Field Trip: Sedona and Jerome

Monday, June 15, 2015

AASG
Association of American State Geologists
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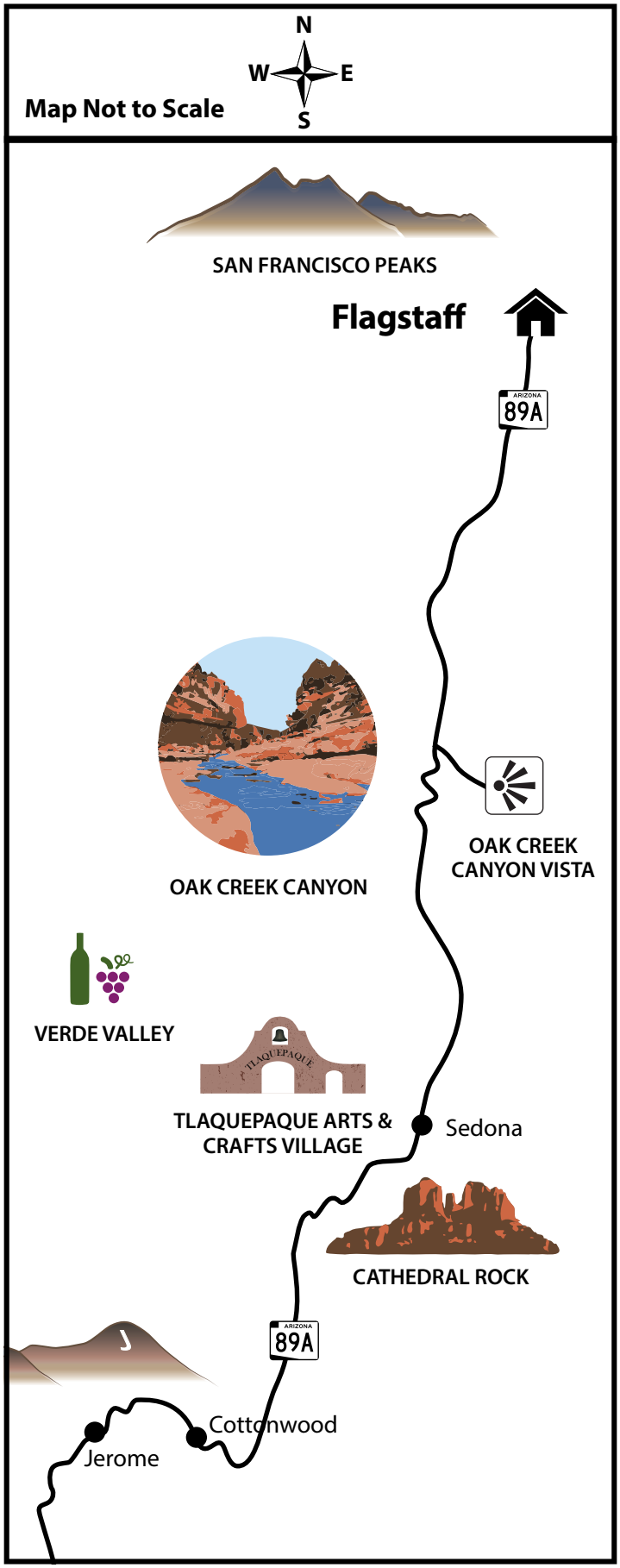
Arizona Geological Survey
AZGS


N
W
E
S
Map Not to Scale
SAN FRANCISCO PEAKS
Flagstaff
ARIZONA
89A
OAK CREEK CANYON
OAK CREEK CANYON VISTA
VERDE VALLEY
TLAQUEPAQUE
TLAQUEPAQUE ARTS & CRAFTS VILLAGE
Sedona
CATHEDRAL ROCK
ARIZONA
89A
Cottonwood
Jerome

Flagstaff to Jerome

Flagstaff to Jerome is 57 miles (~ 90-minutes) on SR 89A. Leaving Flagstaff, the road winds through exposures of the Permian Kaibab Limestone and twenty miles of one of the great Ponderosa Pine forests in the Western U.S. A prominent vista at the head of Oak Creek Canyon hosts an open-air American Indian market.

