

the Valley View

Cascabel ...hard to find....harder to leave.



Issue #22

An Occasional Cascabel, Arizona Newsletter

October 2026

In this issue

We preserve our earlier SJ/Hermitage history that appeared in the Tucson Daily Star on May 30, 2004.

Author Tom Beal and photographer Ron Medvescek. The focus is on community. Super thanks to Kai for his significant effort scanning the old, wrinkled, yellowed newspaper pages.

Sunday Accent

ARIZONA DAILY STAR • SERVING TUCSON SINCE 1877

Sunday
May 30, 2004



The first Hermitage



Before MTE brought phone service



David Omick's unique approach



Photos by Ron Medvescek / Arizona Daily Star

Pearl Mast, who's gotten a lot closer to a mountain lion than she ever wanted to, keeps a watchful eye on Lulu and Etta when she walks them in Hot Springs Canyon.

NATURE RULES

Treading softly and living lightly on the land
in a desert canyon not far from Tucson

Tom Beal
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

KEEP goats in Hot Springs Canyon, and sooner or later, you're going to meet a mountain lion.

Pearl Mast thought having her goats in a pen near the encampment she shares with David Omick would keep lions at bay until one night's peace was shattered by bleating and howling. As she reached the pen, a lion sprang from it and bounded off.

"I'd been wishing I could see a mountain lion, but not under those conditions," she said.

On another night, Omick was "goatwalking" about three miles up the canyon when he decided to bed down. During the night, he heard similar sounds from the two goats tethered outside his backpacker's tent.

One goat was badly mauled before Omick chased the lion off. He brought them closer and kept a lantern burning the rest of the night. The mauled goat survived.

They now share two goats, Lulu and Etta, with a neighbor, keeping them in a "Jurassic Goat Pen," a lion-proof wire enclosure, 16 feet high.

It's the only way to do it in a canyon where the killing of predators, even those that attack livestock, is prohibited by a covenant signed by more than 60 members of the Saguaro Juniper Corporation. The organization has purchased the land or bought the grazing rights on 11 square miles along Hot Springs Canyon.

The purpose, stated in the covenant, is stewardship of these still-wild lands astride the San Pedro River, just over the Rincon Mountains east of Tucson.

"In acquiring private governance of land, we agree to cherish its earth, waters, plants, and

animals in a way that promotes the health, stability, and diversity of the whole community," the covenant's preamble states.

The San Pedro, along with Hot Springs Canyon and the other streams that feed it, has been called the most precious riparian habitat in the Sonoran Desert by the Nature Conservancy.

Undammed for its 140-mile length from Mexico to its confluence with the Gila River at Winkelman, the San Pedro supports a cottonwood-and-willow forest along its banks, flanked in places by lush mesquite bosques.

The Nature Conservancy reports 345 species of birds here, including 13 species of raptors, and the river supports more than 80 species of mammals, 40 species of reptiles and amphibians, 100 species of butterflies and 20 species of fish. The sightings of lions, the occasional bear and the bands of coat-mound deer scribed by visitors to Hot Springs Canyon are helpful signs that the canyon is fulfilling its important role as a wildlife corridor between the San Pedro and the Gilauro and Winchester mountains.

For three decades, federal agencies and conservation groups have been buying up land and water rights in an effort to keep the San Pedro watershed one of our last, best places.

The efforts of Saguaro Juniper are the most novel, and their grazing management "provides a little bit of a model for an organization that's purely going to graze with ecological objectives in mind," said Dave Harris, former program manager for the Nature Conservancy's lower San Pedro holdings.

"If you look at their landscape now, even in the height of one of the worst droughts in 50 years, their land looks good," Harris said.

SEE CASCABEL / E6



Pearl Mast and David Omick enjoy living simply. Here, Mast stands outside their 8-by-16-foot movable home that Omick built. "My sisters, who have closets bigger than this, call it my hovel," Omick said.

On StarNet: Survey the pastoral surroundings as you hike deeper into Hot Springs Canyon. azstarnet.com/slideshow



CASCABEL

Those who share the land envision peaceable canyon

Continued from Page E1

Pearl Mast and David Omick

Mast, 47, and Omick, 48, live here in a movable home Omick built, 8 feet wide and 16 feet long. "My sisters, who have closets bigger than this, call it my hovel," he said.

