

# Time Traveling To Tombstone



Story and photos by Tyson Hugie

I've been obsessed with the *Back to the Future* movie trilogy since it debuted when I was a kid in 1985. This summer, I channeled my inner Marty McFly and did some time travel of my own. Did you know that Arizona is home to a small community that thrives on its reputation as one of the country's best-preserved and most authentic sites from the Wild West?

Just 30 miles south of the bustling I-10



corridor in southern Arizona lies a time capsule of cowboy history. Tombstone, "The Town Too Tough to Die," was founded in 1879 as a silver mining boomtown. The population soared over the next couple of years to over 10,000 residents. Today, fewer than 1,500 people call Tombstone home, but those folks there are proud of their community.

My friend Chris was visiting Arizona from Maryland for a weekend, and this marked his first time in the desert Southwest. When he told me, "Take me to a saloon," I knew that Tombstone would be the perfect place to visit. Our time travels

back to the 1880s were taken in my 2013 Acura ILX—a comfortable and sporty ride, but nevertheless not quite as fun as Marty McFly's 1981 DMC DeLorean from the *Back to the Future* series might have been.

Tombstone is an easy day trip from the Phoenix area, at about 2 hours 45 minutes each way. A pit stop for fuel and drinks at Picacho Peak made a perfect halfway point for us to stretch our legs on the outbound and return trips. At Benson, our route veered from I-10 to Highway 80, which took us directly to Tombstone. For our first stop after entering town limits, we took a (free) self-guided walking tour at Boothill Graveyard and explored the dozens of gravesites, some of which were marked "UNKNOWN," but many others of which had interesting inscriptions on

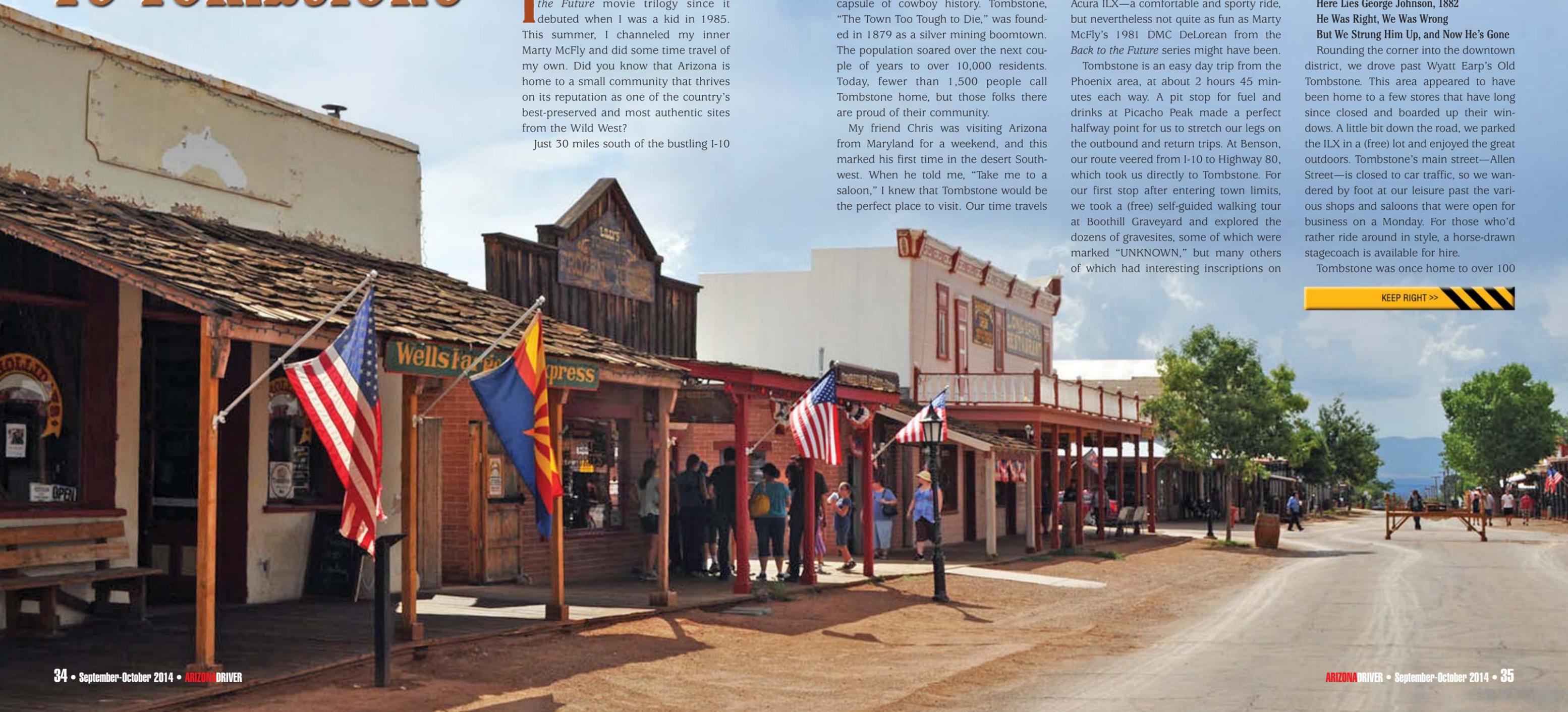
them, such as this:

