

Clarkdale Smelter, circa 1930s



MILEPOST 38

The journey begins at milepost 38, slightly north of the train depot in Clarkdale (see page 10, *Clarkdale, One of the First Planned Communities in Arizona*). Milepost 0 is at the other end of the line where the Verde Canyon Railroad line meets the Santa Fe/Burlington Northern (BNSF) track at Drake. Since construction of the railroad started from that end, the milepost numbers begin there as well. Our trip today will take us as far as milepost 18 and the old Perkinsville station. The 40-mile round trip takes approximately four hours.

As we leave the depot complex, behind you about halfway up the side of the mountain is the old mining town of Jerome. Copper ore from the Jerome mines was brought to the Clarkdale smelter northwest from the depot (See page 3, *Tracks through Time*).

As we begin our journey, notice the mountains to the west-southwest. They are known as the Black Hills. Gazing in the direction of Sedona, you can see the south rim of the Colorado Plateau known as the Mogollon Rim. This was named after Juan Luis Ignacio Flores Mogollon, one of the first governors of New Mexico. The Colorado Plateau is a 130,000-square-mile mesa that extends into Colorado, Utah and New Mexico. The Mogollon Rim is 300 miles long, but the red rocks for which Sedona is famous are only exposed for about 25 of these miles.

Drake depot, March 26, 1964



*Top left: Passengers on an open-air viewing car get an up-close look at the mountain of slag
Top right and bottom: Sinagua Indian Ruins*



Leaving the station, the railroad passes through the old slag dump. Slag is part of the waste material from the smelter, and was actually poured in a molten state. The rusted iron pipes and sheet iron originally formed a barrier to keep the molten waste from the tracks while the slag cooled into the very hard material it is now. The mountain of waste covers about 40 acres, averages 40 feet in depth and represents almost 40 years of operation. Stories are told by long-time residents of seeing red hot ribbons glowing in the dark when the smelter was active.



