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◀ Scott & Sylvia Conklin  
of Sierra Vista, AZ

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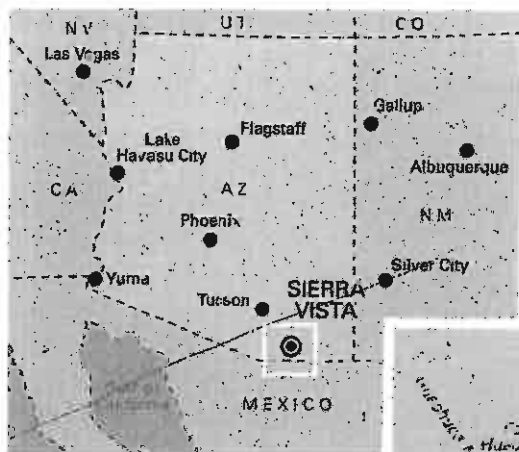
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# PROFILE: SIERRA VISTA, AZ

The site of a strategic Army base, Sierra Vista is a four-season Arizona gem roughly 10 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border. Retirees cite its inexpensive living and the beauty of the Huachuca Mountains.

► BY ROB RACHOWIECKI



**S** IERRA VISTA IS A MODERN TOWN swathed in Southwestern history, bordered by scenic mountains and nestled in nature. This was Apache territory until a U.S. Army camp was established in 1877 to protect travelers and settlers. The camp became Fort Huachuca in 1882 and was instrumental in the last major battle of the Indian wars against the great Bedonkohe Apache warrior chief Geronimo, leader of the Chiricahua Apache, who finally surrendered in 1886. In 1913, the U.S. Army 10th Cavalry, consisting of African-American soldiers known as the buffalo soldiers, was quartered here and remained for almost two decades. Their service is honored by the Buffalo Soldier Trail, which is the main highway on the western limits of today's Sierra Vista.

Fort Huachuca slowly gathered an adjoining civilian community. Beginning with a saloon and house of ill repute, the neighborhood slowly grew to encompass a general store, post office, school and church. It went through several name changes,

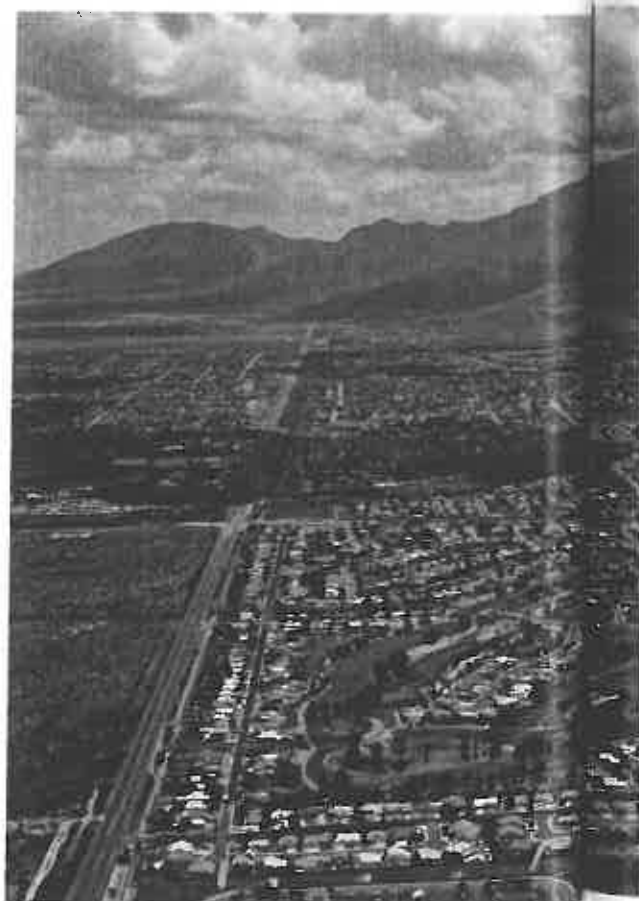
including the community of Fry, after a family of pioneers led by Oliver Fry who homesteaded outside the fort in 1912. Fry Boulevard now is one of Sierra Vista's main thoroughfares.

