

BY PETER CORBETT

Cave Creek's Untamed Legacy

From Gold Rush Glory to Western Weekend Getaway.

Miners searched for lucrative gold strikes in the Cave Creek mining district 140 years ago. Soldiers from nearby Fort McDowell fought off marauding Apaches to protect miners in those early days.

"Cave Creek started as a rough-and-tumble mining town back around 1880," said Preston Westmoreland, a local Realtor and broadcaster. He's sold a few former mining properties in Cave Creek over the past 40 years.

Ranchers followed the miners to Cave Creek, staking their land claims and stringing barbed wire to fence in their cattle.

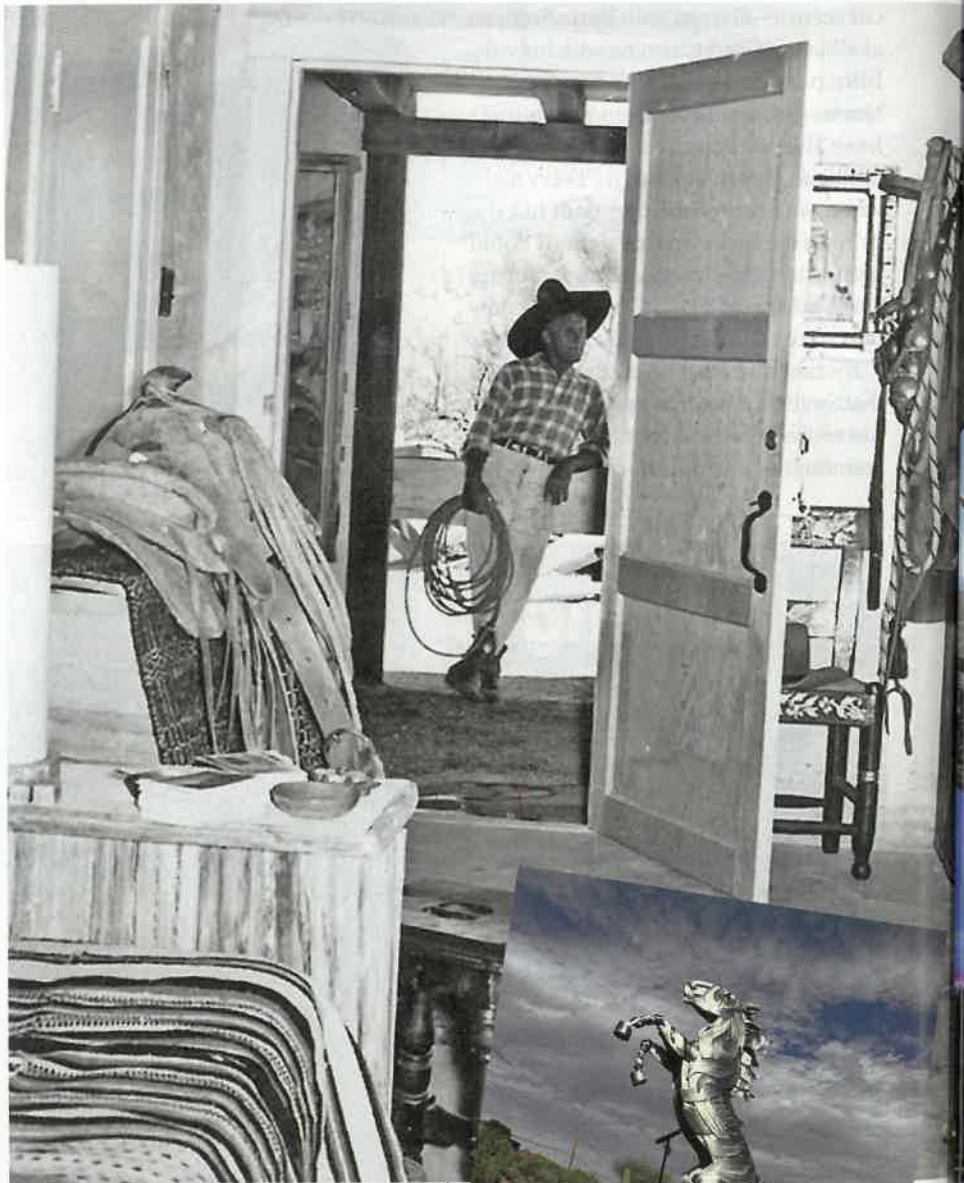
Cave Creek never became a boomtown like others in Arizona, but mining continued into the 1940s.

