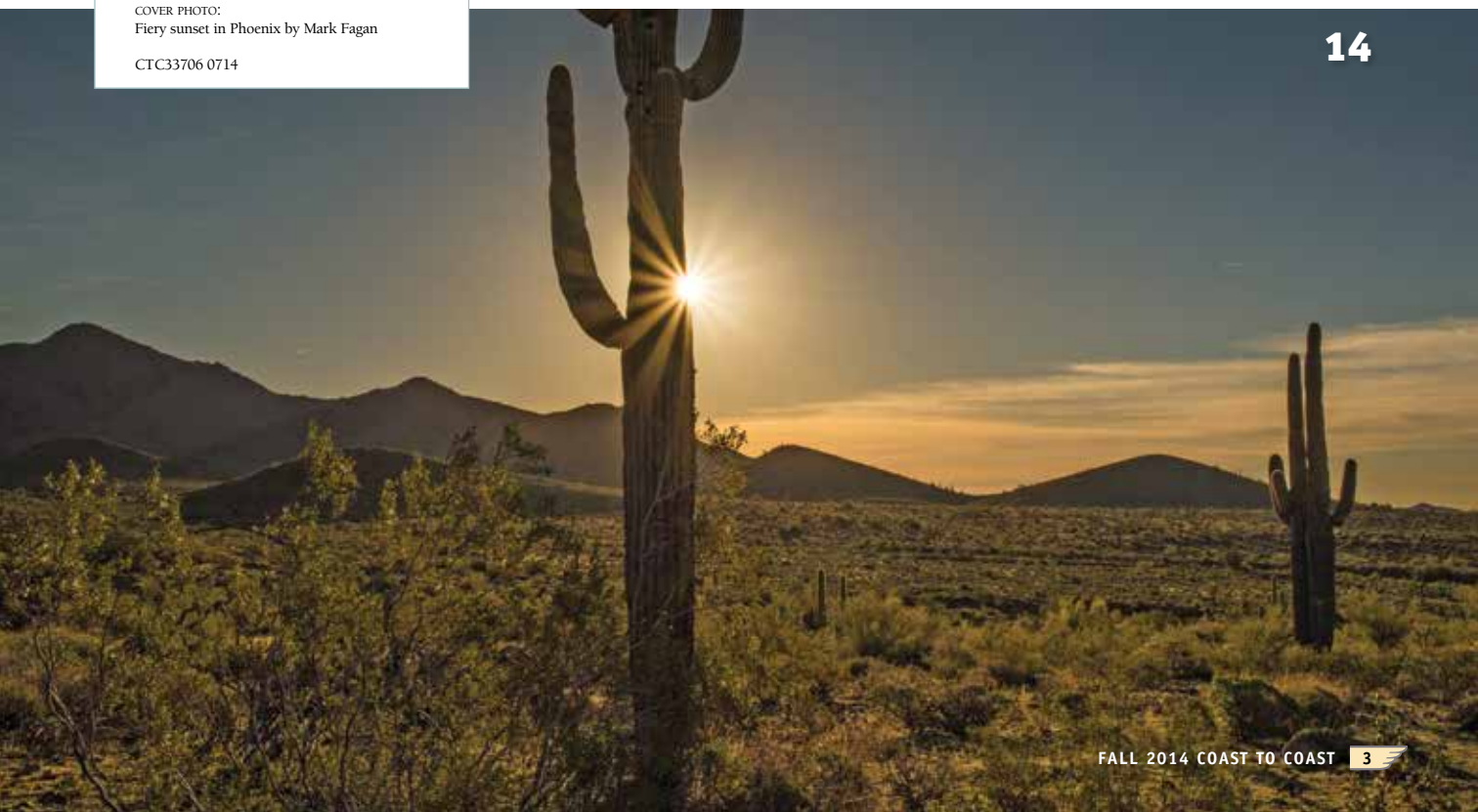
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## a walk on the wild side

Visit Phoenix, the Valley of the Sun  
Story and Photography by Emily and Mark Fagan

Phoenix, Arizona, is a huge, sprawling city. Although there's a "downtown" hub filled with the skyscrapers one would expect of the sixth largest city in the United States, most of it spreads out into the surrounding Sonoran Desert in a wide mass of suburbia that is more than 50 miles from north to south and the same from east to west.

It's hard to imagine that a single square foot of nature could be found in this concrete jungle. However, this is a city that was built with outdoor recreation in mind. Phoenix sits on a flat desert floor with pyramid-shaped mountains jutting up all around town, giving it the nickname "The Valley of the Sun." The mountain faces are steep, and the land is not easy to build on, so these mountains have been set aside for outdoor fun and to give residents a place to immerse themselves in the wild.