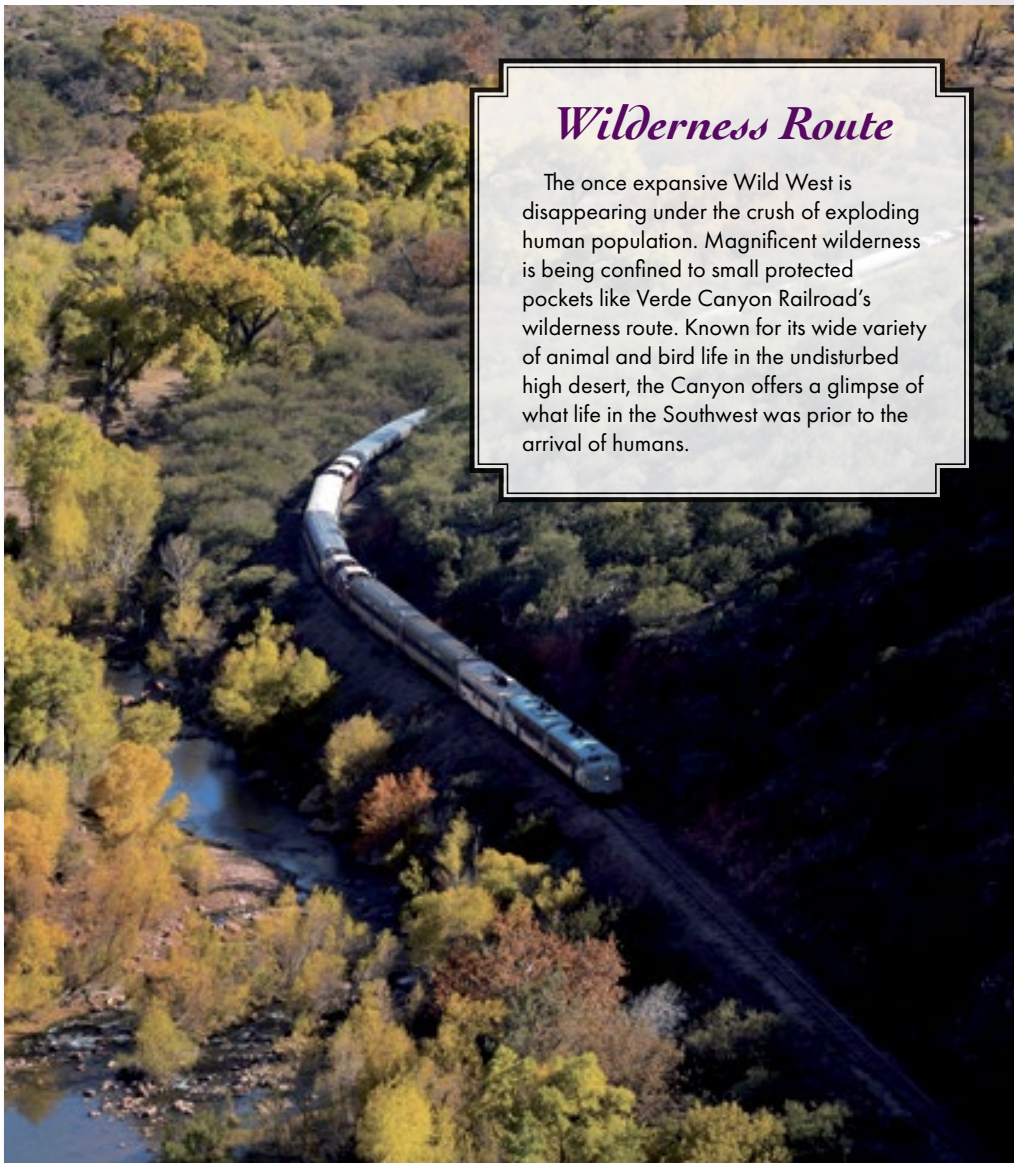
MILEPOST 37

On the left side of the train, Sinagua cliff dwellings cling to the walls of the Canyon almost halfway up the cliff face. (See page 14, *Ancient Ancestry of the Canyon*.) A black area around the roof of the first ruin remains visible; soot from cooking fires indicate the likely location of living quarters. The cave is about six feet high in the front, but the doorway was originally very small and low. Unfortunately, the elements have taken their toll on the structure. The second ruin is tucked back into a long horizontal cave only three to four feet high. This structure may have been used for storage. A small square window in the front wall must have provided a spectacular view of the river below.

MILEPOST 36

The deteriorating rock wall (about two feet high) on the left side of the train is built on a hog-back and drops into the arroyo. The wall (originally eight feet tall) built by the Sinagua was used to force game into the arroyo where hunters were sure to capture the animals.

The tall smokestack on the right is a trace of the original TAPCO power plant (aka The Arizona Power Company). The plant was finished in 1918, just as World War I was ending. Originally providing electrical power to mines in Jerome and the smelter in Clarkdale, the plant's role changed as the push for copper production declined with the end of the war. Instead, it supplied power to the Verde Valley and also Phoenix during peak seasons. Oil hauled on these tracks fueled TAPCO. The plant closed during the 1960s, and was supplanted by a substation that can be seen on the far side of the valley from Milepost 32.



Wilderness Route

The once expansive Wild West is disappearing under the crush of exploding human population. Magnificent wilderness is being confined to small protected pockets like Verde Canyon Railroad's wilderness route. Known for its wide variety of animal and bird life in the undisturbed high desert, the Canyon offers a glimpse of what life in the Southwest was prior to the arrival of humans.

MILEPOST 35

The first railroad bridge you travel over has been recycled. The trestle was actually constructed utilizing an old turntable from the Prescott roundhouse.

Just beyond this point, the Verde River emerges from its inner gorge and becomes entrenched below the tracks in a narrow steep-walled canyon. The dark rock that forms these sheer cliffs is basalt, a form of cooled lava. The train will be traveling on top of this layer of volcanic rock for the next three miles.

