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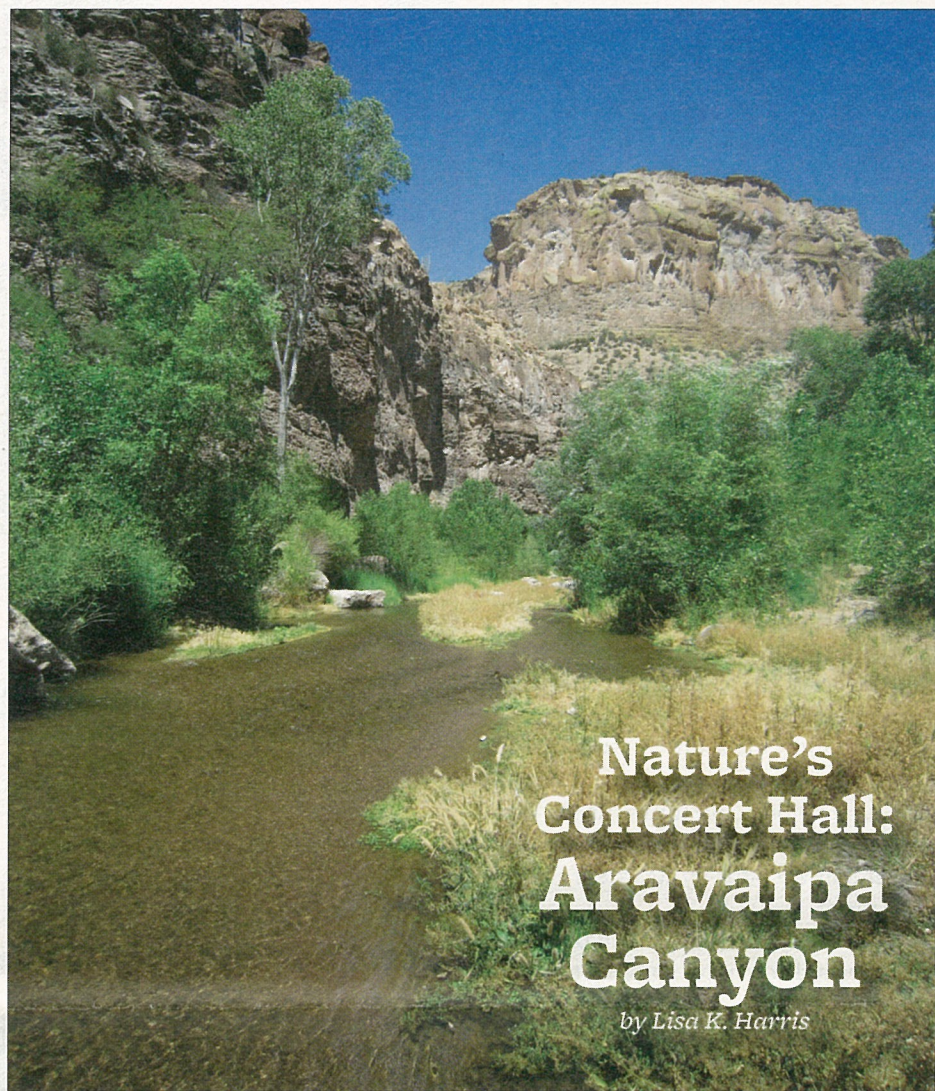
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## Day Tripping



## Nature's Concert Hall: Aravaipa Canyon

by Lisa K. Harris

Aravaipa Creek winds its way through Aravaipa Canyon.

**S**woosh, swash, my tennis shoes sing as I hike against the current, gurgling water swirling around my ankles. Cottonwoods tower overhead, their leaves tinkling like wind chimes in the breeze. The concert hall of Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness, a verdant swath on the Galiuro Mountains' northwest flank, resonates with lush melodies.

I rebalance my pack, having barely escaped face-planting into the creek after a rock slipped out from beneath me, for Aravaipa is a wet hike. I'd managed to convince my two daughters that hiking for three days was the perfect family getaway. Perhaps it was the allure of jumping fish, cliffs aglow in a full moon, infinite hues of green or passing the day partially submerged in cool clear water.

Aravaipa Canyon is all of these and more. Twelve miles from end to end, it's possible to explore the area in a day, but Aravaipa's secrets and side canyons are best uncovered over several. It requires primitive camping, so come prepared with a water filtration system and a mindset for wet feet. Expect solitude—only 50 users are allowed per day—and recalibrate your clock, because Aravaipa's watery trail is not the place to keep time or distance.

It's a place to bask in.

During a rare dry patch, the trail cuts a thin line through chest-high stands of horsetail, a Paleozoic-era plant. With each stride, the stalks brush against my pack, like a boot-camp cadence.

