Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

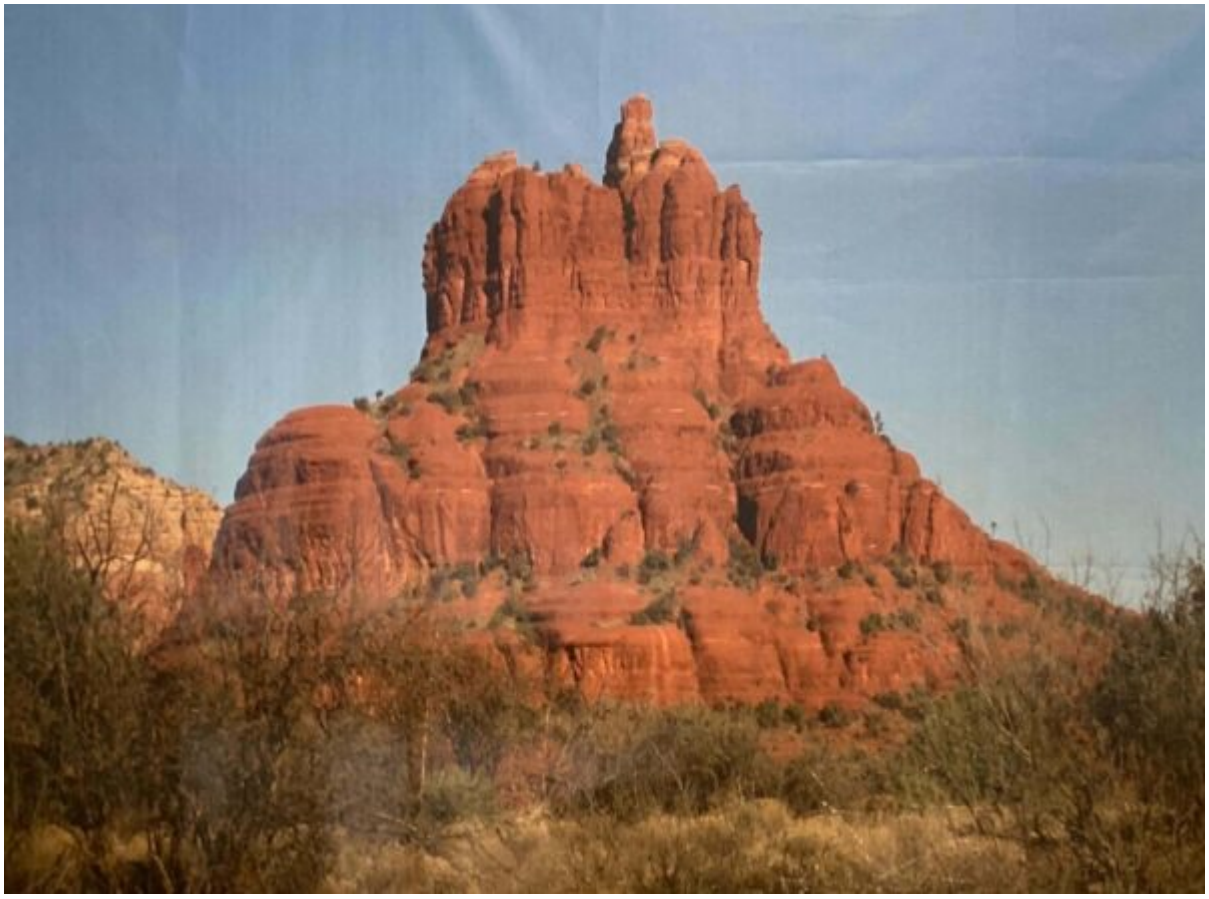
Sedona, Red Rock Country

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, July 31st, 2024

Bell Rock © Margaret Jackson

In April 1999, 25 years ago, I booked two nights in Sedona as a middle stop of our family trip to Hoover Dam and Grand Canyon, before Bryce and Zion, but a late in the season heavy snowfall blocked the road to Sedona via Flagstaff, so we were unable to explore it.

