

High alpine Hannagan Meadow offers respite from desert heat

By Judy Wade and Bill Baker

Even though temperatures haven't yet hit triple digits, we're starting to think about cool weekend retreats. One of our favorite places is Hannagan Meadow.

At 9,100 feet, Hannagan Meadow Lodge is the highest year-round occupied

facility in the state, and one of the coolest.

Located 23 miles south of the town

of Alpine, it sits picturesquely among aspen, spruce and fir on the fringes of a high alpine meadow.

Rustic and laid-back, the lodge has been com-



Weekends Away

pletely updated and renovated since it was built in 1926. Its history is derived from road building and cattle ranching,

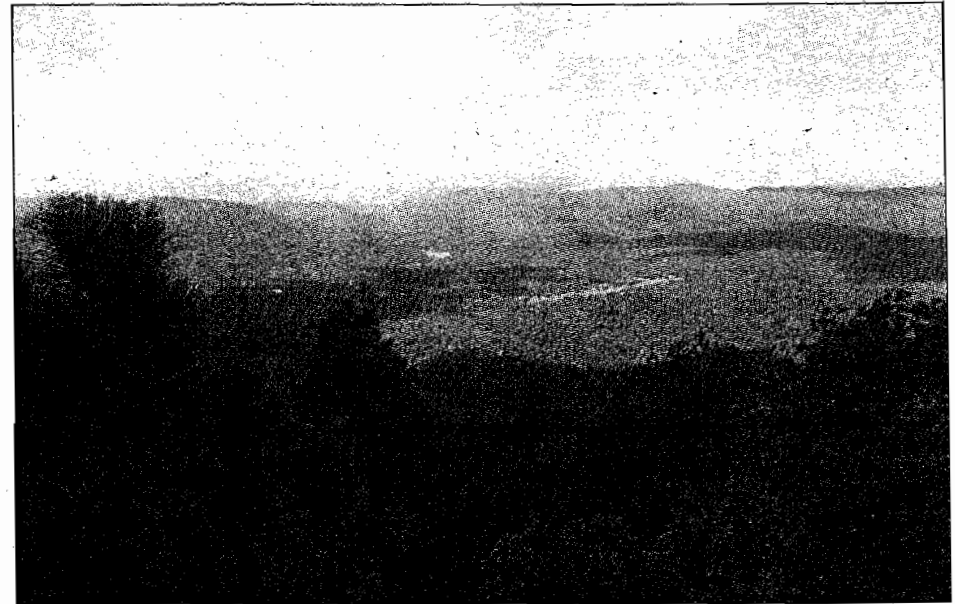


Photo by Bill Baker

On the edge of the Mogollon Rim, the view from Blue Vista Overlook is worth braving the rigors of the Coronado Trail.

originally providing lodging for travelers along the steep, winding Coronado Trail. Owners Tom and Tessa Waite, and Larry and Traci Innes are dedicated to keeping the lodge's historic ambiance, along with its simplicity and back-to-nature feeling.

Eight bed and break-

fast rooms in the lodge itself are decked out with antiques, brass beds and homey furnishings, while cabins farther back on the property have microwaves, refrigerators, and fireplaces or woodburning stoves. Larger cabins have complete kitchens that make them good for families

and for longer stays.

Quiet and serene

Hannagan Meadow's greatest charm is its isolation. It's a one-road-in, one-road-out destination in a remote location. That means no phones, no televisions, no aircraft roaring overhead, no

