HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

GILA-PINAL SCENIC ROAD
(U.S. 60 – Florence Junction, Arizona to Miami, Arizona)

HALS No. AZ-32

Location: The Gila-Pinal Scenic Road (GPSR) (pronounced HEE-lah – PEE-nahl) is located in central Arizona. It is a 26-mile segment of U.S. 60, beginning east of Florence Junction, Arizona, and ending west of Miami, Arizona, between mile post (MP) 214.5 to 240.5.

33.257740, -111.298823 (U.S. 60, Mile Post 214.5, Pinal County Arizona, Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: Gila-Pinal Scenic Road (GPSR) is significant because it is a segment of U.S. 60, which is one of the original transcontinental U.S. highways commissioned in 1926. The Gila-Pinal Scenic Road was designated a scenic road on June 20, 1986, by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT).[1] The route of GPSR travels throughout the Sonoran Desert life zone beginning at the desert floor and moves upward through four biotic communities of plants and animals that are associated with elevation gradients. This segment of U.S. 60 is a descendent of Arizona's first Territorial wagon road that connected Phoenix, Arizona, to the mining boomtown of Globe, Arizona. Over the past hundred years the road connecting Phoenix to Globe has been modified and improved as transportation and engineering technologies have been updated. Along the route there are several natural features, an historic town and associated mining sites, abandoned highway segments and bridges, cultural sites that are sacred to tribal communities, trail heads, campgrounds, and a desert arboretum.

Description: Laid out on a meandering path, the GPSR courses through the Pinal Mountains, to the southeast, and Superstition Mountains, to the northwest, within the boundaries of the Tonto National Forest, which are east of the Phoenix metropolitan area. (Figure 1) Beginning east of Florence Junction, Arizona, at MP 214.5 (Elevation 2,015), the Scenic Road aligns on an east-northeast axis, and ends west of Miami, Arizona, at MP 240.5 (Elevation 3,578). Since its original construction in the 1920s the highway between Florence Junction and Miami has been modified, realigned, and improved based on safety standards, changes in vehicle design, and engineering technologies. There were several construction projects between Florence Junction and Superior, Arizona, that transformed U.S. 60 from a two-lane regional highway into a four-lane divided highway. From Superior to Miami the construction projects widened the two-lane

[1] Annual report of the Arizona Historical Advisory Commission 1987, p. 17, Arizona Memory Project, accessed 25/07/2025, https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/181551

highway to include passing lanes, guardrails, retaining walls, and scenic overlooks.

Designation as a Scenic Road

Designation of U.S. 60 between Florence Junction, Arizona, and Miami, Arizona, began in April 1986. The ADOT Parkways, Historic and Scenic Roads Advisory Committee (PHSRAC) reviewed an application report from the ADOT Roadside Development Services staff.[2] Within the report, several aesthetic criteria were evaluated as the basis of the recommendation. These included Uniqueness, Vividness, Intactness – Development – Encroachment, and Unity – Man-made – Overall. Summary comments in the report stated that:

> Uniqueness criteria rated low because of the abundance of the Sonoran Desert resource within the region. The road alignment fit the topography and created many exciting views and vistas of mountainous valleys and canyons. It helped unify the overall experience. Development is minimal and does not detract from the visual experience. Excellent topographical features increased the vividness of the route.[3]

After their review the PHSRAC recommended to the State Transportation Board that U.S. 60 from Florence Junction to Miami should be designated as a Scenic Road. A couple of months later, in June 1986, the State Transportation Board designated U.S. 60 from Florence Junction through Superior to Miami as a Scenic Road, as recommended by the PHSRAC.[4]

Four Biotic Communities

One unique aspect of the GPSR route is that it traverses the Sonoran Desert life zone beginning at the desert floor and moves upward through four biotic communities of plants and animals that are associated with elevation gradients. Interspersed and cutting through the Pinal and Superstition Mountains there are several canyons that host riparian woodland communities. A few of these canyons are bridged by the GPSR.

