

Where Animals Find Friends

Emily Fagan

By Emily Fagan

Conveniently situated in Utah near three of our most stunning national parks, Kanab is a great place to restock the fridge, pump gas and refill the propane and water tanks in the RV. But in the mad rush to Grand Canyon, Zion National Park and Bryce Canyon, too many people miss the true delights of this charming town of 5,400.

We dashed through town like everyone else, and then, just north of town, we noticed a small sign with a cute drawing of animals below the words “Best Friends Animal Sanctuary.” Impulsively, we decided to follow the sign’s arrow down a side road. Little did we know we were embarking on a fantastic three-day detour.

After a few moments we found ourselves in a gorgeous red rock canyon that opened up to reveal a beautifully landscaped property. Walking between luscious flowers and admiring a quirky iron bird statue, we arrived at a lily pond hosting an array of hummingbirds and feeders below a large building’s tranquil front porch. A woman popped her head out the doorway, and invited us into the visitor’s center to watch a movie about the sanctuary and to review a detailed schedule of the many free tours we could take. What a surprise!

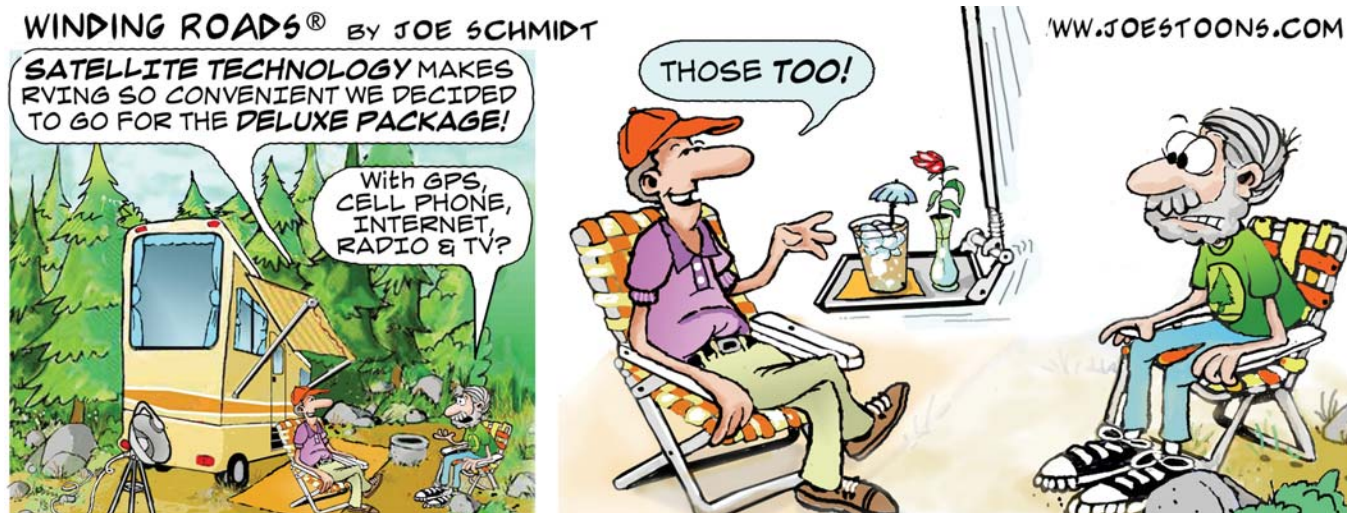
Sanctuary Is Huge

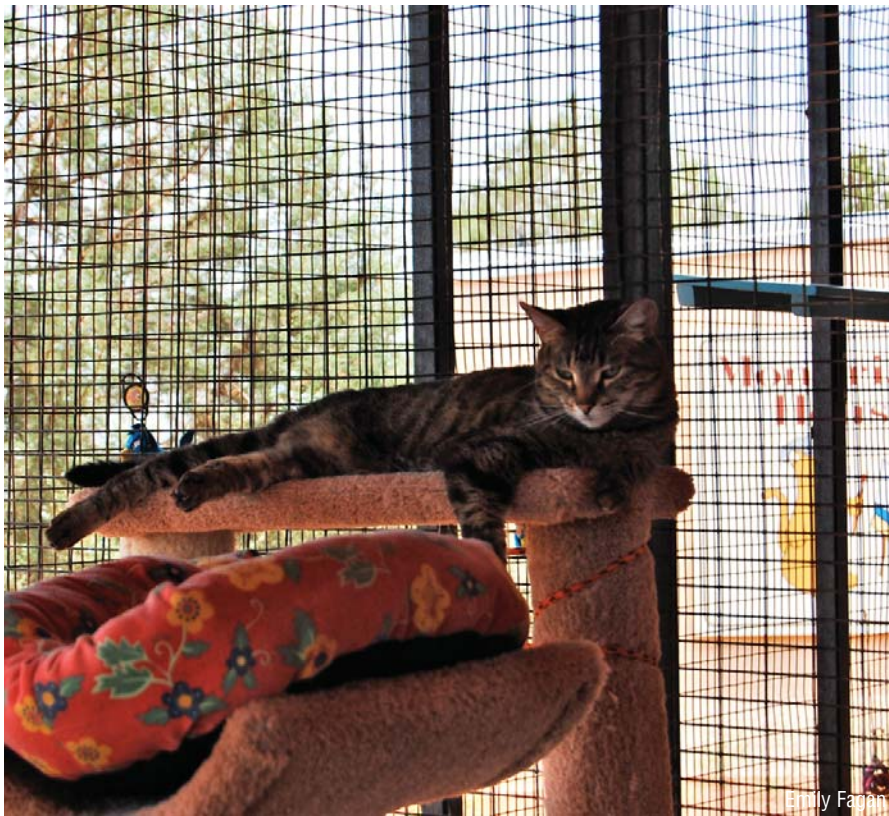
Best Friends was started in the 1970s by a group of friends who wanted to create a no-kill animal shelter. Today it sprawls across five square miles of spectacular red rock scenery, and at any one time houses 2,000 animals of all types. The sanctuary is dedicated to adopting out as many animals as possible, and guarantees every creature a home for life. Angel’s Rest Cemetery holds the remains of

all the animals that have naturally ended their days at the shelter. Each plot has a marker, from the biggest cows to the smallest birds, and every animal has a name.