It is a simple but elegantly built "hovel." There is plenty of shaded outdoor space and there is water that runs from a windmill well. There is a solar shower and there is a wood stove. There is a battery-powered radio for listening to the news on the BBC and PBS. There is a laptop that Omick powers with a car battery. When it needs recharging, he swaps it with the one in his truck.

By covenant, no electricity is allowed in Hot Springs Canyon. It's available at the farm in Oregon where the couple will go soon for the two hottest months of the year, but they haven't decided whether to hook up yet.

"That's a slippery slope," Omick said. "Next thing you know, we'd be buying a television."

Mast and Omick are conspicuous nonconsumers. They met while Mast was a Mennonite volunteer at a birth center in Texas and Omick was at a colonia in South Texas, where he and a Catholic nun had started a nonprofit organization to help migrant workers build alternative housing, power and sanitation facilities.

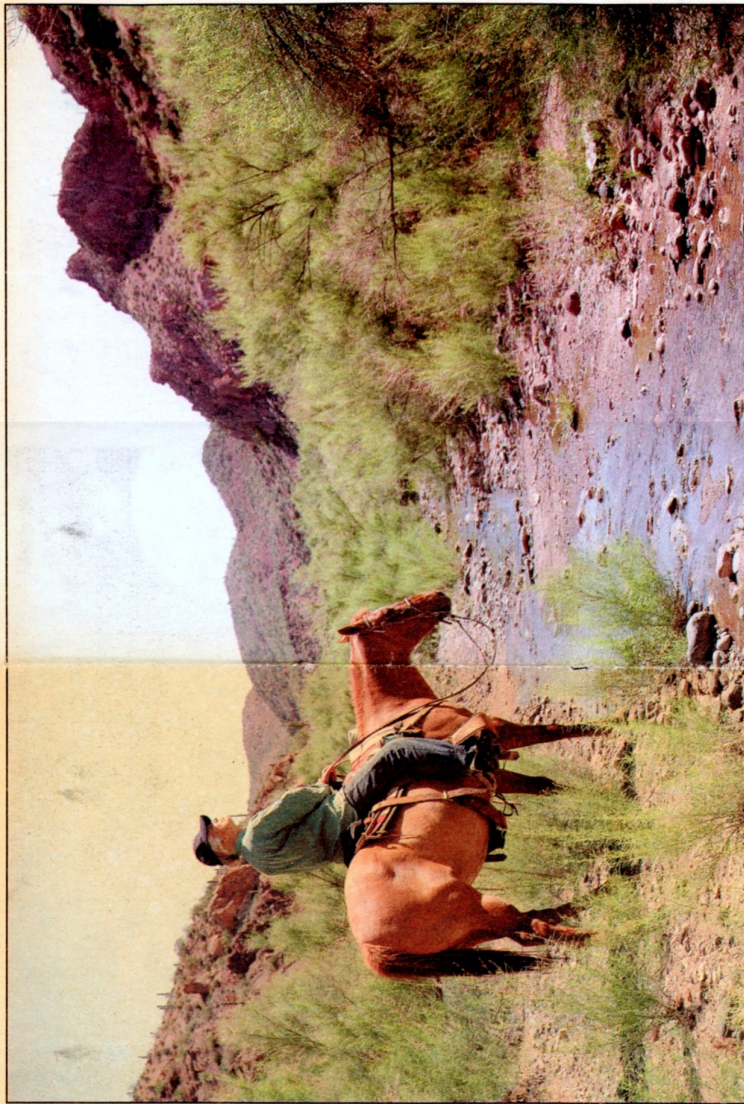
They choose this kind of life because they enjoy it, Omick said.

"I hesitate to talk about it in terms of what's our fair share of the Earth's resources because, for me, it's no sacrifice," he said.

"There is some sense that it's a more connected way of living," said Mast. "It brings me more into the realm of the rest of the environment, of nature."

