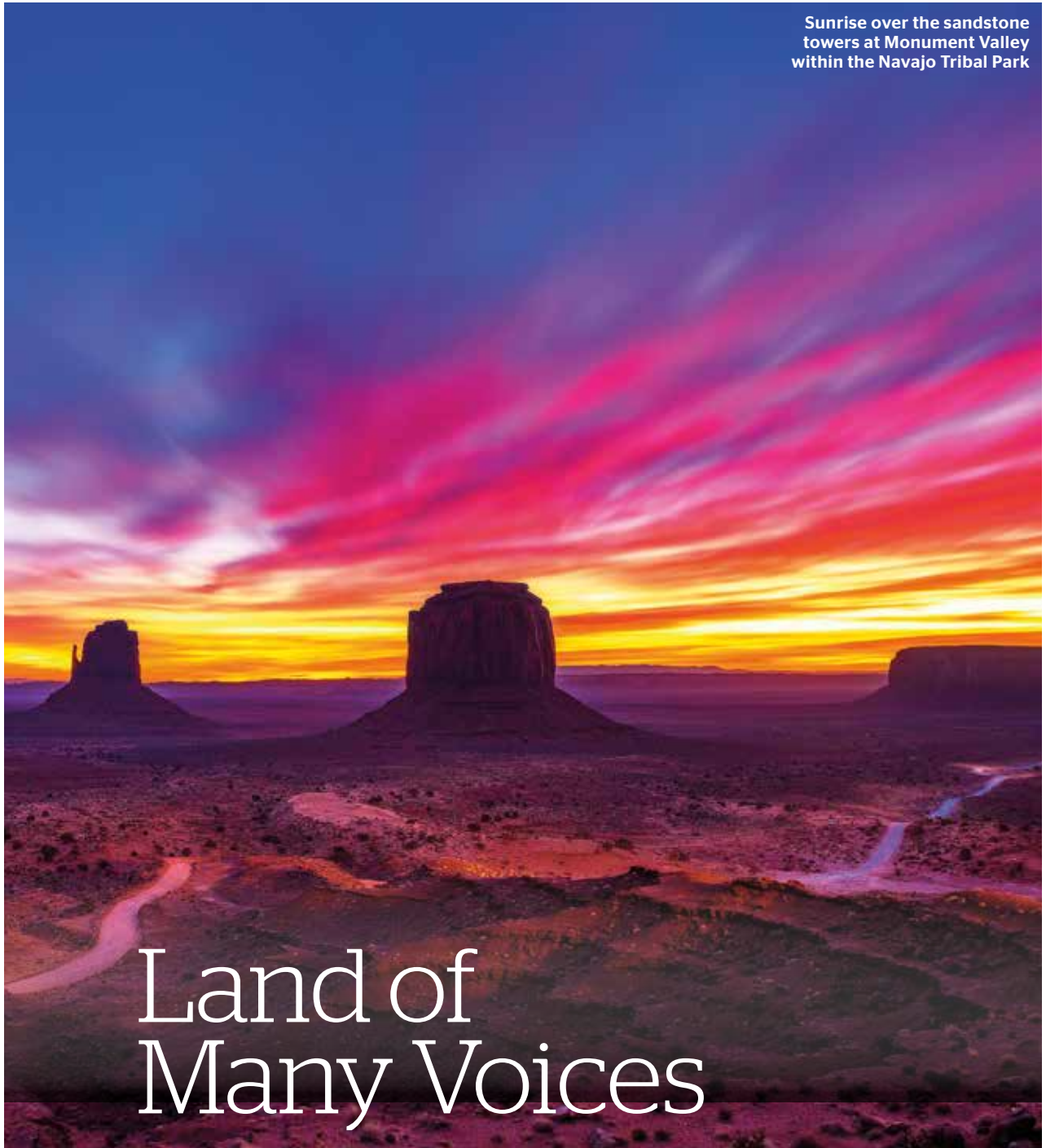


SPOTLIGHT ON...