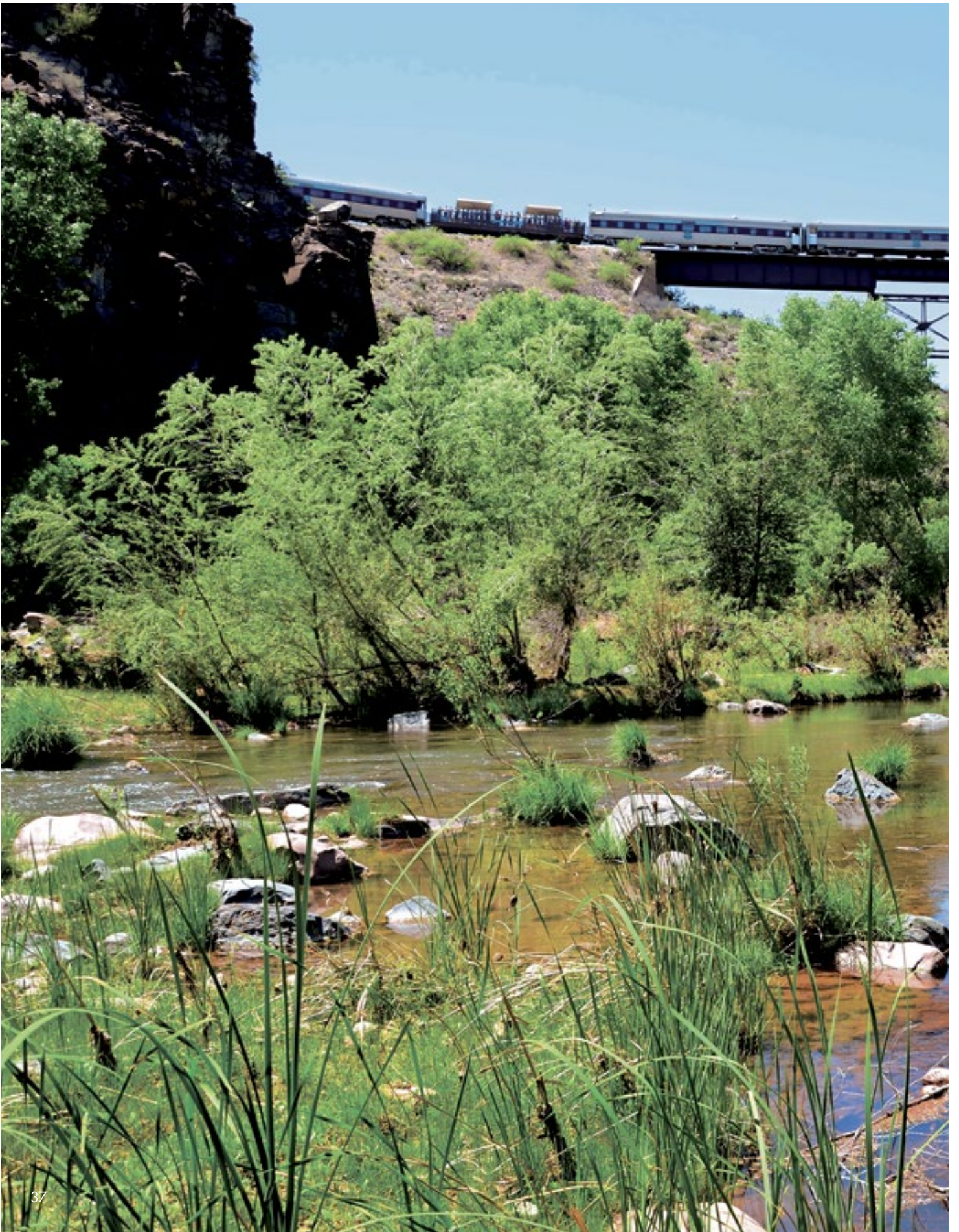


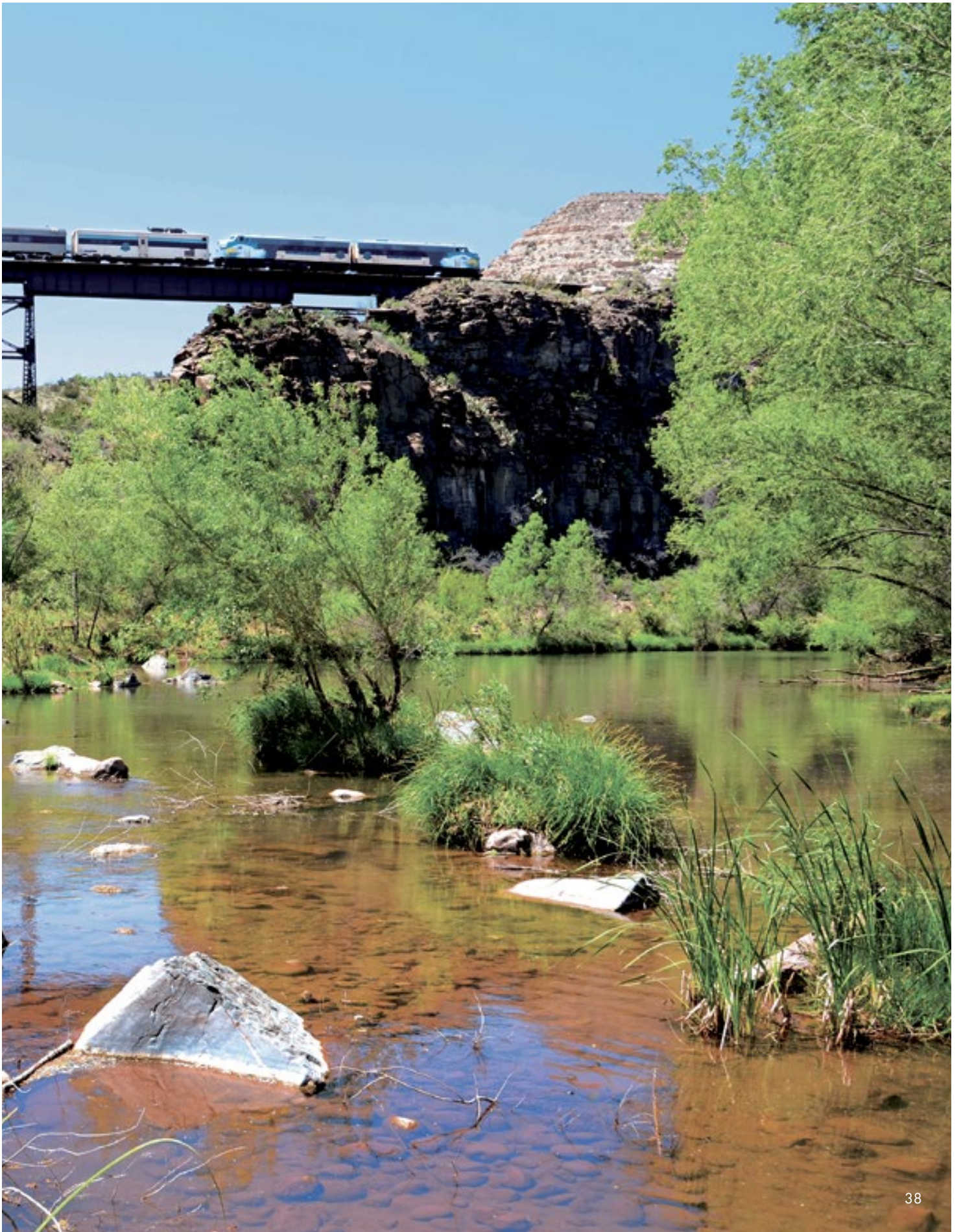


MILEPOST 33.5

The highest and longest bridge on the route is the one that spans S.O.B. Canyon, approximately 125 feet above the river. Building this trestle was an engineering feat accomplished by men and mules. The name has had many connotations throughout the years, but it actually stands for *Superintendent of Bridges*.







The River



The 170-mile Verde River, named by early Spanish explorers, has been flowing through the Verde Canyon for more than five million years, providing sustainable resources to ancient cliff-dwelling and pueblo cultures and farmers and cattlemen of the last century. The river originates from the Big Chino Aquifer northwest of the Canyon between Paulden and Chino Valley. According to local Native American lore, the Verde River is female. The oasis which surrounds her is in stark contrast to the arid uplands through which she meanders. She is principally gentle and receiving, as she gathers water from eight creeks that flow down from the Colorado Plateau. As rain falls on the plateau, these tributaries come roaring through gorges, loaded with life-giving debris which deposit into the Verde. She then creates an emerald swath of land nourished by her waters as she winds her way through the Verde Valley. The train only passes two of these tributaries: Sycamore Creek and Big Springs. The river is restricted just north of Phoenix at Horseshoe Dam, empties into Bartlett Lake, and finally flows into the Salt River.

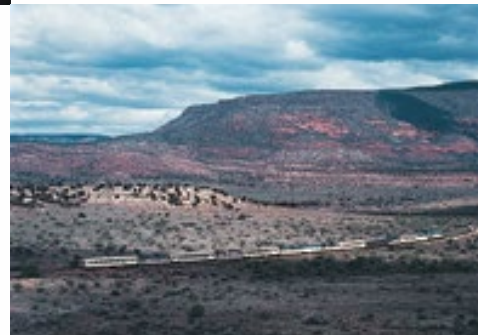




MILEPOST 32.5

The Verde Valley was once a large shallow lake; the light-colored limestone deposits that are so prevalent throughout the valley were formed from sediments deposited in this prehistoric lake. Across the valley on the right, you can see a point where the limestone ridge ends abruptly and butts up against a red sandstone formation. This point marks the edge of the prehistoric lake.

The mountain to the left of the prehistoric lake bed is called Black Mountain due to the dark basalt cap on the top. The gentle slope of this basalt mountain was caused by volcanic activity. Basalt is affected by erosion differently than other rock formations, like those that make up Sedona's skyline. The volcanic rock in the soil seems to encourage more vegetation which makes the rock less susceptible to erosion. Black Mountain was actually the low point in the river valley some 11 million years ago; volcanic material flowed from the plateau and filled the area and protected it. As the surrounding region eroded, Black Mountain remained almost 1,000 feet higher than the rest of the valley. The red sandstone layer about half way up Black Mountain is part of the Schnebly Hill Formation, the same geological strata that results in the beautiful rock formations around Sedona.