The four biotic communities[5] include:

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[2] Annual report of the Arizona Historical Advisory Commission 1986, p. 13. Arizona Memory Project, accessed 25/07/2025, https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/181550

[3] Edward C. Corral. (1986) The Apache Trail Historic Road, U.S. 60 Scenic Road Application Report: State Route 88, M.P. 201 to M.P. 242.5 U.A. 60, M.P. 214.5 to M.P. 240.5. Arizona Memory Project, accessed 25/07/2025, https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/331351

[4] Annual report of the Arizona Historical Advisory Commission 1987, p. 17, Arizona Memory Project, accessed 25/07/2025, https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/181551

[5] The Apache Trail Historic Road, U.S. 60 Scenic Road Application Report, Edward C. Corral, provides specific description of the four biotic communities found along the GPSR. A thorough description of Sonoran Desert biotic communities can be found in “Biotic Communities of the Desert Southwest - United States and Mexico”, David E.

- Sonoran Desert scrub: Near Florence Junction and lower elevations the landscape is dominated by the Arizona Sonoran Desert scrub. This is a diverse and species-rich desert environment characterized by plants adapted to arid conditions. Characteristic vegetation of the Sonoran Desert Scrub includes Arizona's iconic Saguaro (sah-WAH-row), Cholla (CHOY-yah), Prickly Pear, and Organ Pipe cacti. Common tree and shrub species include Palo Verde (PAH-low VAIR-day), Ironwood, Catclaw Acacia (ah-KAY-sha), Mesquite (mess-KEET), Jojoba (HO-HO-bah), and Creosote Bush (CREE-oh-soht). Common animals include reptiles like the Gila monster, rattlesnake, rock lizard and desert tortoise, mammals like javelina (hah-vah-LEE-nah) and coyote, and various bird species.
- Interior Chaparral: As elevation increases, the landscape transitions to the Interior Chaparral community, which is dominated by shrubs and small trees, often with thorny features, characterized by dense, nearly impenetrable thickets dominated by two species of manzanita (man-zah-NEE-tah), acacia, juniper, and shrub live oak.
- Transition to Montane Forests: At higher elevations, the environment changes to Madrean Evergreen Woodland and potentially Petran Montane Conifer Forest, showcasing a shift towards cooler, wetter conditions and different plant life. and
- Ponderosa Pine Forests: Reaching towards Miami, AZ, there are elements of the Ponderosa Pine community within the Pinal and Superstition Mountains. Typically, this plant community is found between 6,000-8,000 feet elevation. Some of these evergreen plant species have been introduced at lower elevations near Miami, Arizona.

Elements of the Sonoran Riparian Deciduous Forest are found along Queen Creek, Devil's Creek, Arnett Creek and Pinto Creek. Each of these creeks are considered to be a combination of intermittent and ephemeral streams within the Middle Gila River basin.[6] These riparian corridors are a unique habitat type because they can occur in any biome.[7] Riparian habitats in the desert Southwest

Brown, ed., *Desert Plants*, Volume 4, Number 1-4, 1982, The University of Arizona, accessed July 21, 2025 https://repository.arizona.edu

[6] U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Jones & Stokes (2002). "Environmental Assessment, Funding Assistance for the Town of Superior, Queen Creek Riparian Restoration", p. 3-9, accessed 13/072025 https://static.azdeq.gov/wqd/swqip/eaf_queencreekriparian_2002.pdf

[7] Mark A. Demmitt. (2021) "Biomes & Communities of the Sonoran Desert Region", Arizona Desert Sonoran Museum, https://www.desertmuseum.org/books/nhsd_biomes.php, accessed 21/07/2025

are known to provide high-value habitat to a variety of Arizona wildlife as well as migratory birds.[8]

Dromedary Peak

As the GPSR proceeds eastward from Florence Junction, the first significant natural feature is Dromedary Peak (DP), on the south side of the highway (MP 217). With two summits, the west summit at Elevation 3,000 and the east summit at Elevation 2,800, DP is popular with hikers and rock climbers.[9] (Figure 2)

Gonzales Pass

After passing Dromedary Peak, a gentle slope rises up to the summit of Gonzales Pass (Elevation 2,631) (MP 218-220). The namesake for the pass is Jose Gonzales who had a concession with a freight company in Tucson, hauling silver ore in 20-mule-team wagons between Pinal City, Arizona, and Florence, Arizona. The usual trail along Queen Creek washed out with each heavy rain, so Gonzales found a safer, shorter route, which later was named Gonzales Pass and incorporated into U.S. 60.[10]