In 1950, the U.S. Census Bureau recorded a population of just 50 souls in Fry. The community adopted its current name in 1956, when the population had reached 1,671. Unlike nearby mining towns such as Bisbee and Tombstone, both founded around 1880, Sierra Vista lacks a historic center and a main street-style downtown. But its recent growth has made it the largest town in Cochise County with a population of nearly 44,000. Meanwhile, Fort Huachuca remains a vitally important military base, contributing to Sierra Vista's development.

Scott and Sylvia Conklin, both 62, met when they were stationed in Fort Huachuca in the early

**“It's like going back 25 years. Rush hour is maybe 15 minutes long and people are helpful.”**

—Jan Bass

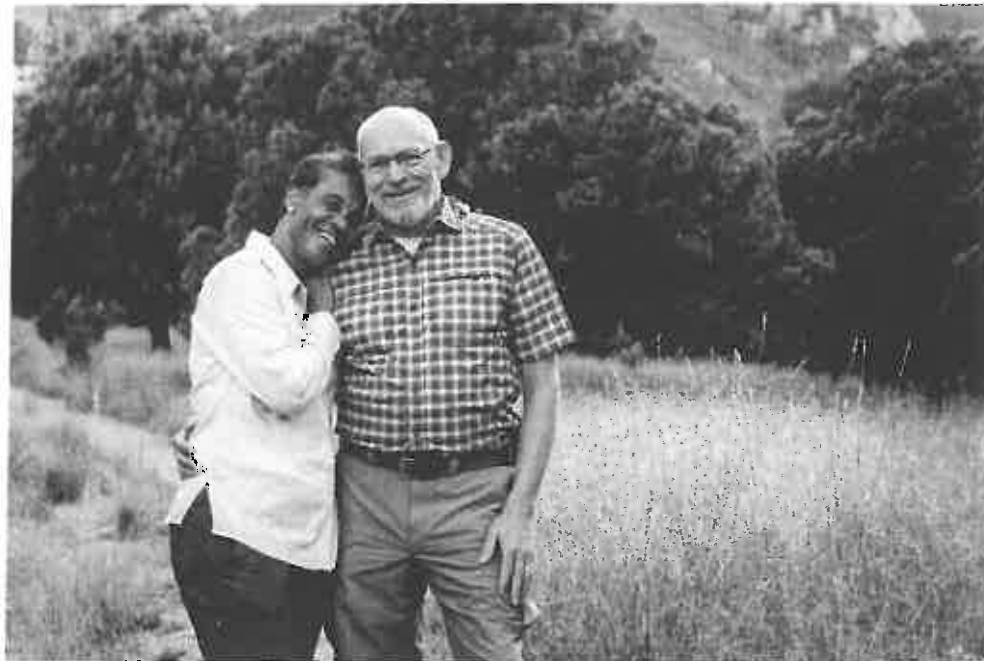


**In southern Arizona, just minutes from the U.S. border with Mexico, Sierra Vista has rugged beauty and an allergy-killing dry climate.**

1970s. After their Army careers, they moved to Santa Clara, CA, where Scott worked as the information technology manager and Sylvia was the human resources analyst for the Cupertino Union School District. They recall that Sierra Vista didn't have many amenities when they were stationed there. It still felt like an Army town when they passed through about 15 years ago, but when they visited in 2014, they found that the town had grown.

"We were planning on retiring in Santa Clara, but Sierra Vista stood out as a better value," Scott says. He reports that the Sierra Vista area has some great dirt bike trails. Sylvia enjoys the hiking and stargazing in the open spaces surrounding the city. The couple moved here in June 2015 after finding a property in a family-friendly, sociable area on the east side of town.