MILEPOST 31.4

As the train starts down the grade, on the left side of the tracks is an old telegraph line. In the early years of the railroad, this was the only means of communication the train crews had with the outside world from this remote and inaccessible area. They always carried a transmitter and could tap into the telegraph line to send a message.

On the right looking to the bottom of the canyon, you can see a large green pipe-like structure against the red cliff. This is a gauging station operated by the U.S. Geologic Survey to measure the flow of water in the river, and determine how much can be removed for irrigation downstream. Near the top of the structure is a small platform. During the 500-year flood in February 1993, the level of the river was within about one foot of that platform.

Across the river on the point of the hill, you will see stones stacked in a circle. This is believed to be a centuries-old pit-house dwelling of the Hohokam Indians. It is believed that the Sinagua used it as a lookout.



Precious Ecosystem

The Verde Canyon is a riparian area, defined as narrow strips of land on either side of streams with flowing water (underground or surface). They are very precious ecosystems especially in Arizona. Under tremendous pressure from grazing and recreational use, less than two percent of the land of Arizona makes up riparian areas, however 70 to 80 percent of wildlife and waterfowl depend on these habitats either directly or indirectly. Riparian areas also support a wide variety of vegetation exclusive from the native desert landscape.





MILEPOST 31

Proceeding down the grade into the canyon, a basalt cliff face is on the left. At the end of the basalt cliff, the horizontally-layered sandstone is tilted at a sharp angle, with layers standing almost on end. Geologists refer to this kind of formation as a *monocline*, one example of what is called a *fold*. Buried deep under the earth's crust, these layers of rock were heated to a point where they were bent and twisted by a tremendous geological force. When rock layers are cooler and more brittle, these same forces cause the strata to break and fracture, creating what geologists call a *fault*. A *fold* is a *bend*, a *fault* is a *break*.

