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Wet Beaver Creek: An isolated paradise

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Seven cliffs and 23 pools.

That is what separates the head of Beaver Creek Wilderness from the foot.

The smallest of the three creek/canyon wilderness areas that cut deep into the Colorado Plateau's along the Verde Valley's western edge, 6,700-acre Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness is also among the most challenging.

Most visitors seldom wander past Bell Crossing, a point just 3.3 miles up the very popular Bell Trail.

The trail begins just west of the Beaver Creek Ranger Station, about 1.5 miles east of the Interstate 17 and State Route 179 interchange.

The Bell Trail is a well-traveled path and the only developed trail in the wilderness area boundary. It runs along the creek bed with numerous side trails leading down to pristine pools, suitable for swimming and fishing.

The first European visitor to the Verde Valley, the Spanish fortune hunter Antonio Espejo, skirted the canyon's northern edge in 1583 on his way from the Hopi villages to see the ancient mines that would one day put Jerome on the map.

He named Beaver Creek, El Rio de las Parras (the river of vines).

A glimpse of Espejo's view is accessible by way of the Apache Maid Trail, which rises out of the creek bed, branching to the north off the Bell Trail, and wanders along the wilderness area's northern boundary before heading to the Apache Maid Lookout.



Beaver Creek parallels part of the Bell Trail.

Keep in mind, the Apache Maid Trail does not access the upper end of Beaver Creek and quickly leaves the wilderness area boundary.

The only way to access the upper end is to travel the creek itself, a notion that is only for the adventurous.

It is in the upper end, past Bell Crossing, that the stretch of seven cliff ascents and 23 pool crossings must be made. An inflatable raft and climbing ropes, as well as an understanding of, and appreciation for, the dangers, is essential.

But you don't have to go to all that trouble to experience all the canyon has to offer.

There is plenty else to see and do.

The Beaver Creek watershed is among the most biologically diverse areas in the state, home to 114 species of birds, 12 amphibians, 54 mammals, 42 reptiles, 15 fish and 186 plants.

It was also once home to the Southern Sinagua culture whose former houses are scattered along the canyon walls.

Trail maps are available from the Prescott and Coconino National Forest.

There is also detailed information on the individual trails available on the Internet and through several good trail guides.

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