Many retirees are ex-military, drawn to the area by the Army base, which provides commissary shopping for veterans. But several attractions are open to the public. The Fort Huachuca Museum features



**Relocating from Santa Clara, CA, Sylvia and Scott Conklin enjoy the lower cost of living in Sierra Vista.**

frontier times. The U.S. Army Military Intelligence Museum sheds light on the Army's role in espionage from 1775 to the Cold War and beyond.

The oldest parts of Fort Huachuca were designated a National Historic Landmark in 1977 to celebrate the camp's centenary. Today, it has many technological functions, including being home to the U.S. Army Intelligence Center, which makes it a fascinating place to visit. American citizens can enter the base with picture ID and current vehicle insurance and registration.

"This is a blended community partly because of the racially diverse Army base," says Pat Call, in his third term as Cochise County supervisor for the Sierra Vista area. He points out Korean churches and German restaurants, which are due to the influence of soldiers who had tours of duty in those countries and returned with spouses.

Call has volunteered for many years as chief pyrotechnician for Sierra Vista's July Fourth fireworks. "They last over an

hour and are among the best in the state," he says. He also is a member of Arizona's Water Resources Development Commission and helps promote water-saving efforts in this desert town. Basins channel rain runoff from washes and drainages of the Huachuca Mountains west of town, and artificial turf fronts City Hall. Rainwater is harvested off the adjoining Police Department parking lot and roof and the Pueblo del Sol Country Club collects rainwater from tennis courts and uses moisture sensors for its golf course to minimize water use.

Walking and biking are popular in Sierra Vista, which has more than 25 miles of multiuse paths. Numerous hiking trails wind up the canyons to the peaks of the Huachuca Mountains and along the banks of the San Pedro River. Arlene and Dennis Ehrenberger, formerly of Anaheim, CA, say they read about Sierra Vista in *Where to Retire* in 2004. Arlene, 69, a retired administrative assistant at California State University, Fullerton, remembers telling her husband, "We can go look, but I'm never living in Arizona." A hike up beautiful Ramsey Canyon changed her mind, and now, 10 years later, she loves the mountains and the brief dusting of snow in winter. She also relishes the spectacular skies and storms of the monsoon season from July to September, which produces more than half of Sierra Vista's annual 14 inches of rainfall. The desert around Sierra Vista has subtle seasonal changes, with some fall colors in the valley. ►



exhibits detailing the region's military history, including the Apache wars, the buffalo soldiers and what life was like in

hour and are among the best in the state," he says. He also is a member of Arizona's Water Resources Development



**Buffalo Corral Riding Stables on the Fort Huachuca Army base offers guided trail rides through the Huachuca Mountains.**

The elevation of 4,600 feet ameliorates the climate, so summer days rarely break 100 degrees and winter temperatures generally stay above freezing. Sunshine is the norm and humidity is low, leading to the summer mantra of "It's a dry heat."

The city's altitude results in other benefits. "I played a round of golf and hit the ball 30 yards farther than I did in Anaheim," says Dennis, 75, who spent 22 years as an Air Force pilot and finished his career as a sales manager for Mead of ACCO Brands. "The elevation makes the air less dense and so the ball travels farther." He plays frequently at Pueblo del Sol Country Club's semiprivate golf course, the centerpiece of the active-adult community of Winterhaven, where the couple live. Public courses also are in Fort Huachuca and in Naco, AZ, about 35 miles southeast.

The city, which has a cost of living below the national average, has one small shopping mall, anchored by Dillard's and Sears, with a multiplex cinema.