Finally in May of this year, after receiving an enticing brochure from Road Scholar, I decided to take this trip that had been on my bucket list, and I signed up for “Best of Sedona: Natural & Cultural Landscapes in Red Rock Country.”



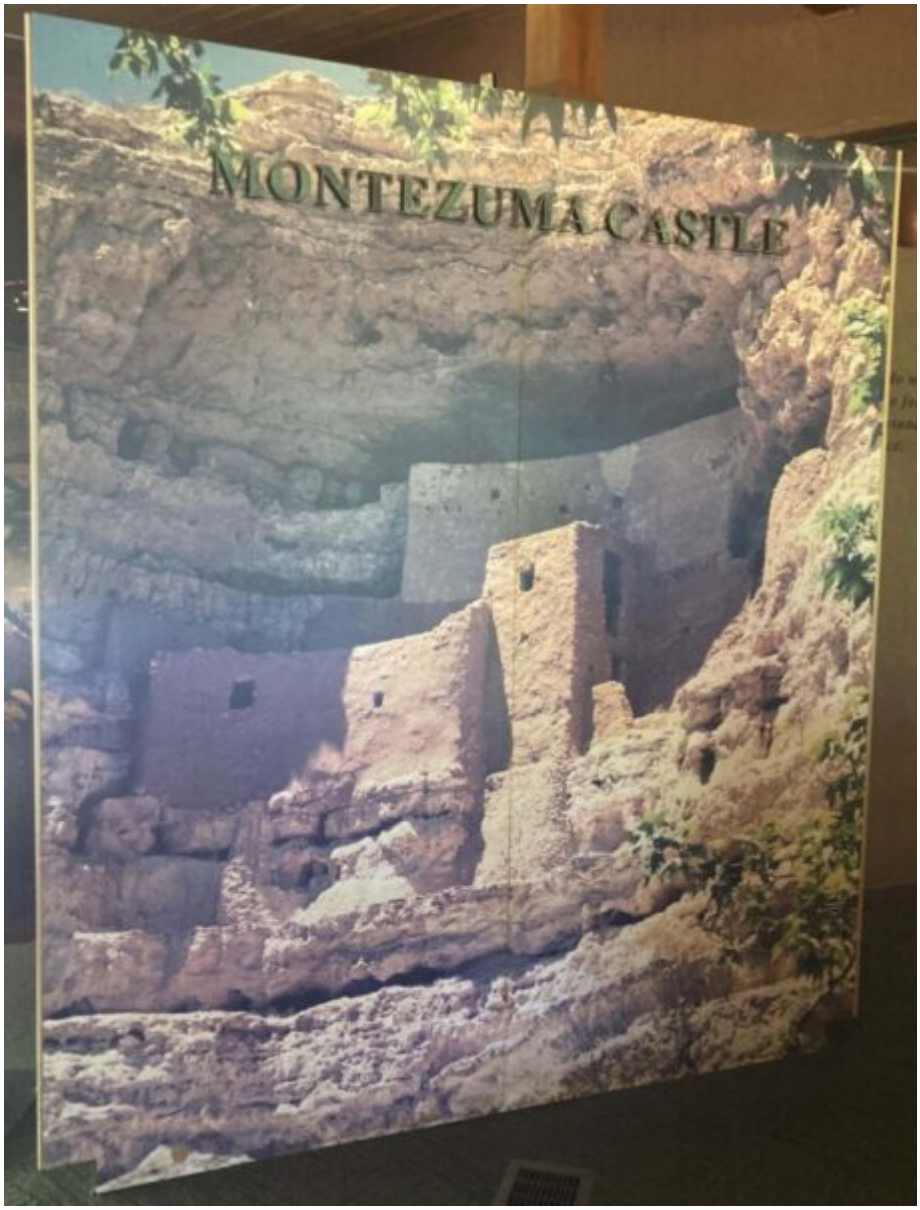
Bell Rock backdrop. Sedona Heritage Museum

I was delighted to find out that our tour leader, Tracy, had met her future husband, Eric Kee, a full-blood Navajo, while they were working in Florence, Italy, my country.