The Gonzales Pass Reconstruction Project (GPRP) was the last of several construction projects between Florence Junction, Arizona, and Superior, Arizona, that transformed the segment of U.S. 60 from a two-lane regional highway into a four-lane divided highway. Completed in 2008, GPRP received the President's Award at Valley Forward's 31st annual (2011) Environmental Excellence awards.[11] In addition to the roadway improvements, the reconstruction project scope included ramps connected to box and pipe culverts under the road to help wildlife find safe paths across the highway. Storm water pollution mitigation was achieved with the installation of parallel roadside ditches and sediment-settling basins. The reconstruction project improved safety, capacity and operational characteristics for this segment of the GPSR.[12]

Picketpost Trailhead

West of Superior, Arizona, there is an access road that leads to the Picketpost Trailhead (MP 221.7). (Figure 3) At this trailhead trail runners, hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians can use the East Saddleridge Trail, which is a short, easy

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[8] U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Jones & Stokes. (2002) "Environmental Assessment, Funding Assistance for the Town of Superior, Queen Creek Riparian Restoration", p. 3-9. https://static.azdeq.gov/wqd/swqip/eaf_queencreekriparian_2002.pdf, accessed 13/07/2025

[9] Summit Post, "Dromedary Peak", https://www.summitpost.org/dromedary-peak/1047333#chapter_1, accessed 15/07/2025

[10] Kimberly Matas. (September 2009) *Arizona Daily Star*, "Joe Gonzales: He learned the value of hard work, service early on", https://tucson.com/news/local/joe-gonzales-he-learned-the-value-of-hard-work-service-early-on/article_5ca01de8-208c-5584-ba7f-61a2bd7ab70e.html, accessed 15/07/2025

[11] Arizona Department of Transportation (September 2011), "Gonzales Pass earns environmental excellence award", https://azdot.gov/adot-blog/gonzales-pass-earns-environmental-excellence-award, accessed 15/07/2025

[12] Arizona Memory Project, "US 60 Gonzales Pass surmounts shaky slopes, other challenges", https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/95905?keywords=Gonzales+Pass&type=all&highlights=WyJwYXNzIiwiZ29uemFsZXMiXQ%3D%3D&lsk=3114d20c897d5f62eb177e899164aec3, accessed 15/07/2025

trail that is near the highway, Crest Trail 130 and Passage 17: Alamo Canyon of the Arizona National Scenic Trail, both of which combine on the same track. Passage 17: Alamo Canyon is one of forty-three passages that comprise the 800-mile-long Arizona Trail as it traverses the state from the Utah/Arizona border to the Arizona/ Mexico border. Crest Trail leads to upper reaches of the Picketpost Mountain, south of the trailhead. Located approximately three miles southwest of Superior, Arizona, Picketpost Mountain, a distinctive butte rising up from the desert floor, dominates the landscape and can be seen from a great distance.[13]

Boyse Thompson Arboretum

Access to Boyse Thompson Arboretum (BTA) is located near MP 223. Relatively hidden from view from the GPSR, the arboretum is located within a segment of Queen Creek canyon and adjacent valley at the northern base of the Picketpost Mountain. (Figure 4) BTA holds a permit from the U.S. Forest Service for managing the vegetation of the mountain's north slope.[14] The history and features of the 400-acre site are well documented by the arboretum itself. In addition, BTA was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976[15] and the Historic American Landscape Survey in 2012.[16] Information in the NRHP nomination form indicates that:

> William Boyce Thompson was a western mine owner and businessman who had long been interested in the role of plants in man's development. The plant life of the subarid regions, he believed, had not been sufficiently studied. The Arboretum was intended to fill that need.

When U.S. 60 was a two-lane highway access to BTA was more direct than it is today. With the conversion of U.S. 60 to a four-lane divided highway, the old path of U.S. 60 has become East Arboretum Way, which is basically an extended entrance drive to the arboretum. Another vestige of this segment of the old highway is the Picketpost Mountain Historical Marker, formerly at MP 223, which was placed by the State of Arizona Development Board in 1960.[17]

Wagon Wheel Tracks

A short distance south of the highway, near MP 224.5, there are wagon wheel tracks that were made during the early days of mining in the area. Access to these wagon tracks is not direct. The side trip to the wagon wheel tracks begins near