MILEPOST 30.7

Looking toward the monocline, the whole shelf of red rock slides right down into the railroad tracks and underneath.



MILEPOST 29

The Sycamore Wilderness area is visible from this point. The area holds a lot of lore, legend and mystery. Many Indian dwellings, petroglyphs and old mines remain. Legend speaks of a lost gold mine five to ten miles east of Perkinsville. In the 1760s, conquistadors found a rich vein of gold in this very rugged and remote area. It is said they were discovered by Apache and picked off one by one. Two survivors escaped, but the mine was never rediscovered.

As the train passes Sycamore Canyon, a purplish-brown rock becomes visible on the right side of the train. It is particularly visible behind the first home. This is called Tapeats Sandstone. It also can be found above Jerome, 2,500 feet higher, where rich ore deposits have been found. In 1900, miners from Prescott staked a claim behind this house and started mining for gold, calling it the *Gold Tooth Mine*. We now know it is unlikely to find gold, silver, zinc, copper or any metals in sedimentary rock, but it didn't seem a ridiculous idea at the time.

The grayish-blond rock above the Tapeats Sandstone is Martin Limestone, with large horizontal and vertical lines creating a block appearance. Deposited during the Age of Fishes, some layers of this rock contain a lot of organic materials. When banged together they smell like oil. In the early part of the last century, the smell lured many to spend millions of dollars in search of an oil reservoir in the central Verde Valley, to no avail.

Above the Martin layer, the Redwall Limestone is a reddish-pink color and appears jumbled, so the texture is called *mottled*. This is the rock excavated by Salt River Materials located west of the train depot. The plant was originally built to make cement for Glen Canyon Dam, which created Lake Powell. Most of the caves seen are in Redwall Limestone. The Supai Sandstone, above the Redwall layer, is the most unstable.



Plant Life



The Canyon is abundant with cactuses and wildflowers. On higher ground around the tracks, the tall stick-like ocotillo and prickly pear, from which jellies and hand creams are made, are found. Banana yuccas, which Native Americans used for food, soap and braided rope for sandals and baskets, also are prevalent. Most of these indigenous plants have sharp thorns and survive with little water.



MILEPOST 28.3

As the train starts into the curve, a large gray rock outcrop on the shoulder of the hill across the river has a remarkable resemblance to the head of an elephant seen in profile, with its trunk to the left, curved and pointing into the air. Perhaps it will be no surprise that this is called *Elephant Rock*.



Elephant Rock

MILEPOST 28

At midpoint in the trip to Perkinsville, the train passes by Sycamore siding, the only railroad siding in the Canyon. Just beyond the siding across the river is the Alvarez Ranch. (See page 16, *Ancestry of the Verde Canyon*.)



Turtle Rock

MILEPOST 24

At the end of a bluff on the right side of the train across the river is *Turtle Rock*. He has a head, shell and even a little turtle tail. Those who traveled through the Canyon as early as the 1920s remember this rock formation having the name.