On Sunday May 5 I flew on Southwest from Los Angeles to Phoenix, boarded a Groom shuttle for the 2 hour drive to the Hilton Sedona Resort at Bell Rock, where, at registration and welcome dinner, I met the other 25 participants.

Red Rocks Lookout. Uptown Sedona

On Monday morning we were treated to an informative talk by Ken Zoll, director of the Verde Valley Archaeology Center. He told us that the word Anazasi for the indigenous people of the area, which means ancient enemy or devil in the Navajo/Diné language, was no longer used, replaced by Ancestral Plueboans. The Verde Valley was inhabited since 11,500 B.C.E. (Before Current Era), another term I learnt was used instead of B.C. (Before Christ) to avoid the connection with the Christian religion. The Hohokam lived here from 700 C.E. (Common or Current Era, not A.D, Anno Domini), joined by the Sinagua around 1125 C.E., a word that means without water in Spanish.



Montezuma Castle display

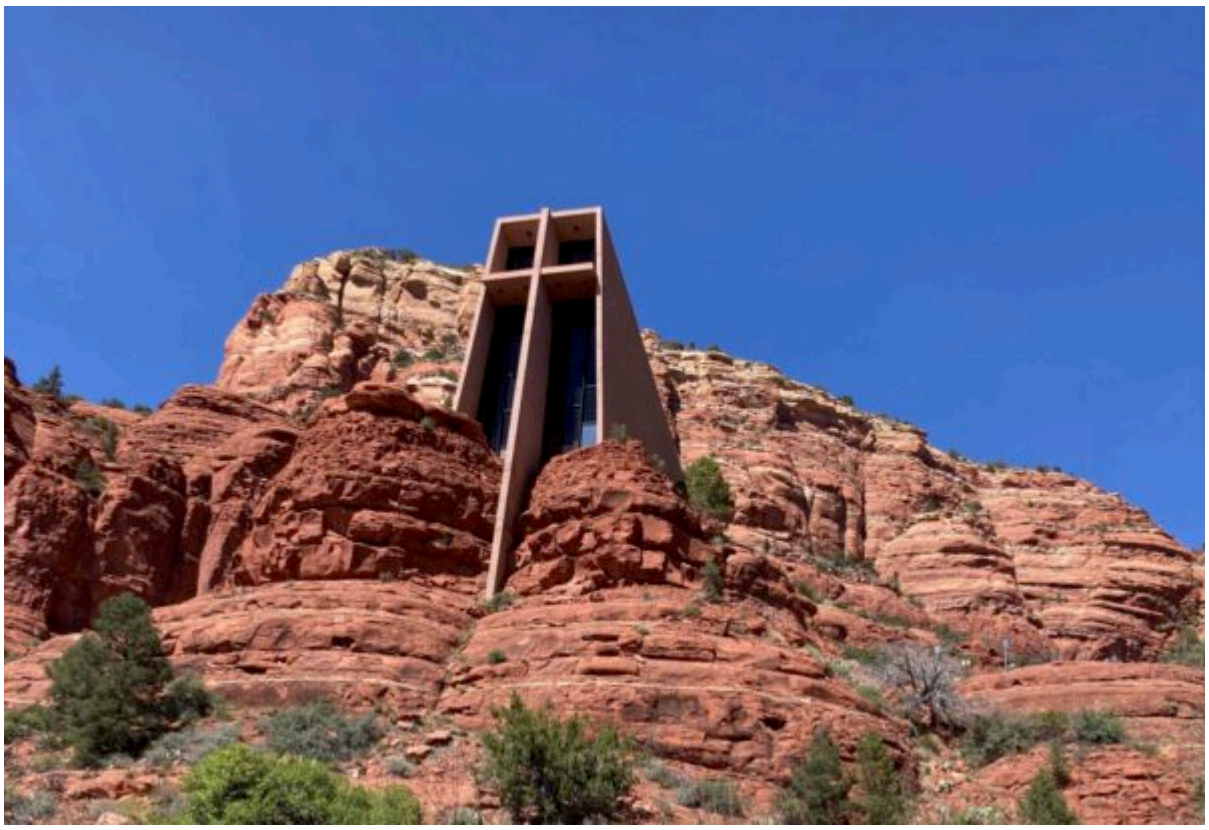
We learnt more details on Tuesday morning, when we visited Montezuma Castle, which is not a castle but a five-story 20 rooms apartment building erected high up into the rock above the creek, and has nothing to do with the Aztec emperor (1466-1520), who was not even born yet when the Sinagua left the valley in 1425. These indigenous people cultivated the so-called Tree Sisters crops: squash, corn and beans, that are complementary when planted together.

