

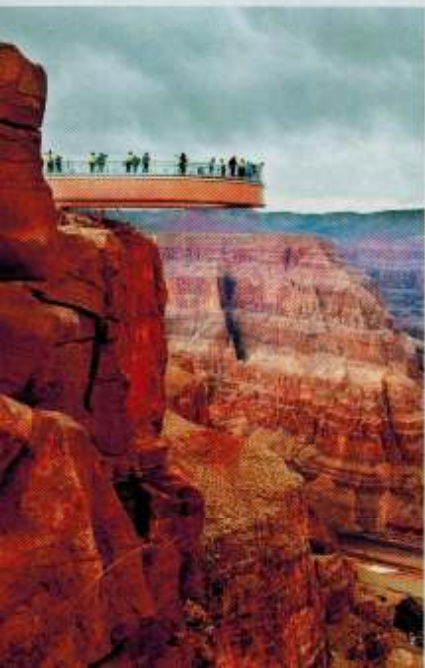
# POINTS OF INTEREST

THIS MONTH'S GUIDE TO NOTABLE AMERICAN DESTINATIONS AND HAPPENINGS

## Grand View

**HUALAPAI RESERVATION, ARIZONA**—Since opening in late March, the horseshoe-shaped, glass-bottomed steel deck extending 70 feet past the western rim of the Grand Canyon has been drawing some 2,000 visitors a day. The Hualapai tribe, which owns a million acres on this remote side of the canyon (90 miles from the national park), built the Grand Canyon Skywalk to lure tourists, most of whom come from Las Vegas, 120 miles to the west. (The basic skywalk package, with lunch, is \$75 per person.) Visitors wear paper booties to avoid scratching the glass floor. Some people, perhaps spooked by being 4,000 feet above the canyon floor in the roaring wind, cling to the side rails. The Colorado River, which carved the spectacular chasm over a period of six million years, slithers like an emerald snake far below one's feet. A layered sandstone and limestone formation called Eagle Point looks like a giant bird with outspread wings. Black ravens dip and dive around the peach-colored cliffs. The view is, in a word, awesome.

( BY BETSEY BRUNER )



## Nowhere Near Down Under

**DAWSONVILLE, GEORGIA**—Soon after boarding a safari truck, we spot a mob of kangaroos lounging beneath a stand of tulip poplars. Minutes later, we come upon about 40 more of the animals lolling in a grassy field. During the 90-minute tour, we see scores of them at this unlikely preserve of antipodean wildlife in the foothills of north Georgia, 60 miles from Atlanta.

Debbie and Roger Nelson, who have been breeding kangaroos in Georgia since 1984, opened the Kangaroo Conservation Center in 2000. The 87-acre facility boasts the largest collection of kangaroos outside Australia. All told, there are 300 animals representing 8 marsupial species. Several species, such as the brush-tailed bettong and the potoroo—small rat-like kangaroos—are threatened or endangered. "We don't want to see kangaroo populations follow the way of Tasmanian tigers, Asian tigers, elephants, gorillas and many other mammals who are either extinct or close to it," Debbie Nelson says.

Growing up in Florida, Debbie developed her fondness for wildlife frequenting private zoos that bred penguins and flamingos and rehabilitated injured dolphins and manatees. Roger hails from a farm in Connecticut, where his family raised cattle as a hobby. She was an art historian and he a mechanical engineer before giving in to their passion for animals. It was after breeding deer, llamas and antelope that the Nelsons tried kangaroos, starting with reds, one of the largest of the species. "It appeared that kangaroos generally did not thrive in captivity," Debbie says. "The challenge to change that inspired us."

The center also exhibits blue-winged kookaburras, panther chameleons and 70 other animals native to Australia and the Asian islands. It has supplied about 425 exotic animals to 30 zoos around the world and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The Nelsons "are doing a marvelous job," says Mickey Ollson, director of Wildlife World Zoo in Litchfield Park, Arizona, which has acquired kangaroos from the couple. "They're very, very dedicated to the animals."

Last year, more than 10,000 people visited the Kangaroo Conservation Center. Guided tours are \$27.50.

( BY NANCY HENDERSON )

KANGAROO CONSERVATION CENTER: CHRIS HALLUZENSKI / MOMENT / REDUX

