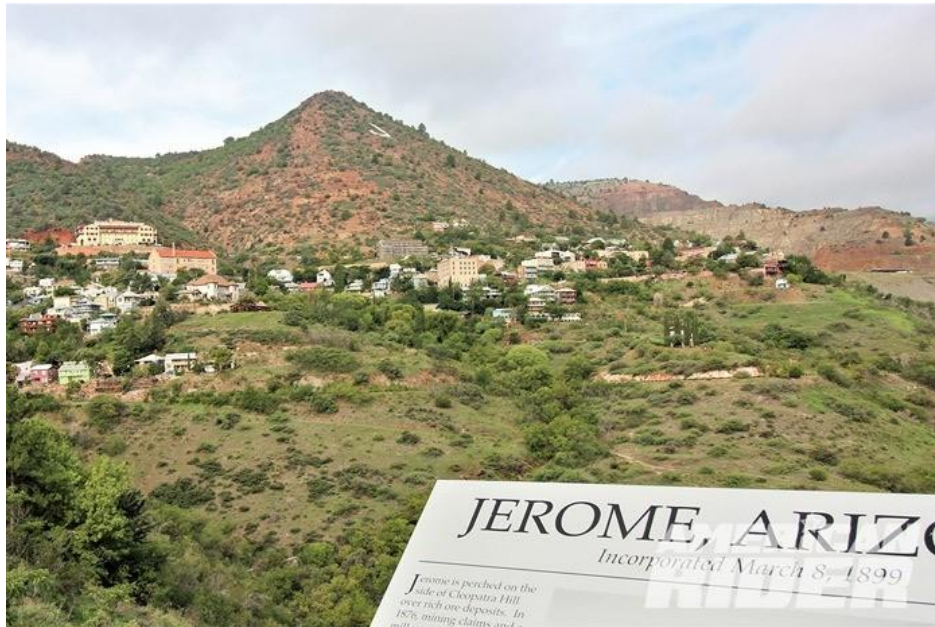


Skull Valley and Haunted Jerome Arizona

Story and Photos by Koz Mraz

Rolling hills and sweepers make Mingus Mountain a fantastic ride. Jerome, home to some of the richest copper mines ever found, was once known as “The Wickedest Town in the West.” Built on a 30-degree incline, Jerome is said to be America’s most vertical city and is slowly sliding down the mountain. Many of the buildings are abandoned, and the old jailhouse and graveyard are closed to the public.



Jerome is now known for its shops, restaurants, and wineries, as well as chilling stories from the town’s infamous [Jerome Grand Hotel](#). Reportedly, a patron rolled his wheelchair off the balcony to his death there, while another later took his life inside Room 32. Hotel guests claim doors mysteriously open and close and the water faucets and lights randomly turn off and on.

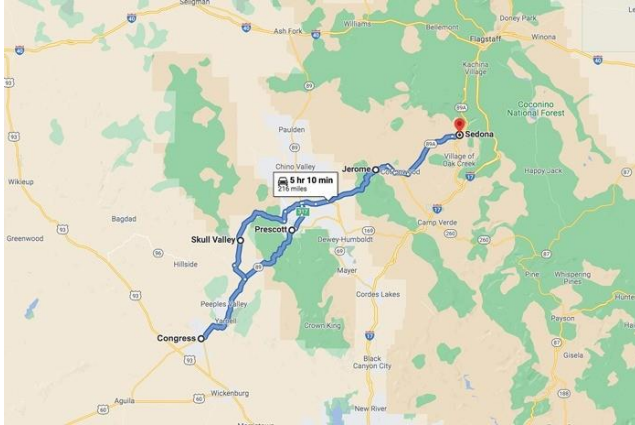


After leaving Jerome, the only scenic view pull-off along this twisted tale soon appears. The hundreds of twists and turns, many with 20-mph speed limits, offer motorcyclists a thrill ride. SR 89A becomes Pioneer Parkway that ends at Iron Springs Road (County Rd. 10). After that, a right turn will take you to Skull Valley.