Arizona

Sunrise over the sandstone towers at Monument Valley within the Navajo Tribal Park



Land of Many Voices

Chris Fitch takes a road trip through the Grand Canyon state to meet the eclectic landscapes and people who inhabit this southern corner of the United States

SPOTLIGHT ON...
ARIZONA



- **Location:** North America
- **Land area:** 295,233 sq km (113,990 sq miles)
- **Population:** 7,016,270 (2017)
- **Population density:** 56.3 people per sq mile (21.7 people per sq km)
- **Native tribes:** 22
- **Languages spoken:** English 72.9 per cent, Spanish 20.8 per cent, Navajo 1.5 per cent
- **Religions:** Protestant 39 per cent, Catholic 21 per cent, Mormon 5 per cent
- **Highest point:** Humphreys Peak (12,633 feet/3,851m)
- **Forest cover:** 19.4 million acres (27 per cent)



Red sandstone formations known as 'the Wave' at the border between Utah and Arizona in the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument

TIMELINE

- **1540**
Spanish settlers and missionaries first arrive in the southwest from Mexico
- **1680**
The Pueblo Revolt saw united Navajo and Apache tribes defeat the Spanish and push them back into Mexico
- **1692**
Southwest re-conquered by Spanish forces
- **1736**
Silver is discovered near Tubac, leading to a silver rush
- **1821**
Arizona becomes part of Mexico following Mexico's independence from Spain
- **1848**
Northern Arizona ceded to the United States as part of 'New Mexico' at the end of the 1846-1848 Mexican-American War
- **1853-1854**
Gadsden purchase sees the south of Arizona and New Mexico also become part of the US
- **1863**
Arizona splits from New Mexico to become separate territory
- **1868**
Signing of the Navajo treaty
- **1886**
Surrender of Geronimo, famed Apache prisoner of war who led resistance to the US military
- **1912**
Arizona becomes the last of the contiguous 'lower 48' to obtain statehood
- **1924**
Native Americans granted citizenship, although not all yet eligible to vote

We're a sovereign nation,' insists Thomas Yellowhair. 'We can make our own laws.' But he's not referring to the United States. The pair of us are standing in the foyer of the Navajo Interactive Museum in Tuba City, north Arizona, and I've been squinting with confusion at the clock over his shoulder, wound an hour later in the day than the time on my wrist. As Yellowhair patiently explains, the Navajo nation of northern Arizona embraces daylight saving time, while the rest of the state does not.

It's a subtle but symbolic statement of autonomy. I didn't consciously cross any borders on my way into Tuba City but I've now entered the official reservation of the Navajo – or *Diné*, in their own language – home to over 300,000 people. Their relative independence from the rest of the state enables the implementation of various local laws from the Navajo Council Chambers, including what time they set their clocks to.

With the aid of a short video, Yellowhair – himself a member of the Honey Comb Cliff Dweller (*Tsétjikiní*) clan, one of roughly 130 subdivisions within the Navajo community – outlines the central belief system of the Navajo. This revolves around three worlds ('black', 'blue' and 'yellow') that the ancient spirit people inhabited before finally settling on the fourth, 'glittering' world – also known as Earth. There's an intense relationship with the land upon which they live. 'The four sacred mountains are supposed to be

the boundary line of the ancient Navajo land,' explains Yellowhair, pointing on a map to various peaks dotted across what is now Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. 'The story goes that the Navajo are supposed to stay within the mountains. If you go out of the mountains, that's not our territory.'

The modern Navajo nation is smaller than the area demarcated by the four ancestral landmarks, yet it still covers more than 67,000 sq km (26,000 sq miles) – equivalent to roughly a quarter of Arizona. This makes it the largest native reservation in the United States, larger even than many actual states. After years of repeated invasion and occupation, the signing of the Navajo Treaty in 1868 brought an end to the detention of as many as 10,000 Navajo residents. It followed the brutal 450-mile 'long walk' (*Hwéeldi*) to the Bosque Redondo Reservation, New Mexico in 1864, during which Navajo people were forcibly removed from their

land by the US government and relocated on foot. Over 200 people perished. The event is a scar on the collective Navajo memory, and continues to trigger pain and trauma to this day.

NAVAJO/CAMERON

The Navajo nation is the starting point for my north-to-south journey through Arizona, to learn about the remarkable diversity contained within just this one state. Cameron, to the south of Tuba City, straddles the edge of the Navajo reservation. Established in 1916, the settlement was one of many that provided a place to buy and sell products. 'It was a trading post, where people traded their wares,' explains Jimmy Jensen, assistant general manager of Cameron Trading Post, almost shouting over the buzzing of the walkie-talkie strapped to his belt.