**Here Lies George Johnson, 1882  
He Was Right, We Was Wrong  
But We Strung Him Up, and Now He's Gone**

Rounding the corner into the downtown district, we drove past Wyatt Earp's Old Tombstone. This area appeared to have been home to a few stores that have long since closed and boarded up their windows. A little bit down the road, we parked the ILX in a (free) lot and enjoyed the great outdoors. Tombstone's main street—Allen Street—is closed to car traffic, so we wandered by foot at our leisure past the various shops and saloons that were open for business on a Monday. For those who'd rather ride around in style, a horse-drawn stagecoach is available for hire.

Tombstone was once home to over 100

KEEP RIGHT >>



saloons, but a series of fires wiped out many, which were never rebuilt. Coupling those fires with troubles over depletion of ore in the mines and the falling price of silver, Tombstone started to clear out by the early 1900s. The good news is that the town didn't dry up entirely; there's still more than enough entertainment in the year 2014 to keep things interesting. For one thing, you can catch a gunfight.

On October 26, 1881, a historical gunfight took place in an empty lot behind Tombstone's O.K. Corral. Lawman Doc

Holliday and three other officers fought it out against four cowboys who were suspected of murder. Thirty shots were fired, resulting in injury or death for everyone involved except for Wyatt Earp (Earp lived on until 1929, when he died at the age of 80). For \$10 each, we watched the show from a set of bleachers which, thankfully, were shaded from the summer sun by a canvas canopy. The actors invited us to join them for a photo-op after the 45-minute show. Chris picked up a couple of T-shirts and some homemade salsas in