Gravity has taken its toll on Jerome, Arizona, America's most vertical city.

Skull Valley was named by white settlers who found the sun-bleached remains of a Native American battle that took place in the area. Willie G.'s Punisher skull would be right at home here, but there's not a lot to see. There are no restaurants or even gas at the garage, but it's a great place for a selfie. Interestingly, Arizona Paranormal Research has recorded balls of light shooting from Skull Valley Cemetery.



Just a few miles down the road is the [Kirkland Bar and Steakhouse](#). First built in the late 1800s, this structure was, at separate times, a Pony Express depot, a Wells Fargo coach station, a railroad stop, and a brothel. To add to the story, Kirkland is known to have underground tunnels that once hid courtesans whenever the sheriff raided the place. People who've taken photos here have discovered phantom figures of a woman in the background, supposedly the ghost of the brothel's madam.



The Skull Valley General Store ain't no Walmart.

From Kirkland, we ride on Kirkland Road to State Route 89 and toward Yarnell. This path continues to the Granite Mountain Hotshots Memorial State Park, a memorial to the 19 members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots who died fighting the Yarnell Hill fire in 2013, the deadliest U.S. wildfire in 80 years. It's surmised the firefighters descended from a burned-black safety zone into the canyon, losing their view of the fire that eventually overran them and killed all but one crew member, who was in another location acting as a lookout.



No gas to be had at the Skull Valley gas station.

For panoramic views of the area, hike up the Hotshots Trail from the parking lot trailhead to the expansive overlook. Or you can continue your hike down the Memorial Trail where you can pay your respects at the site where the Hotshots were recovered. The hike is approximately 3.5 miles from the trailhead to the fatality site.



Granite Mountain Hotshots Memorial State Park.

At this junction, 89 becomes a one-way mountain road with big sweepers and perfectly banked curves. The view of the valley below is staggering, but pay attention and beware of “Elephant Curve.” Legend has it that one of the trucks in a circus caravan lost its brakes and crashed into the rock here in the 1930s, killing their prized elephant. The legend doesn’t appear to be true, but Elephant Curve is listed on the USGS Topographic map, and an elephant is regularly painted on a nearby rock to mark the spot.



Route 89 loops near Granite Mountain Hotshots Memorial State Park.

Then, at the bottom is a U-turn that reveals another one-way road, taking riders back up the mountaintop, snaking along like it’s a freakin’ racetrack. Riders often will loop the road over and over. What a hoot! Be warned, Arizona State Troopers are well aware of our antics and will happily pass out speeding tickets.

Along the return ride on 89, the road sweeps through a surreal spectacle of Salvador Dali-like rock formations before ascending to scenic views of lush, green rolling hills. Riding over the Bradshaw Mountains, you’ll find another thrilling rollercoaster of endless twisties. Riders relish this raucous romp as it heads into Prescott (pronounced Preskitt).



Courthouse Plaza in downtown Prescott.

