

## Christmas Letter 2023

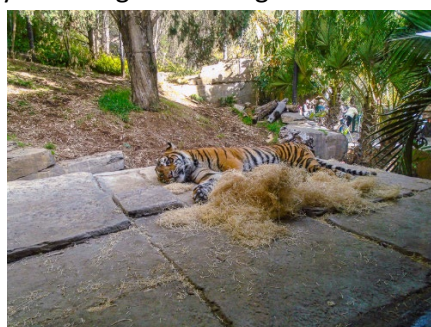
Once again, I have the pleasure of writing my Christmas Letter that has become a longstanding tradition for the past 30 years! The lights are up, the tree is decorated, and the shopping has begun. What follows is a summary of my life this past year – where I've travelled, things I've seen and heard, and some of the photography work I've done. I hope you enjoy reading my letter and I look forward to hearing from you as well!

To start where I left off with last year's letter, my sister Lynn joined us again for Christmas, now an annual tradition so that she can escape the cold and snow of Illinois. She arrived on Christmas Eve and the next morning we all shared a breakfast casserole I had prepared the previous day before we sat down to open gifts under the tree. Once again, Santa was very generous, and the cats enjoyed playing with the wrapping paper and ribbons! After opening gifts, I headed to the kitchen to prepare a traditional Christmas dinner of roasted turkey, cornbread stuffing, baked butternut squash, maple roasted brussels sprouts, garlic mashed potatoes and gravy, and cranberry-orange relish, of course. Our next-door neighbor Mike joined us for dinner, and we all shared the joys of the holiday. After dinner I brought out two pies, I had baked the day before – pecans and persimmon from the trees in our garden. After that it was an early evening for all of us and the end of a lovely day spent with family and friends.



Persimmon Pie

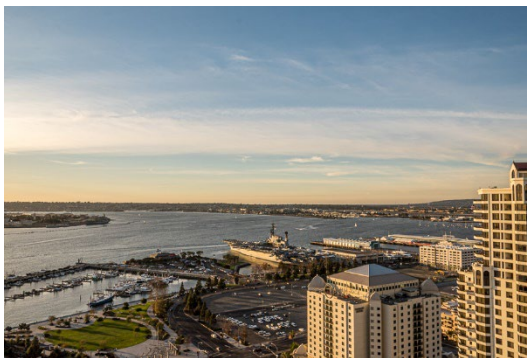
The next morning, we left the house around 10am and drove through San Timoteo Canyon to State Highway 60 and on to Interstate 15 bound for San Diego. Fortunately, we encountered very little traffic all the way to Escondido where we planned to visit the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. The weather was beautiful – sunny and 78 degrees! But as soon as we approached the park it became abundantly clear that half of San Diego had the same idea! So, I dropped Lynn and Leslie off at the entrance while I searched for a place to park. I ended up parking in the last lot (#18) and had a long hike up the hill to meet Lynn and Leslie. Needless to say, the park was very crowded, especially since the week in between Christmas and New Year's Day is a school holiday, meaning lots of families were visiting the park. Lynn and Leslie decided to take the sightseeing tram around the park, while I headed to the new "Tiger Trail" exhibit that has a beautiful replica of a traditional Indonesian house overlooking the tiger enclosure. As I sat in the "Sumatran Longhouse" I enjoyed a cold pint of "Rhino IPA" beer while I watched families excited to see a huge male tiger laying down in front of the window just 2 feet away! The kids were jumping with joy at the sight of the tiger who remained sleeping, totally ignoring the crowd!



"Tiger Trail"

Later, as I walked back to the park entrance to meet up with Lynn and Leslie, I couldn't help but be amazed by the number of large "wagons" designed to transport small children, as well as everything from the basic necessities to all manner of food, drink, clothing, and who knows what else! I even wondered if some of them were "motorized".

When I didn't see Lynn or Leslie, I sent them a text message, only to find out they were still waiting in line to board the tram! (note: in the end they were never able to board the tram!) So, I decided to have another beer at the "Mombasa Grill" overlooking the lagoon as I waited for them. After we finally met up, they told me they had visited the gorillas instead. Then it was a fast trip to downtown San Diego where we checked into the Westin Hotel, one of my favorite places to stay. We were fortunate to have beautiful rooms on the 17<sup>th</sup> floor overlooking San Diego Bay.



View of San Diego Bay

After checking in, I walked down to Seaport Village and visited the Marriott Marquis Hotel where I had spent so many years when I managed the annual ESRI International User Conference. I discovered the hotel now had a new "M-Club" restaurant and bar exclusively for Marriott Platinum members, and a dress code of coat and tie! Meanwhile, the hotel was the headquarters of the University of North Carolina football team competing in the "Holiday Bowl" against the University of Oregon.

That evening, the three of us had a delicious dinner at the Edgewater Grill as the sun was setting over San Diego Bay. After dinner, Lynn and Leslie walked back to the hotel and I headed to Kansas City BBQ for a beer and to soak up the local atmosphere which is always very interesting and unpredictable. I love to look for new signs that get posted around the old bar, and here are a few of the most interesting ones.

- "Facebook: share pointless stuff with friends you don't know"
- "Loud, Proud, and Well-Endowed"
- "Amateurs built the Ark, professionals built the Titanic"
- "Wish you were her"
- "Sometimes the best kind of birth control is just good lighting"
- "Married men don't live longer, it only seems longer"
- "Well, this day was a total waste of makeup"
- "If I'm ever on life support, unplug me, then plug me in again and see if that works – called a reboot"
- "Your village just called; they're missing an idiot"
- "An erection does not constitute personal growth"

The next morning, I joined Lynn and Leslie for breakfast in the hotel, but before we sat down Lynn went to help a lady from Croatia buy a phone charger. The lady did not speak much English, so she was very grateful for Lynn's assistance. While Lynn ordered a bowl of oatmeal topped with walnuts, Leslie and I had eggs benedict which came with prosciutto instead of Canadian bacon – a delicious variation! After breakfast, Leslie suggested driving to Balboa Park and visiting the zoo, which sounded like a great idea before heading home. But as we approached the park, the traffic suddenly came to a crawl as virtually everyone had the same idea about visiting

the zoo. So, I made a quick turn around and we headed north on Interstate 15 towards Redlands. That afternoon I went for a hike in San Timoteo Canyon before a strong storm rolled in from the Pacific Ocean that night.

The next day, after the rain tapered off, I took Lynn and Leslie to visit “Mottes Vintage Car Museum” in Hemet south of Redlands. It’s a small family-owned museum with an amazing collection of beautiful antique cars and trucks that the family has assembled over the years. It’s housed in the old barn on their farm and was well worth a visit.



Motte's Vintage Car Museum

That evening I went online to check in for Lynn’s flight early the next morning. All of a sudden, there was a message saying that American Airlines could not display her flight information and to call the reservations phone line. After finally reaching a live person at the reservations desk it took over half an hour for the agent to confirm a seat assignment! I began to wonder, if I hadn’t tried to do an online check in for her flight, what would have happened at the airport the next morning? (note: it was especially concerning given the disastrous holiday travel “meltdown” at Southwest Airlines that had left thousands of people stranded in airports on Christmas Day!) Early the following morning, 4:30am to be exact, I drove Lynn to Ontario airport for her return home to Illinois. We had spent another wonderful Christmas holiday together and looked forward to next year!

In January and February, I had 7 photo shoots at Walgreens stores in Arizona and New Mexico. They involved doing the same 3D photo surveys as I had done in 2022, so I was very familiar with the routine – 4 hours of 3D scanning of the entire store, including the sales floor, cooler/freezer, office, pharmacy, stock room and even the restrooms! Once the 3D scanning was completed, there was an additional 3 hours of “data collection” that consisted of taking photos and measurements of the shelving and store assets (electrical system, lighting, etc.) Fortunately, there was a new phone app that made the process much easier and eliminated the tedious process of uploading photos and spreadsheets later in the evening!

My first assignment was in Kingman, Arizona. It was a long 6-hour drive across the Mojave Desert and over the Colorado River to Kingman where I checked into the “Best Western Adventurers Hotel”, which turned out to be very nice.



Historic Kingman Santa Fe Railroad Station

After checking in, I visited the “Arizona Route 66 Museum” located in Kingman’s historic Powerhouse building downtown. The museum had a wonderful collection of memorabilia from the earliest days of travel on the



famous highway that connected Chicago with Los Angeles and became known as the “Mother Road”. It was one of the first federally funded roads and it had its share of migrations from east to west, especially during the “Dust Bowl” days of the 1930’s, including a particularly poignant display of that period of American History. Also, a display titled “Main Street America” highlighted the fun and excitement of the 1950’s. A recent addition to the museum was the “Route 66 Electric Vehicle Exhibit”, the first of its kind anywhere with 29 electric vehicles, from the very latest models to those of the past, some dating back to the turn of the century – very interesting! Along with the history of the highway, the building itself had a remarkable legacy, having been built in 1907 to provide power for mines in the area. Later, it also supplied power for the construction of the Hoover Dam until the dam began producing cheaper hydroelectric power in the late 1930’s. At that point the powerhouse was shut down, and it wasn’t until 60 years later that it was restored as a historic museum. The two hours I spent roaming through the museum were very interesting and fascinating, something I never knew about Kingman!



Arizona Route 66 Museum

When I asked the front desk for a suggestion of where to go for dinner, they highly recommended the “Dambar Steakhouse” just down the street on Andy Devine Blvd. When I asked the bartender at the steakhouse for her favorite dish on the menu, she immediately said it was the fresh fried catfish, which I thought was most unusual being that Kingman is over 1500 miles from the Mississippi River! But apparently there are several “catfish farms” in Arizona – who knew! And when dinner arrived, the fish was delicately fried, almost like tempura, along with a crisp fresh salad covered in a creamy dressing with huge chunks of Bleu cheese – it was a phenomenal meal! The cold pint of IPA from the “Mudshark Brewery” in Lake Havasu went very well with the catfish. Meanwhile, I noticed that the man seated near me had ordered a beer and salad, but later switched to a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon wine when his order of a mushroom burger and fries arrived! (note: it begged the question of how well Cabernet Sauvignon goes with French fries covered in ketchup?) Later, I found out that the name Dambar Steakhouse originated when the owners wondered what to name their new restaurant - then the wife asked, “what in the hell are we going to call this damned bar?” Meanwhile, on the TV above the bar was the “Barret Jackson” auction of vintage cars where people bid tens of thousands of dollars for the classic cars!