While Phoenix and the Salt River Valley to the south grew in the early decades of the 20th century, Cave Creek carved out a niche with a trio of dude ranches—Spur Cross, Rancho Mañana and Sierra Vista. Those dude ranches folded by the early 1960s, according to Evelyn Johnson of the Cave Creek Museum.

Spur Cross Ranch is now a conservation area with hiking and equestrian trails north of town. Rancho Mañana is a golf resort, with the Tonto Bar & Grill now in its 30th year.

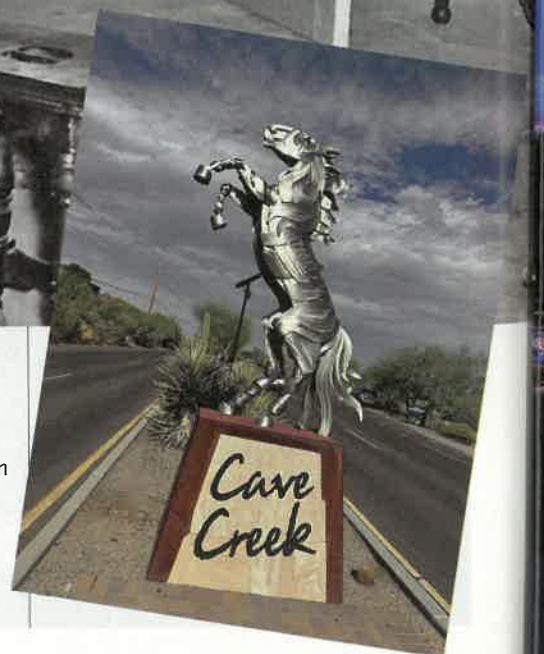
Modern Cave Creek, which shunned town government until 1986, has grown to a population of nearly 6,000 people. The town booms with visitors, especially on weekends as a playground for metro Phoenix bikers and city slickers in Wranglers, snap-button shirts and Tony Lama boots.

"On any night of the week you can hear live music in Cave Creek," Westmoreland said. "They've created an amazing destination. So many people in Phoenix love to go out to Cave Creek."

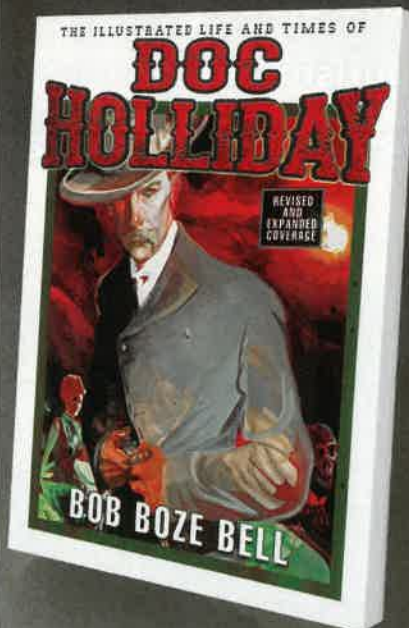


Lon Megargee poses in the doorway of his Cave Creek home, which, though privately owned, is still admired by local artists who describe it as magical. Notably, he posed a model in the front yard with Lone Mountain in the background for his famous painting, "Cowboy Dream," making this an historic spot to say the least.