At the confluence with Javelina Canyon (3.45 miles from the west entrance), our pace slows as sheer rock constricts the waterway and the creek deepens. Occasionally, a saguaro grows from an overhead crevice, appearing suspended in mid-air. Taking a break against a boulder anchoring a tiny sandbar, we nibble on trail mix and watch foot-long chub and suckers congregate in pools cut beneath the cliffs.

Soon afterward, the wedge between banks widens and the water becomes shallower. Cottonwoods, sycamores and walnuts grow thickly near the edges but quickly peter out. On the slopes, prickly pear, jojoba and brittlebush scantily grow. We continue to clomp through water, the sun disappearing beyond the canyon's walls.

We spot Virgus Canyon on our right (4.45 miles from the western entrance) with massive walnut trees crowding its boulder-strewn mouth, and call it a day, settling onto a nearby sandbar just large enough for two tents. Next to our cooking area, I find a USGS elevation marker

continued on page 77

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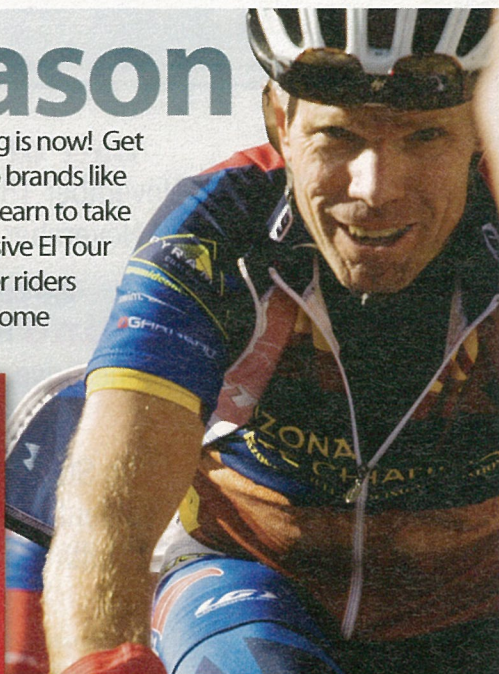
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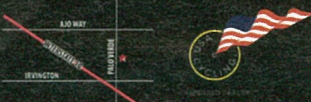
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**DAY TRIPPING continued**



Lyda S. Harris

Backpacking in Aravaipa Canyon

(2,796 feet) pounded into a nearby rock. Stirring sundried tomatoes into linguini on the camp stove, I count 32 vultures swirling above the cliff with others whirling in. I've never seen so many at one go and wonder where they find enough food.

Lyda returns from the creek after filtering water, and reports she felt the flutter of air against her cheek as a bat flitted by. They are everywhere. Big winged and small, dipping and whirling over the water's surface, chasing bugs. In the morning, Ava and I discover mountain lion tracks in the trail's squishy mud just beyond our sandbar and follow them. Given how far it traveled the trail and the topography, the cat had to have moseyed silently by our tents in the night. Measuring the print's width with my palm, I'm reminded that we're visitors in a wilderness area.

Realizing our exposed sandbar will become awfully hot as the day wears on, we move camp to a flat area across

from Horseshoe Canyon (4.85 miles from the western entrance). There are several campsites shaded by gigantic cottonwoods and willows, all with fire rings and logs to sit on.

We spend the day exploring. Climbing into Horseshoe Canyon's narrow mouth, we ease around stagnant pools and follow a trickle of water. After a gigantic boulder, the canyon opens into a rocky cylinder, pock-marked with saplings. A deep watery crevice stuffed with crimson monkey flowers runs up its middle.

We scramble to a lone tree growing against a nearby dry waterfall and find a clear pool with tadpoles clinging to its rocky edges. Easing into inky-colored water, I spook a snake, which disappears into watery blackness. Daring each other to swim the seemingly bottomless pool from end to end, hoping the snake doesn't resurface, our giggles resonate, adding to the canyon's melody.

**Finding Your Way**

The Bureau of Land Management administers Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness, and a permit is required ([www.blm.gov/az/st/en/arolrsmain/aravaipa.html](http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/arolrsmain/aravaipa.html)). From U.S. Highway 77, turn east onto Aravaipa Road eight miles north of Mammoth. Follow Aravaipa Road 12 miles to the trailhead. No dogs are allowed in the Wilderness.

**DL**

*Lisa K. Harris is a freelance writer and environmental consultant with huge wanderlust. Comments for publication should be addressed to [letters@desertleaf.com](mailto:letters@desertleaf.com).*

**WINE WISE continued**

it ideal for warmer climates as it is less cloying than Port.

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**DL**

*Dale Stephen Sparks is a wine guy who has worked both as a sommelier and wholesale distributor in the Arizona market for more than a decade. Comments for publication should be addressed to [letters@desertleaf.com](mailto:letters@desertleaf.com).*

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