

Self-Guided Historic Driving Tour of Forest Lakes Estates, AZ



Stop #1 Water District - 1537 Merzville Road

The first "water" department was a single faucet near the turn-around in front of Marie and Alvis Denison's house. The newcomers filled their water cans, jugs, pans etc. and hauled them to their new mountain retreats.

Getting water for the property owners was more of a problem. In 1967, there were about 150 lots that either had a cabin or a trailer on them. It was soon realized that the subdivision was growing faster than the water supply. The well at the Denison house would only supply about 15 g.p.m.

The Forest Lakes Owners Association, formed in 1967, began the process of securing electricity from APS to form a Water Company. FLOA entered into an Agency Agreement with the Coconino Board of Supervisors to operate the system to insure that the operation would be on a non-profit basis.

Merz and Bill Denison gave FLOA ¼ acre of land on the southeast corner of Merzville Road and Old Rim Road. They also had a well drilled and installed a 5,000 gallon storage tank. People who belonged to the Owners Association were issued a key to a lock box on the front of the well house. In the box was a hose bib and 25 feet of hose. The lines to get water, at times, created a long wait. Some people had 500 gallon water tanks mounted on trailers, while others were using 5 gallon water cans.

FLOA obtained a 1947 ton and a half truck, from the Denison's, on which was mounted a 1,000 gallon tank. The Callahan's delivered water for 1 cent per gallon, for those who had water tanks. In two years there were approximately 150 lots that had water tanks mounted on stands.

The Owners Association, sensing a need for a water district, began to circulate a petition to form a water improvement district. By 1972 water lines had been installed to each lot. It wasn't too long after that that water began flowing to each lot!

The current building was originally the location of the Forest Lakes Mercantile and Post Office. For awhile it contained a laundromat .

On March 4, 1991 the Coconino County Board of Supervisors converted Forest Lakes Water Improvement District from a county improvement district to a domestic water improvement district. All assets and liabilities of the former county improvement district were transferred to the domestic water improvement district.

In 1992 the land for FLDWID office was purchased.

Stop #2 Original Mining Settlement - 1771 Merzville Road

Alvis and Marie Denison built a cabin in this area in 1955 and became permanent residents. Marie's nickname was Merz, pronounced "Mertz," and the little settlement was soon being called Merzville. That's how we got the name of Merzville Road.

The road on which the Denison's lived became Merzville Road, and the water spigot near the turn-around in front of their house was the only place miners and other locals could obtain water. The house still exists on what is today called the DPS Compound at 1771 Merzville Rd.

In the early 1960's the U.S. Government ceased to stockpile manganese so the Forest Lakes operation turned to some logging. But with Arizona's

burgeoning population, the idea of developing a recreation and summer home area began to materialize.

Alvis Denison died on July 22, 1964. The area continued to prosper and grow under the management of Bill Wheeler Denison and Bob Williams.

The dump originally was in an old assessment hole on lot 38N (2418 Tall Trees Loop). It soon filled up and could no longer be used. The only land acceptable to the County for a landfill was at the old mill site, which was owned by Ted Wheeler, whose family was the original sub-divider of the area. To help solve the garbage situation, Ted Wheeler donated the use of the old mill site to be used as a landfill, which was used for several years. The family also donated the property where the fire station and county yard are located today.

The lots in this area were originally numbered 1 N and above. You will still see several old lot markers with an "N" next to the number. These are for historic purposes today. Renumbering of the lots was done to now be numbered 1201, 1202, etc.

Unit "Number One" was laid out and the first "lots available" sign was erected in 1964 on the south side of the road. They are sometimes referred to Lots 1S, etc. The first house built on Lot #1 is still standing and you will see it on Stop #8.

Stop #3 School District & Library - 3031 Old Rim Road

The School

The district can trace its beginnings to a rural school house near the Chevelon Ranger Station and sawmill during WWII. According to Bessie Kid Best, a long-ago Coconino County School Superintendent, the sawmill owner (a Mr. Whiting) said he would build a schoolhouse if the county would hire the teacher and buy the furnishings and books ... and so they did. The school building was relocated several times.

Circa 1972 a triple-wide trailer was purchased for use as a schoolhouse. It remained a one room/one teacher schoolhouse. In the late 1980's, the school ceased to operate. In 1989 the triple-wide trailer was moved to Forest Lakes and became the Chevelon Butte Elementary School District #5 office and community center for Forest Lakes.

However, in 1982 the Chevelon Butte Elementary School District #5 had been incorporated as a formal school district. After the elementary school house was closed the district continued to function, for all practical purposes, as a transportation district even though it is still an elementary school district.

The district could reopen a school house any time they chose without additional approval by the state.

The Library

The first Librarians were Peggy Freeman and Katherine Price. Peggy went to the county and told them Forest Lakes needed a library. Cheryl Rife started volunteering as the Librarian in 1994 and the job was turned into a paying position on January 2, 1996.