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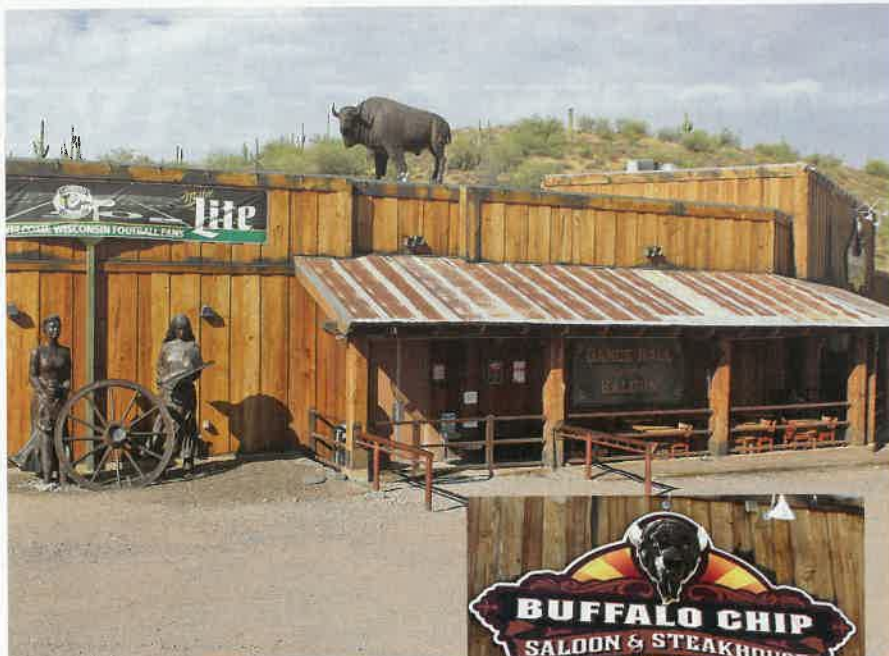
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By day, Cave Creek has its share of coffee shops, cafes, antique and touristy stores selling kitschy Western items in Frontier Village and along Cave Creek Road. Cave Creek Cowboy Co. is celebrating two decades in business selling Western wear, jewelry and leather goods.

After sundown, Cave Creek can get rowdy with saloons featuring country-rock music and dancing.

Harold's Cave Creek Corral is the oldest of the bunch. A guy named Johnny Walker started the Corral Bar in 1935 to serve construction workers for nearby Bartlett and Horseshoe dams. It was tiny place with picnic tables and mesquite trees for shade. The workers entertained themselves with a contest to see who could sit on a block of ice the longest.

Harold Gavagan bought the Corral Bar in 1950, renamed it and enlarged the place. A notable photo at Harold's shows comedic actor Dick Van Dyke playing a snare drum with a guitarist and washtub bass player.

Next door is the Buffalo Chip Saloon & Steakhouse, established in 1951. The bar was leveled in a Thanksgiving Day fire in 2015. It reopened less than a year later with a much larger footprint. The Chip features bull-riding for amateurs Wednesdays and Fridays in a small arena tucked into a hillside.

Bikers line up their Harleys and Indians at the Roadhouse across from Harold's and the Hideaway down the block.



The Buffalo Chip, known to locals as "The Chip" does a rip-roaring business in the entertainment corridor of Cave Creek.

With the original honkytonk, Harold's, next door, the Roadhouse across the street and the Hideaway down the street, Cave Creek has become a destination for bikers and cowboys for several decades now. That there haven't been more fights is a testament to the vibes and the entertainment.

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Janey's Coffeehouse & Bodega, farther down Cave Creek Road, is a quieter spot with live music on a patio flanked by tall saguaros.

Locals pay homage to town history at the Cave Creek Museum. It's open October 1 to May 31, closed Mondays, Tuesdays and holidays.

The museum features a relic of Cave Creek's mining era, a 10-stamp mill once used to crush ore at the Golden Reef Mine north of town. The restored mill is powered up for demonstrations on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month, October 26 through late May.