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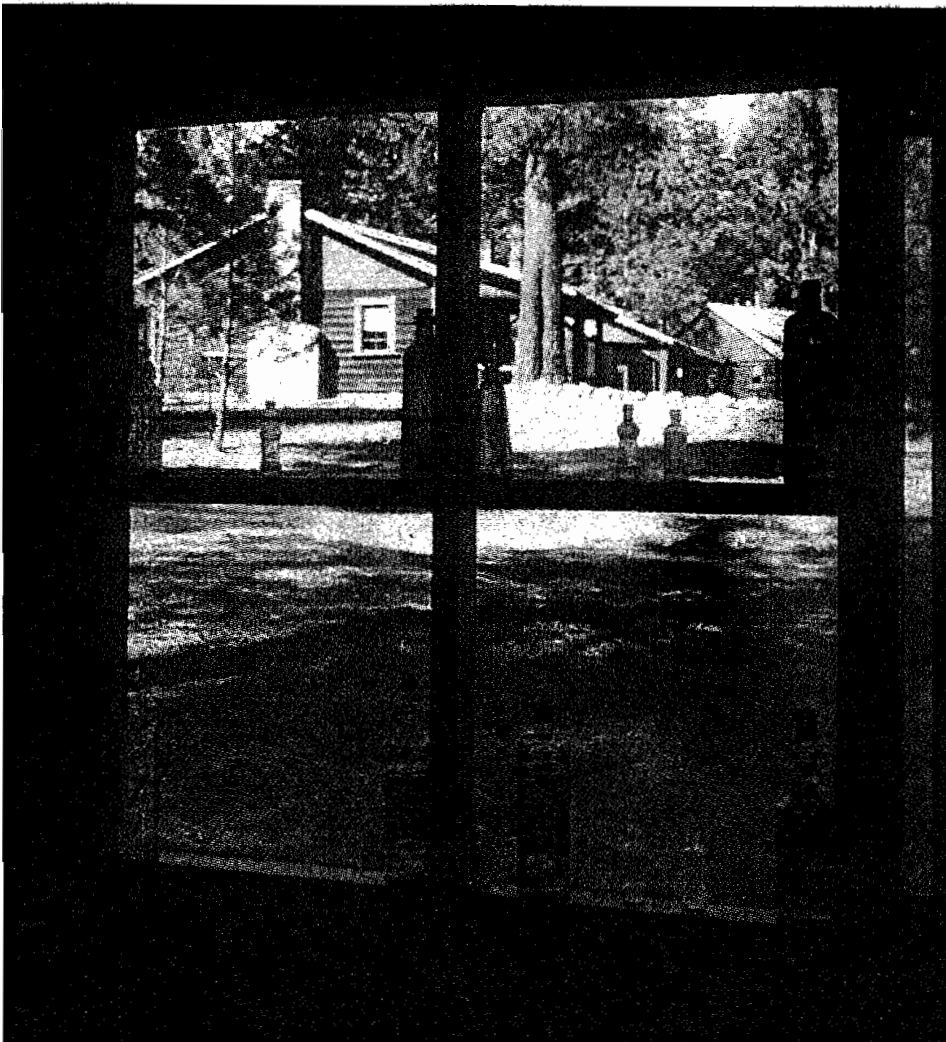


Photo by Bill Baker

Hannagan Meadow Lodge, in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest south of Alpine at an elevation of 9,100 feet, has welcomed guests since 1926. It is a delightful place for hiking and relaxing without big-city intrusions.

Meadow

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freeway noise. Cell phones do not work. There is a phone in the lodge, however. Miles of hiking trails along forest paths replace a workout room, and fabulous sunsets and a sky full of stars fill in for a nightly dose of television. That pleasant fragrance is pure, clean air.

Although it's out personal preference to snug into a cabin, filling the fridge and pantry so we

can prepare simple meals, the lodge has a good restaurant that serves three meals a day. It also has a liquor license so your favorite libation, or something close to it, is most likely available.

If the book you brought with you is not enough entertainment, outdoor guides can help plan fly fishing expeditions to nearby lakes in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. The stables behind the cabins offer hourly trail rides and overnight campouts.

Be sure to check before booking as the horses are not always in residence.

One of Hannagan Meadow's claims to fame is as the site of the Mexican gray wolf reintroduction program. The initial release of radio-collared wolves was in 1998. Since then other wolves have been

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Weekend at Hannagan Meadow

WHERE: Hannagan Meadow is about 23 miles south of Alpine via Hwy. 191, or a 2.5 hour, 64-mile drive north of Morenci. Gas is available at the General Store.

HOW MUCH:

Accommodations: Lodge room price including full cooked breakfast, \$70-\$125. Cabins, \$150-\$200.

Food: Wine and groceries brought with us, \$58. At the Lodge Restaurant, buffet breakfast, \$6.95 per person. Dinner entrées, which include fish, steak, chicken and pasta, are \$9.95-\$16.95.