They have figured out that they can live adequately on 50 paid days of labor each year. In Oregon, they live on a farm that breeds waterfowl. There, Omick designs and builds whatever needs building. Mast, a nurse, works vacation shifts at a nearby nursing home. For the rest of the year, they live at Hot Springs, growing and canning food from their garden, drinking goat's milk, eating a daily breakfast of mesquite pancakes.

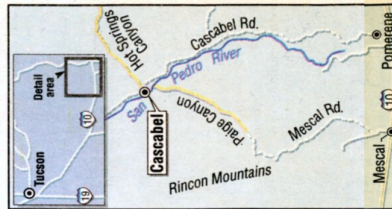
made partly with flour milled at Saguaro Juniper's annual mesquite-milling festival.



Photos by Ron Miesewick / Arizona Daily Star
Widget. She calls the canyon "one little chunk of Creation that gets to keep on doing what it's doing."



Pat Corbett, 64, at home at El Poirero, says things were quieter and people more sociable before the phones came seven years ago.



The Saguaro Juniper Covenant

PREAMBLE:

In acquiring private

Jim and Pat Corbett
"On the prairie, when the

of high growing and climbing food from their garden, drinking goat's milk, eating a daily breakfast of mesquite pancakes, stayed for seven years.

Jim and Pat Corbett

"On the prairie, when the wind whips a drizzle and snow sifts in rivulets through the sagebrush, I've hugged the sticky, pink, death-chilled body of a newborn lamb under my coat, and its heart fluttered in reply. And on a desert mountain, amidst the hush of soaring granite, I've opened a forgotten spring. The few who remembered thought it had long ago gone dry, but I found the hidden place and dug down until a stream ran clear and cold in the

summer sun. "So what are epiphanies to me? Still in my twenties, I could already write as good a remembrance as any I could imagine for myself at ninety. He kept a lamb or two from freezing, he found and opened a forgotten spring."

Nobody could write a better epitaph for Jim Corbett, who died at his home here on Aug. 2, 2001, than this one he wrote himself in "Goatwalking: A Guide to Wildland Living: A Quest for the Peaceable Kingdom."

But people today live Corbett's epitaph, in the homes of now-legal immigrants across America and along this dusty stretch of road that parallels the green canopy of the San Pedro River.

"Most of us," said his widow, Pat Corbett, "might look at something and say 'My, that's a terrible thing to happen,' but Jim would say, 'Let's go do something about it.'"

Corbett and his friends were well on their way to creating a land-centered covenant community when, in 1981, he stumbled across a more compelling need—Central Americans who were be-

ing rounded up and returned to El Salvador and other war-torn places despite their very real fear of persecution and death.

Corbett, working at first through the Pima Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), enlisted a growing network of churches into a nationwide Sanctuary movement that eventually led to the prosecution of Corbett and 10 others on federal charges. "For six years," said friend Nancy Ferguson, "it was Sanctuary, Sanctuary, Sanctuary."

Afterward, the Corbetts and their friends turned their attention back to the quest for that peaceable kingdom.

Pat Corbett, who lives here now with one dog, four cats, two horses, a retired mule and a few cows, remains the heart of Saguaro Juniper.

Her place is along the San Pedro in a mesquite grove where she and friends have added a stuccoed straw-bale living room to an old trailer.

This is El Portero, where her husband, the Harvard-schooled philosopher, rancher, goatwalker, librarian and Sanctuary co-founder, spent his last days. The obituary on the Saguaro Juniper Web site relates that "on the day before he died, Jim told a friend, 'I'm going on a journey but I don't know where. His last words to Pat were 'I love you,' and then, 'We should go move cows tomorrow.'"

Pat, 64, still rides her horses and helps move cows. She's also a firefighter in Cascabel's volunteer department. She's 20 miles down a dirt road but still needs to get away from the madness now and then on her horse. Things were quieter and people were more sociable seven years ago before the telephones came, she said.

Once a month, she hosts the rotating weekly worship group of six to 10 Quakers who have settled or often visit nearby.