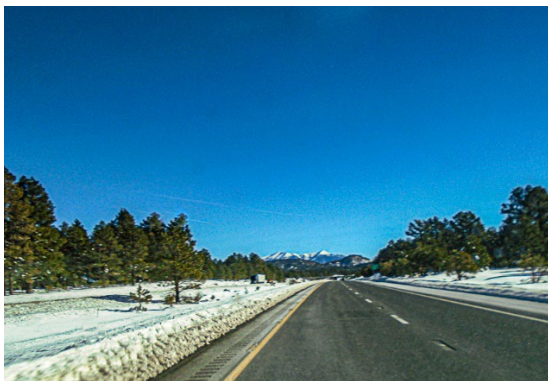
After dinner, as I was driving back to the hotel, I spotted the “Tack Shed Saloon and Eatery” which with a name like that I just had to check out. At the entrance to the bar was a large sign that read “All Democrats must be accompanied by an adult”! It was pretty obvious I was entering Trump country! As I sat down at the bar, I noticed several things that confirmed this was indeed Trump country. (1) virtually every guy, young or old, had a beard and lots of tattoos, (2) the walls were “decorated” with lots of deer, antelope, and bear heads, as well as numerous animal skins. When a guy sat down next to me, I couldn’t help noticing the abundance of ink on his body – virtually up to his neck, all with the theme of Star Wars! After a couple of beers, I headed back to the hotel, having seen a bit more of the local Kingman life than I cared to!





Tack Shed Saloon and Eatery

Early the next morning I went to the local Walgreens store to do the 3D site survey, and as usual, the store manager asked why I was there? I gave her a copy of the “Letter of Authorization” from Walgreens corporate office, but I had no explanation of what they would be doing with the survey, to which she responded, “they never tell us anything”! It was a long day of 7 hours, but I was able to finish by 3pm since the pharmacist was especially helpful in covering all the sensitive patient information before I photographed the pharmacy. The next day I checked out of the hotel and headed to my next assignment in Sedona. As I approached Flagstaff everything was covered in 12 – 18 inches of snow since the elevation now was well over 5,000 feet. There were gorgeous views of San Francisco Peak rising over 12,000 feet under clear blue skies as I exited Interstate 40 and on to Arizona highway 89A that would take me south down through the incredibly scenic Oak Creek Canyon to Sedona.



San Francisco Peak near Flagstaff



Oak Creek Canyon

There was still quite a bit of snow along the road and covering the forest floor. I arrived in Sedona around 3pm and checked into the Green Tree Inn which had a beautiful view of massive red sandstone cliffs for which Sedona is most famous. Later that afternoon I found the “Oak Creek Brewery” where I enjoyed a very good “Canyon Cruiser IPA”. Then for dinner that evening the brewery owner highly recommended “Steakhouse 89”. It was a very nice restaurant that had an old vintage bar which had been imported from Scotland, dating back to the turn of the century. In one corner of the restaurant was a huge stone fireplace with a blazing fire that really warmed up the place. I took a seat at the bar and ordered a pint of “Flagstaff IPA” from another local brewery named “Lumberyard”. The bartender, who happened to be from Mississippi, highly recommended the restaurant’s signature dish, seafood pasta, which I thought was a bit strange when Sedona is almost 500 miles from the ocean! But it was chock full of shrimp, lobster, salmon, crab, and calamari in a delicious creamy tomato and red bell pepper sauce served over linguine and topped with a generous amount of parmesan cheese. It was

definitely a place to add to my list of favorite restaurants. When I returned to the Green Tree Inn, I spotted a large wild boar (Javalina) roaming through the parking lot!

The next morning, I called my former Esri colleague Vicki who had moved to Sedona a few years earlier and we arranged to meet up for dinner after I completed my work at Walgreens. Fortunately, I was able to finish early so I had time to drive to “Red Rocks State Park” south of town where there were incredible vistas of the surrounding landscape for which the park is named.



Red Rocks State Park - Sedona

When I returned to town I met up with Vicki and her companion Rod at the “Szechwan Restaurant” where we shared a delicious selection of their favorite dishes, all of which were authentic tastes from Szechwan. As we enjoyed a fantastic dinner, we had fun catching up on the years since we had left Esri – a wonderful evening and reunion with my long-time friend. The following morning, I joined Vicki and Rod at their house for breakfast of Vicki’s fresh baked muffins and coffee. They showed me some photos of the renovation of their house, which involved a huge construction project – the result was gorgeous! And to top it off, they have a spectacular view of deep red sandstone cliffs just a few hundred feet across the street! Soon it was time for me to head south to Tucson and my next assignment.



With Vicki and Rod at their home in Sedona

Along the way, I stopped at the “Red Garter Saloon” in the small town of Elroy for a pint of “Breakaway Pilsner”. As I sat at the bar, a couple of guys were actively engaged in playing an electronic game called “Big Buck Hunter – Open Season” that had “simulated” rifles aimed at video images of various animals on a big screen, including bison, bear, deer, mountain goat, and even rabbit!



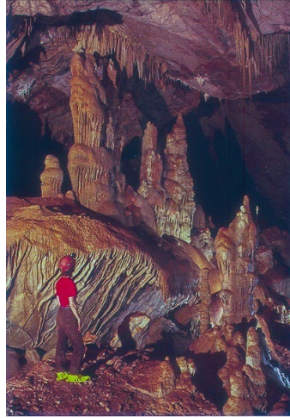
From Elroy I continued south on Interstate 10 to downtown Tucson where I checked into the “University Inn”, a small motel near the University of Arizona Tucson campus. (note: it was the only accommodation available downtown under \$350!) The motel was operated by a nice family from India and the room was clean but very basic. In fact, there was no clock in the room and when I complained to the motel owner, he explained that guests kept stealing them. However, for me he would provide a clock! Once I had checked in, I walked across the street to “Bumsteds Bar and Grill” where I had a local IPA at the bar. Seated next to me were a couple of Germans drinking local “Kiltlifter” beer and watching a program called “Fail Army” on the bar TV. Basically, the program featured videos of people doing insanely stupid things, which always resulted in lots of injuries! After watching more serious injuries that I could count, I finished my beer and walked back across the street to the motel – leaving the Germans to continue watching “Fail Army”!

Early the next morning I drove to the Walgreens store and began working on the 3D survey. All went well and I was able to finish everything by 3pm – even had time to grab a sandwich for lunch, something I rarely had time for. Then I headed south to the small town of Benson about an hour from Tucson and my next assignment. When I checked into the Comfort Inn, I was told the hotel was sold out because of the International Gem and Mineral Show in Tucson. Luckily, I had a confirmed reservation! It didn’t take me long to discover that Benson had very few places to eat or drink – in fact, one could drive through the whole town in a matter of a few minutes. But I did spot the “Riverview Inn Saloon” and took a seat at the bar. As I expected, it was packed with a very local crowd, and as I ordered a beer, the bulk of the conversations around me consisted of the “F” word – “F” this, “F” that, “F” you, ... Meanwhile, three guys at the bar were in a heated discussion about the biggest “boobs” they had ever seen. In the end they all agreed on “38 double G” – which happened to also be the same size as the barmaid! I didn’t think it could get any worse until every other word became “shit”! Since the food menu was worse than the conversations, I left after one beer in search of somewhere else to eat. I found the “Arena Bar” on the edge of town located in the middle of a huge horse arena next to the mainline of the Union Pacific Railroad. It was quite popular that night, but I was able to find a seat at the bar where I ordered a bottle of “O’Dell IPA” from a brewery in Fort Collins, Colorado. The only beers on draft were Bud Light and Coors Light! When my beer arrived, it was served on a “coaster” they called a “beer diaper”. (note: according to a legend, a major retailer tried placing diapers on the shelf next to the beer, and sales of diapers soared!)

When I looked at the menu posted on the wall, there were only two choices, (1) tacos with chicken or (2) tacos with pork, both of which came with a salad. I ordered one of each and they were absolutely delicious! The bartender said they were served every Monday night – I guess they hadn’t heard of “Taco Tuesday” yet! Looking around the bar I noticed that no one took off their cowboy hat, and a sign posted above the bar – “Please let us know if something offends you so we can have a good laugh”! Another sign posted on the wall read, “Our liquor license permits alcoholic drinks to be taken outside anywhere on our 9.7 acres”. Meanwhile, every 15 – 20 minutes I could hear the roar of diesel locomotives passing by outside the bar. At one point during the evening, I spotted some ladies playing a video game where the objective was to find all the differences between two “identical” photos – it was called “PhotoPlay”. It seemed simple enough until I noticed all the photos were of young, mostly nude women – the ladies continued to play while their husbands were engaged in a conversation at the bar about the NFL! I was curious, so I went over to the ladies and asked why there were no photos of nude men – to which they answered, “there are, but all of them are so old and not very handsome”!

The next morning, I checked out of the hotel and drove south to “Karchner Caverns State Park”. The caverns were accidentally discovered only recently because the entrance was so well hidden by the surrounding landscape. I signed up for a tour that explained the history and geology of the caverns, which was fascinating. Our tour guide pointed out one of the most unique and amazing formations that looked exactly like strips of “bacon”, including the brilliant red color of the rock that had been created by mineral water very slowly dripping over millions of years.





Karchner Caverns State Park

Leaving the state park, I drove southeast on Interstate 10 to the village of Wilcox, and if you blinked you could miss it. Needless to say, not much was happening in Wilcox that day! In the distance were several high mountains covered in snow.



Motel in Wilcox



Mount Graham near Safford

Eventually I came to the town of Safford, the location of my next assignment. After checking into the Best Western Desert Inn, it once again became a challenge to find a place for dinner. The young lady at the front desk suggested “Sarah’s Bull Pen Bar”, so I headed that way. I found their only draft IPA beer was “Juicy Jack’s IPA” - it was only OK for one beer, but I felt compelled to search for another place in town. Not far down the road was “JD’s Bar and Grill” so I decided to check it out. It was very crowded and loud and had no IPA beer available, which was not a point in JD’s favor. Before I left the bar, I couldn’t help but be amazed by the sight of a 3ft tall glass beer dispenser called a “beer Tower”. It was filled with Bud Light, and at \$25.00 it was less expensive than a pitcher! Back on the road, I kept looking for a quiet place for dinner and Denny’s just off US Highway 70 fit the bill! The country-fried steak, hash browns, and toast was a perfect end to the evening.

The next day, after finishing work at the local Walgreens store, I checked out of the hotel and headed south to visit “Chiricahua National Monument”, part of the Coronado National Forest. There I discovered an unusual and beautiful landscape of snow-covered mountains, spectacular volcanic columns rising several hundred feet into the sky, and an encounter with a “Coati”, a small animal that is a close cousin of raccoons and native to northern Mexico and southern Arizona.