Gas: \$57.36

TIP: Be sure to fill up with gas before starting the Coronado Trail. The next reliable place for a fill-up will be Hannagan Meadow.

HE LIKED: A night sky full of brilliant stars that appear to be just out of reach.

SHE LIKED: Being able to blame the altitude for all that huffing and

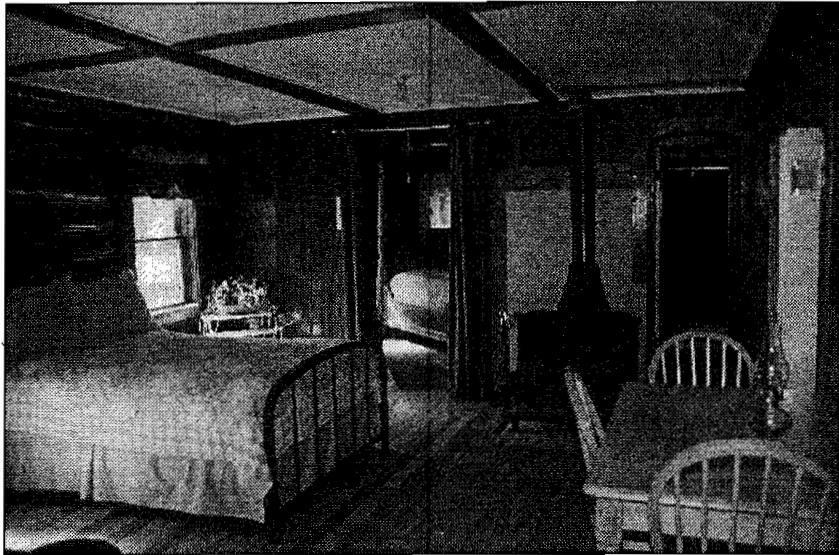


Photo by Bill Baker

Historic cabins at Hannagan Meadow on the Coronado Trail have wood-burning stoves or fireplaces, and cooking facilities.

puffing while hiking, not her physical condition.

INFORMATION:

Hannagan Meadow Lodge, (928) 339-4370, info@hannaganmeadow.com.

For road and weather conditions, ADOT (Arizona Department of Transportation), 1-(888) 411-ROAD (7623) or www.az511.com.

For trail and forest conditions, Alpine Ranger District, (928) 339-4384.

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released, resulting in a population today of about 50 animals in the wild. Various small steps, say project managers, are resulting in a successful reintroduction of this lovely creature. Hannagan guests often report hearing an early-morning chorus of their distant howls.

Coronado Trail

There are two ways to get to Hannagan Meadow. One is to circle north from the Phoenix area into Alpine, then head south. The more interesting, scenic and some say challenging way, is to proceed north from Morenci on U.S. Highway 191, also called the Coronado Trail.

The historic byway is a ribbon of twists and turns that make it impossible to move at anything but glacial speed. The 10 mph speed limit, posted in some areas, is self-enforcing. It is said to be the route taken by Francisco Vasques de Coronado more than 400 years ago as he searched for the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. Today's travelers find trea-

sures in the magnificent scenery and spectacularly beautiful woods

The road wiggles along high mountain passes through the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, through magnificent stands of pine and aspen. Those who love it do it yearly. For others, a single white-knuckle trip is enough.


About seven miles south of Hannagan Meadow, a sign for Blue Vista Overlook signals a stop. This amazing viewpoint brings you directly to the edge of the Mogollon Rim. In the distance, Mount Graham in Safford is a prominent landmark. Noisy blue jays and piñon jays are flashes of blue among the gray-green pines. A short nature trail with interpretive signs identifies plants at the lookout.

Once tucked in to a cabin at Hannagan Meadow, it's easy to slow life to a crawl. Although there is plenty to do, you don't need a permission slip to do nothing at all. We find that the smell of wood smoke and crackle of logs in a fireplace are powerful reminders of the delights of life's simple pleasures.

Judy Wade and Bill Baker are a travel writer/photographer team living in Ahwatukee Foothills.

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