

2,000 places to camp

Bisbee couple's Web site details sites in 138 national forests **Accent**

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By **Howard Fischer**
CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

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It would require the governor

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Summer programs

► If you have a summer program for school-age kids, send info on it to us at <http://Tucson.com/abouttucson/kidsprograms/main.php> online.

The list of programs will be published March 12. Deadline for online submissions is 5 p.m. Feb. 17. If you have questions, call Maria Parham 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays at 573-4116.

BREAKING IT DOWN

Happy campers

Fred and Suzi Dow visited more than 2,000 campsites in 138 national forests, collecting colorful memories and practical information for their online guide

By Doug Kreutz
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Suzi Dow can't forget that startling morning when a bull moose wandered into the Wyoming campsite she shared with her husband.

Fred Dow still gets nervy when he recalls the day he and Suzi took a "white-knuckle shortcut" over a hideously narrow cliffside road on the way to a campground in Colorado.

Those are just two of the countless colorful memories the Dows, of Bisbee, have gathered during more than a decade of research on national forest campgrounds.

The goal of their work, in a nutshell, is to create a nation of happy campers.

Their detailed findings — on everything from campground facilities and fees to vegetation and nearby attractions — are available free at www.forestcamping.com on the Internet.

"National forest campgrounds are the best undiscovered recreational opportunities in the country," says Suzi, a housewife and communications instructor who travels the nation's back with her retiree husband in their 31-foot motor home. "Everybody should get out there



Photos courtesy of Fred and Suzi Dow

Fred and Suzi Dow, with Ralf (in Suzi's arms) and Dani, in front of the couple's 31-foot motor home.

Says Fred: "We've visited over 2,000 campgrounds in 138 national forests" since starting the project in 1994. "We'll do about 2,500 to 2,700 in all. We hope to finish in 2009."

The Dows, both of whom had extensive experience as tent campers, said they started gathering data for the Web site after determining that their fellow campers didn't always have the information they needed for a convenient, trouble-free outing

simply provide what we thought was the information campers needed and wanted," says Fred. "We came up with a database that is comprised of 50 to 55 fields of data for each campground. That's a lot of information."

To collect data, the Dows visit each campground they list — but don't necessarily camp in each one because they sometimes cover two to four campgrounds in a day.

CAMPGROUNDS ONLINE

► A trove of information on national forest campgrounds is available on a Web site — www.forestcamping.com — maintained by Bisbee residents Fred and Suzi Dow.

The site has a "publish on demand" feature that allows users to purchase selected campground information in book form. The softcover books range in price from \$15 to \$20.

► The Web site of the U.S. Forest Service — www.fs.fed.us — also provides information on national forest campgrounds around the country. The site can be searched by state or by national forest name.

CAMP SITES

Continued from Page E1

They're usually on the road, visiting campgrounds, from mid-May to early November.

Fred describes some of the information they present in the online database.

"First, we identify the campground and describe whether it's reservable or not through the Forest Service reservation system," Fred says. "We give a narrative description of the campground — noting the vegetation, things to do and anything unique such as that it's a great place for canoeing or rafting."

Individual data fields on the Web site provide information on the number of campsites, recreational-vehicle accessibility, hookups, restroom facilities and access for handicapped visitors.

"We'll describe hiking trails in the immediate area, whether you can take power boats on a lake — things like that," Fred says.

The Dows are limiting their research to developed campgrounds that have 10 or more designated sites and are accessible in a family sedan.

In addition to campground data, the Web site includes a "Camping With Suzi" section with journal entries, photo albums, recipes and other offerings.

John Able, Web manager for the Coronado National Forest of

Southeastern Arizona, says he finds the Web site attractive and comprehensive in scope.

"I'm most impressed by how many campgrounds they've visited, how many national forests they've visited," Able says. "I think there's a trend these days toward getting first-person information, as opposed to information only from the source" or agency involved.

"I think that's valuable," he adds. "Based on the amount of their experience, I think their opinion is going to be very useful."

Able says it's important for campers to check national forest Web sites as well as the Dow's site before planning a trip.

"There are things that change fairly quickly," he said. "For example, in the wildfire season there are often closures of campgrounds and trails."

He recommends that campers visit the home page of the U.S. Forest Service — www.fs.fed.us — and search the site for the forest they plan to visit.

The Dows, meanwhile, plan to leave for Oregon this spring to continue their campground research.

"We have Oregon, Washington state and Alaska to do before we're finished," Suzi says. "We've got lots more campgrounds to see."

► Contact reporter Doug Kreutz at dkreutz@azstarnet.com or at 573-4192.