Chiricahua National Monument



Coati

I drove through the entire park and then continued southwest to the historic old mining town of Bisbee, originally known as Lowell. The region was once the site of one of the largest open pit copper mines in the world! These days Bisbee (Lowell) depends on tourism for its economy, and as a result, the town is a wonderful example of historic preservation and restoration. As I walked around the old town, I soon discovered the “Old Bisbee Brewing Company” that had a great double hopped IPA, which I enjoyed on their patio under the clear sky. Nearby was the historic “Copper Queen Hotel” which was the height of luxury during the mining boom days in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was built by the Phelps-Dodge Mining Corporation that spared no expense in furnishing the hotel with the finest articles from San Francisco and Europe. I spent a couple of hours walking around the old town and taking photos of the historic buildings, of which there were many. Then it was time to head for the town of Sierra Vista west of Bisbee for my next assignment.



Open Pit Copper Mine – Bisbee



“Downtown” Lowell



Museum of Mining History - Bisbee

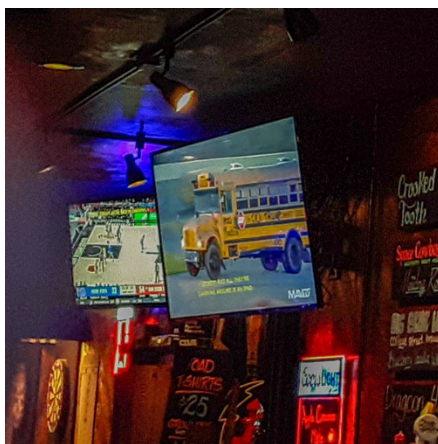
When I arrived in Sierra Vista, I discovered that “downtown” was located just outside the main gate of Fort Huachuca. (note: the old fort has the unique heritage of having been the headquarters of the legendary “Buffalo Soldiers” after the Civil War) Once again, after checking into the Comfort Inn, it was difficult to find a nice place for dinner. When I saw the “German Café” I looked forward to having a delicious taste of Germany. Although the menu featured several of my favorite German dishes, the café had no license to serve beer or wine! What – a German restaurant with no beer? I thought they were kidding – they weren’t! So, I left in search of another place for dinner, and not far down Main Street was the “Ranch House Steakhouse and Saloon” that looked like it could be what I was looking for. But as I pulled into the parking lot, there was a large sign posted on the front door – “Closed for Good”! As I was about to give up on dinner, I spotted “Sunna’s Korean Food” on the other side of the street. I ordered grilled pork with vegetables and rice, which came with 8 small cold side dishes, along with a cold bottle of Tsing Tao beer. Sunna kept telling me it was “spicy”, and I kept saying “that’s fine, it’s delicious”! So, at last I had found a wonderful dinner and made a new friend, Sunna.





"Sunna's Korean Food"

On the way back to the hotel, I passed the "Bone Dry Tap House" and decided to drop in. It was a popular bar with soldiers from Fort Huachuca and had an impressive list of 25 craft beers on tap. When I asked the bartender for a "West Coast Style IPA", she recommended the "Thorn Brewery IPA" from San Diego, and it was excellent. As I sat at the bar, I suddenly noticed a most bizarre program on the big screen TV above the bar. It was a race among a bunch of school buses on a racetrack that was designed for NASCAR races! To say it was weird would be an understatement!



My last stop for the evening was the Circle K convenience market across the street from the hotel to pick up some chips. But as I walked up to the front door it was locked with a posted sign – "Closed for a well-deserved employee break"! What - give me a break!

I was up early the next morning to do the 3D survey at Walgreens. The work went very well, and I was able to complete the store at 2pm, and by 5pm I had uploaded everything and went in search of a beer downtown. One of the Walgreens staff had told me about a bar called "High Heat Sports Bar & Grill" where I had a very nice "Draught IPA" from a Mesa, Arizona brewery. While I was sitting at the bar, I watched the "AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am Golf Tournament". The weather on the course was literally "miserable" – heavy rain and 30mph winds! Several players had their shots end up on the beach below the golf course and almost into the Pacific Ocean! (note: definitely a water hazard of infinite dimensions!) I was actually amazed that play was not halted, given the extraordinary weather conditions. As I looked around the bar, of all the 10 big-screen TVs, only one was showing the golf tournament – every other TV had a hockey game. Another observation that caught my eye was the total disregard for Covid – as evidenced by the lack of face masks and a bartender who sneezed on the cash register, then gave the credit card in her hand back to the customer, neither of whom gave it a second thought!

Although the selection of craft beers was great, the food menu was limited to burgers and fries. So, I went looking for an alternative and was very surprised to find the local Pizza Hut "Bistro" not only served pizza but also several traditional Italian dishes, as well as beer and wine! My server recommended a personal pizza with pepperoni, Italian sausage, mushrooms, and olives. It was excellent, with a crisp, flaky crust – one of the best I've had! The cold bottle of "Modelo Especial" lager went very well with the delicious pizza. As I was about to leave, my server, a young, very attractive woman, suggested that I should try the "Horned Toad Bar" just down the

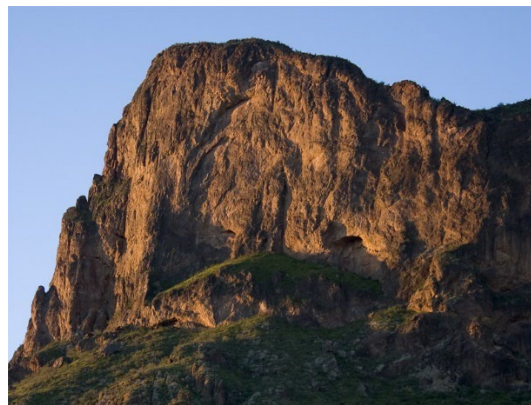


street for a local craft beer. When I entered the bar, it was pretty crowded, but I managed to find a seat at the bar. The gorgeous barmaid suggested a pint of “Tombstone IPA” from a local brewery, and it was an excellent West Coast style IPA that I really enjoy. Meanwhile, a band from Bisbee played very familiar hits from the 1960’s and 70’s. I had a very relaxing evening on my last night in Sierra Vista – thanks to my server at Pizza Hut Bistro!

The next morning, after a nice complimentary breakfast of sausage gravy and biscuits at the hotel, I headed to Interstate 10 for the journey home. As I left Sierra Vista there were beautiful views of the snow-covered Huachuca Mountains in the early morning sunshine. Along the way, just north of Tucson was a stunning geologic feature of the desert landscape – a tall pinnacle of stone rising a couple hundred feet straight up from the flat desert floor. It was known as “Picacho Peak”, and one couldn’t miss it.

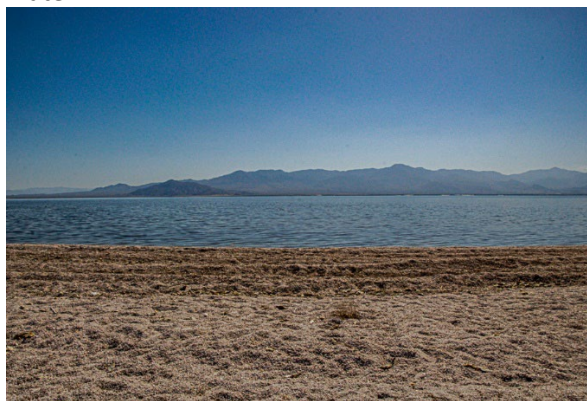


Huachuca Mountains



Picacho Peak

When I turned west off I-10 on to I-8, not only was there far less traffic, but the highway was also in much better condition. As I approached Gila Bend, I stopped at a large truck stop for gas and lunch at “Chester’s Chicken” – their spicy chicken sandwich was great. Then it was a long drive on I-8 to Holtville, California and State Highway 115/111 that paralleled the eastern shore of the Salton Sea, where I made a short rest stop at “Corina Beach State Park” and watched lots of migratory birds that stopover on their way north for the summer. After a long drive on highway 111, I joined I-10 again just outside Indio and continued to Redlands. I arrived home around 6pm – glad to be home again! But my time at home was to be a bit short-lived as I had a new assignment in New Mexico a week later.



Salton Sea

Just after I returned home, my best friend John and his wife Ginny visited with us in Redlands, and we had a wonderful time over dinner at the Old Spaghetti Factory. They had been spending the weeks before in Scottsdale but decided to move on before the weekend of the Superbowl in Phoenix. It was great to catch up on the time since their last trip to Scottsdale the year before. They also mentioned that there was talk about organizing a reunion of our 1963 high school class which would be the 60<sup>th</sup>!

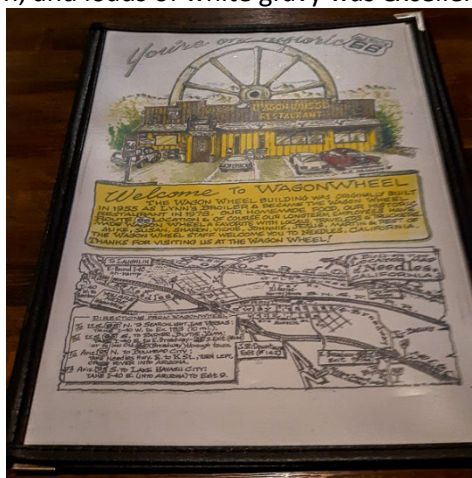
The following week, it was a long drive on Interstate 40 that would eventually take me to Albuquerque, New Mexico for my next assignment. As I crossed over the Colorado River into Arizona, I suddenly realized I needed to

stop for gas. I saw an exit for “Golden Shores” and a sign for gas, only to discover the Chevron gas station was 5 miles away on a 2-lane local road! When I reached the tiny town of Golden Shores, I saw the Chevron station was the only one open in town – three other gas stations were abandoned! So, I filled up with gas and then parked in front of the Food Mart to get a receipt and pick up some cold beer for later that evening. But when I returned to my Jeep, it wouldn’t start – in fact, the engine wouldn’t turn over at all! After several failed attempts to “jump” the battery from a nice local Jeep owner, I was forced to call AAA. To my amazement, the entire call with AAA was totally “automated”, including a text message sent to my phone which used a AAA GPS app to determine my location! Then I received another text message informing me of when the tow truck would arrive! A short time later the tow truck showed up and the driver named Dylan said he had already arranged for a mechanic at the Mobil gas station in Needles, California, 20 minutes away, to be ready to diagnose the problem.



Chevron station – Golden Shores

At first the mechanic thought the problem was the crankshaft position sensor, but after replacing it the engine still wouldn’t turn over. At that point he determined the problem had to be a faulty starter motor, which he arranged for a replacement to be delivered from Laughlin, Nevada that would take at least a couple of hours. By this time, it was 5pm Arizona time and meanwhile, I had a hotel reservation that night in Williams, Arizona over 175 miles away! The guys at the Mobil station pointed out the “Wagon Wheel Restaurant” across the street and highly recommended the chicken fried steak for dinner. Indeed, the chicken fried steak served with mashed potatoes, fresh green beans with bacon, and loads of white gravy was excellent!