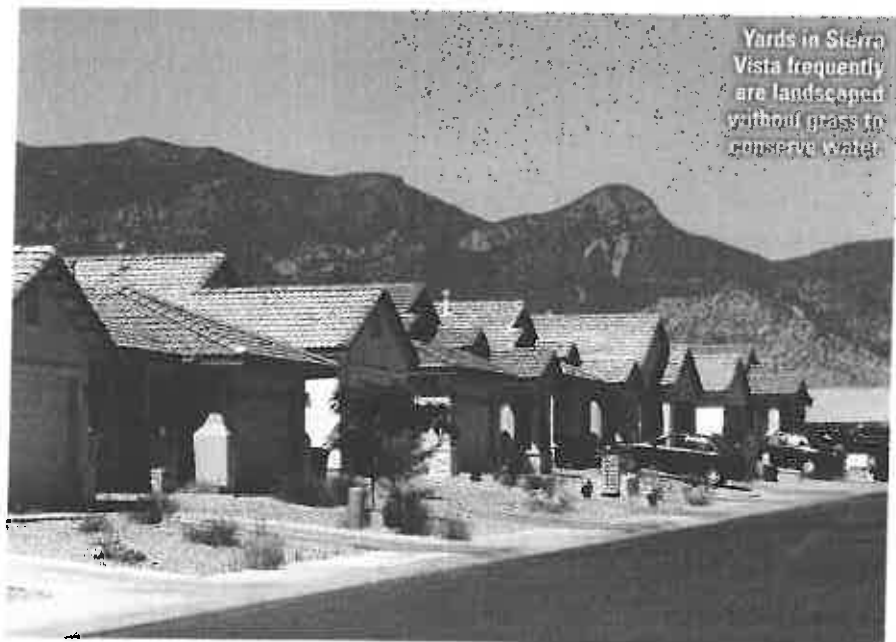
Buena High School has a performing arts center, which is used for three concerts per year by the Sierra Vista Symphony.

For more shopping and cultural experiences, residents take a daytrip to Tucson, AZ, about 75 miles northwest. The city has trendy restaurants, exciting nightlife and a thriving arts scene. Other highlights include the Arizona Theatre Company and about a dozen other theatrical groups, the Tucson Symphony Orchestra and the University of Arizona with its beloved Wildcats sports teams.

Sierra Vista is ideally located for other

daytrips. Surprisingly, a grape-growing region is around the Arizona villages of Sonoita and Elgin, about 30 miles northwest. A dozen wineries enthusiastically offer wine tastings and sales.

Another favorite drive is roughly 20 miles northeast to the authentic Wild West town of Tombstone, often called "the town too tough to die." Its history was born in Fort Huachuca, where a prospector named Ed Schieffelin left to ▶



Yards in Sierra Vista frequently are landscaped without grass to conserve water.

CTV OF SIERRA VISTA PHOTOS

**Population:** 43,806 in Sierra Vista and 127,448 in Cochise County

**Location:** Sierra Vista sits at a 4,600-foot elevation in southern Arizona, about 10 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border. It's also some 30 miles south of Interstate 10, 75 miles southeast of Tucson, AZ, and 200 miles southeast of Phoenix. It adjoins Fort Huachuca, a U.S. Army base. The nearest border crossing is in Naco, AZ, about 35 miles southeast.

**Climate:**

January: High 61°/Low 34°

July: High 92°/Low 66°

**Average relative humidity:** 40%

**Rain:** 14 inches annually

**Snow:** 1 inch annually

**Cost of living:** Below average

**Housing cost:** The average sales price of homes in Sierra Vista was \$168,977 in the third quarter, according to the Southeast Arizona Association of Realtors.

aid-to-education reduction given to all owner-occupied primary residences. The reduction typically is capped at \$600.

**Homestead exemption:** None, but there are property tax relief programs for widows/widowers, disabled persons and those older than 65 who meet certain income requirements.

**Personal property tax:** The state has a vehicle license tax based on an assessed value of 60% of the manufacturer's base retail price. The assessed value is reduced 16.25% each year after the vehicle is registered in Arizona. The rate is \$2.80 per \$100 valuation for new vehicles and \$2.89 per \$100 valuation for used vehicles. There's also an annual vehicle registration fee of \$8 and an annual air quality research fee of \$1.50.