MILEPOST 22.5

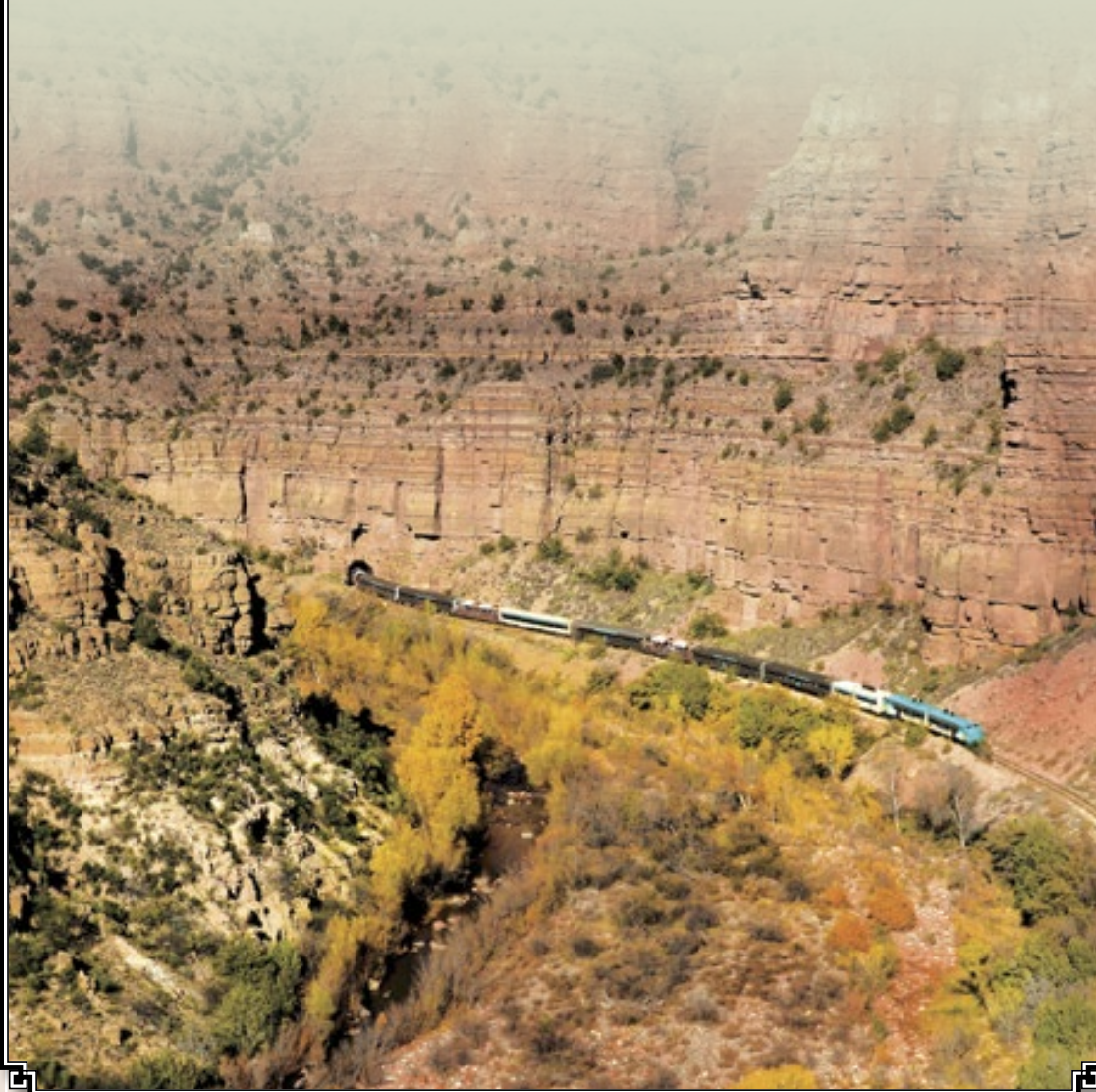
Very few excursion trains provide passengers the thrill of passing through a tunnel. Our manmade tunnel is 734-feet long and curved, so the exit cannot be seen from the entrance. At some points, the train comes within six inches of the tunnel walls, which were created by blasting through solid limestone and supported by timbers for only about 30 feet at each end. In 1911, a crew of 25 Swedes completed the project in just six months.