Red Rocks of Sedona seen from Hwy 89A. Photo by USDA Forest Service, Coconino National Forest

SR 89A descends Oak Creek Canyon through a series of hair-pin turns, surrendering nearly 2,500 feet of elevation—from 6,500 feet to 4,000 feet—before reaching Sedona. Oak Creek Canyon is the result of a normal fault that uplifted rock to the west (right) hundreds of feet higher than rocks to the east. Rim basalts of the San Francisco volcanic field cap the Mogollon Escarpment here. From top to bottom, the canyon walls comprise: rim basalts, Kaibab Limestone, Toroweap and Coconino Sandstones; the latter displays prominent cross beds. The Schenbly Hill and Hermit Formations crop out near the canyon floor.

Sedona is the heart of Arizona's Red Rock Country and receives millions of visitors annually. Its premiere arts & crafts village, Tlaquepaque (pronounced Tla-keh-pah-keh), sits on the banks of Oak Creek shaded by large sycamores. Authentically fashioned after a traditional Mexican village, Tlaquepaque comprises 30 specialty stores and galleries as well as five restaurants.

Sedona-area landmarks include: Cathedral Rock, Chapel Butte, Bell Rock, West Fork Oak Creek Trail, Devil's Bridge, Airport Mesa and Doe Mountain. For those interested in seeing Sedona's back country, we can help arrange a Pink Jeep Tour.

Leaving Sedona and traveling west on AZ 89A for about 10 minutes you will see the House Mountain Shield Volcano about five miles south of the highway. After crossing the Verde River, one of central Arizona's few perennial rivers, the vehicle(s) will take a northwesterly route to Jerome, Arizona.

Photo courtesy of Tlaquepaque Arts & Crafts Village

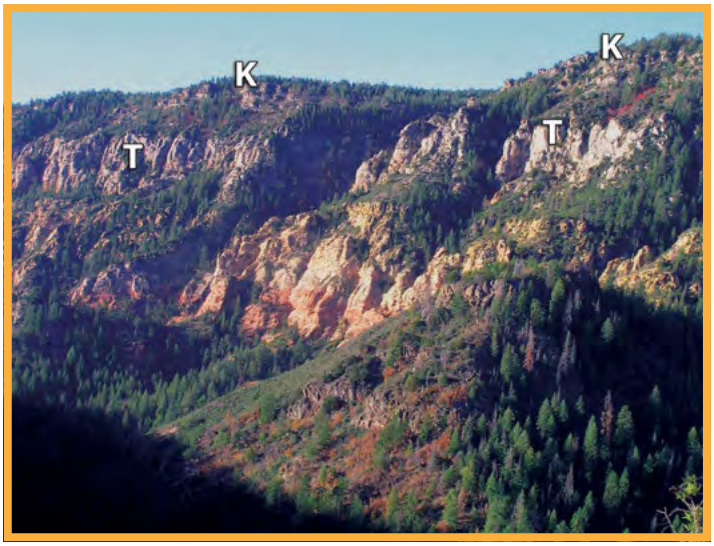
Jerome is perched 5,200 feet high on Cleopatra Hill in Arizona's Black Mountains. Founded in 1876, Jerome was home to the United Verde copper mine that operated through the first half of the 20th century. By the 1950s, the copper ore was exhausted and mining came to an end. Jerome's population shrank to several hundred people and the town morphed from a thriving mining camp to an artisan colony.

In 1967, Jerome was designated a National Historic Landmark. America's most engaging 'ghost' town, largely unchanged since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, hosts dozens of shops and galleries, a winery, and the Jerome State Park housed in the old Douglas Mansion.

