

# Living in Cherry

Prescott \*  
Cherry

**Location:** About 35 miles southeast of downtown Prescott

**Elevation:** Similar to Prescott, approximately 4,700 feet

**Getting There:** From Prescott, take Highway 69 to Dewey, take a left on Highway 69, drive about nine miles until the Cherry Road sign. Cherry is located six miles from Highway 169. The road is very bumpy and stretches the short distance to nearly 25 minutes.

## Cherry: Remoteness suits most of hamlet's hardy citizens fine

By **GREMLYN BRADLEY**  
The Prescott Courier

Tucked away on a bumpy, winding dirt road is one of Yavapai County's best-kept secrets.

And the residents of Cherry kind of like it that way.

The tiny community boasts a familial atmosphere, one where people meet at each other's homes in the morning for coffee and conversation.

"Everybody's here to help the other guy," said Boyce Macdonald, who has lived in Cherry for about 17 years.

While the six-mile, 25-minute drive from Highway 169 makes Cherry anything but easily accessible, a lucky few call the town home.

When asked how many peo-

ple actually live in Cherry, Macdonald said, "Thirty-five full time and fifty on a big weekend."

A population of 35 is a dramatic decrease from the late 1920s, when 300 people lived in the area, according to Al Creighton. The diverse group ranges from baby-boomers to retirees and even includes two "movie moguls," a husband-and-wife team involved in the entertainment industry.

Cherry — believed to be named for the area's choke cherry trees — itself was born into glamour as a town made on mining claims. The claims became homesteads and the homesteads became private deeded land.

Today, Cherry is a privately-

owned island surrounded by U.S.D.A. Forest Service land.

"Most all of us border the forest," said Macdonald,

"They make pretty good neighbors," added Creighton.

Cherry Road, the only one in the town, is owned in part by the Forest Service, the county and private owners. Creighton said the road was built by the Army to connect Fort Verde and Fort Whipple. Macdonald attests to this, saying he has found old military buttons in his front yard.

A retired aerospace engineer who is still active in commercial real estate, Creighton moved to Cherry with his wife, Grace, a retired registered nurse, in 1979.

Al Creighton visited the



Reporter Gremlyn Bradley

Enjoying their own little piece of paradise are Cherry residents (from left) Boyce Macdonald, Al Creighton, Grace Creighton and Frank Melluzzo.

town in 1953, when he was set on buying a ranch. Grace Creighton had been familiar with the area since 1956. Today, they live in a remodeled home, which at one time was a one-room mining cabin.

They live a sort of country lifestyle, which includes butchering their meat, canning fruits and vegetables and enjoying fresh eggs.

But they admit not all people are as taken with the rural life as they are.

"Some people, they just come and say, 'Oh, look at the flowers, look at the trees,' "

Grace Creighton said. "But when the sun goes down, they want to go home."

Macdonald, a commercial real estate agent who also works with the Arizona Organ and Tissue Bank, said he and his wife experience similar reactions.

"The majority of our friends, they just think we're crazy," he said.

The remoteness, however, does not stop several Cherry folks from commuting to Phoenix.

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Frank Melluzzo, a partner with Gosnell Builders of Phoenix, said Cherry is an ideal location.

"What's so nice is, if you have children in Phoenix, they can come up here in an hour and a half and be here for dinner. On Monday morning, they can leave early and get back to Phoenix."

Melluzzo, who also worked in the mining industry for 18 years, came to Cherry in 1957.

"I had a summer home in Prescott," he said, "but I liked this better."

And not much has changed through the years, he said, with the exception of phone service, which was added in November 1988.

"Before, we had CBs," Melluzzo said.

"When there was a fire at the Cherry Lodge, I got on my CB and got a man in Indiana," Melluzzo said. "I told him my problem and he called Camp Verde."

Fire is a serious concern in Cherry and everything possible is done to avoid the problem. The Creightons, for example, have three wells hooked up to three different electric services.

Melluzzo has his well hooked up to his pond, a favorite summertime swimming hole near his home.

"If you do anything that's going to cause any smoke, you call everyone," he said.

As for crime, illegal woodcutting is one of the biggest problems. Break-ins have been known to happen, but the locals say the criminals are always captured.

The credit goes to a highly efficient system of neighbors watching out for each other and taking down license plate numbers of suspicious cars.

"There are a lot of policeman running around in unmarked cars," Macdonald joked.

"The only A-1 service we get is

from the tax assessor," he added, with a laugh.

Residents also double as good samaritans and aid in rescue-type operations when people get lost or stuck on Mingus Mountain.

"We live on the main road, so we get all the people that are stranded," Macdonald said.

Melluzzo recalled being awakened one midnight by two nuns in their habits who got stuck, and scared, on the mountain.

If it sounds like Cherry's residents are living the good life, they are. But, then, they know how to have a good time.

"Melluzzo's got what he calls 'the bar,' we have a hangar, Boyce has a big yard," said Grace Creighton.

Barbecue get-togethers, apple pressing parties and dips in the crystal-clear water of Melluzzo's pond are summer traditions.

"Within two hours, we can get a potluck going," said Melluzzo, for whom a party of 40 is not an unusual undertaking.

Their wild times, however, are not loud enough to spook away the wildlife among which they live. Grace Creighton, a talented artist, does renderings of local creatures, such as quail and foxes, and puts their likenesses on greeting cards.

A picture on Melluzzo's bulletin board shows him and a "pet" javelina sharing a patio lounge chair.

With the Forest Service surrounding them, the folks in Cherry don't have to worry too much about encroachment, with the exception of their winged and four-footed neighbors.

"Far enough away but close enough," is how Macdonald explained their own little piece of paradise. "Right here, to me, is just right."

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