Stop #4 Manganese Mining Mounds - 2268 Summer Loop

The area that is now Forest Lakes began as mining claims filed by Reed Denison in the late 1939-1940 era. Reed Denison was the brother of Alvis Denison who initiated the present settlement of the area with Bill Wheeler, Denison and Bob Williams.

Reed Denison was killed in an auto accident in 1949. At this time Alvis became highly involved and continued to develop the mining interest of the area. The principle metal involved was manganese. The United States government was purchasing the metal and stockpiling it.

Bill and Alvis conducted the mining with the help of two Caucasian miners and five Indian families from the Zia Indian Reservation located northwest of Albuquerque, New Mexico. When the ore was washed out, it was transported to Show Low, Arizona and loaded into gondola cars at the railhead. The ore was then railed to the smelter at El Paso, Texas for stockpiling.

The U.S. Government ceased to stockpile manganese in the early 1960's and the operation turned to some logging and the idea of developing a recreation and summer home area began to materialize.

Many old mining sites are still visible on several lots in the community. Many of them have a depression in the ground next to the mounds that accumulated water. You will see at least 3 mounds at this location.

Stop #5 The Pond - End of Canyon Drive

An ore separation plant was designed by Alvis Denison circa 1950 and constructed where the Old Dump area was located to the north of the Pond. (End of Canyon Drive near the Pond) The water well for the plant was the first water well drilled in the area. Two large diesel generators were installed to furnish power for the plant.

The same location was the site of the slash pit for a many years.

The compactor was just to the east of the slash pit where the private residence now sits. It was in operation during the 1990's.

Today the field north of the pond is used for a helicopter landing zone for emergency use.

The Pond has always been a favorite recreation spot for residents and their families. The Library sponsors an annual fishing derby there each summer. It's a great place to take a walk and have a picnic. The hills get a wonderful covering of snow in the winter and is a great place for sledding.

Stop #6 Jimbo's Hardware Store - Corner of Sheep Springs & Little Pine Trail

The land for the hardware store was purchased in 1969 by Jimbo and Joan Ledford. Jimbo built the house next to the store and the one behind it as well as the store in 1976. Jimbo and Joan owned and operated the store consisting of one big room with lots of steal shelving, cardboard bin boxes holding merchandise from pipe fittings, nails, electrical parts, chain saws and paint, etc.

Roxie Allen, daughter of Jimbo and Joan, grew up in Forest Lakes and now lives in the house. She remembers watching her daddy build the store, brick by brick, board by board. The front of the building has different brick on the face to show patrons what type of brick could be purchased.

Phase II of the hardware store (as it sits today) began shortly after 1978. Jimbo opened a dealership showroom of Polaris Snowmobiles, with all the Snowmobile gear, Echo Chainsaws and Kerosene Heater's as well as a retail chain with Sentry Hardware – Jimbo's now became Jimbo's Sentry Hardware. In 1987 Jimbo & Joan sold the hardware store so that they could travel the country.

Stop #7 Fire Station - 1532 Merzville Road

With all of the people coming up on weekends and during the summers, along came fires, accidents, heart attacks, etc. The nearest hospitals were in Show Low and Payson. Ambulances were available at both locations, but it took 45 minutes to 1 & ½ hours to get them here.

It seemed that most of the fires would start up on Sunday nights after all the people went back "down the hill". The old 1947 Chevy water truck was the only water Forest Lakes had for fighting fires. The truck, with help from almost everyone here, put out a lot of fires and prevented many major catastrophes. None of the lots had been cleaned up and there was a considerable amount of fuel for the fires to go racing off into the forest.

It got to where there were so many accidents with chain saws and people falling off roofs that when we got the people to the hospitals, the nurses would say, "another one from Accident Acres!" There were and still are a lot of heart attacks mostly from over exertion and people not used to our high altitude of 7500 feet.

In July 1975, a petition was circulated to form a Volunteer Fire District within Forest Lakes Estates and one mile within the outer perimeter of said subdivision. For the first several years there was not much tax money coming in. The Owners Association obtained an old military 6 x 6 from the County Civil Defense and paid \$13,000 to have it converted to a fire truck. The truck had a front mount 500-g.p.m. pump and a 1,000-gallon water tank on it. An old ambulance was bought with tax money and donations then refurbished. The fire department had about a dozen people trained as E.M.T.s. In 2008, the Fire Department switched from a volunteer force to a full-time paid Fire Department.

Stop #8 First house - 318 Hillcrest Trail

The first house that was built in Unit I, Lot 1 on Hillcrest Trail still exists. A newer house where the current residents live is located just to the south of it.

Unit I includes Lots 1—33. They were originally numbered with an "S" to differentiate the South side of Hwy 260 from the North side, that also had Lots 1 and up. Lots on the North side were later e-numbered by adding the number 12 in front of them; i.e. 1201, 1202, 1203, etc.

Some of the old Lot number signs are still in the ground. They add a bit of charm to our wonderful community called Forest Lakes Estates.

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