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[13] Frank S. Crosswhite. "History, Geology and Vegetation of Picketpost Mountain", *Desert Plants*, Volume 6, Number 2, 1984, p. 73, University of Arizona, accessed 17/072025, https://repository.arizona.edu
[14] Ibid
[15] Marjorie Wilson. (1976) National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form: Boyse Thompson Southwestern Arboretum, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service
[16] Erickson, Helen and Gina Chorover, Rebeca Field, Allison Kennedy, Sylvia Lee. (2012) Historic American Landscape Survey: Boyse Thompson Arboretum, United States Department of Interior, National Park Service

[17] Bert M. Fireman, Historical markers in Arizona, Volume 2. Arizona Memory Project, accessed 25/07/2025, https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/139235

MP 225.5 where Apache Tear Road intersects the southside of U.S. 60. From this intersection there is a short, circuitous route over unmaintained trails that lead westward back to the wagon tracks. They were formed in the 1870s-80s when ore-laden wagons hauled loads from the Silver King Mine to the Pinal Mill on Queen Creek.[18]

Town of Superior, Arizona

After the discovery of the Silver King Mine, in the 1870s, the plain north of Queen Creek became a scattered collection of small homes, stores, tents and shacks. This remained until the 1910s when the Magma Copper Company began work in the area. The town site of Superior was formally platted in 1912.[19] During the early years of U.S. 60 it was routed along Main St. through the commercial center of Superior, Arizona. At the northwest corner of Main St. and N. Magma Ave. is the Magma Hotel. (Figure 5) Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994, the Magma Hotel was one of the first buildings in Arizona that was constructed of reinforced concrete in 1912. There was an addition of adobe in 1916 and an addition of brick in 1923 which has prominent brick letters "McPherson's Hotel Magma" at the top of the front of the addition. The final footprint of the hotel created a small courtyard that opens onto Main St. When U.S. 60 was converted to wider vehicle lanes the highway bypassed Superior's commercial spine along Main St. Today many of the commercial buildings are vacant with boarded store fronts. Heading south on Magma Ave. the original route of U.S. 60 crossed the Magma Avenue Bridge, a concrete-arch structure that was constructed in 1910. Today GPSR passes through Superior, and an exit leads to an overpass that leads to the Magma Avenue Business District.

Apache Leap

Apache Leap has a dominant presence on the eastern flank of Superior, Arizona, and can be seen for miles when approaching the town from the west. (Figure 6) With an Elevation 4,285-4,683, Apache Leap forms the western edge of the Pinal Mountains. The face of Apache Leap is a tilted bedrock strata in the lower part of the Queen Creek canyon immediately upstream of Superior.[20] Named after a legendary event in Apache history, on the plateau above the escarpment was the site of a battle between Apache warriors and U.S. Cavalry. Rather than surrender to the cavalry the warriors decided to leap over the edge of the escarpment to their death.

Queen Creek Canyon

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[18] Bold Canyon Outdoors, https://www.boldcanyonoutdoors.com/2020/04/28/old-mining-wagon-wheel-tracks-in-superior-arizona/, accessed 17/07/2025

[19] Michael F. Anderson. (1994). National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Magma Hotel, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

[20] U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Jones & Stokes (2002), "Environmental Assessment, Funding Assistance for the Town of Superior, Queen Creek Riparian Restoration", p.3-7. https://static.azdeq.gov/wqd/swqip/eaf_queencreekriparian_2002.pdf, accessed 13/072025

As GPSR continues eastward it tracks closely with Queen Creek and climbs up through this narrow, rugged canyon (MP 227 – 230). (Figure 7) Queen Creek canyon was formed between the southern edge of the Superstition Mountains and the northern edge of the Pinal Mountains. The original route, known as the Superior-Miami Highway, was circuitous, with switchbacks and hairpin turns as it coursed through the canyons.[21] On April 29, 1922, after three years of construction, the Arizona Highway Department (AHD) celebrated the completion of the "Million Dollar Highway" - twenty-one miles of winding road through mountainous terrain previously only accessible by horse, stage or railroad. The nickname was based on the cost of construction. This segment of highway was built using labor from a prison camp created in Superior for the purpose. Four years later, in 1926, blasting and drilling was completed on the rough-cut 300-foot-long Claypool Tunnel, named for state senator W.D. Claypool. In 1952, the need for wider vehicle lanes based on updated safety standards resulted in the relocation of U.S. 60 to higher terrain. The Claypool Tunnel was replaced by the concrete-walled 1,200-foot-long Queen Creek Tunnel. Now the abandoned old road is a hiking trail. Two original bridges, the Queen Creek Bridge and Devil's Canyon Bridge, still stand and both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.[22] [23]

