

# Get Your Kicks on Route 666!





# THE DEVIL'S HIGHWAY

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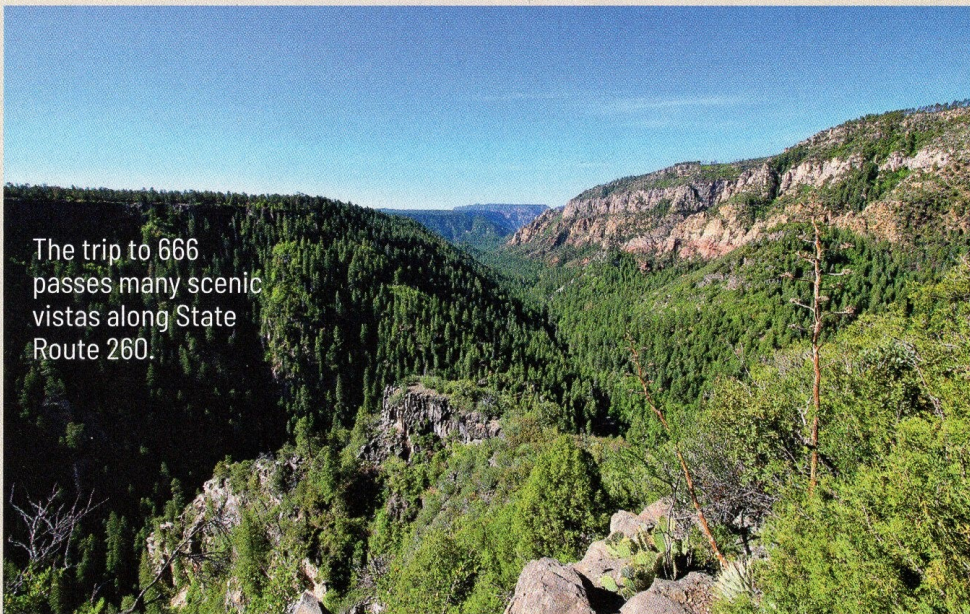
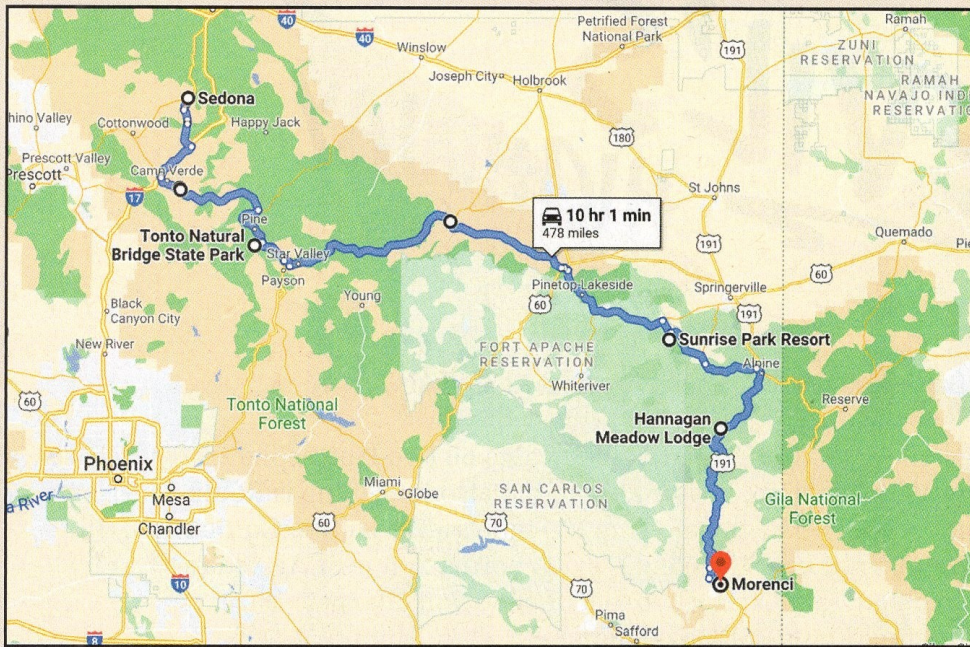
**A**rizona is home to the longest continuous stretch of Route 66 two-lane asphalt, the most storied highway in America. Lesser known but also intriguing is Route 666, appropriately dubbed Devil's Highway. This 120-mile section of the Coronado National Scenic Byway Trail near the New Mexico border is one of Arizona's wildest rides, with more than 650 corners and 5,000 feet of elevation change.

Interestingly, you might not find Route 666 on contemporary maps, as it was renamed U.S. Route 191 in 2003 because the Department of Transportation was regularly replacing stolen "666" highway signs. Apparently, the devil made 'em do it!



