

Arizona State Parks Celebrate 50th Anniversary

On the Mesquite Loop Trail in Red Rock State Park, designed for visitors with limited mobility and/or time, there is a scrap metal sculpture. A great blue heron overlooks a riparian pond where a duck glides by and birds and dragonflies look on from an adjacent, leafy tree. This lovely piece of art was created by a children's art collaboration project as part of the 50th Anniversary of Arizona State Parks.

Through the end of December 2007, Arizona's parks are celebrating their birthday with special events held at each of Arizona's 29 parks. Check www.azparks.gov for more information.

No visit to Sedona and the Verde Valley is complete without a trip to the state parks in the area, which provide some of the most enthralling views and memorable day trips. There are restrooms on site and often park benches and picnic areas to enjoy the surroundings. All of these parks charge minimal entrance fees..

- **Dead Horse Ranch State Park** is a natural oasis on the Verde River, only minutes from Main Street, Cottonwood. The park offers many outdoor pleasures — from birding, fishing and paddling to hiking, camping and horseback riding. Its 423 acres include a riparian forest and the lovely Verde River Greenway. There are picnic ramadas and miles of hiking trails. RVs are welcome here, and there are sites with and without hookups. An annual birding festival is held at the park in April; Verde River Day takes place in September.
- **Forte Verde State Historic Park** in downtown Camp Verde is an architectural heritage site, with three buildings that housed officers during the Indian War Era (1865-1891) – and one administration building which now is home to the visitor center and a small museum.

The historic homes have been furnished to reflect life during the pioneering days of Forte Verde and include period furniture and household items, such as china from England, pianos and toys. There are occasional historic reenactments, especially for Fort Verde Days; which are held in October. On the fourth of July Fort Verde features living history presentations and vintage baseball. From mid-December to early January the historic homes are decked out in Victorian-era trimmings, and the park offers special events, including a Victorian wreath-making workshop.

- **Jerome State Historic Park** encompasses the Douglas Mansion, which was built in 1916 for the owner of the Little Daisy Mine, and the surrounding grounds.. The park is on the crest of its own detached hill and offers a spectacular vantage point for panoramic viewing of the Verde Valley on the one side and Jerome on the other. There are picnic tables to enjoy the stunning scenery. Inside the large mansion, visitors learn about Jerome's mining-era history. The mansion also

includes period furniture, furnishings, many panoramic photographs and a reconstructed library.

- **Red Rock State Park** is known as a “Center for Environmental Education” for its many interpretive programs and guided nature walks, including bird walks and seasonal sunset and moonlight walks along a five-mile interconnecting network of trails. Oak Creek winds its way through the beautiful property, attracting not only humans but also many forms of wildlife. The red rock views are dramatic. The park is a peaceful, uncrowded spot for hiking, birding, and just plain relaxing. There are tables and ramadas (with water, electricity and grills) for picnicking. The visitor’s center has educational exhibits about the Arizona desert and its history as well as classrooms, a theater and gift shop.
- **Slide Rock State Park in Oak Creek Canyon.** A natural rock slide has made this park the most talked about—and visited—attraction in beautiful Oak Creek Canyon year round. During warm-weather months, Slide Rock is also a family favorite for swimming, wading, sunbathing, picnicking, bird watching, fishing and hiking. The park has a volleyball court; a market for snacks, ice cream, suntan lotion, souvenirs and other sought-after items; and an apple orchard, with nearly a dozen different varieties of apples in season. There is an apple festival in October. The park was once a working apple farm, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A house from the 1920s, antique farming equipment and original irrigation ditches can be seen on site.