Hiking the stunning mountain trails is a passionate pastime for many city-dwelling Phoenixians. When we lived there before we started full-timing in our RV, we often did the most popular lunch-time and after-work hikes up Camelback Mountain, Pinnacle Peak, and Piestewa Peak. The scenery along the trails was rugged and stunning, and the views from the top were spectacular.

We recently visited Phoenix with our fifth-wheel trailer and had a chance to explore some of the lesser-known natural areas on the outer edges of the city. Just a few weeks before our arrival, a brand new hiking trail was added to the Phoenix Sonoran Preserve system. Situated in North Phoenix on the new East Sonoran Desert Drive, between Cave Creek Road and Interstate 17, this section of the preserve covers several square miles and is ideal for road cycling, mountain biking, and hiking.

The trails are easy, and we were enchanted to hear the haunting cries of the Gambel's quails and the insistent calls of the cactus wrens all around us as we walked up the Apache Wash trail. Although they are small in stature, those little cactus wrens sound for all the world like stubborn engines

trying to start! Moving up the trail, we saw lots of giant saguaro cactus standing tall and proud, arms stretched high in the air. Their distant cousins, the squat barrel cactus, sat grouped around them in many

elevation gain on this hike—not to mention having to crane our necks when someone pointed out where the hike ended. This is a steady uphill hike for a mile and a half and a steady downhill on the return. Starting in the



Views while mountain biking in the Sonoran Desert



spots, like students seated at the foot of a teacher.

As the trail wound higher and higher around both the front and back sides of the mountain, we were astonished that despite being in the middle of a very busy part of the city, this preserve is so large that the only evidence of civilization was far in the distance on the horizon, several miles from where we stood. Houses were mere white specks, barely visible to the naked eye, and the only sounds we could hear were the chirps and calls of the desert birds.

Another exhilarating hike is the Wind Cave Trail at Utery Mountain. We knew we were in for a good hard work out when we saw the profile of the

morning, the entire trail was shaded and the crisp cool air felt really good on our rapidly heating bodies as we huffed and puffed between the craggy rocks and boulders. In no time the views began to take shape below us.

At the top we were greeted by a crew of savvy chipmunks that are very wise to the things hikers bring in their packs. These guys had grown fat and happy on granola bars and sandwich bread pieces, and they made no bones about coming right up to us to say hello and see what we had brought to share with them. The trail gets its name from the rock overhang that shelters a large area at the top of the

mountain, and this “wind cave” offers a welcome cool breeze to all the hikers that stop for a snack before heading down.

It’s the return trip that really made our heads spin, however. The trail runs alongside a huge

snakes in and out of the most beautiful Sonoran desert landscapes I have seen. The bright yellow brittlebush flowers were in bloom when we visited, and the humble little hedgehog cactus were resplendent as they

cans first arrived in this area, they saw the evidence of these canals and of these ancient people, and they began to build their own canals for the same purposes. Recognizing that they were building a modern city



In addition to fishing off a pier on the Salt River, the region offers scenic drives and opportunities to add to your birding life list



wall of jagged cliffs that are covered from top to bottom in lichen. Lichen is a living organism that comes in all colors of the rainbow and, on this particular trail, once the sun moved high enough in the sky, the lichen lights up in brilliant shades of yellow and orange. The towering walls of rock came alive. Making our way down the trail, we often looked over our shoulder at those vibrant cliffs, watching the colors change in the sunlight.

On the other side of Usery Mountain, heading north from Mesa on the Bush Highway, we discovered the magical Wild Horse Trail. This is a wonderful mountain biking and hiking trail that winds up and down and

showed off their vivid magenta flowers. This trail is so little used that hikers and bikers mix happily. We saw only one other person on the trail each time we went and, because we always had our cameras in tow, each hike or bike ride quickly turned into a photo shoot!

The Sonoran Desert around Phoenix isn’t strictly about cactus and craggy mountain peaks, however. The most stunning urban oases—which are true desert oases—lie along the waterways and lakes that are sprinkled around town. Phoenix was originally settled by early peoples who took clever advantage of the natural rivers in the area to build irrigation canals to water their crops. When Ameri-

on top of an ancient one, they named the city “Phoenix” after the mythical phoenix bird that regenerated itself by rising out of the ashes of its predecessor.