We hopped on a shuttle bus to take the Feathered Friends and Wild Friends tours. As we drove along a winding dirt road, the canyon stretched before us. Cottonwood trees lined the moist bottom of the canyon below, and steep red-rock walls braced the far side. We passed a pair of rescued horses being lovingly groomed by volunteers, and we saw the pasture in the far distance where the farm animals graze in the summer.

The birds living at the Feathered Friends building have it made in the shade: most are hand-carried outside each summer morning (two-by-two in the “Parrot Parade”) to their daytime cages that are artfully placed under shade trees near a fountain. Volunteers and visitors can play with the birds or sit peacefully on park benches and listen to their chirps and squawks and occasional “hellos.” Each evening they are carried back to their indoor cages. Nearby, the Wild Friends area houses native animals, from ducks to falcons to ferrets, that have been rescued and are being rehabilitated for return to their natural habitat.





A cat lounges on a perch in the Best Friends sanctuary.



Joey, a hyacinth macaw, lives in the Parrot Garden.

Cats and Dogs

On another day we took the Kittyville and Dogtown Common tours. Kittyville is a huge complex of octagon buildings. Each cat run has both an indoor and outdoor area, filled with scratching posts, high perches and private hideaways. Some ten to twenty lucky felines live in each run. When we walked in only a few cats were visible, but as we looked high above us we could see the occasional swishing tail or paw hanging down. Food dishes and cat boxes are placed high up on these perches so the shy cats can keep to themselves and feel safe above the more exuberant kitties that play with the volunteers below.

The din of barking at Dogtown Common was deafening. It was filled to overflowing with dogs rescued from Michael Vick's dog-fighting operation when we visited, and the dogs were in the process of being socialized in preparation for eventual adoption. Like Kittyville, the dogs have enormous indoor/outdoor runs that fan out from octagon-shaped buildings, and they zip through the dog doors at will. They were slowly being introduced to the concepts of affection, gentleness and love by caring volunteers.