Pondering life after  
dancing with the devil.





The trip to 666 passes many scenic vistas along State Route 260.

## Red Rocks Launch

I began my two-day journey from Sedona, riding south on Interstate 17 before heading east on State Route 260, which is a thrilling 217 miles of ascending high-speed sweepers that rise over 4,000 feet.



Only seven miles east of I-17 is the trailhead to the Camp Verde Cliff Dwellings, a former Sinaguan settlement believed to stretch back nearly 1,000 years. The site includes more than 80 cliff dwellings with more than 300 rooms inside, all hand-carved into the sandstone ridge.

It's quite a hike to get to, and that didn't jibe with my plans to dance with 666, so I continued heading east on Route 260 and enjoyed the many passing lanes that helped my trusty steed stay ahead of the pack. With posted speed limits of 55 mph, a little faster felt just right. Flying through crisp air scented by pines, firs, and spruce forests, the mountain views and quaint towns are exhilarating. There's a dramatic change in altitude and temperature as you gain elevation.

After Route 260 heads southward, you'll find the turnoff to Tonto Natural Bridge State Park, which contains the largest natural travertine bridge in the world. Tonto Bridge stands 183 feet high and measures 150 feet at its widest point. It's a steep climb and about an hour's walk, but it's worth a visit if you're not racing toward Route 666 like I was.

Further along, I lunched in Heber-Overgaard at the Wild Woman Saloon and Grill. They have great menu options and some of the best french fries I have ever eaten. The Wild Woman? Never found her.

Further east, I split from the 260 to take Route 273 to the Sunrise Ski Area and continued nearly all the way to the New Mexico border before heading south on Route 191, Devil's Highway. This diagonal shortcut winds gracefully through beautiful tree-lined rolling hills and open meadows reminiscent of Vermont or Italy, and drops into Hannagan Meadow.

The Wild Woman Saloon and Grill serves up tasty grub. Its menu of wild women was lacking, at least during my visit.





lodge is the Blue Range Primitive Area, which offers some of the most incredible scenery in the state. Among the highlights are three beautiful rivers: the Black, the Blue, and the San Francisco. I could spend a week here.

## Riding Devil's Highway - Route 666

Only seven miles south of Hannagan Meadow is the Blue Vista rest stop at the edge of the Mogollon Rim, a 9,184-foot vista of mountains covered in fir, pine, and aspens as far as the eye can see. Take advantage of the spectacular views while stopped because the hundreds of twists, turns, and 1,000-foot drop-offs on your ride down will demand all your attention.

The Coronado National Scenic Byway Trail snakes between the twin cities of Eagar and Springerville in the north to the twin



The Tonto bridge (top) is the largest natural travertine bridge in the world. The Hannagan Meadow Lodge is a rustic hub for Route 666. Feeding time for Minnie and Mouse, the Clydesdales at the lodge.



## Devil Dreams

Hannagan Meadow Lodge is a truly amazing place and became my home for the night. It's been open to the public since the scenic Coronado Trail was dedicated in 1926. Rooms cost about \$80, but you should make your reservations early because it's a favorite getaway from Arizona's scorching summer heat.

The lodge stands alone in the middle of the Apache National Forest, located at about 9,200 feet in the White Mountains. It's completely isolated, and there's no cellphone service, but they do have wi-fi in the main lodge. Otherwise, there are no phones or TVs in the rooms or cabins. Very refreshing.

The lodge offers hearty food lovingly cooked up by grandma and her granddaughter. Wolves howled at night, and Minnie and Mouse, their two massive Clydesdales, greeted me in the morning. Surrounding the





cities of Clifton and Morenci in the south. This spectacular roller-coaster ride follows the trail used in 1540 by Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado as he searched for the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. The Queen of Spain sent 1,500 soldiers to plunder this mythical city of gold. They never found it.

As Route 191 (666) works its way south, it tests your nerves with some hair-raising curves and steep drop-offs with no guardrails. Some corners are so tight that your speeds may dip to only 10 mph. Oh, and be careful of those damn tar snakes that make your bike squirm when the asphalt becomes hot. The narrow road descends into the town of Morenci, where you'll ride through one of the largest open-pit mines in the world, a daunting sight.

You may decide to dare the Devil once again and turn around to re-ride Route 666 northbound, as I did. I ended up back at Hannagan Meadow Lodge for dinner and proudly wore my Hannagan's Highway 666 T-shirt while pondering my adventure.



Depending how you look at it, the Devil's Highway can be quite heavenly.

I have to give props to Francisco Vasquez de Coronado for blazing the first trail, and to the D.O.T. for originally designating it as Route 666, elevating this wild ride to mythic proportions.

I came to ride the Devil's Highway, looking for fun and adventure, and I found it. ⚡

