



## Oracle State Park Historic Ranch Opens to the Public

By Jan Cleere

*The Desert Leaf*  
Volume 15, Number 10  
November 2001

Just 40 miles north of downtown Tucson, unconquered trails wind around picturesque vistas within the boundaries of Arizona's newest State park. Oracle State Park: Center for Environmental Education, over 15 years in development, opened to the public on October 1st.

Park Manager Jerry Ravert says the 4,000 acre desert preserve will still be maintained as a wildlife refuge and continue to offer environmental educational programs, which are ongoing functions of this desert woodland. A 28-year veteran of the Arizona State Parks system, Ravert came to Oracle after nine years as Assistant Manager of Karchner Caverns. It's obvious in talking with him how committed he is to keeping Oracle State Park a learning center for children and adults. He was there when the State first acquired the property assisting with inventorying the Kannally Ranch House, an integral part of the Park's uniqueness.

When the ranchland was willed to the Defenders of Wildlife in 1976, it came with a ten-year endowment to maintain the property as a wildlife and ecological refuge. After it was donated to the Arizona State Parks system in 1986, it fell into disrepair as other, more pressing park projects took precedence.

Through the efforts of organizations such as Friends of Oracle State Park, a volunteer group instrumental in providing assistance throughout the Park, enough funds were raised to start renovation of the ranch and clear fallen trees and dead brush from washes and trails.

In 1990, the Parks Board initiated plans to open Oracle State Park to the public. It took over 10 years to put everything in place.

Now hikers can explore Bellota Trail, Windy Ridge Trail and Nature Trail Loop, each about a mile long; visit wildlife watering sites in search of deer, quail and maybe a javelina. Designed for school outings, these short trails teach children how to identify fragrant trees and desert grassland using their five senses. Hiking all three trails provides a pleasurable three-mile walk around the grounds.

**Jan Cleere**  
**Author and Freelance Writer**  
[www.janCleere.com](http://www.janCleere.com)  
[jan@janCleere.com](mailto:jan@janCleere.com)

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Bill John, Friends of Oracle State Park volunteer, delights in the enthusiasm of school children as they discover edible hackberries and sweet acorns while traipsing along the well-marked trails, then making a beeline for cookies made from mesquite flour. He hopes the kids will come to understand and appreciate the intricacies and delicacies of the desert.

For the more adventurous, a seven-mile stretch of the statewide Arizona Trail meanders around the Park crisscrossing the sandy Kannally Wash. Cottonwood Wash also runs through the forest of manzanita, mesquite and oak, plus numerous species of cactus. Never fear though, flowing water in either riverbed is a rarity. Bill John seeks any excuse to roam the washes looking for the tracks of mule deer or an occasional bobcat. "The washes are the roads of the Park," he says while noting areas where brush and downed trees need to be removed to keep paths clear. A volunteer crew will be out cleaning up dead branches almost as soon as they drop. In fact, the entire Park looks like someone took a washboard and scrubbed it clean. Even the critters seem to understand that visitors are now a part of their natural homestead.

Park staff and over 70 volunteers, including members of the Saddlebrook Hiking Club, worked diligently preparing the Park for its October debut. Official opening ceremonies are scheduled for Spring 2002.

Additional projects are still on the drawing board including clearing a 2 1/2 mile trail that will take hikers to the highest point in the Park, and the addition of teen and adult programs.

Hiking, biking, birding and horseback riding are allowed in designated areas but leave your motorbikes at home. Large covered ramadas, a barbeque area and restrooms can comfortably accommodate up to 140 picnickers.

The focal point of Oracle State Park is the handsome, snowy-white Kannally Ranch House that towers above Oracle's rolling hills. At 4,500 feet, breezes from the Santa Catalina and Galiuro Mountains continually waft across bougainvillea-lined terraces and patios surrounding the home built in 1929. Guided tours of the old ranch house, which should be booked in advance, present an adventure back in time.

A tree-lined patio leads visitors into the dining room of the home, which also serves as Park headquarters and gift shop until new facilities are built. Nestled in the corner, a large beehive fireplace once warmed guests on cool Oracle nights. Between dining room and kitchen and encompassing an entire wall, a giant freezer more than adequately iced down butchered cattle from Kannally stock.