Oak Flat Campground, also known as Chi'chil Bildagoteel Historic District
Rising through the Queen Creek Canyon, GPSR approaches the Oak Flat Campground (OFC), also known as the Chi'chil Bildagoteel (chee-chill bill-dah-goh-tell) Historic District (CBHD) which is accessed on the south side of the highway at North Magma Shaft 9 Road (MP 231). (Figure 8) Oak Flat is a mesa at approximately Elevation 4,000, with Apache Leap at its western edge and Devil's Canyon coursing north-south through its eastern edge. Situated within the rolling hills west of Devil's Canyon, OFC is a rustic campground that is managed by the Tonto National Forest Globe Ranger Station staff. Features within and near OFC include fire pits, picnic tables, hiking trails, unusual rock formations, and rock-climbing opportunities. The historic district is larger than the campground and is recognized as a Traditional Cultural Property based on its association with Western Apache Tribal Communities as well as other tribal communities in Arizona. Tribal members regularly come to Chi'chil Bildagoteel to perform traditional ceremonies, involving prayers and songs, for tribal needs

[21] Arizona Department of Transportation (June 2019), "The mysterious disappearance of the Miami-Superior Highway plaque", accessed 28/07/2025, https://azdot.gov/blog-article/mysterious-disappearance-miami-superior-highway-plaque

[22] Clayton B. Fraser. (1988) HABS/HAER Inventory: Queen Creek Bridge, National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

[23] Clayton B. Fraser. (1988) HABS/HAER Inventory: Devil's Canyon Bridge, National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

and practices.[24] The appearance of Oak Flat and CBHD might change in the near future because of the recent approval of the Resolution Copper Mine. Even though the Federal Courts have authorized the U.S. Forest Service to approve a land exchange with the mining corporation, stakeholders continue to file lawsuits to stop the mine. If the mine is allowed to expand, then Oak Flat and CBHD will be consumed by an open pit copper mine.

Devil's Canyon
After passing Oak Flat, GPSR passes through Devil's Canyon which aligns north-to-south, generally (MP 232-234). (Figure 9) Along this 2-mile segment of GPSR there are several unique rock formations and rock outcroppings.

Top-of-the-World
Between MP 234 and 238 is the unincorporated community of Top-of-the-World, which straddles the Pinal and Gila County line. Within an irregular boundary, the community covers approximately six square miles with the GPSR passing through the middle of the area. Located in the Pinal Mountains, it is named because of its height above sea level at 4,600 feet.[25] At MP 237 is the Top-of-the-World Trading Post, which has been closed. (Figure 10) In past years the trading post sold a wide variety of antiques, rocks, crystals, camping gear and clothing.

Mountain Breeze Memorial Gardens
Near the end of the GPSR, at MP 240, is the Moutain Breeze Memorial Gardens (also known as Holly Hillcrest Cemetery). (Figure 11) Grave markers within the cemetery include stone, concrete, statuary and military.[26] Entrance to the cemetery is setback from the highway so that vehicles can park outside of the small site. There is a fence that is a combination of masonry piers, with a stucco finish painted white, topped with black wrought iron and glass lanterns, and a low pony wall topped with black wrought iron fence between the piers. Within the cemetery grounds several tree species are present, including Italian Cypress, Aleppo Pine, Cottonwood, Fir, and Arborvitae.

History:

Early Roads and Highways
Prior to 1920, American roads and highways were simply graded, without the benefit of engineering design. Engineering of highways became standardized nationwide in the 1930s. With more cars on the roads, travelling at faster speeds, there was a need for improvement of the road system. By 1940, several parkway,

[24] Nanebah Nez. (2016) National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Chi'chil Bildagoteel Historic District, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service.
[25] Kiddle, "Top-of-the-World", https://kids.kiddle.co/Top-of-the-World,_Arizona#A_Look_at_Top-of-the-World.27s_History, accessed 19/07/2025
[26] Patty Gault. (2011) Mountain Breeze Memorial Gardens. Arizona Memory Project, accessed 25/07/2025, https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/162287

turnpike and freeway projects in the United States began to provide those improvements.[27]

