

Summer is a special time for those living in the Sonoran Desert. Temperatures can quickly rise into triple digits. Each year, we “vacate” our homes and load up our overland rigs with as many gadgets as possible to provide the comforts of home-away-from-home. But in loading them, we must be careful to not exceed the maximum payload capacity of our rigs. Then, it’s time to head out.

We head toward a mountainous area that we think is the perfect overland spot. Here, it provides cooler temperatures that match a very relaxed vibe. We’re talking about Four Peaks, in the Mazatzal Mountains on the eastern horizon of the Valley of the Sun, an excellent overland choice located around 60 miles from downtown Phoenix.

The mountains are part of the 60,740-acre Four Peaks Wilderness Area. Not to be confused with Four Peaks Brewery, this wilderness area offers a scenic drive with impressive views of saguaros, manzanitas, and pine trees. It will take between two and three hours to get to the scenic overlook. But trust us: you will be in awe of the fantastic view. The Four Peaks Wilderness Area has a minimal elevation of 1,700 feet, climbing up to 7,600 feet on Brown’s Peak, the tallest of the four nubs.

To reach the views that dreams are made of, you will take a well-maintained 28-mile off-road trail to get to the coveted overlook. Your rewards are mesmerizing views of Roosevelt Lake and the cities of Mesa and others in the Valley, from an elevation of 5,774 feet.

The trail

The first five miles of the trail begin an off-road adventure that winds through stands of cacti and giant boulders. As you gradually begin the climb, you’ll notice the road offers many twists and turns, leading to various washes, creeks and pull-ups for boondocking campsites.

Passing the Mud Springs Trailhead leads to the most technical part of the adventure. In other words, this is where the trail begins to test your nerve. You’ll encounter tight turns at about 17.8 miles in. At the top of the trail, you’ll come upon a junction of routes. A right turn

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Overlanding: high atop Four Peaks

BY SANDRA MUÑOZ DOREE
PHOTOS BY WILLIAM DORÉE

onto FR-648 is next. From here, continue south on the path for two miles toward the Pigeon and Lone Pine Trailheads. You will find the overlook thick with vegetation and stunning 360-degree views. It is here we set up our Off Grid Trailer for the night.

Cooking on the mountaintop

Our Camp Chef Mountaineer burner made our dinner of pulled pork sandwiches and cowboy beans an easy fix. Meanwhile, our trusty Truma Cooler kept our Four-Peaks Hazy IPA ice-cold. Kicking back into our Dometic chairs put us in perfect position to view the most extraordinary sunset. It was a kaleidoscope of colors ranging from pinks and yellow streaks blending into glowing orange rays. It was the perfect way to end the day and begin a nearly impossible evening. Gusty winds cleared the skyline to display a full moon. That was our cue to put away the chairs and awning. At that point we decided to hunker down in the comfort of our Off Grid Trailer.

The next morning, we woke to a vibrant sunrise peeking through our window. Resplendent with vibrant blues, yellows and orange glowing rays, it was enticement enough to get us out of the comfort of our OGT. Soon, the smell of freshly scrambled eggs, bacon and hash browns filled the air. Freshly brewed coffee and breakfast burritos, combined with a panoramic view of Ponderosa pine and mountains as far as the eye could see is definitely one of the best ways to start the day.

The best time for adventure

It's best to explore Four Peaks during the week, as it gets crowded on weekends. Temperatures for this overlanding adventure are best from late October to early May. Research the trip in advance so there are no surprises. Finally, for this trail, a 4x4 vehicle is a must.

More to explore

What must go up must come down. The fun continues via SR 288, a scenic backcountry road that takes you to Payson, where routes SR 260 and SR 288 merge to the entrance of Mogollon Road.

The Mogollon Rim is a rugged escarpment defining the southern Colorado Plateau. The Rim extends across the forest, where you can marvel at plateau views and the desert canyon country. A unique view can be had by overlanding to the top of a 2,000-foot drop known as "The Edge of the World." Camp along this ridge and wake up to views of miles of ponderosa pines. It's the perfect end to a great adventure.

The Arizona landscape enjoys a well-earned reputation for those searching for cooler weather. At the same time, you can go from the triple digits all the way to cold weather gear. Preparing for both extremes will guarantee you have a great trip, regardless of which way the wind blows. ■