Beyond the kitchen, a dark stairway leads upward toward a bathroom decorated in circus motif created by Lucile Kannally and, high above, colorful hand-painted ceiling beams add another whimsical touch to the winding stairs.

# Oracle State Park

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The next level of the home comprises the heart of Kannally Ranch — the massive great room. Here the family conducted ranch business and hosted dinner parties attended by local townsfolk as well as prominent Tucsonans. Wall-flush bookcases with colorful hand-painted borders flank an enormous fireplace filling one end of the room. Deep-red draperies adorning French doors are replicas of original Italian creations that hung there over 70 years ago. Pictures of cowboys and ballerinas painted by Lee Kannally cover the walls. A concoction of evaporated milk added to the cleaning water was said to add sheen to the imported slate-tile floor. The Kannally dogs thought it delicious.

A large terrace off the great room reveals spectacular views of towering rock formations and cloud-capped mountains. Below, another patio bursts with flowering rose bushes, historic gardens, a bird hotel and a pathway to the original McCarius house and a small cottage built by the Kannally brothers.

The solarium off the great room, which Mary and Lucile Kannally filled with a profusion of plants, also served as a drying-off spot on rainy days. Around the doorway, flower and bird murals brighten the tiny room that is dominated by an old table surrounded by equally ancient leather-bound chairs.

The only bedroom in the ranch house belonged to the maid. Sleeping quarters in the small adjacent cottage and on wind-kissed terraces were enough for the Kannallys.

A trip to Oracle State Park (\$5.00 per carload with entrance fee included in annual State park passes) is a bargain for those who want new trails to conquer and a look back at early cattle ranching in the old west. Drive north on Highway 79 (Oracle Road) to Highway 77. Continue on 77 to the Oracle turnoff. Follow signs through town to the Park entrance.

As a fundraiser, Friends of Oracle State Park offer personalized bricks for individual and corporate purchase that will be embedded in a new patio at Kannally Ranch. Check with Park personnel for information.

### **The Kannally Family**

When 23-year-old Neil Kannally arrived in Oracle around 1902, he didn't know whether he would live or die. Diagnosed with tuberculosis, Neil was one of many who came to Arizona praying the dry desert air would cure their debilitating disease.

Neil did survive, and as more Kannally brothers and sisters descended upon Oracle, the Kannally Ranch grew into a profitable cattle business overseeing thousands of purebred Herefords.

In 1903, Neil and 17-year-old brother Lee bought 160 acres of the old McCarius Ranch three miles east of Oracle, and purchased 12 head of cattle for \$8.50 each. As additional Kannally siblings emigrated from Illinois to Arizona, they acquired their own sections of land until the Kannally property encompassed almost 50,000 acres.

# Oracle State Park

## Historic Ranch Opens to the Public

Brother Vincent oversaw the business end of the ranch while Neil and Lee wrangled the herd and drove them through Red Rock and Steam Pump Ranch to waiting trains at Winkleman and Florence. Mary, the oldest sister, became surrogate mother to Lucile who was only seven when she arrived in 1905. Two more brothers, Michael and William, lived off and on at the ranch. Parents Catherine and Michael never lived there.

The family soon outgrew the small McCarius house that stood on the land Neil and Lee first purchased. The boys built an additional bungalow for their sisters but neglected to include clothes closets. To be sure, the girls probably reminded their brothers often of their exceptional carpenter skills. In 1929, the family built the ranch house that stands in Oracle State Park today.

The Kannallys thrived and prospered in the desert climate, but none married except Michael who had no children. Both Lee and Lucile left behind remnants of their artistic talents. Lee was an avid painter even if he had to lay a canvas on his bed and paint bending over because of injuries he incurred during World War I. Evidence of Lucile's art is on display throughout the house in carvings and around decorated doorways.

When Neil died in 1951, most of the cattle were sold off and in 1952, the aging Kannallys sold all but 4,000 acres to Magma Copper Company (now BHP Copper). The remaining acreage is the essence of Oracle State Park.

Upon her death in 1976, Lucile willed the Kannally property to the Defenders of Wildlife. As the last Kannally, she directed all family papers and photographs be destroyed. The Kannallys are buried at Holy Hope Cemetery in Tucson.