Oak Creek Canyon Vista
Window into ancient Arizona

Oak Creek Canyon is a geologically young, v-shaped valley formed along an active fault. As you leave the vista and descend into Oak Creek, you will see zones of crushed, punky rock. Those zones demarcate the Oak Creek fault zone.

From John Bezy's *Guide to the Geology of Sedona and Oak Creek Canyon area, Arizona*, "The buff-colored Kaibab Formation (see the figure below) consists of horizontal layers of silty limestone and dolostone, and siltstone and sandstone cemented by calcium carbonate. The underlying, reddish-colored Toroweap Formation (T) is cross-bedded sandstone in the cliffs of Oak Creek Canyon, changing to siltstone and gypsum at other locations. Limestone and dolostone are carbonate rocks that are composed of calcium carbonate and calcium-magnesium carbonate, respectively. The erosion-resistant limestone and dolostone form massive cliffs: the less resistant siltstone and sandstone weather and erode back into recesses that shelter the cliff dwellings of early Indian residents of this region. Red and white chert nodules (a form of silica consisting of minute crystals) are common throughout the formation. Fossils of brachiopods, cephalopods, and sponges are abundant in the limestone and dolostone.



View of Oak Creek Canyon looking south from the Oak Creek Canyon Vista atop the Mogollon Escarpment. K is Kaibab Limestone; T is Toroweap Sandstone (Photo by John Bezy)

Right: Stratigraphic column of the Verde Valley area of Sedona, Jerome and Oak Creek Canyon.

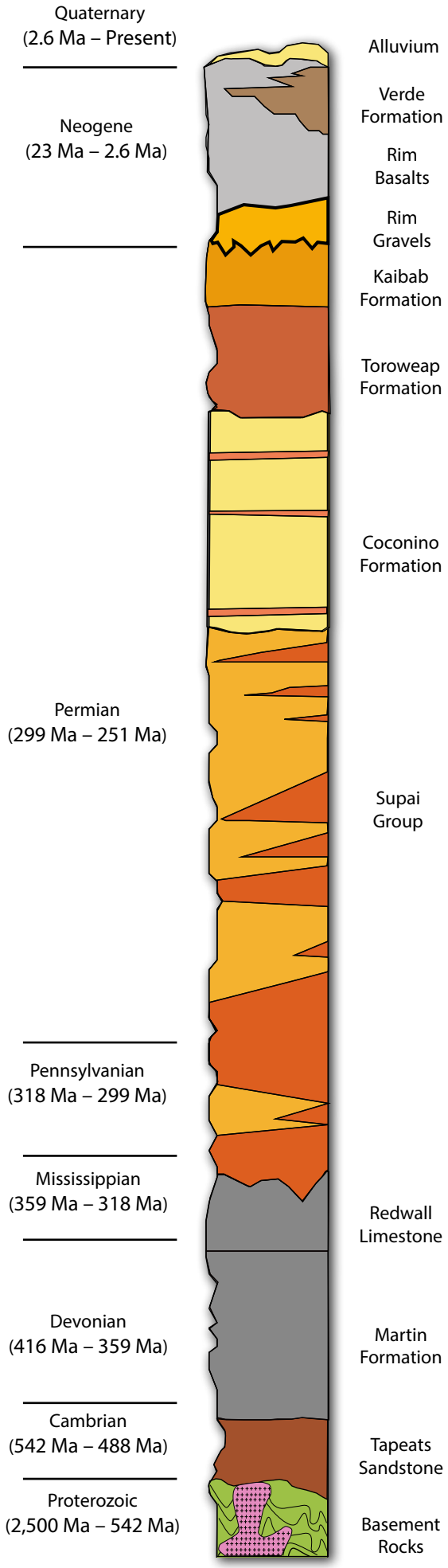


Photo by Doug Kerr, CC BY 2.0, Flickr

Sedona

by Robert DeMayo (abridged)

Mention the Southwest to anyone these days and they're not talking about the Grand Canyon, or Santa Fe; they are talking about Sedona, Arizona. Some are attracted by the breathtakingly beautiful buttes, spires, and canyons, others want to relax in a spa, take a jeep tour, or just enjoy the town. *USA Today* rated the ride down route 89A from Flagstaff to Prescott (right through Sedona and the Verde Valley) the most scenic in America.