Wagon Wheel Restaurant – Needles, California

After dinner I walked back across the street to the Mobil station and attempted to call the hotel in Williams to advise them that I would be arriving very late. It took me several calls to finally reach a person at the front desk, but they said it would be no problem to arrive late.

At last, the new starter motor arrived, and installation began. In the meantime, the guys suggested that I go next door to the “Chilling Point Restaurant and Bar” for a beer while they worked on the Jeep. I ordered a cold bottle of Lagunitas IPA at the bar and checked my email while some music called “soft rap” played in the background. (note: the Wagon Wheel Restaurant had classic Country and Western music which I found to be more enjoyable) Looking around the bar, I spotted a large sign promoting the “Super Pig Roast Party” on Superbowl Sunday! Just as I was about to finish my beer, the guys called to say my Jeep was ready. After handing over \$825.00 for the replacement of the starter motor, I pulled out of the Mobil station and back on I-40 headed east toward Williams. It was a long two and half hour drive at night over rough pavement and having to overtake countless number of Semis! Eventually I arrived at the “Grand Canyon Railroad Hotel” in downtown Williams and checked into a very nice room overlooking the historic old railway station. It was a very cold night with almost a foot of snow still on the ground. But at least I had made it to Williams, my first stop on the journey to Albuquerque.

Before retiring for the night, I watched a fascinating program on PBS titled “Legacy List” where a team assisted families to “downsize” their home while saving the most important things that defined the history and “legacy” of their family. The team helped family members to identify and search for the things they felt were most important to keep and to let go of things that were no longer important or necessary. The episode was about a black family in Birmingham, Alabama whose sisters wanted to preserve the memory and heritage of their parents who had dealt with the death of their first child, their older sister, a result of the bombing at the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue Baptist Church in 1963, a tragedy which began the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. King. It was a fascinating and emotional program!

I was up early the next morning to begin the drive to Albuquerque, but not before having a great country breakfast of eggs, bacon, hash browns, and sourdough toast at the “Pine Country Café” near the Grand Canyon Railroad Station. As I continued my journey east on I-40, it was a beautiful clear day with spectacular views of snow-capped San Francisco Peak north of Flagstaff always in my rear-view mirror. There was an abundance of snow on the ground around Flagstaff, but further east the snow became less so, only in the shadow of trees and hills. As I approached the New Mexico border, the brilliant red rock cliffs were gorgeous in the sunshine. Meanwhile, the BNSF Railroad mainline was always in sight.



San Francisco Peak



New Mexico border

I arrived in Albuquerque around 2:30pm but had difficulty locating the “Springhill Suites Hotel” downtown. Eventually I discovered I had passed it a couple of times without realizing. I checked into a very nice room on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, and when I entered the elevator, I was surprised to see that floors 2 and 3 were dedicated to “Ronald McDonald House” which was connected by an enclosed elevated pedestrian bridge to the hospital across the street.

Since I had arrived early, I decided to go to the Walgreens store and do part of the 3D site survey. However, when I arrived the store manager, as well as all the staff, was totally clueless about the 3D site survey, despite my “Letter of Authorization” from Walgreens corporate office. In fact, the store manager insisted upon following me



around the store the entire time I was measuring shelving and taking photos! I couldn't help noticing how several products were locked up in clear plastic cases, including "Tide" laundry detergent, "Airwick" room deodorizer, and even "Glad" garbage bags! When I asked why, the store manager told me those things were most frequently stolen. (note: this was also the first Walgreens where I saw "armed" security personnel in the store, off-duty Albuquerque police officers) After completing the data collection part of the 3D site survey, I went next door to the "Bosque Brewing Company Public House" for a beer. The place was very busy since it was next to the University of Arizona Tucson campus. The barmaid recommended the local "Riverwalk IPA", along with an order of Alaskan cod and chips for dinner. The fish was perfectly cooked – lightly battered and crispy like tempura. As I was about to leave after finishing the excellent dinner, she suggested that I try the "Route 66 Diner" across the street for a traditional dessert – homemade peach cobbler! The historic old diner was originally "Sam's Phillips 66 Service" station built in 1946 and converted to a diner in 1987. Inside it's a "classic" from the 1950's and filled with original Route 66 memorabilia everywhere, as well as bright green naugahyde covered stools at an old-fashioned soda fountain! The homemade peach cobbler, topped with vanilla ice cream, was outstanding and a great ending to my evening.

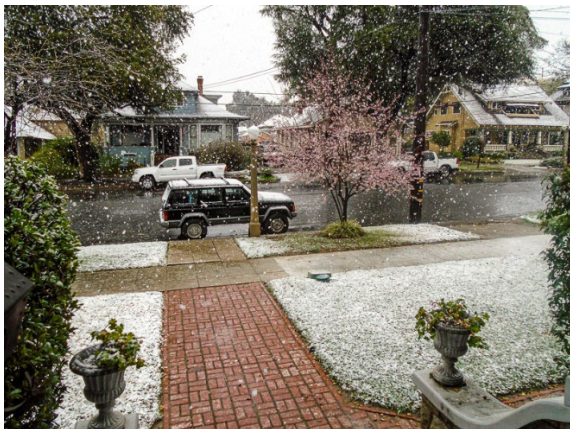


Once again, I was up early the next morning to complete the 3D site survey. As I drove to the store, I saw the Albuquerque police car still parked in front. Throughout the day, I also saw a lot of homeless people wandering around the parking lot, one of whom was an elderly lady covered in an old, ragged blanket and dirty rags wrapped around her feet. Her body reeked of rancid urine – so sad to see! I finished work around 3pm and left Tucson, headed west on I-40 toward Gallup, New Mexico where I had a reservation for the night at the Springhill Suites Hotel. Driving through northwestern New Mexico in the late afternoon sun, I was fortunate to see spectacular views of brilliant red cliffs and mesas near Thoreau, New Mexico. Part of the route to Gallup was along the route of old US 66, the "Mother Road". I stopped for gas at the "Phillips 66 Route 66 Travel Post", a strange combination of "66"! As soon as I pulled up to the gas pump, I noticed it displayed a question on the screen – "Debit, Yes or No?" But none of the buttons on the screen were labeled **Yes** or **No**! After consulting with the cashier, it turned out that the Yes and No buttons were located on a keypad below the screen – very confusing and definitely not intuitive!

Continuing west on I-40 there was not much traffic, but the eastbound traffic had been reduced to one lane and vehicles, mostly semis, were backed up for several miles! The weather was beautiful and clear, but quite chilly at 38 degrees when I pulled into Gallup. I checked into a nice room on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the hotel and uploaded the Albuquerque data collection files and photos before looking for a place to have dinner. I searched online and the "Third Street Tavern" seemed interesting. However, what I found when I got there was a "mini market" in front and a very crowded, loud bar behind! But at least the bar had a cold bottle of Lagunitas IPA, one of my favorite beers. When I asked to see the food menu, the barmaid said there was just one thing, "chili dogs" on Saturday, and since today was not Saturday there were no chili dogs – or any food for that matter! Meanwhile, C&W music played at full volume, followed by old Mexican songs. At the same time, the Golf Channel, which no one was watching, was on both big screen TVs above the bar – weird! After finishing my beer, I looked for another place to have dinner and was fortunate to see "Applebee's Grill & Bar" on Maloney Avenue on the other side of Main Street. My order of the "Chili Lime Chicken Bowl" was outstanding and a very nice end to the evening. Back at the hotel I watched CNN news before retiring for the night. The next morning, following a

great complimentary breakfast of scrambled eggs, sausage, potatoes, and toast at the hotel, I got back on I-40 for the long 9-hour journey home. And once again it was great to be home!

Near the end of February, a very cold, powerful storm hit southern California, and for the first time in many years, we saw snow falling in Redlands! At that time, little did we know that a month later southern California would be hit by a massive “atmospheric river” which would cover the San Bernardino Mountains with exceptionally deep snow, more than 12 feet in some places! For several days afterwards, people in the mountain communities were unable to go anywhere! In the central Sierra Nevada Mountains, the snow reached a historic depth of over 900 inches (**75 feet**) at Mammoth Mountain ski resort! (note: in fact, the ski resort stayed open for skiers well into the middle of July, something unheard of in the past!)



Snow in Redlands



San Bernadino Mountains under 12 feet of snow

At the end of April, I headed to Perris to attend the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual “BBQ, Boots, and Brew” festival at the Orange Empire Railroad Museum. The weather was perfect for the event, sunny and pleasantly warm. I sat under the shade of a large tree and listened to a band playing classic C&W songs while I enjoyed a cold IPA beer from a local brewery. Later in the afternoon I sampled some of the delicious BBQ being prepared by several local groups who were competing for the award of “Best BBQ”. Everyone had a fun time, especially the families who rode the old steam train from the museum to downtown Perris. Meanwhile, I watched skydivers slowly floating down to the Perris airport a short distance away.



Orange Empire Railroad Museum steam train



BBQ, Boots, & Brew festival

The first week in May I suddenly got an urgent phone call from the company with which I have a contract for photo shoots. They asked me to do a photo shoot the next morning at a Sephora store in Corona because the person who had been assigned suddenly quit that day! And in order to keep their contract for work with Sephora, the photo shoot had to be completed that next day! Normally I wouldn't have given it a second thought to do the shoot, but when they told me I had to use a totally new kind of camera which I had never heard of, let alone used, I had misgivings. But they doubled the pay and practically begged me to do the shoot. Later in the day I had to drive to Temecula to meet up with the other photographer from San Diego who had the new



camera. That evening I had about an hour to “practice” with the camera before the shoot the next morning. Despite being totally unfamiliar with the operation of the camera, I was able to get the shoot done, with some phone support from the company! After the shoot, I hoped I wouldn’t have to repeat that experience again.

A week later I had a photo shoot in Desert Hot Springs that involved taking photos of a couple of resorts and a historic site known as “Cabot’s Pueblo Museum”. One of the resorts was so “exclusive” it was almost impossible to locate, and once I found it, I had to be escorted around the property by the General Manager. Photographing Cabot’s Pueblo Museum was very interesting, being one of the earliest sites in the region. In the early 1800’s, Captain Cabot was searching for a source of hot springs and when he found a large one, he built his house on the site, a beautiful example of pueblo architecture.