A horsewoman from birth and a rancher for much of her life, she also embraces the greater rural community and likes the fact that you can't pass someone on the road without

Continued on next page

The Saguaro Juniper Covenant

PREAMBLE:

In acquiring private governance of land, we agree to cherish its earth, waters, plants, and animals in a way that promotes the health, stability, and diversity of the whole community. This entails attentive stillness to meet and know the land as an active presence. It entails study, observation, shared reflection, and cumulative corporate experience to increase and bequeath our understanding of ecosystem health, stability, and diversity. It entails symbiotic naturalization into the land community—a communion of actual nurture and shelter. As elaborated by these entailments, fully accountable governance—stewardship—is the distinctively human way of bonding into one society with all who share in the land's life, which is the foundation for instituting a biocentric ethic among humankind.

PRINCIPLES:

1. The land has a right to be free of human activity that accelerates erosion.
2. Native plants and animals on the land have a right to life with a minimum of human disturbance.
3. The land has the right to evolve its own character from its own elements without scarring from construction or the importation of foreign objects dominating the scene.
4. The land has a pre-eminent right to the preservation of its unique and/or rare constituents and features.
5. The land, its waters, rock, and minerals, its plants and animals, and their fruits and harvest have a right never to be rented, sold, extracted, or exported as mere commodities.

For more info

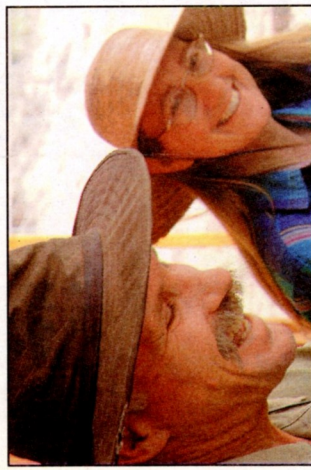
- To learn more about Hot Springs Canyon and the members of the Saguaro Juniper Corporation, visit www.saguaro-juniper.com
- Information about the Cascabel Heritage Association is at www.cascabelheritage.org



Pat Corbett, 64, at home at El Portero, says things were quieter and people more sociable before the phones came seven years ago.

"Most of us might look at something and say 'My, that's a terrible thing to happen,' but Jim (Corbett) would say, 'Let's go do something about it.'"

PAT CORBETT



David Omick and Pearl Mast spend time on their porch. Though their home is small, their yard goes on forever.



The porch is where the couple washes dishes and clothes with the gravity-fed shower Omick devised.



The clothesline holds a sign announcing "poker and Scrabble night" at the community center. It's an efficient way of spreading the word in Cascabel, where 150 people live along 15 miles of dirt road.

Continued from previous page

stopping the truck and chatting. Asked why the group has invested so much time, money and energy in Hot Springs Canyon, she replied: "It's gorgeous, just one little chunk of Creation that gets to keep on doing what it's doing. Why wouldn't you do that?"

Tom Orum and Nancy Ferguson

Tom Orum and Nancy Ferguson, two of the seven owners of El Potrero in Cascabel, sometimes say there in what Tom calls his "plywood tent" — a sleeping shack fitted with an evaporative cooler.

Most times they live just outside Tucson, in a trailer on a piece of land across a farm field from Mission San Xavier del Bac. There, Orum, a plant pathologist, and Ferguson, a biologist, both retired from the University of Arizona, share their land with "friends with a small f," some of whom are also "Briarcliff" in the Chukar congo

vantes' fictional knight.

The skills Corbett learned early as a rancher and cowherd were honed while goatwalking. It made him a wonderful immigrant smuggler during Sanctuary times and an accomplished two-footed cowherd during his 14 years on Saguaro Juniper land.

Dave Harris of the Nature Conservancy said he would of-ten encounter Corbett on the road, walking from El Potrero to Hot Springs Canyon, paying a daily visit to the cows that grazed its 11 square miles.

"You'd see this old, scrawny guy out there, and he's got his gnarled-up arthritic feet stuck into sandals with nylon webbing. He's already walked four or five miles, he liked to see his cows every day, heading off there with no water, a pair of jeans, crummy sandals and an old hat. Anybody else would just die in that situation."

Debbie Hawkins

Debbie Hawkins lives across the river from the others, on a



Residents of Cascabel gather regularly at the community center, which they built in 1988. Annie Wilkinson, Karen McKelvey, Pearl Mast, Lara McClure and Etha Otter play Scrabble to raise money for the all-volunteer Cascabel Fire Department.

drainages to catch water, build soil and promote plant growth.