These rivers still flow today, and there are many access points where you can slip away from the urban chaos to watch the long-legged water birds standing by the water’s edge, or cast a fishing line, or simply admire the sunrises and sunsets as they reflect in the water at the base of the mountains. We visited the Verde River while riding our bikes in the Fort McDowell Indian Reservation and again at the Eagle View RV Resort, which backs up to the river. Lots of RVers gather beside their rigs to watch the

bald eagles soaring in the afternoons and to enjoy happy hour gatherings just above the riverbanks. Snowy egrets and great egrets flock to these rivers, too. We watched them flying up and downstream every morning and evening as they commuted between their roosting trees near the mountains and their dining areas along the riverbanks.

One evening, as we set up our cameras on tripods to capture the beautiful river scene at sunset, we heard the loud crashing and crunching sounds of tree limbs snapping and tall grasses being mowed down on the opposite side of the stream. Friends had told us they had seen wild horses in this exact spot a few nights earlier and we were really excited at the prospect. Surely the heavy footprints we were hearing on the riverbank across from us were those of a wild horse. We swung our cameras around, waiting for the horse to step out of the tall reeds, when the grasses parted and a huge brown cow emerged. We chuckled as we watched it lower its head for a drink.

We got lucky with the horses the next day, however. Stopping at the Blue Point Overlook along the Bush Highway to admire the lofty cliffs towering above the river, we looked down at the glassy water below us and saw two horses standing side by side at the river's edge. No one knows the exact origin of these wild horses, but it is thought that their ancestors were owned by residents of the Indian reservation many generations ago. Now there are three herds that roam unimpeded through the National Forest, through the Indian reservation and wherever else they can find open space on the eastern fringes of Phoenix.

They are small horses, perhaps with some mustang blood in their heritage, and we watched them contentedly grazing in the grasses and rolling and scratching their backs in the gravel by the riverbank.



A desert marina on the Saguaro Lake, inquisitive chipmunks, and happy horseback riders share the region

As we watched that first pair, a few more horses wandered out of the tall grasses. Two of the adults had very young foals with them. After admiring these wild horses from a distance, what a contrast it was to return to the parking lot and see a group of horse-back riders, dressed in cowboy hats and western garb, coming up the dusty trail from a ride in the desert. Those tall, refined horses seemed as contented as their wild counterparts while their handlers brushed them down after their ride.

The Bush Highway is one of the most awe-inspiring drives in the Phoenix area, and we made a point of driving its length several times. It climbs and dives

through sweeping turns that carve their way through lush Sonoran Desert landscapes. If you travel from north to south during the golden hour of the setting sun, the massive wall of cliffs by the Blue Point viewing

area light up in brilliant shades of orange.

This drive winds past Saguaro Lake, one of the prettiest lakes in greater Phoenix. Driving down to the lake's main access point from the highway, our jaws dropped as we took in the view of the sparkling blue water backed by distant purple cliffs. Water skiers zoomed across the lake, a kayaker paddled slowly close to shore, and all the boats in the little marina twinkled in the sun. We walked along the shoreline, admiring the views, and then stopped for a bite to eat on the patio of the Lakeshore Restaurant overlooking the lake. Boaters came and went on the docks below us, and the Desert Belle paddleboat

welcomed passengers aboard for its cruise around the lake and upriver through the canyon.

After lunch we meandered further out along the shore to a gravel beach and boat launch. Tall cottonwood trees spread

A saguaro and ocotillo cactus in silhouette



their limbs wide, offering welcome shade at the picnic tables. A party boat motored into the cover and anchored briefly. As we listened to the laughter of the kids in the boat and the splashing of a man wading out into the water with his fishing rod, it didn't seem possible that this watery world was in the middle of the desert.

Phoenix will always be home for us. But when we returned as visitors in our RV after years of exploring other places on the road, we were surprised to discover so many special spots where nature abounds. Even though Phoenix is a big, crowded city, it's a great place to take a walk on the wild side.



## The Rally's Back

What's better than being in Phoenix in March? Being in Phoenix in March at the Camping World/Good Sam Rally, March 19-22, 2015. There are more reasons to attend than great weather. Where else can you rub shoulders with thousands of RVers, meet and greet old and new friends, and learn from experts in all fields having to do with the RV lifestyle.

See you at The Rally held on the Phoenix International Raceway for a weekend of nonstop activities, including huge RV displays, a wide array of exhibit booths, educational seminars and unforgettable entertainment. Highlights include a veteran's salute sponsored by Coast to Coast, a rally golf tournament, and an opportunity to renew your wedding vows while trying to break the record of 1,087 couples.

### REGISTRATION INCLUDES:

- 4 days of camping
- 4 days of festivities
- Evening entertainment

To register, call 800-701-1399. To stay up-to-date on all that's The Rally, visit [www.therally.com](http://www.therally.com).