Almost 8,000 years ago hunter/gatherers roamed the canyons while searching for the abundant food. Then came the Sinagua—a proud and resourceful people—who excelled in the area for hundreds of years, and then disappeared. Later arrivals include the Yavapai, the Apache, and the pioneers. The Coconino National Forest surrounds Sedona, and on many local walks the past feels just around the corner.

Modern day Sedona is the new-age capital of America with thousands of people coming to experience the famous "vortexes," or just immerse themselves in the metaphysical community. Alternative medicine is firmly established with numerous natural, holistic-based healing practices such as hot-stones massage, Reiki, acupuncture, aromatherapy, homeopathy, hypnotherapy, and massage. Whether you want a Tarot card reading, some time for meditation and spiritual contemplation, or just need to get yourself grounded, you've come to the right place.

Sedona has been featured in over 60 films, but in most cases it was referred to as Wyoming, New Mexico, California, even Canada. It wasn't until The Rounders (1964), staring Henry Fonda, was filmed here that Sedona was called Sedona in a movie.

Outdoor activities include golfing, hiking, mountain biking, powershute flights, and horseback rides. Jeep tours are one of the best ways to get off into the canyons and climb right up on the rocks.

Over millions of years water carved out a natural corridor between Arizona's northern plateau and the southern desert. Through this process, the sparkling water of Oak Creek, fed from springs and snowmelt up on the Mogollon (mug-e-on) Rim, eventually created Oak Creek Canyon. It is at the mouth of this canyon where Sedona is nestled. Below, and on all sides, is red rock country; 500 sq. miles of awe-inspiring beauty that stretches south right into the Sonoran Desert.

The town itself has less than 14,000 residents—nothing compared to the 5 million people who visit it annually—and building restrictions aim to keep the red rock views the main attraction. There are very few streetlights, no buildings over two stories, and everything must match the primary colors found in the rocks. The city only allows a minimum of exterior lights so at night the stars are visible. Coyotes, Bobcats, Mule Deer, Javalinas, Black Bears, and even Mountain Lions live in this area and are often spotted just on the edge of town.

Tlaquepaque

This well-preserved wilderness is made up mostly of pinon pines and junipers, but near the creeks are old sycamores and cottonwoods. The brush is called high chaparral and is very diverse because the area is a transition zone between the Colorado Plateau and the deserts to the south. From mixed conifer forest to desert grassland, the different habitats for plants and animals are incredible.

Jerome—the town that would not die

By Robert DeMayo

Set dramatically on the side of Mingus Mountain, the town of Jerome is propped on a thirty-degree mountainside two thousand feet above the Verde Valley. Fifteen hundred feet separates the upper-level houses from the lowest. At night the lights of Jerome twinkle enticingly above the valley after sunsets.

Before the arrival of Europeans, Indians mined minerals from the hills around Jerome. The first scouts to search the area claimed the Sinagua had made a fair hole in the mountain. They sought blue azurite for jewelry and pigments for pottery and body paint. After they left the area it simply remained silent, watching Cottonwood and the other pioneer towns as they slowly grew. But there is a spirit in Jerome that will not rest; it simply waited.

Beginning around 1876—the same year the first pioneers reached Sedona—miners started to seriously attack the rich copper reserves. Eventually a fortune in copper, as well as gold and silver was extracted. In fact, the United Verde would become the richest privately-owned copper mine in the world—producing $29 million worth of ore in one year alone.

Between 1897 and 1899 Jerome caught fire numerous times. One fire destroyed 24 saloons and 4 Chinese restaurants. But each time the residents quickly rebuilt, and by 1900 it was the fifth largest city in Arizona.

By the 1920s Jerome became a mining boomtown with a population that peaked at 15,000. The hills surrounding the town were overrun with tents and shacks occupied by countless immigrants: Mexicans, Croatian, Welsh, etc. At the same time Sedona was a small farming community with only a few families.