Jensen, another member of the *Tsétjikiní* clan,

SPOTLIGHT ON...
ARIZONA

points out the large black-and-white photographs adorning his office, century-old images that depict another world, despite being recognisably the same location. 'You see the heritage, it's still here,' he says, cracking a smile. Nowadays Cameron is a convenient place for curious tourists and day-trippers to stop off and purchase traditional arts and crafts created by Navajo artisans, including pottery, baskets and replicate weaponry. 'Every day we'll have people come in from the reservation and say "Can I sell you my stuff?," he says. 'They'll show us what they've made, and if we're interested, we'll buy it.'

Almost hidden behind the curtains of rugs lined up and waiting to be purchased, Elsie Glander epitomises the spirit of Cameron Trading Post. She sits at a large loom, upon which is the completed bottom foot of a rug woven in a distinctive Navajo 'storm' pattern. She was taught to weave in this way by her mother as a young girl. 'Weaving started back in the late 1700s, when the Spanish brought the sheep over,' she explains softly, her fingers stroking the wool threads, gently pulling them back and cutting them to the desired length. 'It was more just for clothing and blankets, but as time went on they started trading.' Having woven more than 500 rugs, she now takes custom orders that can take up to five months to weave, with uniquely-designed patterns for each customer. 'You have to have a lot of patience,' she croons. 'There's a lot of therapy to it, it helps your mind. You draw with your wool.'

FLAGSTAFF/PHOENIX/TUCSON

While the Navajo might be the most populous of Arizona's tribes – indeed, the largest in the US – they are far from alone. The state contains 22 federally recognised tribes, including the Yavapai-Apache, the Havasupai and the Hopi (whose territory is surrounded entirely by the Navajo reservation). Combined with the high-profile 389 miles (626km)-long international boundary with Mexico to the south, there are few states with such extreme ethnic and cultural diversity.

Driving south, the road rises upon approach to the imposing Humphreys Peak, its snowy 12,633 foot summit just visible beneath a looming umbrella of dark clouds. Past the boarded-up 'Sacred Mountain Trading Post' (Humphreys is the highest of the San Francisco peaks, one of the four sacred Navajo mountains) it then plunges into the elevated Coconino National Forest, before descending into Flagstaff, the first 'International Dark Sky City' (a town that has shown exceptional dedication to the preservation of the night sky), and home to the Lowell Observatory (where Pluto was discovered in 1930). At over 7,000 feet above sea level, it has a fresh 'mountain town' feel, with temperatures plummeting accordingly once the sun goes down.

On the dashboard the dial rolls from 92.9 KAFF ('northern Arizona's home for country music!') to KMLE 107.9 ('Nobody's playin' more country!') as I head south from Flagstaff. The descent from the Colorado Plateau is fast, dropping to below 4,000 feet in barely half an hour. The resulting change in environment is dramatic. As the temperature rises, vast ponderosa pine forests are replaced by saguaro cacti and valleys that scream out for Road Runner and Wile E Coyote. Gigantic SUVs block out the sun as



Weaver Elsie Glander makes a rug with a traditional Navajo pattern



Don Guerra, founder of Barrio Bread bakery in Tucson

The state capital of Arizona, Phoenix. The city has grown from only 100,000 residents in the 1950s to 1.5 million people today



they overtake, and roadside signs promote locations with seductive names such as the 'Red Rock Secret Mountain Wilderness Area.'

It's hard not to be overwhelmed by the sprawling urban landscape of state capital Phoenix, emerging from the desert like a gigantic mirage. Flat like a tortilla, barely a ripple rises above the heat-cracked streets of gently rolling suburbia, punctuated by bursts of green golf courses and lush parks. Rapid expansion has seen Phoenix explode in the postwar years, absorbing satellite towns such as Scottsdale, Mesa and Glendale. From only 100,000 residents in the 1950s, over 1.5 million people now live within an area spread across 1,165 sq km (450 sq miles) of the Salt River valley, making it one of the least dense of all US cities.