Cabot’s Pueblo Museum



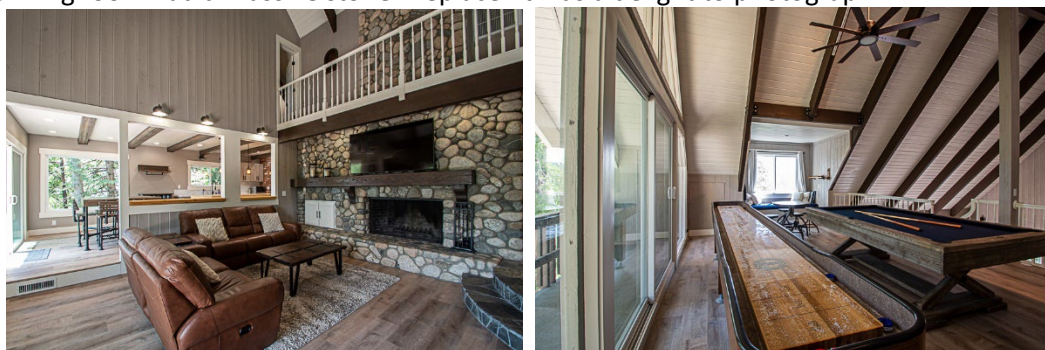
the “O Spa & Resort”

At the end of May, on Memorial Day weekend, I attended the annual “Redlands Festival of Arts in the Park”. There were well over a hundred artists displaying their work, which ranged from painting, photography, and jewelry to sculpture and ceramics. The weather was perfect, and it was fun to walk around among the booths to see so many beautiful works of art. I also spent some time in the beer garden listening to several musical groups playing for an appreciative audience. All in all, it was a wonderful time in the park.



Redlands Festival of Arts in the Park

The next week I had a photo shoot in Lake Arrowhead, a large 5-bedroom “cabin” overlooking the lake with a game room upstairs, complete with pool table and shuffleboard. The huge deck outside spanned the entire house and the living room had a massive stone fireplace. It was a delight to photograph.



Lake Arrowhead cabin



After the shoot, I stopped at the “Bear Claw Saloon” in Crestline where the huge head of a Moose mounted on the wall dominated the bar.



Bear Claw Saloon

Then in early June I made my way to San Diego to attend the “West Coast School of Photography” on the campus of the University of San Diego as I have done every year for the past five years. My trip started on the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train to San Diego Old Town where I had a reservation for six nights at the “Marriott Courtyard Hotel” courtesy of my Marriott reward points. The roundtrip ticket cost me \$105.00, as opposed to \$125.00 for parking at the hotel! Looking at it another way, my monthly pass on the San Diego transit system cost me just \$23.00, compared to \$25.00 a night to park at the hotel! During the stopover at the station in Fullerton, I had time for a delicious “Santa Fe Scramble” breakfast with ham, hash browns, and toast at the Santa Fe Café. As I enjoyed breakfast sitting outside on the patio alongside the railroad tracks, I watched long BNSF freight trains thunder through the station just a few yards away! When I arrived in Old Town, skies were cloudy due to the heavy overcast known as “June Gloom” – so typical at this time of year.

After checking into the hotel, I took the trolley to Linda Vista station and walked over to the “Ballast Point Home Brew Tasting Room” for a beer. When the server at the bar saw my Marine Corps hat, he gave me a 10% military discount – nice to be recognized as a veteran! After the beer, I walked over to the bus stop to catch the bus to the University of San Diego (USD) campus for the “Meet and Greet” event. To my surprise, there was a large dead rat laying on the bench at the bus stop! Although it was pretty chilly that evening, it was fun to meet up with several “alumni” with whom I had attended classes in the past. As the social came to a close, I just managed to catch the bus back to Old Town a few minutes before it arrived at the USD bus stop. Later I discovered that Google Maps was capable of displaying the arrival time of every San Diego bus and trolley, including any delays! And since the USD dining room had not been open that night, I had a delicious dish of sweet and sour chicken at a small Asian café in Old Town.



University of San Diego

The next morning, I was up at 6:30am to have breakfast at the hotel before boarding bus #44 to the USD campus to join the class on landscape photography. As everyone introduced themselves, several people spoke about their international trips. But when it came to me, I decided not to tell them I had travelled to 100 countries – I didn't want anyone to think that I was "boasting". As lunch time came around, I had a delicious plate of Teriyaki chicken and spicy noodles in the USD dining room. (note: USD has consistently received national awards for having the best food of any university in the country) Later in the afternoon, our instructors postponed the planned "practice photo shoot" outside due to the heavy overcast, which didn't surprise me. Just before the close of the class, I received a text message from Amtrak telling me that my train on Friday from San Diego to Riverside had been cancelled, but with no explanation! So, after the class I headed downtown to the Santa Fe Depot to ask Amtrak why my train had been cancelled. The Amtrak agent explained that a massive landslide had occurred a few hours earlier in San Clemente that had closed the tracks! (note: this had also happened a couple of weeks earlier) So, Amtrak would be going back to using a system of shuttle buses to take passengers from Oceanside to Irvine in order to bypass San Clemente. Meanwhile, on my way back on the trolley to Old Town, the trolleys headed downtown were packed with Padres baseball fans for the evening game with the Chicago Cubs. Later that evening, I took the bus back to the USD campus to join fellow classmates for the "Welcome Social". It was a nice evening of sharing stories with people I knew and those I met for the first time. But I found that I had stayed a bit too late to catch the last bus to Old Town, so I walked down the hill to the Linda Vista station and on to Old Town by trolley. As I walked back to the hotel, I passed the "Old Town Saloon" and decided to stop for a beer. There I found a classic old bar and a "seasoned" bartender who remembered the Reagan presidency, the Nixon resignation, and the Stanley Kubrick film "A Clockwork Orange"! We talked about our "generation", and he mentioned he had been the bartender for over 32 years! I really enjoyed our conversation, as did he.

The following morning as I rode bus #44 to USD, I received **40** text messages from our class assistant Sharon and students in the class, most of whom just responded with a stupid "yeh"! (note: so why can't people understand what "reply all" means!) It was definitely a case of text message "overload"! (note: later, I asked Sharon to remove me from her "group" text messages, and if there was anything she really needed me to know, she should call me – she understood and even agreed with my frustration) The day in class was filled with some very interesting stuff, but a few of the presentations were beyond me as far as how they related to photographing landscapes, especially as we watched a video that "analyzed" renaissance portrait painters! In another video, the videographer spent 20 minutes analyzing paintings in the Louvre that had absolutely nothing to do with landscapes! (note: I had to ask myself why – what was the point? Frankly, it frustrated me!)

After lunch we spent two hours outside photographing on the USD campus to capture images showing the use of the "Dynamic Symmetry" technique. I was able to find some nice examples among the beautiful buildings, and at last, the sun appeared for about an hour before hiding behind the "June Gloom" clouds again.



University of San Diego campus

After class, I spent some time selecting and processing my photos as I sat in the Marriott Courtyard Hotel "Bistro" with a cold pint of Stone IPA. (note: it was just \$5.00 during Happy Hour, and \$8.00 later) Then I decided

to order dinner - a fantastic “buffalo grilled chicken sandwich” in the Bistro, after which I walked down the street to “Rockin Baja Lobster” for another beer. While I sat at the bar, I noticed the female bartender was having a difficult time keeping up with all the drink orders. She made a couple of mistakes and had to ask one of the servers how to fix some of the cocktails. But she certainly gave the job as much as she could. Later, as the pace slowed down a bit, she confided in me just how difficult it was – not that I could do anything to help her, except to listen, which is what I think she needed most! As I left the bar, I wished her luck!

The next day we had a very interesting session about the International Photographic Competition, including a discussion of the categories and rules, along with a display of last year’s 10 best images in each category. It was abundantly clear that the competition was very tough! For lunch I had some delicious orange spiced chicken and chow mein in the USD dining room before taking a long walk around the campus. That afternoon, we all went to Balboa Park where we spent a couple of hours photographing details of the ornate old buildings that were once part of the “1915 Panama – California Exposition”.



“El Prado” – Balboa Park



“Artist’s Village – Balboa Park

After class, I went downtown again to change my Amtrak ticket for an earlier departure to make sure I could connect with the train to Riverside on Friday afternoon. Then I walked over to the “Fish Market Restaurant” for a fantastic dinner of King crab cakes and fresh arugula salad, along with a pint of “Ale Smith 394 Pale Ale” as I gazed upon a gorgeous sunset across San Diego Bay. Then it was back on the trolley to Old Town before retiring for the night.

We spent most of the following day in the classroom with our instructors, Doug and Laura, as they explained how they processed their images in Lightroom and Photoshop. While their photos were amazing, their explanation got a bit too technical at times and many of us were lost and a bit frustrated. But we all had to agree that their photos were incredible! That evening we went as a class to have dinner together at Sharon’s favorite restaurant in La Jolla, “Osteria Romantica”. It was a lovely old Italian restaurant with wonderful traditional dishes, as well as some more modern ones, such as the one I ordered, fresh grilled Halibut with artichokes and mushrooms!



“Osteria Romantica”

I sat with Sharon, Doug, and Laura and learned they were planning a trip to Alaska in September, which gave me an opportunity to let them know about some of my favorite places to visit and things to do in Alaska. Sharon



told us she was also planning a trip to East Africa in July, so I told her about my travels across Africa and offered her my suggestions of where to go and what to do. We all had a great conversation over dinner. Then we all headed down to Scripps Pier on the beach to photograph the sunset, and when we arrived, we found there were several small groups of UC San Diego graduates having their photos taken, including some lovely Asian girls in white dresses and high heel shoes! (note: not very practical in the soft sand on the beach) There were some beautiful sunset photos, especially from under the pier.



Scripps's Pier at sunset

Once the sun had dropped far below the horizon, we packed up our gear and headed back to USD. I rode with Ted in his huge GMC Yukon XL and everyone in the vehicle, except me, had their cell phones dialed into Google Maps for GPS directions. I relied upon my “mental map” of San Diego and ended up correcting the route a couple of times for Ted, who was kind enough to drop me off in Old Town. Back at the hotel I sat down in the Bistro with a beer and downloaded my photos from the evening shoot at Scripps Pier. Meanwhile, the TV was tuned to CNN with the news of Trump being indicted on 37 federal criminal charges! (note: there were many more indictments to follow)

The next morning, I boarded the 11:03am train at Old Town station for the trip to Oceanside where buses waited for the shuttle to Irvine Amtrak station. The journey to Oceanside was great, with lovely views of the ocean and beaches under the bright morning sun. But the transfer to buses in Oceanside was a bit chaotic, however, I managed to get a seat at the front of the bus. There was very heavy traffic southbound on the I-5 freeway, but luckily the northbound lanes to Irvine moved along at a fast pace so that we arrived ahead of schedule. From there I boarded another train bound for Los Angeles that took me to Fullerton where I would connect with the “Southwest Chief” train to Riverside. At Fullerton station I saw two young Amish couples also waiting for the Southwest Chief, and they told me they were returning home to Pennsylvania. Since I had a couple of hours before the departure of the train, I walked over to the “Old Spaghetti Factory” for dinner – “garlic mizithra with shrimp” - outstanding! The restaurant is beautiful and has a very interesting history of having once been the Union Pacific Railroad passenger station during the days when Fullerton was an important stop on the famous Union Pacific “Overland Express” that travelled from Chicago to Los Angeles.