The Covenant Community

Involving people in ownership and stewardship of protected land is the real goal, just said Garry Nabhian, the ethnobotanist and author who co-founded Native

Seeds/SEARCH in Tucson. Nabhian is now director of the Center for Sustainable Environments at Northern Arizona University.

"It's not just an abstraction," said Nabhian. "They have found a way to bring people into participation into those practices that has had a ripple effect

throughout the Southwest, if not the world.

"It's sort of a nursery ground of new ideas that exemplifies Jim's very pragmatic, collaborative, Quaker way of doing things."

It's not always easy. The group makes decisions by consensus, overcoming the last objection before moving on. Corbett notes in his book that the group reached easy agreement on things like banning roads,

Debbie Hawkins

Debbie Hawkins lives across the river from the others, on a small parcel of land she calls "Friends" in the Quaker secessionist community of Saguario Juniper.

A straw-bale building on this land is the Tucson home for Saguario Juniper visitors from Casacabel Juniper and elsewhere and world headquarters of the "Goat and Garden Group."

This group was first formed to help Jim Corbett, who had been with their goat-milking chores around Mexico with the goatherds, discovering the practice and philosophy of "errantry" that he would later describe in his book.

Jim Corbett, a former priest, became a goatherd with the desert goats of Central America, and was uprooted by wars in the United States aided and then refused political asylum.

The Sanctuary movement began. Jim Corbett, a former priest, became a goatherd with the desert goats of Central America, and was uprooted by wars in the United States aided and then refused political asylum.

After the 1986 Sanctuary trial, at which Jim Corbett and his wife were acquitted and eight Sanctuary members convicted on federal alien-smuggling charges, the group turned its attention back to finding land. Once again, Jim Corbett was the philosophical guide.

And Jim was the group's nuts-and-bolts guy. A lot of people had been looking for a better group, said Pat Corbett, but Jim Orum made Saguario Juniper happen.

Orum, 56, is a "Johnny Appleseed" figure: projects and gardens grow when he's around. He and Ferguson, 60, got together and decided to find a good place to ask if he could plant a garden in her back yard. They've been married for 24 years.

Orum met Jim Corbett while rolling his garden cart past Himmel Park one day, on his way from one garden he had planted to another, about seven miles away. Pat Corbett was playing volleyball with a woman Orum knew. Jim, plagued throughout his life by rheumatoid arthritis, was watching.

"I was a bit crazy then," Orum said. "I had been living about 100 miles from Tucson in a Volkswagen Beetle, Ferguson said, up on blocks in his yard. Corbett was more than happy to talk to a man who would rather walk and garden than drive. Orum was happy to be introduced to someone with available land.

Orum later went on a long goatwalk with Corbett — you take a couple goats and head out, unworried about water and provisions. The goats forage and provide milk. They are the ideal companion for the pastoral nomad. "A way of life on milk and wild foods," Corbett wrote in his book. They are the ticket to "errantry...sallying out beyond a settled establishment ways, to a life regarding to one's inner leadings."

It is the way of St. Francis and the way of Jim Corbett, who said people often remarked on his resemblance to Car-

“

Goats, wrote Jim Corbett, are the ticket to "errantry... sallying out beyond a society's established ways, to live according to one's inner leadings."

”

JIM CORBETT

author who co-founded Native that has had a ripple effect



This tent/ramada is one of three sites available through the Casacabel Hermitage Association for solitude seekers.



Karen McKelvey, hospice nurse, came to Saguario Juniper community. She found it, and a role as board member of the Casacabel Hermitage Association.

BUILDING THE DESERT HERMITAGE

Erecting this sturdy A-frame ramada of freshly peeled mesquite poles, like running my palm along the smooth white skin of your spine

All day carrying bundles of palo verde limbs pale green and prickly pruned to the Llanero lattice and land our promises

All day wandering in the desert wearing action and contemplation,

► **Karen McKelvey**

jection before moving on. Corbett notes in his book that the group reached easy agreement on things like banning roads, motorized vehicles and electricity in the canyon but spent days discussing what to require that just be lessed.