Post-WWII Highways

After the Second World War the automobile factories, that had been making fighter planes and other military weaponry and vehicles, began turning out powerful, streamlined cars. As Americans embraced the automobile for personal use, millions of speedy, heavy vehicles damaged the pavement of the old highways, and traffic volumes congested city streets.[28] For example, traditional road engineering strove to get from point-to-point by the straightest possible line over the shortest possible distance. When curves were necessary, the driver was expected to slow down to a speed appropriate for the radius of the curve. But on a superhighway, drivers were expected to travel at a constant speed, which required that the curves be stretched out to accommodate that speed. At the same time, engineers began to pay more attention to the aesthetics of highway location. Long straight, stretches of highway had been studied and shown to be deadly dull in a literal sense; on such roads, drivers' attention often wandered from the road and some even fell asleep. An attractive blend of curves, rolling hills, and straightaways was both safer and more aesthetically pleasing to the driver.[29] During the 1950s U.S. 60, between Phoenix and Show Low, Arizona, was one of a group of routes that were improved to modern highway standards, connecting Phoenix to northern Arizona.[30]

Arizona's First Territorial Road

The first major road project in the Arizona Territory, with funding from the Territorial Legislature, was approved and constructed in 1877. A wagon road between Phoenix, Arizona, and Globe, Arizona, was needed after rich deposits of silver were discovered on the San Carlos Indian Reservation. The boomtown of "Globe City" [31] sprang up and was associated with Globe Mine.[32] Transporting men and materials to the silver mine and moving silver ore to Phoenix were the impetus for the new wagon road. This was funded by Territorial bonds in the amount of $10,000. The work was supervised by three road commissioners who were prominent residents from Maricopa County, Arizona.[33]

Miami-Superior Highway

One of the most important pieces of public works legislation in American history was the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916. It established a model for federal participation in highway development: individual states would submit proposals

[27] Pry, 117
[28] Ibid, 118
[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid, 148

[31] In 1878 the "City" was dropped from the name of the town, hence the current name of Globe, Arizona.
[32] Globe. Arizona Memory Project, accessed 25/07/2025, https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/247362
[33] Pry, 20-21

for road projects; they would receive approval from the U.S. Office of Public Roads (OPR); the state would fund the project construction; and finally, OPR would reimburse one-half of the construction cost to the state. This model of proposal, approval, construction, and reimbursement for highway projects prevailed for the remainder of the twentieth century.[34]

Federal Aid Project 16 for the Miami-Superior Highway in Gila and Pinal counties (later U.S. 60) involved some of the most difficult highway construction undertaken by the Arizona Highway Department (AHD). In the early years of statehood, as part of the labor force, prisoners were hired as road workers for some of the state's highway projects.[35] The heaviest portion of the work was accomplished in the late 1910s and early 1920s consisting of 1.75 miles of road blasted through rugged Queen Creek Canyon. Designated as Section C, this part was completed in 1921 at a cost of approximately $300,000.

In addition to numerous small drainage structures, the project involved construction of substantial concrete arch bridges over Queen Creek at the mouth of the canyon, and Devil's Canyon. The AHD bridge department designed the Queen Creek Bridge as a long-span, open spandrel arch, with a moderate arch barrel rise, two tapered ribs and paneled concrete parapets with steel pipe guardrails. Similarly, the AHD bridge department designed the Devil's Canyon Bridge as a medium-span, filled-spandrel arch, with a moderate arch barrel rise, a roadway which cantilevered over the arches on both sides, a corbeled arch ring and paneled concrete parapets with steel pipe guardrails. Under the supervision of AHD Resident Engineer H.B. Wright, a force account work crew constructed the Queen Creek Bridge in 1920-21 for a total cost of $30,118 and the Devil's Canyon Bridge in 1921-22 for a total cost of $23,780. These bridges carried traffic until their replacement in 1949. The original Queen Creek Bridge and Devil's Canyon Bridge now stand abandoned beside the current path of the GPSR.