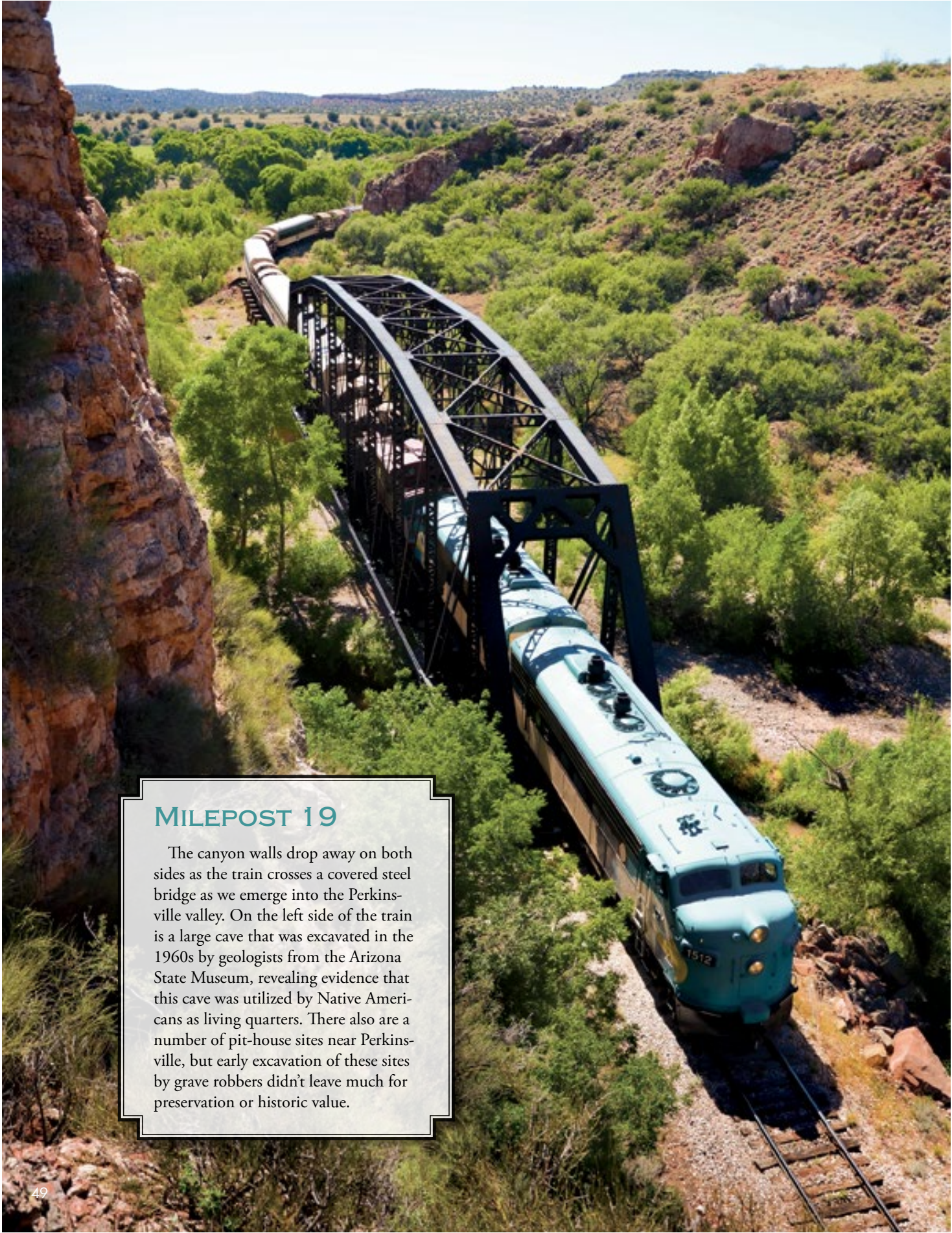


Cottonwoods, Willows & Sycamores



The rich blend of deciduous trees, including sycamores, walnuts, cottonwoods, willows, box elders, ashes, alders and oaks, is unique to the Intermountain West. As the train makes its way deeper into the Canyon, trees along the river provide a canopy for the riparian habitat of the Verde. These indigenous species can transpire more than 100 gallons of water each day. The cottonwoods have dark rough bark and heart-shaped leaves that tremble in the summer breezes, much like their relative, the aspen, which grow at higher elevations. They are mixed with desert juniper and mesquite. Large shrubs found along the route include canotia, barberry, greythorn, fourwing saltbush, creosote bush, manzanita, fenderbush, ephedra (aka Mormon Tea), cliffrose and Apache plume. Smaller shrubs include winterfat and snakeweed.





MILEPOST 19

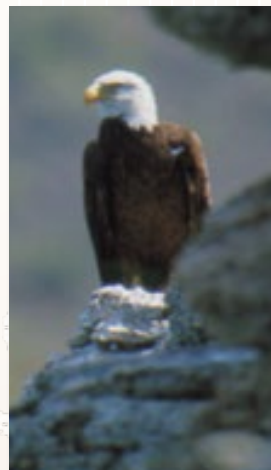
The canyon walls drop away on both sides as the train crosses a covered steel bridge as we emerge into the Perkinsville valley. On the left side of the train is a large cave that was excavated in the 1960s by geologists from the Arizona State Museum, revealing evidence that this cave was utilized by Native Americans as living quarters. There also are a number of pit-house sites near Perkinsville, but early excavation of these sites by grave robbers didn't leave much for preservation or historic value.

Wildlife Diversity

The Verde River is home to a diversity of wildlife. Mule deer, antelope and Javelina (collared peccary) are sometimes visible. Occasionally an elk, fox or coyote can be seen. Mountain lions, black bears, bobcats and ringtail cats also have been spotted, but rarely. The small population of elk that reside in the Canyon are not native to Arizona. That species was irradiated by hunters during the early part of the last century. Today, the elk seen in Arizona are relations that were transplanted from Wyoming.

Bald eagles, golden eagles, red-tail hawks, black hawks, ducks, wild turkeys, ravens and a variety of other birds are regularly visible from the train. Great Blue Heron, large wading birds standing three to four feet tall and bluish-gray in color, are often seen along the rails. Gliding along on a wingspan that can reach close to six feet, the Heron is one of the most graceful birds in the world.

The waters of the Verde are generally so clear that large fish can often be spotted. The River is not considered a good trout stream, as water temperatures are too warm most of the year. Carp, catfish, large-mouth and smallmouth bass, and bluegill thrive in the river, as do beaver and otter.



MILEPOST 18.5

In 1912, the Railroad put a station on the Perkins' ranch and called it Perkinsville. (See page 19, *Ancestry of the Verde Canyon.*)

