

LOCOMOTIVE LORE

TRAVEL BACK IN TIME ON THE
VERDE CANYON RAILROAD

ARTICLE TERESA K. TRAVERSE
PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED

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Traveling by train is typically viewed as a mode of transportation from a bygone era, but historians must have forgotten to tell that to the operators of the Verde Canyon Railroad.

The historical train, which departs from Clarkdale, Arizona (just 30 minutes from Sedona), traverses through 20 miles of breathtaking Arizona landscape. The most striking vintage feature of the train is its FP7 locomotives—two of just ten left in North America—that power the train. Each car is named after a different place, and features air conditioning, large windows and a snack bar. Guests who want to immerse themselves in the surrounding natural splendor can take in the fresh air on outdoor cars, complete with shaded canopies and benches. A tour guide will discuss all the sights to behold and alert riders of photo opportunities. Maybe you'll see an eagle or two, and Black Bears and beavers have been known to occasionally make an appearance. The guides have also named certain dramatic rock formations, like the Abraham Lincoln, top hat included, and Nixon's outline. Even if you don't spot exactly what the guides point out, you'll still enjoy all of the dramatic views.

As the train speeds by meandering streams, mountains studded with lush green trees and dusty dirt trails with ATVs and Jeeps climbing up, you will gain a true appreciation for the beauty and diversity of the Arizona landscape. At one point, the entire train is submerged in darkness as it heads under a tunnel carved into the mountains. At another, you'll pass under a dramatic train trestle.

The journey's last, and only, stop before heading back to Clarkdale is Perkinsville—a true ghost town. There, behold a bucolic scene

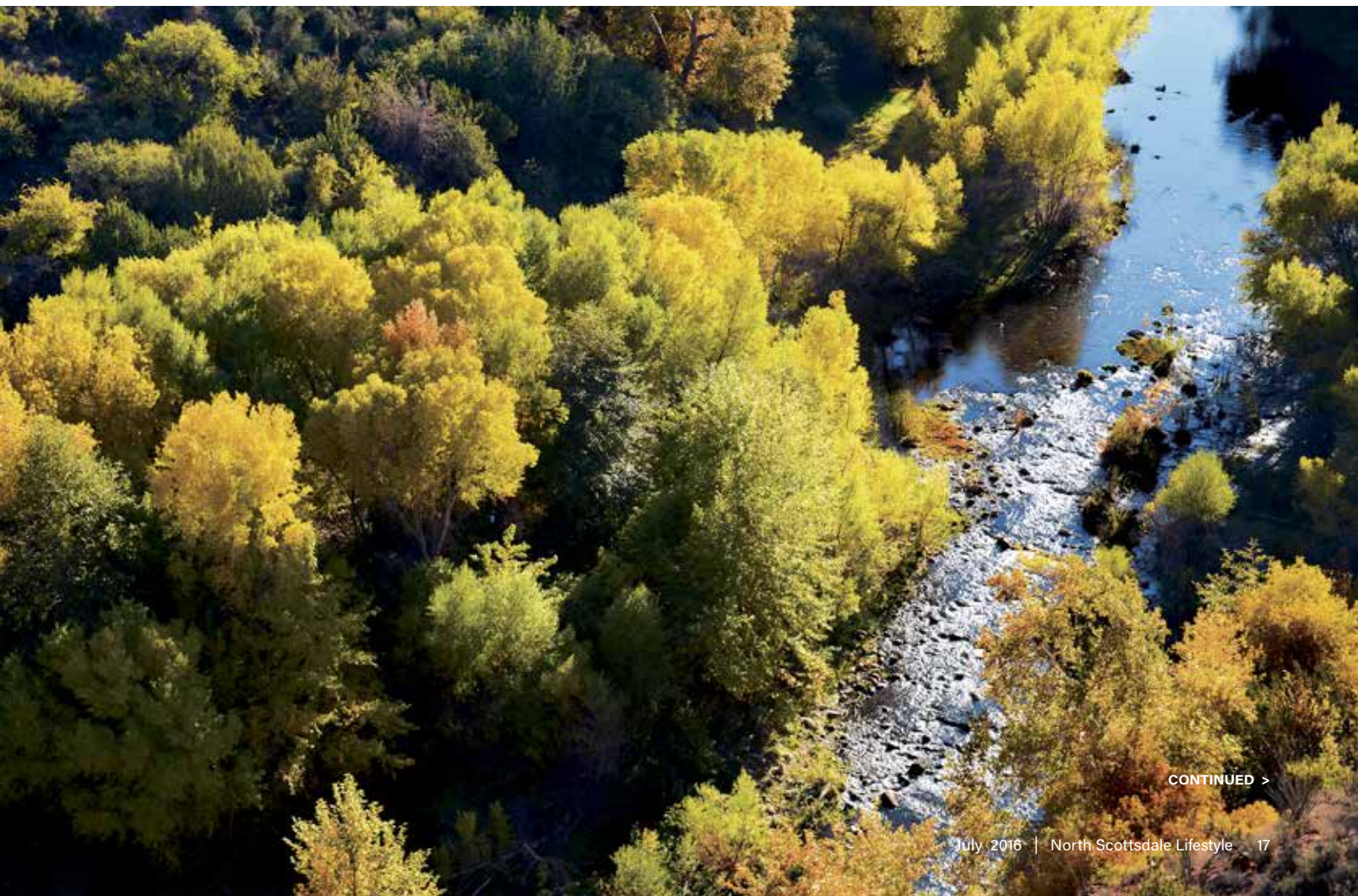
complete with cows munching on green grass, rolling hills in the background, a small wooden house and a hallowed out water tower. It's also where the acclaimed 1962 movie *How the West Was Won* was filmed. Although at one time as many as 12 families lived here, the town served primarily as a water depot for the train until it was abandoned after the Jerome ore mines closed in the 1950s.

However, the journey's not only about taking in the dramatic vistas and getting an informal, albeit interesting, history lesson. The train ride is truly a fun experience for all those onboard. Guests in first-class are treated to Champagne and chips upon sitting down and wine flows freely throughout the day, the bartender also makes a mean Bloody Mary. Seats are plush with thick floral-printed cushions that jive well with the overall vintage feel of the historic train, which has been the site of numerous weddings, vow renewals, birthdays and reunions.

Before or after the train departs, it's well worth checking out the on-site John Bell Museum to see relics of the past. You'll spot luggage, tools and lights from the turn of the century while reading more about the train's unique history, which dates back to 1911 when it was used to transport ore miners traveling to nearby Jerome, Arizona. Nearly 80 years later, in 1990, the train took its very first journey as a tourist transport, and business has been booming ever since.

Although the hey day of train travel may be long gone, Verde Canyon Railroad is a reminder that it's still alive, and just a train ticket away.

For more information, visit their website at VerdeCanyonRR.com.



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