As an integral part in one of the state's most important early highway projects, the original Queen Creek Bridge and Devil's Canyon Bridge structures are technologically important as early examples of a state-wide bridge design trend. Three basic concrete arch configurations were utilized by the AHD in the 1910s and1920s: the Luten arch, the open spandrel arch, and what it termed the "common arch" - or segmental filled spandrel-design long-span. Examples of the former were designed by their inventor, Daniel Luten, a civil engineer who pioneered the design and construction of reinforced concrete bridges[36]. The latter two were designed in-house by AHD bridge engineers for medium-to-long-span

[34] Ibid, 34
[35] Ibid, 27
[36] Purdue University, Archives and Special Collections, "Daniel B. Luten, 1869-1946", https://archives.lib.purdue.edu/agents/people/982**,** accessed 15/07/2025

applications. The Devil's Canyon Bridge is noteworthy as the oldest such AHD-designed common arch remaining in Arizona.[37]

The automobile road that would connect the mining town of Superior with the outside world was completed in 1922, part of Arizona's "Million Dollar Highway." After a national numbering system was adopted in the mid-1920s, this eventually became U.S. 60. Four years later, the Claypool Tunnel was cut through the mountainside east of Superior to better aide travelers who were on their way to, and from, Miami, AZ. The Claypool Tunnel was replaced by the much more efficient Queen Creek Tunnel in 1952. The new tunnel's dedication ceremony served as the crowning moment of the AHD's 15-year project to improve US 60 between Superior and Miami.

Nationwide Grid of Highways

The U.S. Numbered Highway System, often called U.S. Routes or U.S. Highways, was established in 1926. This is an integrated network of roads and highways numbered within a nationwide grid in the contiguous United States. The numbering system followed a grid by generally using even numbered routes running east to west with low numbers starting in the north. Routes running north to south utilized odd numbers, with low numbers starting in the east. As the designation and numbering of these highways were coordinated among the states, they are sometimes called Federal Highways, but the roadways were built and have always been maintained by state or local governments since their initial designation in 1926.[38] GPSR was originally numbered U.S. Highway 180, while U.S. 60 The National Old Trails Highway crossed northern Arizona between Lupton and Topock, following a route that matches Interstate 40 today.[39]

U.S. Highway 60 in Arizona

In the early 1930s the U.S. 60 number was given to Arizona's newest east-west highway, which extended from Springerville, Arizona, near the New Mexico border, to Ehrenberg, Arizona, at the California border. This was part of the shortest transcontinental highway at the time; a 3,053-mile route connecting Norfolk, Virginia, with Los Angeles, California.[40]

Although U.S. 60 once spanned the distance from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, it now terminates in western Arizona. The still-active route runs 2,670 miles from Virginia Beach, Virginia to Quartzsite, Arizona. The earliest portions of U.S. 60 within the state of Arizona were approved in 1927 and incorporated pre-existing routes from the Central Arizona cities of Wickenburg to Phoenix,

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[37] Clayton B. Fraser, (1988) HABS/HAER Inventory: Devil's Canyon Bridge, National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service.
[38] Historic US Highways, History of the US Highway System, https://www.historicushighways.com/history-of-us-highways, accessed 06/07/2025. Wikipedia, United States Numbered Highway System, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Numbered_Highway_System#History, accessed 06/07/2025.
[39] Pry, 36
[40] Ibid, 50

Phoenix to Miami, then to Springerville at the Arizona - New Mexico state line. The remaining segments from the Globe area to Show Low and onto to Springerville, as well as the segment from the California-Arizona state line to Wickenburg, were completed in the 1930s. By 1935, U.S. 60 navigated almost 400 miles across Arizona's midline and functioned as one of the state's most important east-west transportation routes. In June 1986, a 26-mile segment of U.S. 60 between Florence Junction and Miami was officially designated as a Scenic Road (GPSR).[41]

Reconstruction and Improvements

Significant portions of U.S. Route 60 were rebuilt, most notably the Miami-Superior Highway, which was widened and moved to its present-day alignment in the early 1950s.[42] Although interstate construction accounted for the majority of Arizona's highway construction budget—often as much as two-thirds of each year's expenditures—there was still much work being done on other roads in the state highway system. Highways such as U.S. Route 60 and U.S. Route 89 were widened and realigned to improve capacity and safety.[43] Of Arizona's original federal highways, only U.S. Route 60 has survived more or less intact, with just a small section incorporated into Interstate 10 in western Arizona.[44]