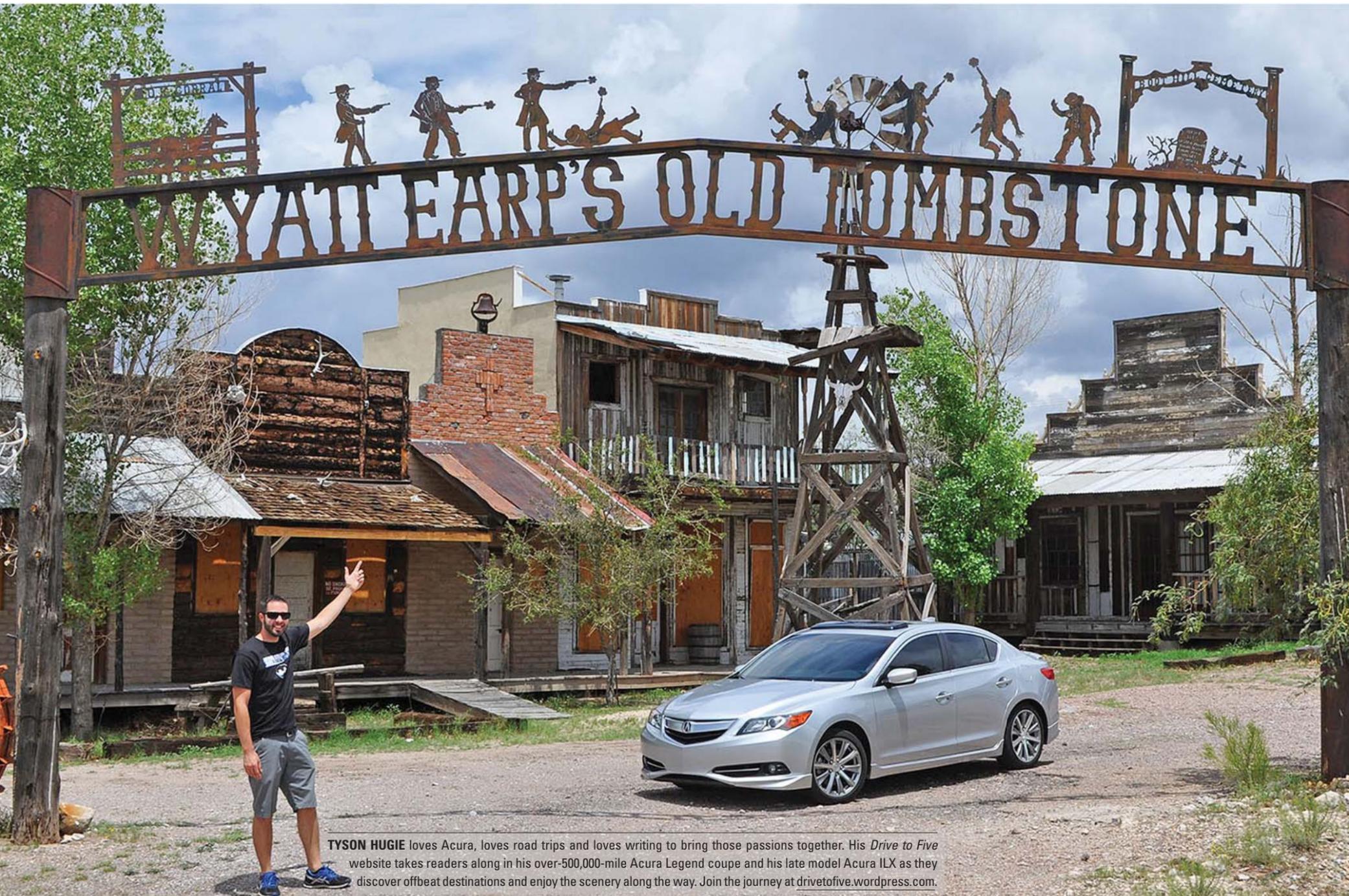
the gift shop, to take home to his family in Maryland.

No road tripping adventure is complete without some grub, and after a little bit of debate (the choices were many), we went to the Crystal Palace Saloon for lunch. The 'shroom and Swiss hamburger was phenomenal, but my favorite item on the menu was the fried ice cream for dessert. The actors from the gunfight we'd seen just a few moments earlier came bustling into the saloon for a bite to eat while we were mid-meal, boots and

spurs creating a racket on the original wooden floor. The experience became all the more authentic.

For a little more area history, we made one more visit: Tombstone's 1882 courthouse still stands proudly and is now home to a visitor center. The building's initial cost was \$45,000, and it has endured the test of time over the last 132 years. It's a must-see for anyone visiting the area.

To anyone seeking a taste of the Wild West, Tombstone fits the bill to a T. Just watch out for stray bullets. ■



**TYSON HUGIE** loves Acura, loves road trips and loves writing to bring those passions together. His *Drive to Five* website takes readers along in his over-500,000-mile Acura Legend coupe and his late model Acura ILX as they discover offbeat destinations and enjoy the scenery along the way. Join the journey at [drivetofive.wordpress.com](http://drivetofive.wordpress.com).