Sedona Heritage Museum

On Monday we also listened to an engaging talk by Nate Meyers, director of the Sedona Heritage Museum. We learnt that Sedona was the name of the wife of one of the early white settlers, T.C. Schnebly, who moved to Oak Creek Canyon, then called Red Rock Country, in 1901, built a house that served as the local Post Office.

Telegraph Office. Sedona Heritage Museum

It was interesting from my feminist perspective to hear that Sedona was an educated woman who had married against her parents wishes, and was a member of the WCTU (Woman's Christian Temperance Union) fighting for prohibition. I did some research and realized that these ladies, that we see in westerns chasing away prostitutes, were not stuck-up churchgoers, but courageous pioneer women concerned that their husbands would spent money getting drunk in saloons instead of providing for their wives and children. So it makes sense that, after Sedona moved back to Missouri, she joined the suffrage movement, supporting women's right to vote.



Chapel of Holy Cross

On Monday afternoon we went on a trolley tour, visited the Chapel of the Holy Cross, built in 1956, not by the son of architect Frank Lloyd Wright as our musician driver told us, but nevertheless impressive among the surrounding red rock formations, one of them nicknamed Twin Sisters.

Red Rocks. Twin Sisters

On Tuesday afternoon we were treated to a leisurely ride in a renovated vintage train of the Verde Canyon Railroad.

Johnny Guitar set © Republic Pictures

On Wednesday morning Nate Meyers gave us another talk about movies that were shot in Sedona as a location, usually westerns from the silent *Call of the Canyon* (1923) based on the novel by Zane Grey, to *Blood on the Moon* (1948) with Robert Mitchum, *Broken Arrow* (1950) with James Stewart, *Johnny Guitar* (1954) with Joan Crawford, *3:10 to Yuma* (1957) with Glenn Ford.

The museum has a partnership with the Sedona Film Festival, and they jointly show movies, such as *The Rounders* (1965) with Henry Fonda and Glenn Ford.

McDonald's turquoise arches. Sedona Heritage Museum

Then we had a free afternoon and I spent it visiting the Sedona Heritage Museum, where I saw the turquoise/teal (not golden) arches that in 1993 McDonald was persuaded to install in their Sedona location, on a terracotta building, to preserve the aesthetics of this area, where billboards were outlawed in 1970.

Barn mural. Sedona Art Center

I took a walk in Downtown Sedona, which they call Uptown. I watched people of all ages working on clay art pieces at Sedona Arts Center. I walked into souvenir shops and art galleries, I discovered a Mexican restaurant with an enticing menu of food and drinks, 89 Agave Cantina, I enjoyed a sparkling rosé at the Art of Wine.

Cathedral Rock painting by Todd Frame

Sedona is known as a spiritual New Age destination, particularly since the Harmonic Convergence took place here on August 16-17, 1987, when some believed that an extraterrestrial spaceship was hidden inside the Bell Rock butte and would take flight. That's why you see lots of shops selling crystals, offering to read your chakra and even to photograph your aura, directing you to the location of the vortexes and to UFO sightings.

If you are interested in exploring that aspect of Sedona, Road Scholar offers this program: "Sedona's Healing Arts for Women: Yoga, Qi Gong, Ayurveda and More."

Shop. Uptown Sedona

Click on underlined words for background info.

Stay tuned for my second article about this magical Sedona tour, our last day at the Grand Canyon.

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