Best Friends intervenes in many animal cruelty cases. It rescued 1,600 rabbits from a crazy lady's backyard in Reno, Nevada. Down the road in Pahrump, Nevada, they removed 800 cats from another wacky woman's home. The stories go on and on, and Best Friends stays on top of it all, from the 200 guinea pigs kept in a 10x10-foot kitchen to the many animals left homeless after hurricanes Katrina and Ike.

Help from Volunteers

We were floored by the size and scale of this sanctuary. Several books have been written about the good works of Best Friends, and National Geographic has done a televi-

sion series on Dogtown Common. In the following days we took a tour of the Bunny House and viewed Horse Haven from a distance, and still did not see all there is to see. The sanctuary is eager to receive any help it can from animal lovers of all types, and you can volunteer to work with your favorite animals for anywhere from a few hours to a week or more. There are cabins on the property where volunteers can stay, and a large cafeteria serves food. There are also two RV spaces with full hookups (an overnight fee is charged, even for volunteers). Some volunteers enjoy their "working" vacations so much that they return year after year.

One critical part of the adoption process is the "trial sleepover," where an animal goes home with a volunteer overnight. The objective is to discover any bad behavior or undue nervousness and make sure that the animal is really ready to become a good pet. Several local hotels allow volunteers to bring a pet to their hotel room for a sleepover, and local restaurants allow pets when sitting outside.

My favorite animals are the parrots, and I spent many happy



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A hike up Squaw Trail leads to an expansive view of Kanab.

hours with them in the Parrot Garden. Queztl, an African grey, doesn't seem a day over 5, yet at 54 was the same age as my husband, Mark. Tika, an umbrella cockatoo, wanted to be hugged and petted endlessly, while Seppi, the sanctuary's mascot Moluccan cockatoo, was the most spirited. He not only "pens" a monthly newsletter column in the newsletter about the goings-on in the sanctuary, but he gets his fresh perspective by hanging upside down from the roof of his cage. He showed off for me by walking the entire length of his cage roof upside down, stopping in the middle to hang by one leg, flap his wings like a madman, and let out a terrific squawk.



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Kanab's city park is beautifully landscaped.

We left Best Friends grinning ear to ear, thrilled to have found such a delightful place simply by following an arrow down a side road.

Small Town Sounds

Wondering what else Kanab might have to offer, we wandered through the beautifully landscaped city park one day. The swimming pool and water slide had just opened a month earlier and the water was teeming with kids. Early one morning, from the back of the city park, we hiked up Squaw Trail into the red rock mountains. Scampering along the edge, we rose higher and higher above town until we came out on the crest where an expansive view greeted us. The small town drifted into a massive valley at its edges, and it all seemed very far away. The silence on the mountain was pure, broken just occasionally by the distant whirring of a farmer's tractor, the call of children's voices as they played, and a lone motorcycle rumbling down the main street.

Kanab is also known as "Little Hollywood," as so many movies were filmed in the area during the golden age of cinema. The Parry Lodge features several rooms lined with autographed photos of former stars, and there are plaques scattered around town commemorating each celebrity whose footprints graced Kanab's red soil. Immersing ourselves a little deeper into this town, we got our hair cut by the local barber. His childhood bedroom window was visible from the barber chair; roots grow deep in this town. The 11th of 14 children, his dad had enjoyed the celluloid side of town, playing bit parts in many movies and even in the TV series *Gunsmoke*.

We left Kanab vowing to return again for another visit. The national parks will always beckon, but now we know that a special town awaits in their midst, one that offers far more than just a brief stop for provisions. ■

Emily Fagan and her husband, Mark, have been full-time RVers since May of 2007. You can read about their adventures, including more on their visit to Kanab, Utah, at www.roadlesstraveled.us.

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For more information on Kanab, Utah, and Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, check out these websites:

- City of Kanab: www.kanab.utah.gov
- Kanab's official tourist site: www.visitkanab.info
- Best Friends Animal Sanctuary: www.bestfriends.org
- Parry Lodge: www.parrylodge.com