Boarding Amtrak buses in Oceanside



“Old Spaghetti Factory” in Fullerton

Finally, it was time to board the Southwest Chief, also a historic Santa Fe Railroad train between Chicago and Los Angeles. It was a very enjoyable ride to Riverside, and as I sat in the dome lounge car, I almost wished I was going all the way to Chicago!

The third week of June had me on the road again to Mesa, Arizona for another round of photo shoots for Walgreens. As I drove east on I-10, I saw the westbound lanes were closed due to a large brush fire just north of the freeway and traffic was backed up for several miles. Then I turned off the interstate and headed northeast on California Highway 62 through Yucca Valley to Twentynine Palms where I stopped at Circle-K for some gas since it would be another 100 miles to the next gas station. I also bought a sandwich for lunch and the cashier kept calling me “hun” as in “have a great day hun”! Traffic on highway 62 was almost non-existent, which was just fine with me. It was a long drive to Parker, Arizona on the Colorado River where I filled my gas tank with much less expensive gas at the “Running Man” station on the reservation of the Colorado River Tribes. Later in the afternoon, I stopped at the “Ocotillo Saloon” in Bouse for a cold pint of Lagunitas IPA, which was still only \$3.50, compared to \$10.00 in Phoenix! When I visited the men’s toilet, there was sign posted on the wall “Trump 2024 – Take America Back Again”. And as I looked down, there was a sticker in the urinal that read “Piss on Biden”! (note: I avoided making any mention of politics while I sat at the bar)



“Ocotillo Saloon” – Bouse, Arizona

Then it was another long drive across the desert to Wickenburg and on to Mesa where I had a reservation at the “Sheraton Hotel at Wrigleyville”. It turned out that “Wrigleyville” referred to the spring training camp for the Chicago Cubs baseball team. After checking into the hotel, I had a couple of beers in the bar before heading to “Famous Dave’s BBQ Restaurant” for dinner. The young bartender recognized me from my previous trip last fall and highly recommended the “St Louis Baby Back Ribs” served with cornbread muffins and “Wilbur Beans” – an excellent choice! The cold glass of “Forty Eight State Brewery IPA” went very well with the BBQ ribs.

The next morning, I was up early, only to discover the shower sprayed water everywhere and all over the bathroom floor! I skipped breakfast to get to the Walgreens store as soon as they opened. Fortunately, it wasn’t very busy, and I was able to complete the work by early afternoon. Once again, I noticed all the “Tide” laundry detergent remained locked up in clear plastic cases! While I had spent several hours working in the air-conditioned store, the outside temperature was a blistering 103 degrees! When I returned to the hotel, I had a couple of cold beers and a delicious plate of perfectly breaded fish and chips for dinner in the hotel bar. Meanwhile, “Golf’s Best Moments” played on the big screen TV above the bar, including Tiger Woods famous shot that ended up off the course and behind a tree, which bent his club as he hit the ball!

The following morning, I checked out of the hotel and headed to Scottsdale for my next assignment. After “scouting out” the Walgreens store there, I checked into the “Hampton Inn & Suites” at the “Talking Stick Resort” on the “Salt River-Pima Indian Reservation” The corner suite on the top floor was very nice. Later, I walked over to the casino to check it out, but I was not impressed – very loud, smoky and with only one small café and a couple of bars. I was expecting a lot more. Then I drove to the “McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park” where I found it was 110 degrees in the shade!





"McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park" – Mesa, Arizona

By this time of day, I was ready for the cold beer at the "Red Robin Bar & Grill" nearby. However, burgers and fries weren't on my mind for dinner that evening. So, as I drove back to the hotel, I spotted "Chili's Restaurant" and decided to stop. The bartender's recommendation of the "Seafood and Chicken Pasta" was exceptional! And, as usual, the portions were huge, so I left the restaurant with half of the dinner in a takeout box. Back at the hotel, they had no beer for sale in their "pantry" since they were not permitted to sell alcohol on the Indian Reservation. However, the front desk directed me to Albertson's a short distance away where I purchased a couple of beers for the evening. Back in my room, I watched a couple of old episodes of "Law and Order" on TV, but the constant interruptions of commercials really frustrated me since I'm so used to watching recordings on my TiVo DVR at home where I can easily skip the commercials.

The next morning, I drove to the Walgreens store to do the 3D site survey, and Nicole, the store manager, was most helpful, especially in having the pharmacy cover all the patient information before I photographed it. As a result, I didn't have to put up thick black plastic sheets to cover all the shelves where the prescriptions were stored, and so I was able to complete the survey by 4pm - then I went back to the hotel to upload the 3D scans. After that, the guy at the front desk recommended "Maverick's Sports Bar" when I asked where I should go for a beer. What I found was basically a bowling alley next to the bar and it was incredibly loud, so I only stayed for one beer. As I looked online, I saw there was a "Ruth Chris' Steakhouse" not far away – suddenly I felt like having a good steak for dinner! I began dinner with a cold glass of "Goose Island IPA" and when I informed the bartender that it was from a brewery in Chicago, he was surprised, even though he had grown up in Chicago. When I asked for his dinner recommendation, he immediately said the "Petite Filet Mignon and Scampi Combo" was amazing. When the plate arrived with two 4oz medallions of filet mignon grilled perfectly rare, along with huge grilled Scampi, I knew it was the right choice for dinner. In particular, the Scampi were presented in a very unique "pinwheel" design! It was an absolutely fantastic dinner, but not cheap at \$82.00! After the amazing dinner, I retired for the night.

Once again, I started the day early to arrive at the Scottsdale store as soon as they opened at 7:00am. The store manager was not there, and the staff had no idea that I would be doing a 3D site survey – unfortunately, it is so typical. But they were happy to help me! Joe, a big black man, was especially helpful and all day long I overheard him at the checkout counter welcoming and interacting with all the customers as if they had been old friends! He was so warm and friendly to everyone, even if he had never met them. He was a very unique and valuable employee, but I had to wonder if the Walgreens corporation ever knew of him – however, it was clear that the local community certainly did! I had a great time working with him that day. While I was collecting data about the shelving, I came across a very unique product that immediately caught my eye "Boudreaux's Butt Paste"! I just had to get a photo of it!





As I left the store it was at least 110 degrees outside, and I looked for a nearby bar to get a cold beer. Joe suggested the “Parma Italian Roots Restaurant & Bar” in “Greyhawk Plaza” just a few minutes away. When I asked the bartender for a local IPA, she recommended the “Mother Road IPA” from the “Mother Road Brewery” in Flagstaff, which took its name from old Route 66 known as the “Mother Road”. It was a very nice West Coast style IPA, as opposed to an East Coast style that was “hazy”. She offered me a taste of her favorite East Coast IPA and I found it to be more mellow and not quite so hoppy. It was nice to sit and relax in an air-conditioned environment while outside it was still 105 degrees in the shade!

On the way back to the hotel, I spotted a craft brew restaurant called the “Taphouse Bar & Grill” where I ordered a very nice pint of “Mason’s IPA” from a San Diego brewery. The bartender highly recommended the “Famous Fish and Chips” for dinner, and they were superb – crisp on the outside and tender on the inside! (note: I was not disappointed) A man sitting near me at the bar spent the entire time on his phone dealing with a problem, and though I couldn’t make out exactly what the problem was, he was obviously not happy! Then he quickly downed his beer and left. A middle-aged couple took his place, and soon we had a very nice conversation about traveling, especially since their plan was to take a cruise to Alaska. As soon as I mentioned I had lived in Alaska, they were anxious to hear about what I would recommend as places to go and things to see. Later, back at the Hampton Inn I packed up my equipment in preparation for my return home the next day.

I checked out of the hotel early the next morning and headed west on US Highway 60 to Parker and then across the Mojave Desert on California Highway 62 through Twenty-Nine Palms before joining I-10 to Redlands. Along the way I stopped at the Ocotillo Saloon in Bouse again and as I walked in the bartender recognized me and set about pouring a cold glass of Lagunitas IPA for me before I had even sat down at the bar! I had to wonder if I was her only customer that ordered Lagunitas, since everyone else in the bar was drinking Bud Light! I noticed two old guys at the far end of the bar were watching a documentary film on the bar TV about the “Watergate Break-in” which led to Nixon’s resignation. One guy was explaining it to the other guy as if he had never heard of it! And as I left the bar, they were still discussing it as if it was the latest news in Bouse!

In early July, I attended the annual Esri International User Conference in San Diego, as I have done every year since 1983 when I was an Esri user in Alaska. The journey to San Diego began on the Amtrak bus from Riverside to Fullerton where I would connect with the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train. Even though the express lanes on the 91 freeway were closed for maintenance, traffic moved at a fast pace, most likely because it was a Sunday morning. So, we arrived about 20 minutes ahead of schedule and I had time for breakfast at the “Santa Fe Café” as I watched trains passing through the station. Since the portion of track from San Juan Capistrano to Oceanside remained closed due to a massive landslide earlier in June, we had to board the shuttle bus at Irvine station. Once again, I was lucky to get a seat at the front of the bus, affording me a clear view of the freeway as traffic moved along quickly. As we passed Camp Pendelton there was a huge military field exercise in progress with lots of helicopter and tank activity. For a few minutes it almost seemed as if we had entered a war zone! When we arrived at the Oceanside station, the transfer from bus to train went smoothly. But just after boarding the train, the conductor announced that there would be no amenities served in business class and the café car would be

closed – basically, no food or beverage service on the one-hour trip to San Diego! He then explained that Amtrak upper-level management had decided to reassign staff from San Diego to Los Angeles as a result of the track closure. He concluded his announcement by “suggesting” we call Amtrak to register a “complaint”, and even gave us the telephone number! (note: it would be the same situation on my return trip from San Diego to Oceanside)