The radio soundtrack for my arrival at the southern city of Tucson is 99.5 KIM ('Tucson's country favourites!'). Like Flagstaff, Tucson provides a young, diverse balance to the central business metropolis that is Phoenix. 'It's a very different cultural heritage,' explains Susan Irwin, division director of library and archives at the Arizona History Museum in central Tucson. 'Tucson has a really very robust Mexican-Spanish heritage, and always has. Phoenix, on the other hand, it's really more of a white settlement. It doesn't have that same diversity.'

Only 100 miles north of Arizona's border with Mexico, Tucson's proximity to these Hispanic influences has had an ongoing impact on the cultural mix of the city that's different from the capital, argues Irwin. 'Phoenix, when it really grows, it's growing from people coming from around the rest of the United States,' she explains. 'In Tucson, it's coming from the south. I think that makes a huge cultural difference between the two.'

▶ LANGUAGE

■ The Navajo played a large but understated role in the US World War II effort. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, hundreds of Navajo signed up to fight alongside the rest of the population. It wasn't long before military officials realised they had an asset on their hands: the little-known Navajo language. The Navajo 'code talkers' used their language as the base for a remarkably effective encrypted code. The methodology for the code involved substituting Navajo words for common English military terms – buzzard for bomber, whale for battleship, etc. – as well as using various Navajo words broken down phonetically in place of English letters. The code was able to communicate messages relatively quickly, and yet proved impossible for the Japanese to crack.

One way this influence manifests itself is through cuisine, with Tucson becoming the first UNESCO city of gastronomy in the US, in 2015. 'Tucson, it's had this spotlight on it,' says Don Guerra, founder of the Tucson-based Barrio Bread bakery, as he runs around sliding trays of bread in and out of hot ovens. Baking with Sonoran wheat grown in the region, Guerra has gained a following through his community activities and devotion to using local produce. 'I can act politically through a loaf of bread,' he argues, grabbing freshly baked loaves branded with his cactus logo and piling them up ahead of a day's trading. 'My family's on both sides of the border, you know? The border crossed us. I source grain from the other side of the border, I showcase it here, I tell people where it comes from. It's not just a loaf of bread, it's a story.'

SPOTLIGHT ON... ARIZONA

► PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

■ From north to south, Arizona's geology is defined initially by the vast Colorado Plateau, a 337,000 sq km (130,000 sq mile) elevated landscape between 3,000 and 14,000 feet high. The plateau uniformly uplifted tens of million years ago with almost no breaks or folds. In the last five million years it has also gradually become home to the iconic Grand Canyon, stretching 448km (278 miles) along the path of the Colorado river, carving its way through the sandstones and limestones that layer the plateau. It also contains numerous other gorges, mountains, valleys and canyons, as well as the colourful Painted Desert.

South of the plateau, the landscape gradually drops away and becomes the northern region of the Sonoran desert, which stretches across 310,800 sq km (120,000 sq miles), even into neighbouring California and Mexico. This desert landscape of southern Arizona is home to the distinctive saguaro cactus, as well as the lesser-known barrel cactus, organ-pipe cactus, and prickly pear.

SOUTH ARIZONA

Leaving Tucson, I'm immediately confronted by signs presenting distances in kilometres instead of miles, a legacy of President Jimmy Carter's failed attempt to introduce the metric system to the US (this is the only section of the nationwide highway he managed to convert). Back in the north, occasional roadside signs warned of a 'low' or 'medium' risk of wildfires, but on the yellow, dry, sun-washed desert landscape of south Arizona, the signs instead read 'EXTREME' in bold red letters.

This part of the state used to be Mexico. It wasn't until the clock struck midnight on 1 January 1854 that the Gadsden purchase – when the southern parts of Arizona and New Mexico, together roughly 78,000 sq km (30,000 sq miles), were bought by the United States to allow for the construction of a transcontinental railroad to run all the way to the Pacific coast – meant the stars-and-stripes flew over this landscape.

Unlike the relative ease with which the Navajo reservation operates across three different US states, this far south the strict geopolitical realities of international borders interferes with native lands. Probably most impacted by the current US-Mexico border are the Tohono O'odham – 'the people of the desert' – the second largest community in Arizona behind the Navajo. Their range once expanded as far north as the land that is now Phoenix, and to the south as far as the Gulf of California. But the border cut right through their territory, instantly forcing them to become either American or Mexican citizens.