The population also consisted of a fair amount of Indians (Yavapai and Tonto Apache) who had recently returned to the area after being forcibly removed. Their women got work doing laundry, while the men toiled underground.

High above the town were the company houses. On Company Row prim Victorians housed the mine's managers and their families. If you were in Arizona during this period, Jerome was the place to make your fortune. Jenny Jerome, cousin to Eugene Jerome (who lent the town his last name), was Winston Churchills' mother.

The average miner however had to settle for boardinghouse rooms, which were occupied corresponding to the miners' hours—sometimes three men sharing a bed in eight hour shifts. Prostitutes rented small apartments, or brick "cribs," which were located in back alleys behind the town's saloons, while basements were rumored to hide opium dens.

In 1927 the "Spanish Mission" style United Verde Hospital opened. Newspapers described it as the most modern and well equipped hospital in Arizona and possibly the Western States. Not only was the hospital fireproof, it was designed to withstand the blasts of up to 100,000 pounds of dynamite set off by the mine.

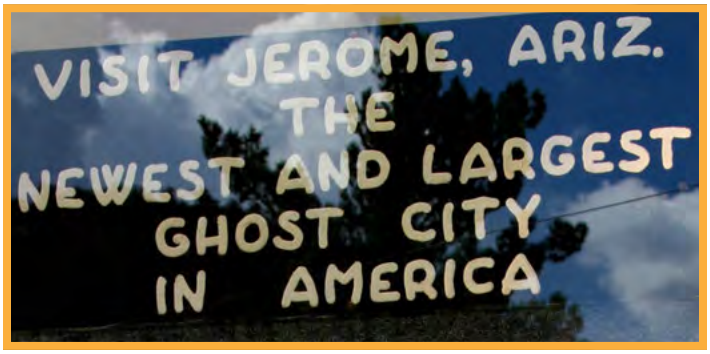


Photo by dbking

Fortunes in Jerome were based on the price of copper, and after the stock market crash of 1929 the town's population slowly plummeted. In 1953 the last mine closed. By this time there was over 100 miles of tunnels under the city and certain sections would occasionally slide down the mountain, creeping slowly, destroying entire blocks at a time.

The townspeople were used to the fickle vagaries of fate and somehow kept the town alive for decades. Before the turn of the century, Jerome had burned down and been rebuilt three times, but eventually the residents just gave up and for more than 20 years Jerome sat quietly—the largest ghost town in America.

In the 1970s, groups of artists moved into the empty buildings and the ghost town was rebuilt as an arts community. The spectacular location—elevation 5,400 feet—attracted a variety of businesses, and slowly Jerome became what it is today, a collection of late 19th and 20th century buildings housing restaurants, saloons, B & Bs, and art galleries, all perched on a steep hillside overlooking the Verde Valley.

The town seems proud of its ghost town past with restaurants like The Haunted Burger, and The Asylum Restaurant and Lounge. The United Verde Hospital lay closed for 44 years, then reopened as The Jerome Grand Hotel. There are 30 simple rooms, many with balconies and excellent views. With its history as a hospital—and the occasional mine cave-in—its easy to see why its been featured in quite a few "most haunted" shows.

Other places worth visiting are the Jones Brewery, Paul & Jerry's Saloon (originally the Senate Saloon 1899), and the Spirit Room Bar (the town's liveliest bar with live music on weekends). The current population is still below 500, but this "town that wouldn't die" is worth a visit if you're in the area.

Civic Building in Jerome in the U.S. state of Arizona. According to the Jerome, Arizona, Tourguide published by the Haven United Methodist Church in Jerome, the Civic Building was originally the Clark Street Elementary School, which closed in the early 1950s. Since then, the building has become home to City Hall, the Jerome Library, and the Jerome Humane Society.