New exhibits include historic lunch boxes miners carried with them underground. Also, a collection of delicate bronze and pewter sculptures portray Native Americans.



Peter Corbett has been exploring the West for the past half century and spent 35 years as an Arizona journalist.

WHERE HISTORY MEETS THE HIGHWAY



FIRST STOP

Cave Creek Tourism Bureau, 6061 E. Cave Creek Road, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily, October to May and weekends June to September.

cavecreek.org

MINING HISTORY

Learn about the area's mining era at the Cave Creek Museum, 6140 Skyline Drive.

cavecreekmuseum.org

BULLS TOSS FOOLS

Wannabe bull riders can test their mettle for a few seconds in the Buffalo Chip's bull-riding arena on Wednesdays and Fridays. The saloon serves barbecue, beer, booze and church on Sunday.

buffalochipsaloon.com

HAROLD'S GOES WAY BACK

Cowboys, cowgirls and city slickers gather at Harold's Cave Creek Corral for dining, dancing and country-rock music.

haroldscorral.com

HERE'S JONNY'S

A popular spot, Local Jonny's serves coffee, breakfast, lunch and dinner. That includes burgers, tacos, wraps and salads plus a full bar with a choice of Arizona craft beers.

localjonny.com

JANEY'S COFFEEHOUSE & BODEGA

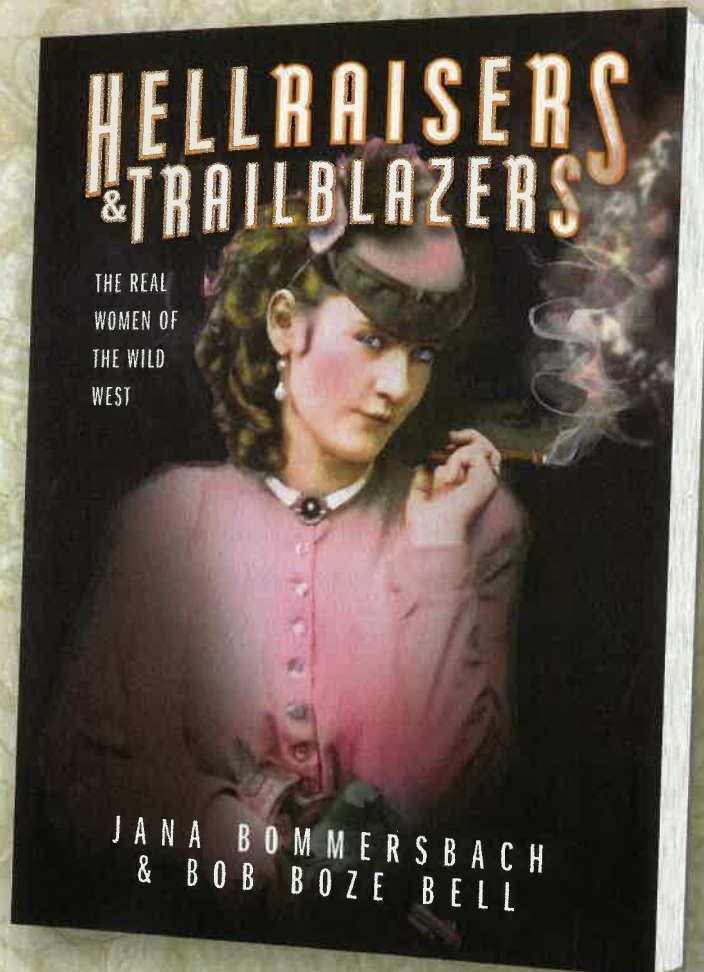
This little gem features a mix of musicians on its patio, including the Sonoran Dogs, a progressive bluegrass quartet, and acoustic guitar virtuoso Bill Dutcher.

cavecreekazmusic.com

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