'The US-Mexico international boundary is a very recent part of our history, and the native people here on either side of that border share many things in common, with a very deep history,' says Eric Kaldahl, chief curator and deputy director of the Amerind Museum in Dragoon, east of Tucson which displays the fine art of Native American people. 'The border's been really hard on them since it's been hardened and militarised in this last 20 years.' He describes a recently

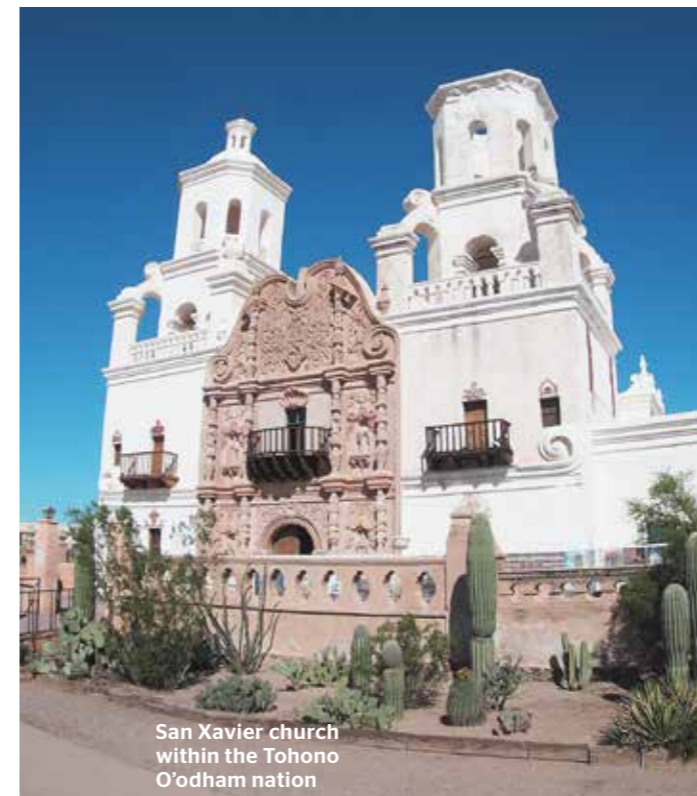


Horseshoe Bend, a meander of the Colorado River, located near the town of Page

revived tradition in which young Tohono O'odham boys pass into manhood by walking all the way to Mexico's Pacific coast and returning with valuable salt and seashells. 'But they've had a real difficult time with the border,' he explains. 'There's a lot of talking between tribal governments and the US border patrol, because the O'odham reservation has 75 miles of US-Mexico border. It's a source of a lot of tension.'

Driving through the Tohono O'odham nation itself feels a world away from the busy streets of Tucson, barely ten miles north of here. Coyotes dash across the dirt road, swapping one area of bare desert shrubland for another. Emerging from the haze is the striking white building known as San Xavier, the largest of 61 churches and chapels on Tohono O'odham land. When the Spanish arrived in the 16th century and headed north from conquered Mexico, they built a huge number of missions across the region. San Xavier was founded in 1692, with construction of the church itself finishing in 1797. It remains highly active today.

'The relationship between the people and the church nowadays is fairly strong,' says Gabriel Mendoza, food production supervisor at the nearby San Xavier Cooperative Association (SXCA), and member of the Tohono O'odham nation. 'You still have those hardcore traditionalists who practice solely traditional beliefs. Then you have people that have a balance



San Xavier church within the Tohono O'odham nation

► WATER

■ Arizona has been in some stage of drought since 1994. Even the northern region of the state, where the main drainage of the Colorado river flows, frequently experiences periods of drought. The plateau is considered semi-arid and receives between 250 and 375mm of precipitation annually, while the southern region is subtropical, and receives as little as 75 to 380mm (3 to 15 inches) annually.

The surprisingly green city of Phoenix is dependent on the water piped down by the Central Arizona Project, developed in the 1970s. A long waterway that diverts part of the Colorado river near California, it carries it 541km (336 miles) across the state to water the south.

between traditional beliefs and the church.' Raised by his grandmother, Mendoza and his siblings grew up learning from her hybridised adherence to both beliefs. 'Back in my home, O'odham language was fluent, that was the way we communicated,' he continues. 'Right now the homes are so modern. The way that the times have changed, not a lot of people speak the O'odham language, and not a lot of people attend ceremony.'