**Religion:** A wide array of Christian churches are in Sierra Vista as well as a Jewish synagogue.

**Education:** Sierra Vista is home to a campus of Cochise College, a community college.

dependent," according to WalkScore.com. Neighborhoods will vary.

**Health care:** The 100-bed Canyon Vista Medical Center opened in April 2015. It has a Level 3 trauma emergency department, intensive and critical care units and various specialists. Cochise Oncology is a small cancer center. Several major hospitals are in Tucson. Some residents travel to the border town of Naco in Sonora, Mexico, for inexpensive dental care and prescriptions.

**Housing:** Two communities have a majority of residents 55 and older. **Vista View**

**Resort**, (520) 249-7640, has 355 properties. New homes and resales range from the mid-\$80,000s to the mid-\$100,000s, and lots still are available. Homes have one to three

bedrooms, one and a half to two baths and two-car garages. Residents own the houses

but not the land, reports Sonny Lee, owner of Service First Realty, specializing in Sierra

Vista retirement real estate. A monthly resort fee that ranges from \$315 to \$345 covers the

land lease, property taxes and use of a community center and pool. **Winterhaven** has

resale homes available as well as plots of land, some on the golf course. Prices range

from the mid-\$100,000s to the mid-\$300,000s. Contact real estate agents for resales.

**Rentals:** A substantial percentage of homes in Sierra Vista are rented, due to the rotating

population of the adjoining Army base. Most house rents range from \$800 to \$1,200 a

month, although cheaper apartments and condos and more expensive homes are available.

**Visitor lodging:** Sierra Vista's accommodations mainly consist of chain hotels and

motels. An exception is the Lazy Dog Ranch bed-and-breakfast in a quiet spot by the San

Pedro River about 10 miles northeast of town, from \$125, (520) 458-5583. The acclaimed

11-room Casa de San Pedro Bed-and-Breakfast Inn in the San Pedro River Valley is roughly

20 miles southeast of Sierra Vista, from \$169, (888) 257-2050. More bed-and-break-

fasts are in Bisbee, AZ, about 25 miles south-

east. Rooms and suites with kitchenettes are at Sierra Vista Extended Stay Hotel, from \$49,

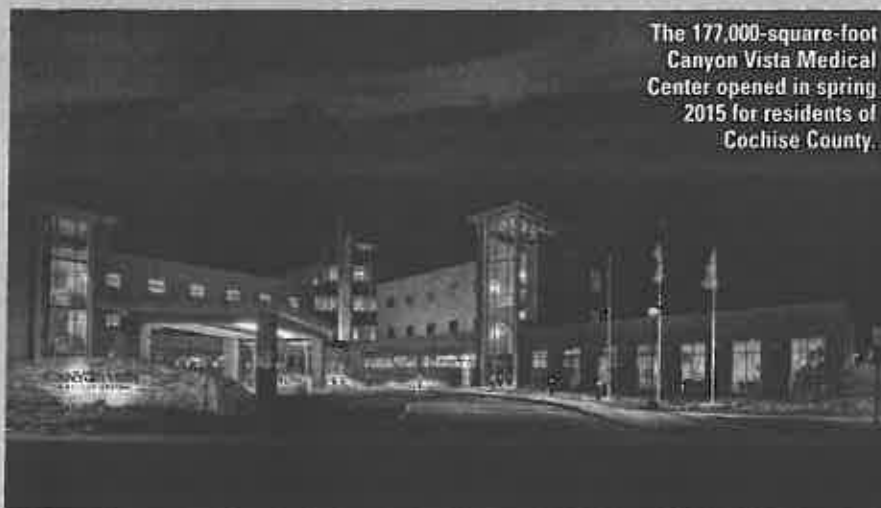
(520) 458-0540, Garden Place Suites, from \$89, (520) 439-3300, and TownePlace Suites by Marriott, from \$118, (520) 515-9900.