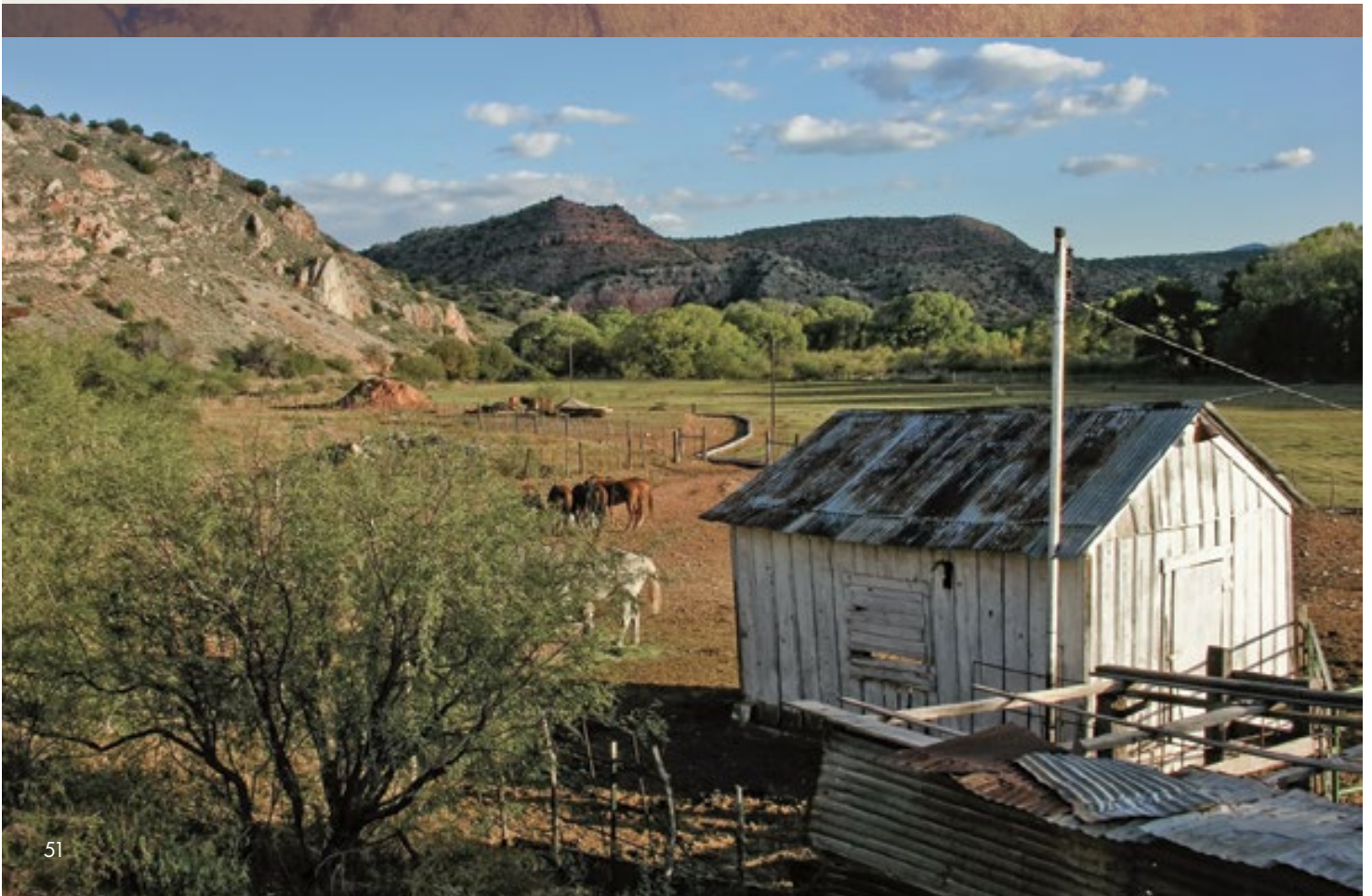
The structures remaining in "downtown" Perkinsville were all built by the railroad. The first building on the left was the section house (bunkhouse). Just beyond it is the base of the old water tower, used until the last steam engines came through this valley in 1952. Beyond the tower's base are remains of a house, which was originally occupied by the Santa Fe station master, but burned down during the last decade. The last building is the original depot that also served as a post office and schoolhouse.

On the right behind the old cattle pens, some whitish-colored tailings can be seen at the base of the hill. This was the site of a limestone quarry and kilns for converting the limestone into slaked lime. The lime was transported to the Clarkdale smelter where it was used as flux in the smelting process.

Vintage water tower, 1962



Ranch outbuild



What remains of the original depot, now a storage unit on the ranch



At its peak, Perkinsville had 10 to 12 families living in the immediate area. For a brief period, there was a small school, general store and post office. The smelter closed in the early 1950s, eliminating the need for slaked lime, and the railroad switched to diesel locomotives, which made the water stop unnecessary. Soon after, Perkinsville became a ghost town.

In the 1960s, a few scenes from the classic Western film *How the West Was Won* were shot here. George Peppard, Debbie Reynolds and Eli Wallach were featured next to the depot. Rumor has it that the water tower was blown up during filming, only to have the footage end up on the cutting room floor.

The railroad tracks go on another 18 miles beyond Perkinsville to Drake to meet the Santa Fe/Burlington Northern line. This part of the railroad is still used for hauling freight by the Clarkdale Arizona Central Railroad.

At Perkinsville, the engines on the excursion train will disconnect, run around the train on the track to the right, hook onto the other end of the train and take us back to Clarkdale. The return trip provides the same spectacular scenery and opportunity to spot sights missed on the first leg of the journey. No matter how many times these tracks are traveled, the chance to see exceptional and fascinating occurrences in nature never ends.