When the train arrived at the Santa Fe Depot in downtown San Diego, I walked over to the Embassy Suites Hotel and checked into a very nice two-room suite on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor overlooking San Diego Bay. Then I walked down to the Convention Center to register for the User Conference and pick up my badge, after which I returned to the hotel for a beer in the hotel’s “New York West Restaurant and Bar”. Along with the beer I had a delicious plate of “Ale Candied Bacon” – crisp bacon covered in a thick coating of stout beer, cracked black pepper, sea salt, and fried peanuts – amazing! Later, I walked along the waterfront to the “Brigantine Restaurant” in the new “Portsides” development next to the old historic “Star of India” clipper ship. I found a seat at the bar overlooking San Diego Bay and enjoyed a cold pint of local Stone IPA as I waited for my dear friend DeeAnne to join me for dinner. The restaurant was very busy with an hour or more wait for a table, so DeeAnne and I shared dinner at the bar. It was really nice to see DeeAnne and we had a great time as we caught up on the time since last year’s user conference. When the time came to order dinner, both of us chose the fish and chips – crisp Alaskan Cod and a huge pile of fries! Before we finished dinner, I gave DeeAnne an autographed copy of my book “Travels with King Kong – Overland Across Africa”. After dinner, I walked over to “Kansas City BBQ” for a beer and to see what new signs had been posted in the bar. As I sat at the old bar, Mike the bartender kept up a lively “banter” with the locals seated around the bar. While I enjoyed my glass of local IPA, I made note of some of the best new signs posted around the bar, and here they are:

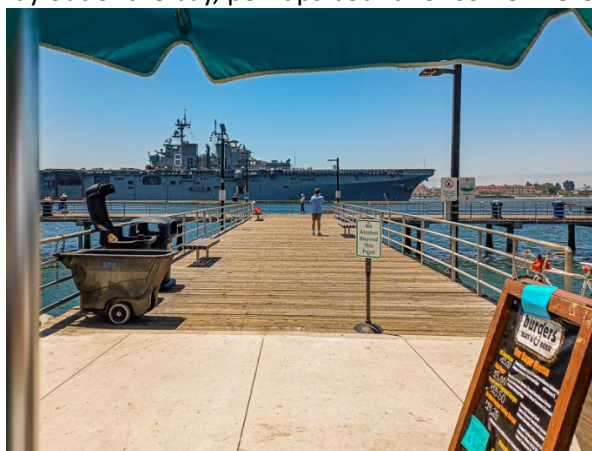
- “Smile – it’s the second best thing you could do with your lips”
- “You must be from the shallow end of the gene pool”
- “Wife and dog missing – reward for the dog”
- “Earth first – we can visit the other planets later”
- “24 hours in a day – 24 beers in a case – coincidence?”
- “If we are what we eat, I’m fast, cheap, and easy”
- “Before giving anyone a piece of your mind, be sure you have enough to spare”
- “Money talks – mine always says goodbye”
- “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of those who would threaten it – US Navy”

The next morning, I attended the opening plenary session, along with over 18,000 other people – the largest user conference ever! The A/V setup and stage were very impressive, as always! (note: later, DeeAnne told me that my old colleague Matt was still in charge of the setup)



Esri User Conference – Plenary Session

While the morning plenary session was outstanding, many of us felt that Jack's presentation was a bit long with too many slides filled with too much information and not enough demos! (note: so it was no surprise that the audience was less than enthusiastic at times when he was expecting applause, and he was clearly disappointed) But as he ended the morning session with a passionate plea for saving our earth, he was obviously overcome with emotion and choked up, almost to tears! At that moment, we all felt it too – 18,000 of us! (note: it was the moment I remember most from the conference!) I skipped the second half of the morning plenary session and walked over to “Burgers, Bait, and Beer” on the fishing pier overlooking San Diego Bay for an early lunch. The home-made hamburger was delicious as I sat outside on the pier enjoying a cold beer while a massive Navy ship slowly sailed by on its way out of the bay, perhaps bound for somewhere in Asia.



Lunch at “Burgers, Bait, and Beer”

The weather was gorgeous – sunny and 75 degrees. Meanwhile it was 96 degrees in Redlands!

After lunch, I watched the afternoon plenary session in the “overflow session room” upstairs in Ballroom 20 – much quieter than downstairs in Hall H. Highlights of the session included:

- Keynote presentation by a National Geographic Society Explorer about the Okavango Delta in Botswana which receives water from the “Angolan Highlands” a hundred miles away in Namibia
- Fascinating presentation about oceans and their impact on weather and climate change by the Chief of Data Management and Climate Prediction at NOAA
- Last presentation was about the use of GIS technology in the Ukraine war by a senior US Department of State official

Following the close of the plenary session, we all went upstairs to the Map Gallery Reception, and although it's one of the most interesting and popular events of the user conference, it was horribly crowded.



Map Gallery the day after the Opening Reception

So, I had my one complimentary beer and then left the reception early to walk along the waterfront to Seaport Village where I discovered “Mike Hess Brewery”, a new small craft brewery taproom. There I sat outside on the



deck enjoying a very nice West Coast IPA and watching people strolling among the shops in Seaport Village. Earlier in the day I had the pleasure of running into many of my old Esri colleagues and international friends, including Peter from the Czech Republic, Mehmet from Turkey, and Alex from Canada. Alex and I had a long conversation about his family farm in northern Ontario where his son now grows marijuana in large greenhouses!

For dinner that evening I walked along the waterfront to my favorite restaurant, “Top of the Market” next to the USS Midway aircraft carrier. Dinner began with a delicious shrimp and linguine appetizer compliments of the chef, followed by fabulous jumbo crab cakes and hot sourdough rolls. The chilled glass of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc was a perfect accompaniment. Then my server highly recommended his favorite dessert, “Strawberry and Rhubarb Galette” topped with vanilla bean ice cream – incredible! Before leaving the restaurant, the chef gave me a taste of his new coconut and mango curry sauce and it was amazing. On the way back to the hotel I couldn’t help but notice that almost all the “pedicabs” were now electrically powered, in addition to having loud stereo systems and very bright light displays! Gone are the days of actually “peddling”! (note: I still remember when Maureen hailed a pedicab to take three of us to a restaurant in Little Italy – a steep climb uphill, for which the pedicab driver earned a large tip!)

The next morning, after a great ham and cheese omelet for breakfast at the hotel, I returned to the Convention Center to visit the “Expo Hall” again. It was filled with hundreds of vendors displaying their hardware, software, and services, alongside booths with Esri staff giving software demos and answering technical questions. There I happened to run into DeeAnne, and she invited me to have lunch with her in the Convention Center staff café. Then it was back to the hotel to check out and make my way to the train station for the return trip to Riverside. At the Santa Fe Depot I waited in line with other passengers to board the train scheduled to leave at 1:15pm. Suddenly, at 1:00pm, we all heard an announcement that the arrival of the southbound train from Los Angeles was delayed and there was no information about when it would arrive! So, I immediately went to the Amtrak agent and found out the train had hit a person walking on the tracks just north of Old Town. The agent told me that the “incident” had closed the tracks in both directions and no trains could go beyond the Old Town Station, not even the commuter trains. And since there was no idea of how long the “investigation” of the incident would take, Amtrak had to cancel all northbound train service indefinitely. When I told him that I had to make the connection to the Southwest Chief train in Fullerton at 6:00pm, he advised me to rebook my trip for the next morning, which I proceeded to do. However, since I had already checked out of the Embassy Suites Hotel, it became a challenge to find accommodation at another hotel since virtually every hotel in downtown San Diego was fully booked for the Esri User Conference! Finally, after an exhaustive search online, I located a vacancy at the “Gaslamp Plaza Suites” in the Gaslamp District downtown – their last available room! As I checked into the hotel, I found it a bit ironic since at one time many years ago I had been an owner of a unit when it was a timeshare property! Having secured accommodations for the night, I walked down to Kansas City BBQ for dinner. But my choice of “Rib Tips Sandwich” was not good – being mostly “gristle”! It was hard to find any meat in the sandwich. When I mentioned it to my server, she immediately apologized and took it off my bill! Later, sitting at the bar was a much better experience as I watched tourists having fun taking selfies beside the old piano that had become famous for a classic scene from the original movie “Top Gun “. From KC BBQ, I walked up to “Patrick’s Irish Bar” – one of my favorite places for live music in San Diego. Sitting outside on the patio with a pint of Stone IPA listening to the band playing old blues music, a lady suddenly sat down near me, and she looked familiar, but I couldn’t remember her name. When she looked at me, I recognized her as an old Esri colleague named Lisa! We ended up having a great evening remembering many of the old times when we had worked together. (note: our old friend Jack Horton never showed up that evening, in spite of the fact that Patrick’s was his “home away from home” in San Diego!)

The following morning, I went back to the Convention Center to visit the EXPO again. As I walked among the exhibit booths, I happened to run into my next-door neighbor Mike who was manning the “Geodatabase” software island. He was lamenting the lack of interest in geodatabase technology from the attendees, but it was still early in the day so I suspected the attention would pick up later. When lunchtime approached, I headed to

“Joe’s Crab Shack” on the waterfront for a delicious dish of “Crab and Shrimp Dip”, served along with hot, crusty sourdough rolls, well before the crowd of conference attendees arrived! As I was sitting at the bar, I saw a very long line of people patiently waiting outside in Embarcadero Park for a BBQ food truck to open. Meanwhile, I had already finished a delicious lunch! After lunch, I walked back to the hotel, packed my bag, and checked out. On my way to the train station, I stopped for a beer at the “Gaslamp Tavern” and enjoyed sitting outside in the lovely 75-degree weather.



A “Bicycle Train” in the Gaslamp District!

Then I boarded the trolley to the Santa Fe Depot for the departure of the train to Oceanside, which was on time. While there was still no food or beverage service on the way to Oceanside, the bus shuttle to Irvine station was very efficient. Later, the service in business class aboard the train from Irvine to Fullerton was very nice and we arrived on time. I had time to have a beer at the Santa Fe Café before boarding the Southwest Chief to Riverside. Once on board, I had a jalapeno cheeseburger and beer from the Café car while I sat in the Sightseer Lounge car enjoying the scenery of the Santa Ana River canyon at sunset! It was a very pleasant trip to Riverside and I looked forward to relaxing at home.

A week later, I had two photo shoots on Saturday – a Sephora store in Burbank and a daycare center at Paramount Studios in Los Angeles. The Burbank shoot was scheduled at 8am, which meant I had to leave home by 6:30am to make sure I would arrive on time given the unpredictable nature of freeway traffic. Luckily the traffic moved well, and I arrived about 10 minutes early. I introduced myself to the store manager, a large, rather overweight “brassy” woman with a shiny “nose ring”! From the beginning it was very clear that she was in charge, but at the same time, she was very helpful to me. Unfortunately, the 3D camera kept malfunctioning whenever I tried to scan the front half of the store. It would constantly “disconnect” from the iPad with the error message, “no internet connection found”. The store manager thought the problem might have been due to the close proximity to Burbank Airport – but who knows! So, I ended up being able to complete only half of the store – very frustrating!