Some members of Saguario Juniper are philosophically opposed to grazing cattle in the desert but agree to the process to protect the integrity of their state grazing leases.

At its mouth, the Springs Canyon walk upstream the canyon narrows and the streambed dampens. A fence protects this part of the canyon from cows. Lush grass and wildflowers line the banks. Sycamores shade a running creek that doesn't dry through-ravaged times.

Farther up canyon, the Nature Conservancy's Muleshoe Ranch protects the five streams that drain the Caluros and the Winchester into this canyon.

It's tempting to call this jewel of a desert the canyon for the monastery, spiritual and social investment being made here.

But this group embraces a wider love of this canyon between the mountains, where lions and rattlesnakes can't be killed, where the Chiricahuan desert is a sacred place where juniper trees grow up one slope and saguaro dot the other side.

In 1987, when Jim Corbett proposed buying the first 135 acres in Hot Springs Canyon, he asked Nancy Ferguson: "What would you say if I told you about the desert? I'd like to have a nurse tree for a saguaro?" "I was essentially sold at that point," Ferguson said.

► **Contact reporter Tom Beal at 575-4128 or tombeal@azcentral.com.**



Debbie Hawkins has a chat with one of the members of the Saguario Juniper herd. She calls each one by name, even those she's marketing as steaks and hamburger.

Commentary on Community

By Anna Lands

In Wendell Berry's essay on "The Work of Local Culture", he explores why and how small rural communities change; what has been gained, and what has been lost; what is the 'cost-benefit ratio'? I have been thinking about this too: how and why Cascabel has changed, what is the same since we first met in 1974, and how have we gained or lost with the changes, and what would we want to retain or restore?

In 1974 there was electricity. The pavement ended after the turn in Pomerene (although the Tres Alamos bridge was there) so it was a two hours' drive from there to "here". There were no telephones so a few people had radio-phones. Folks would put up brush caution-barriers at the washes. I was advised to keep in my car: food, flashlight, book, 6-pack of beer to share, shovel. Visiting sometimes went on for hours waiting for the waters to recede. This last part remains, although there is less rain these days.

With telephones in the early 90's, computers followed, making remote work possible and influencing how and when neighbors would visit. Pima County bought land, then sold it to a real estate developer, opening up Hot Springs Canyon to 4+ acre parcels...and a new population. Maria Araiza Troutner, who moved to Tucson recently, is the last of the people who had farmed when this was still Mexico *and* who still lived here. Ramon Gamez told me that neighbors used to gather where 3 Links meets Cascabel Road, play music and dance and visit, lighting the dance floor with their truck lights. Members of the old families now live in town or have moved away. Maybe the only thing that is constant is change.

All of us *choose* to live here. Our reasons may vary, but it seems to me that some of what we have in common are our appreciation of privacy, of quiet, of dark night skies, of being more a part of Nature than would be possible in a less remote area, and the ease with which we can participate in Community.

Being in and of Cascabel, what do we choose to nourish.. and how?

Even the UPS driver stops if I've pulled over on the road. One time I stopped for a neighbor whose very modern car had a tire I could not change. A contractor with SunZia stopped, changed the tire, and we all got home - with gratitude. A car was broken down near Hot Springs Wash. The driver was astounded that a woman alone would stop to offer help to a man. "That's what we do," she said. And that IS what we do. We do it in different ways - all part of the gift of living in a remote place, with purpose and with appreciation for one another...no matter what.



Month 2026	Narrows A Wilkinson	Clayworks Barbara Clark	N Cascabel Daniel Baker
April	1.03	0.06	0.05
May	0.23	0.15	0.14
June	0.79	0.17	0.13
July	3.84	2.02	2.89
Aug	2.11	2.04	1.96
Sept	2.47	3.24	3.01
Total '26 ytd	12.82	10.09	10.52
Total '25	10.35	10.13	12.10

Cascabel Community Center

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Valley View Logo - Dave Shreeve and Barbara Clark

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PO Box 544 Mammoth AZ 85618
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Saturday
 October 24
 9:00am – 2:00pm
 Cascabel
 Community Center
 Got your beans???



Sgt Luca De Gregorio USMC
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—Waylon
Citron Cockatoo
Joined the flock in 1999

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