**Information:** Sierra Vista Chamber of Commerce, 21 E. Wilcox Drive, Sierra Vista,

AZ 85635, (520) 458-6940 or SierraVistaChamber.org. Sierra Vista Convention and

Visitors Bureau, 1011 N. Coronado Drive, Sierra Vista, AZ 85635, (800) 288-3861 or

VisitSierraVista.com ▶



The 177,000-square-foot Canyon Vista Medical Center opened in spring 2015 for residents of Cochise County.

**Sales tax:** 8.05% (1.95% on groceries)

**Sales tax exemptions:** Prescription drugs

**State income tax:** For married couples filing jointly, the rates are graduated from 2.59% of taxable income up to \$20,325 to 4.54% of taxable income of more than \$304,868. For single filers, the rates range from 2.59% up to \$10,163 to 4.54% of more than \$152,434.

**Income tax exemptions:** Up to \$2,500 in federal, state and local government pensions are exempt. Pensions from state and local governments outside Arizona are not exempt.

**Estate tax:** None.

**Inheritance tax:** None.

**Property tax:** The rate in Sierra Vista is \$10.5327 per \$100 of assessed value, with homes assessed at 10% of market value. Annual taxes on a \$168,977 home would be about \$1,190, which includes a state

servicing the county. It has a Center for Lifelong Learning featuring noncredit classes. The University of Arizona has a Sierra Vista campus and an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute on its main Tucson campus.

**Transportation:** Sierra Vista Municipal Airport is used by private planes. Tucson International Airport has five airlines serving 16 nonstop destinations with approximately 55 daily departures. The much-larger Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport has 16 airlines and about 1,200 daily arrivals and departures. The nearest Amtrak station is in Benson, AZ, roughly 35 miles north. Vista Transit offers five bus routes throughout the city on weekdays and two expanded routes on Saturdays.

**Walk Score:** Sierra Vista has an overall walkability rating of 23 out of 100, or "car



**The Art in the Park fair is held the first weekend in October in Sierra Vista Veterans Memorial Park.**

Earp and his sidekick Doc Holliday blazing away against a bunch of bad guys. Today, the well-preserved historic town showcases mock gunfights, stage-coach rides and people in Victorian garb. Tourists from around the world flock to see the Corral and enjoy a cold drink at Big Nose Kate's Saloon. They wander through the Bird Cage Theatre, supposedly haunted by the ghosts of 26 people killed there when it was a gambling hall and brothel.

Many of the 19th-century settlements scattered around Tombstone did not survive, creating several ghost towns, which attract tourists. Fairbank, one of the best preserved, has a visitor center and a modest museum inside a schoolhouse.

Another quick daytrip is to the Victorian copper-mining town of Bisbee, about 25 miles southeast. By the early 1900s, it had become the largest city between St. Louis and San Francisco. Its fascinating history can be explored in the Bisbee Mining and Historical Museum, a Smithsonian Institution affiliate. Bisbee also is famous for underground tours of ▶

look for valuable rocks in 1877. The soldiers told him that all he would find would be his own tombstone, so when

Schieffelin struck a lode of silver ore, he named his claim Tombstone. A boomtown burgeoned and in 1881 became the site of the Old West's most infamous shootout — the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, featuring Deputy Sheriff Wyatt



**In nearby Elgin, AZ, Sonoita Vineyards, Arizona's first winery, has 30 acres of vines and hosts daily tastings.**



The annual Cochise Cowboy Poetry and Music Gathering promotes an interest in Western heritage.

the Queen Mine, attractive historic hotels and bed-and-breakfasts, a flourishing arts district and various festivals and

events, including the Bisbee 1,000 The Great Stair Climb — a race that takes runners on stairway paths around town, including more than 1,000 steps.

Barry and Tess Nelson, who also live in Winterhaven, have participated in the Bisbee 1,000 and sometimes drive out just to trot around the route for exercise. Tess, 72, who worked as a secretary, started traveling throughout North America in an RV full time in 1982 and ended up in Sierra Vista in 1999. Barry, 76, a former senior operations manager for General Dynamics Corp., moved here in 2005.