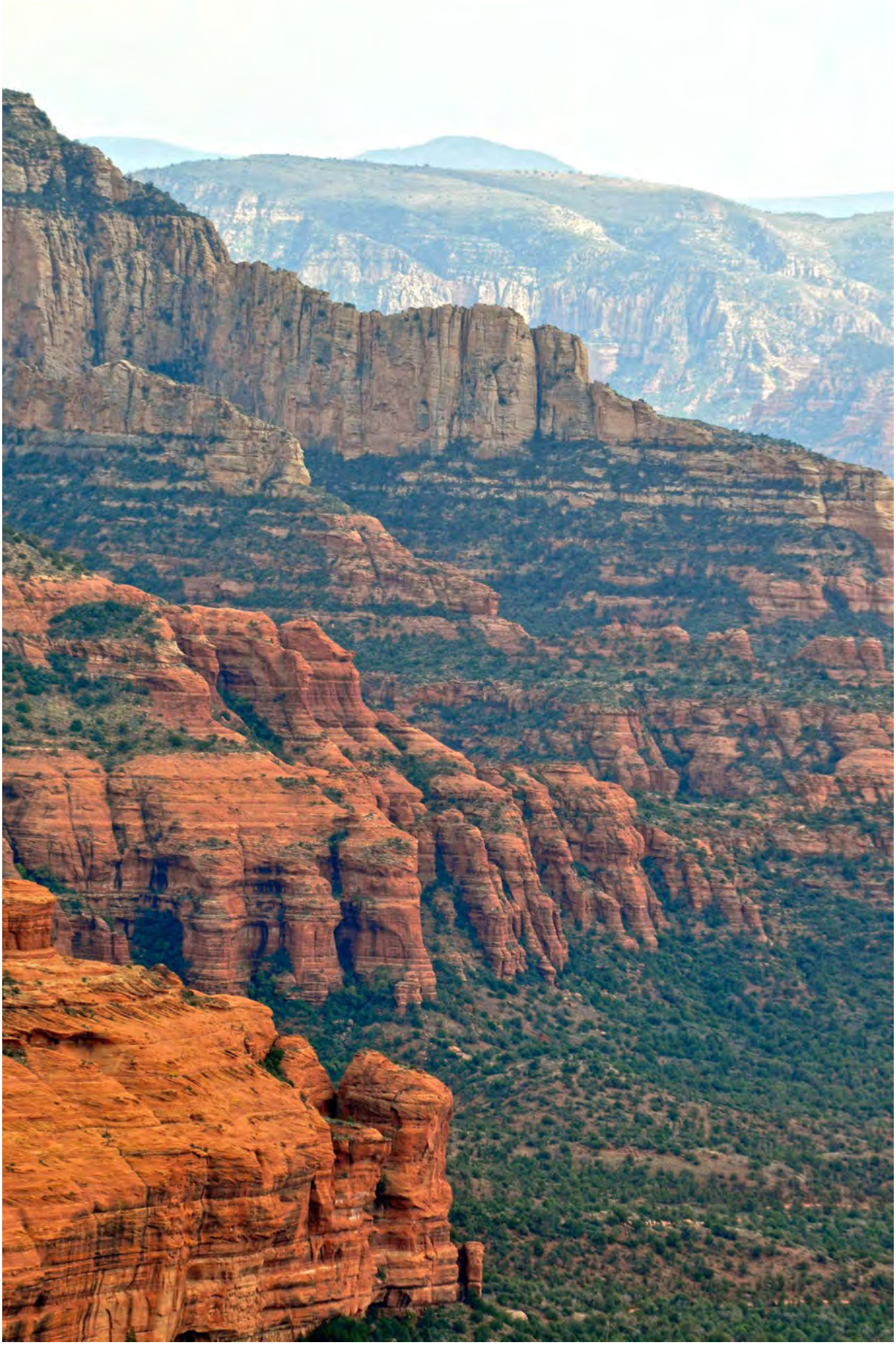


Photo by U.S. Forest Service, Coconino National Forest, CC BY-SA 2.0, Flickr