After the Second World War, the emphasis in bridge construction in Arizona shifted from developing new crossings to improving highway alignments and coping with the heavy traffic that came with the state's rapid postwar growth. This required bridges to be higher, wider, stronger, and longer. For the realignment of the narrow and winding Miami-Superior segment of U.S. Route 60, the roadway had to be moved to a higher elevation, which could only be done by building new bridges at Pinto Creek and Queen Creek. Using an identical design for both locations, a graceful steel arch design that won a national award, the bridges were completed in 1950 and 1953.[45]

During the first quarter of the twenty-first century numerous highway improvement projects have been completed. As mentioned earlier in this report, in the early-2000s between Florence Junction, Arizona, and Superior, Arizona, there were several construction projects that rebuilt this segment of U.S. 60 into a four-lane divided highway. In 2016 ADOT completed the installation of a light-emitting diode (LED) lighting system in the Queen Creek Tunnel on U.S. 60 east of Superior. This lighting upgrade was the first time that this innovative and energy-saving technology was added to an Arizona highway tunnel.[46] After

[41] Arizona Department of Transportation, List of Historic and Scenic Roads, accessed 01/072025, https://azdot.gov/about/historic-and-scenic-roads/list-historic-roads
[42] Pry, 58
[43] Ibid, 63
[44] Ibid, 75
[45] Ibid, 106
[46] Arizona Department of Transportation (October 2016), "Queen Creek Tunnel on U.S. 60 receives LED lighting system", accessed 07/28/2025, https://azdot.gov/news/queen-creek-tunnel-us-60-receives-led-lighting-system

seventy-two years of service the Pinto Creek Bridge was replaced in 2021. The 1940s-era bridge that was replaced received an award of merit in 1949 from the American Institute of Steel Construction for Most Beautiful Steel Bridge, Class II.[47] In 2023 the Pinto Creek Bridge received an America's Transportation Award for the Best Use of Technology and Innovation, Medium Project, for the Western region.[48] Currently, the Queen Creek Bridge and Waterfall Canyon Bridge are being replaced with completion anticipated in 2026.[49]

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Photographer: Steve Venker, ASLA Emeritus
July 31, 2025

Entry 2025 HALS Challenge: Landscapes of Roadside America

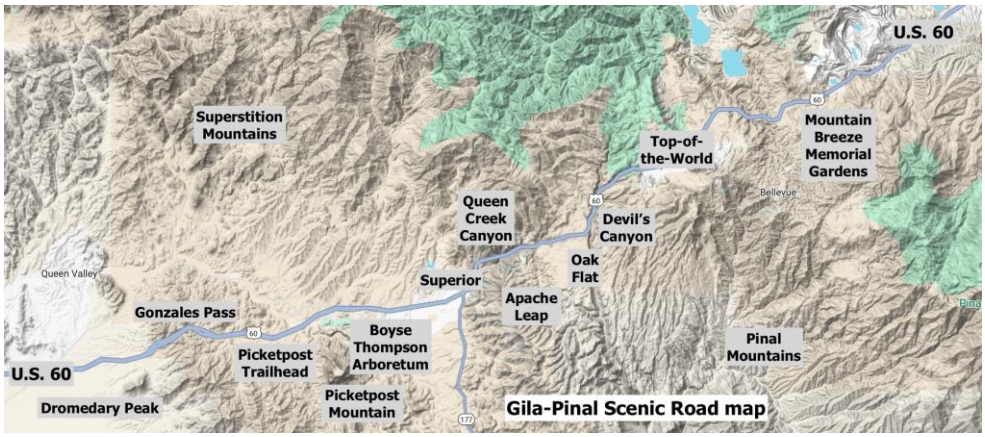

Figure 1 - Map of Gila-Pinal Scenic Road (prepared by Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 2 - Dromedary Peak, facing south (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 3 - Picketpost Trailhead, facing southeast (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 4 - Boyse Thompson Arboretum, facing south. Picketpost Mountain in the background. (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 5 - Magma Hotel, Superior, Arizona, facing north (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 6 - Apache Leap, facing southeast (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 7 - Queen Creek Canyon, facing southwest (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 8 - Oak Flat/Chi'chil Bildagoteel Historic District, facing southwest. In the upper right, the initial mine tailings of the Resolution Copper Mine are visible as an unvegetated slope. (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 9 - Devil's Canyon, facing north-northwest (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 10 - Top-of-the-World Trading Post, facing north (Steve Venker, 2025)

Figure 11 - Mountain Breeze Memorial Gardens, facing south (Steve Venker, 2025)