One way Mendoza takes responsibility for restoring traditional ways of life is through the food grown

SPOTLIGHT ON... ARIZONA

in the SXCA, which heavily promotes native desert produce such as tepary beans and various squashes, as well as wild crops including mesquite flour, l'itoni onions and cholla buds. 'This is just one of my many responsibilities as an O'odham male,' he reflects. 'It all ties back to traditional practices, everything from the rains, to the land, to the water, to ceremony, to growing, to harvesting. It's all tied, not just to the people, but to the land itself.'

The very existence of the co-op is almost a protest against the government's historical efforts to break up tribal lands. 'Originally tribal lands were owned by the tribe,' explains Cie'na Schlaefli, interim sales and marketing coordinator at SXCA. 'It was one big landmass that was owned by the individual nations of the tribes around the country.' Most O'odham people lived a semi-nomadic existence following the seasons, therefore not maintaining a permanent home. The passing of the Dawes Act in 1887 saw most tribal land divided into small plots, to be farmed by individual families, that, over time, saw farms sold on, often into non-tribal hands. 'It was another way to take land away from the Native Americans,' explains Schlaefli. 'But San Xavier didn't do that.' Instead, the 1,300 landowners pooled their resources, joining their land back together in the 1970s, until the district of San Xavier – one of 13 within the Tohono O'odham nation – became farmed again as one single entity. Frequent car traffic and well-stocked shelves indicate that it's been a successful endeavour.

Signs warning of an impending international border are increasingly frequent as I approach Tubac, the first European settlement in what is now Arizona, and also now a thriving artistic community 'where art and history meet', according to the slogan at the grand entrance. A nearby site was inundated in 1736 by hundreds of prospectors seeking silver, concentrating on land owned by one Bernardo de Urrea. Called

► DEMOGRAPHICS

■ For thousands of years the traditional inhabitants of Arizona included the Ancestral Puebloans, Hohokam, Mogollon and Patayan people. 'When a lot of people think about the southwest they often think about the Apache and the Navajo, but they're the late-comers to the region,' says Dr James Watson, associate curator of bioarchaeology at Arizona State Museum. These two groups are believed to have arrived in the region around five or six hundred years ago, travelling down from Alaska and northern Canada, further adding to the mixing of people in the region.

Recent immigration from Mexico and Central America has seen the state witness a significant demographic shift. Nearly a third of the population – 31.4 per cent – registered as either Hispanic or Latino in the last census. 'There's a lot of variability in the landscape, but there's just as much in the people,' says Watson.

Politically, the shift has seen Arizona move from deep red Republican to solid purple. The triumph of Democrat Kyrsten Sinema in the Senate race last year means Democrats are seriously considering winning the state as a strategy for regaining the White House.



'Ranchito Arizonac' (or 'the good oak tree' – 'arizon-a' – in his native Basque), this site provided the inspiration for the name adopted for the entire territory when it broke off from neighbouring New Mexico more than a century later.

NOGALES

Nogales is a town with the unique qualification of being the only settlement at the US-Mexico border to have a twin with the same name on the opposite side. Leaving the Interstate at exit 1A, I'm suddenly confronted by a huge, rust-red metal fence that reaches high into the sky and snakes across the hillsides, surrounded on both sides by houses fairly similar in appearance, but in totally different geopolitical circumstances. It's as though the border simply cleaved its way through what was once a regular southwestern town, stationing checkpoints and military vehicles alongside fast-food restaurants and gas stations, forever splitting it in two.

'That's the interesting part of it. It was one town that grew up in two,' explains Axel Holm, former president at the Pimeria Alta Historical Society, a stone's throw from the imposing border fence. 'The fact is that we have a railroad straddling the border, and that names both towns. So the town developed an intense unity from the beginning, it was considered one community. It was just incidental that it was in two countries.'

Considering the undeniable connection between the people and the geography either side of the fence, it feels peculiar to face this essentially arbitrary line. Nevertheless, political realities being what they are, I triple-check the presence of my passport in my pocket, then, to cries of 'Hey, amigo!', march across the border into Nogales, Mexico, my Arizona journey complete. ●

► LINKS

■ Visit Arizona visitarizona.com