Both widowed, Tess and Barry met at a garage sale. "The best thing I ever got in a yard sale was her," Barry says. They married in 2009 and teach line dancing to the Winterhaven community.

Sierra Vista's size attracted Roy Bass, 64, who retired from the Air Force and then flew for Omni Air International, Inc. He and wife Jan, 69, a homemaker, were based in Las Vegas, but knew they wouldn't retire there. They moved to Winterhaven in 2006 and immediately felt at home. "It's like going back 25 years," Jan says. "Rush hour is maybe 15 minutes long and people are helpful." ▶

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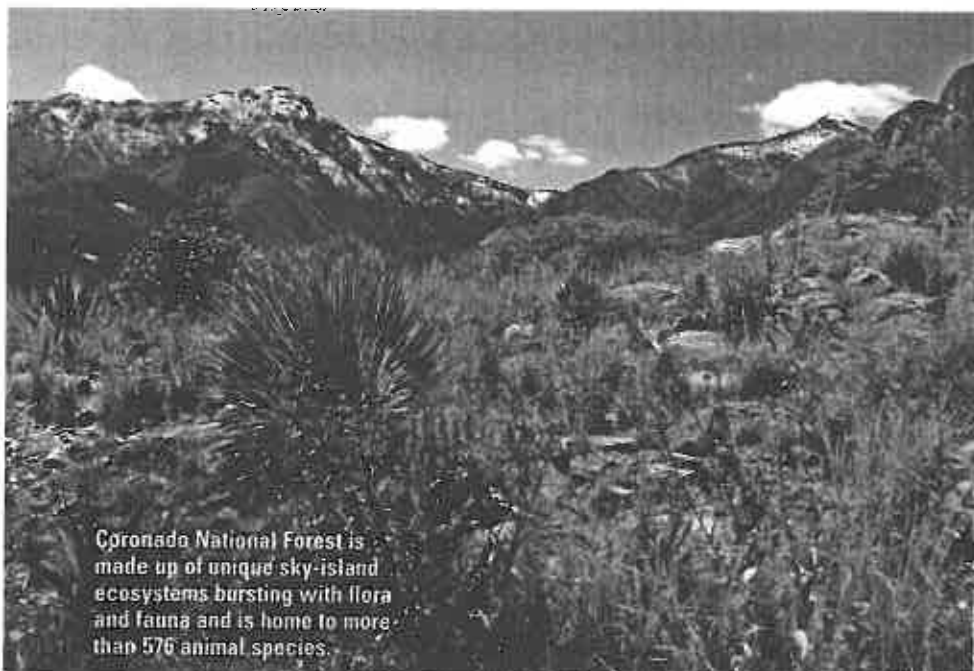
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Hikers and bikers of all skill levels have miles of beauty and panoramas on Huachuca Mountain trails.



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Norma has discovered that Sierra Vista is known as the hummingbird capital of North America, with more than half of the 26 species found north of Mexico recorded near here. She has become fascinated by birding. "Sierra Vista is the perfect location to learn how to do it well," she says.

Barry also enjoys the variety of experiences. "Tess and I will typically say 'yes' to any new opportunity that comes our way," he says. "There is so much to do around here that I can't imagine what could entice me to live anyplace else." **W**

*Rob Rachowiecki is a Tucson, AZ-based writer and photographer and author of numerous guidebooks, including "Five-Star Trails: Tucson."*

Norma Vindiola, 71, an adult education teacher, relocated here from the Northeast. "I planned to retire in Boston, to be near my son, but its blizzards in 2013 and 2014 were too cold," she says. "I have friends and relatives in southern

Arizona and I liked Vista View Resort's no muss, no fuss, so I bought a house here."

A lifelong tennis player, she works as a volunteer coach for children at the Sierra Vista Community Tennis Association and also is a substitute teacher.

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