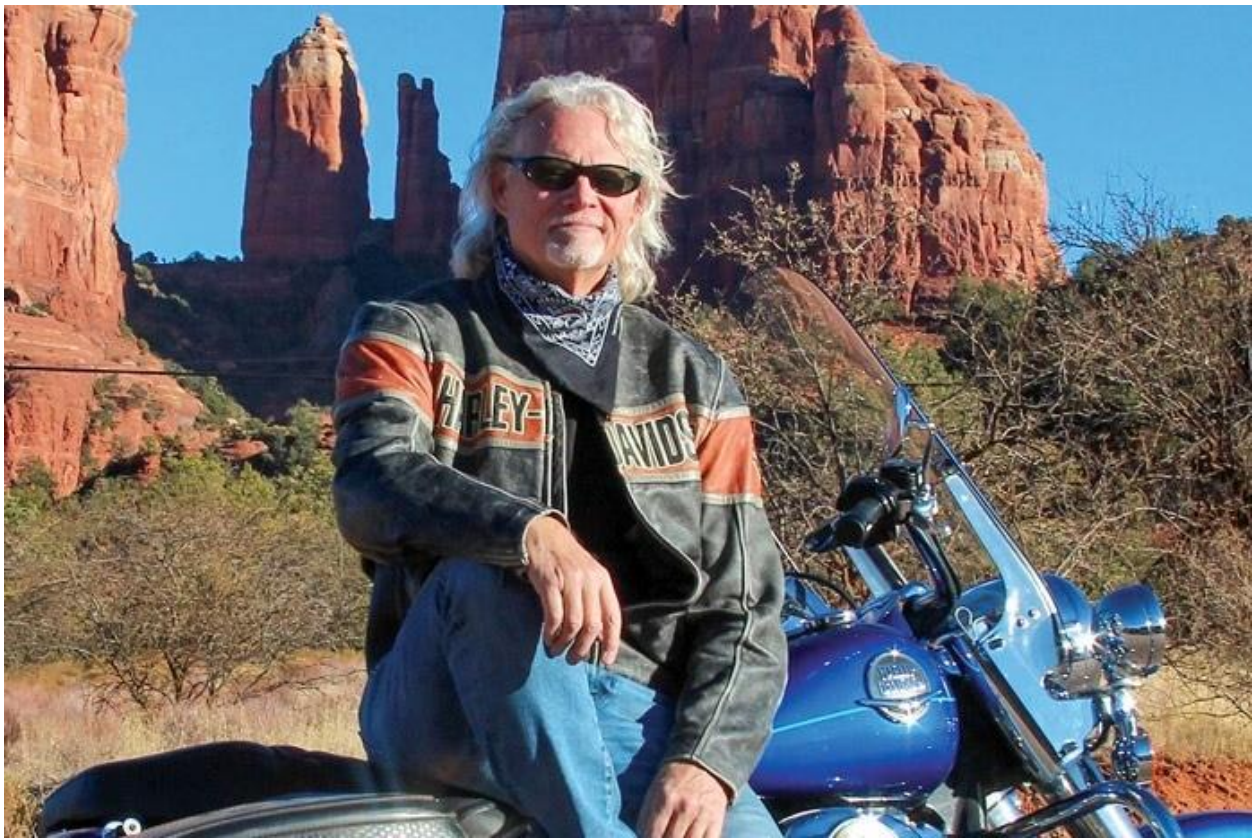
The [Palace Saloon](#) along Whiskey Row is known as one of the Top 10 historic bars in America and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. What's known as "the great fire" of July 1900 destroyed most of the street, including the original Palace. Patrons drinking at the saloon supposedly picked up the huge oak bar and carried it across the street to the Courthouse Plaza to continue drinking (ha!), and it's the centerpiece of the Palace Saloon today.



The historic Palace Saloon on Prescott's Whiskey Row is a must-see.

The Palace is steeped in memory with the likes of Wyatt Earp, Virgil Earp, and Doc Holliday. It features a pressed-tin ceiling (allegedly intended to stop bullets from the floor below) and a vast collection of historical memorabilia. It's worth taking a tour to find out more about Whiskey Row and its ghostly visitors.

If an overnight stay in Prescott is on the agenda, the [Hassayampa Inn](#) is your place. It birthed its most famous legend in 1927, the year it opened. A young bride named Faith Summers checked into a balcony suite with her older husband and, according to legend, Faith's husband went out to buy cigarettes and never returned. Faith waited for three days and then took her life in despair. Since then, countless hotel guests and employees have reported encounters with a young woman throughout the hotel, crying at the end of a bed.



This story's author, Koz Mraz, is neither a ghost nor wicked.

Winding back through the Black Hills range to Jerome is another thrill ride with spectacular vistas. The loop outlined here is only 160 miles, yet it can take four hours or more of travel because of the technical terrain. And that's not including time to stop and take in all the history of the area.

The Skull Valley loop will leave haunting memories, forever begging your hasty return to ride the Wild West's wickedest roads. Koz Mraz