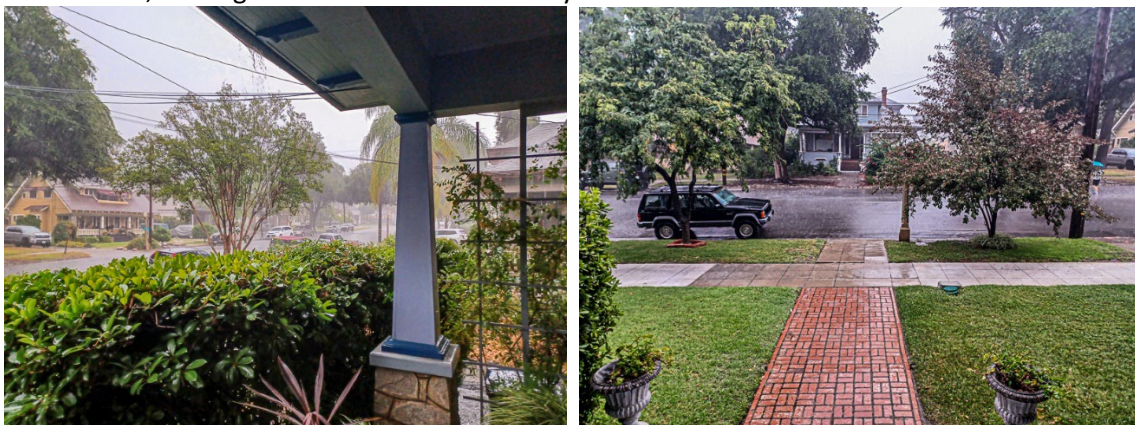
After picking up some gas at a Union 76 station in Burbank, I drove south on US 101 to my next shoot at Paramount Studios. The traffic was horrible, especially once I had exited the freeway and had to drive on local two-lane streets! When I finally arrived at the Paramount Studios main gate, I checked in with security and received my official “Gate Pass”, along with directions to the daycare center. It was located between two huge studios and the director of the center showed me the classrooms that she wanted photographed. Since there were only 3 of them, I was done in 20 minutes – one of the fastest shoots I’ve had, which I appreciated.



Paramount Studios "Gate Pass"

But then the drive home began as a traffic "nightmare" - bumper to bumper on Melrose Avenue, as well as US 101 southbound to downtown LA! However, once I was beyond the junction with I-10 and able to use the "Express Lane", it was 65mph almost all the way home. Still, the journey from Paramount Studios, a distance of 65 miles, took me over an hour and half! (note: that worked out to be an average speed of less than 40mph) When I arrived home, I vowed never to drive to West Los Angeles again – the stress of the traffic was not worth it!

In late July and early August, I was assigned to conduct 3D site surveys at 11 Walgreens stores in southern California, the first stores in California to be on the schedule. It was a very nice piece of work that put over \$7,000 into my bank account! Although the stores were located in southern California, it still involved a lot of freeway driving which I wasn't too thrilled about. Then in Late August, two significant events happened. First of all, a routine plumbing inspection of the water pipes in my 123-year-old house revealed some issues with the condition of the original pipes, many of which were slowly leaking. While it was unfortunate news, it wasn't a big surprise given their age! The problem required the complete replacement of all the old pipes – a major project! The plumbing company was amazing – completing the work in just two days! So now, the system should be good for another 100 years. Then, on August 19<sup>th</sup> southern California was hit by "Hurricane Hilary" as it moved northward along the coast of Baja California. Yes, there are hurricanes in California, but they are very rare – the last one was over 85 years ago in 1935! Hilary pounded us with 80mph winds and heavy rain for two days. Some places in the Mojave Desert recorded up to 5 inches of rain – more rainfall than they normally see in an entire year! In Redlands we had just over two inches of rain – much appreciated since the normal August rainfall is less than a tenth of an inch, making it the driest month of the year. It was an event to be remembered in history!



The remnants of Hurricane Hilary in Redlands

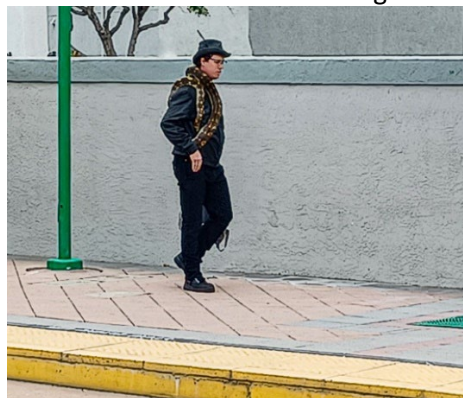


As my birthday approached in early September, I made plans to spend time in San Diego, with a stopover in San Clemente to celebrate with my dear friend Tina! The journey to San Diego began with a ride on the Amtrak bus from Riverside to Fullerton station where I would connect with the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train to San Diego. As we left Riverside, the freeway traffic was horrible, even the carpool and express lane – bumper to bumper for miles! Amazingly we arrived at Fullerton station just 10 minutes late. (note: great driving by the bus driver) Even after arriving a bit late, I still had time to enjoy a delicious “Santa Fe Scramble” with spicy sausage for breakfast as I sat on the patio at the “Santa Fe Café” and watched long BNSF freight trains roar through the station! The southbound Amtrak train was on time and the service in business class was very nice, now available all the way to San Diego since the tracks around San Clemente had been cleared a couple of weeks before. So, no more need for shuttle buses from Irvine to Oceanside!



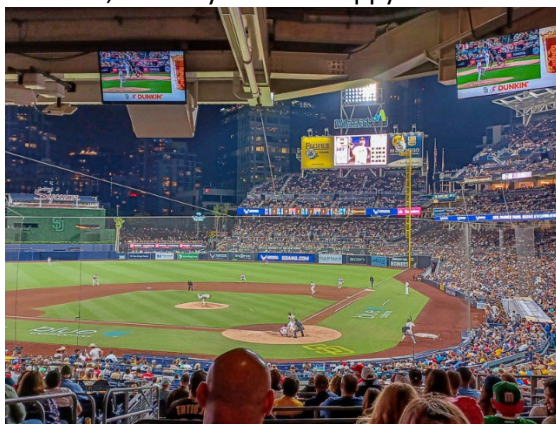
“Santa Fe Café” – Fullerton station

When I arrived in downtown San Diego, I walked to the “Sofia Hotel” and checked into a lovely corner suite. In the hotel lobby lots of old photos about the hotel’s history were posted when it was once known as the “Pickwick Hotel” in the early 1900’s. Recently, the hotel had been beautifully renovated while preserving its unique history. After checking in, I took the trolley to “Hazard Center” and browsed through Barnes & Noble bookstore. In the “Humor” section I discovered a fascinating book titled “F in Exams – The very Best Totally Wrong Test Answers”. The book was a collection of the most unusual and clever answers from students on exams that were totally wrong! When I went to checkout, the cashier said that the book was one of his favorites, along with a book titled “Senior Citizens Handbook”. When I asked him to describe the book, he said it was nothing but “blank” pages! So, I wondered if very many people bought it, and he said it was a “best seller”! (note: I had to wonder if people actually opened the book before they bought it?) Leaving Barnes & Noble, I walked to the trolley station to return downtown. When I got to the platform, I suddenly noticed a very unusual sight – a man standing on the opposite platform with something large hanging around his neck. At first, I thought it was just a long brown scarf, but as I looked closer, I could not believe my eyes!!!! The “long brown scarf” suddenly moved, and it was at that moment I realized it was a large Boa Constrictor snake wrapped around the guy’s neck! (note: and I wasn’t the only one at the station to notice) A few minutes later, he boarded the trolley headed to Santee, and I could only wonder what passengers on the train must have thought!



Man with Boa Constrictor

When I got to Seaport Village, I walked along the waterfront past several huge, very expensive yachts docked in the Marriott Marina. Then I went to the Omni Hotel bar for a beer, along with lots of Padres baseball fans who were busy “preparing” for the game against Philadelphia. Since I had purchased a “Premier Club” ticket, I went to the exclusive Omni Hotel entrance to Petco Park as I had done in the past. But the hotel had recently changed the rules and now only allowed hotel guests to use the entrance. So, I had to walk over to one of the main gates where I was confronted by security and told I was not allowed to enter with a backpack, regardless of how small! They told me I had to store it at a place called “Lock-It-Up” on the opposite side of the stadium! Apparently, the security policies of Petco Park had changed in the 2 years since I had last been to a game. After storing my backpack in a locker, I entered the stadium and made my way to the “Premier Club” which used to be owned by the Omni Hotel but is now managed by Lexus. Upon entering the club, I found it to be very crowded with every seat occupied! I stood at the bar with a pint of IPA for almost a half hour before a seat next to me opened up. The beer was nice, but very expensive (\$17.00 a pint), and to my surprise, the “grilled chicken sandwich” I ordered was almost the same price – when it finally arrived! As soon as the national anthem was sung, the entire club stood in silence – you could have heard a pin drop! After I finished the delicious sandwich, I went in search of my seat in the stands. I found that my seat was occupied by a small boy, and when I said it was my seat, his mother seated next to him offered another seat on the aisle in the row behind, which she said was open because their friend was not attending the game. So, it all worked for both me and her family. I enjoyed the game, despite the expensive beer, and the Padres won 7-0, so everyone was happy!



Petco Park

The next morning, I took the bus to Balboa Park to visit the “Model Railroad Museum” for the first time. Before the museum opened, I enjoyed a delicious BLT in the “Café at the Park”. Then I spent a couple of hours exploring the Model Railroad Museum. It had a very realistic model of two amazing American railroad achievements – (1) the “Tehachapi Loop” that enables freight trains to ascend the Sierra mountains from Bakersfield to Mojave, and (2) the “Carrizo Canyon Bridge” on the old San Diego and Arizona Eastern Railroad that ran between San Diego and Yuma, Arizona. The model railroad displays were some of the best I’ve seen anywhere.



Model Railroad Museum



the “Tehachapi Loop”

Around 2pm, I checked out of the hotel and boarded the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train bound for San Clemente. The views of the beaches and Pacific Ocean sparkling in the bright sunshine were gorgeous. Upon arriving at San Clemente Pier, I met up with my dear friend Tina at “Fisherman’s Restaurant”, one of my favorite places. Tina and I enjoyed a delicious dinner of grilled chicken and fresh green salad, and we were fortunate to be graced with a beautiful sunset!



Dinner with Tina



San Clemente Pier sunset

Later that evening, we sat on her patio and shared a glass of wine as we had a great conversation before retiring for the night. (note: meanwhile, her three cats kept a close eye on me) While two of them kept their distance, one struck up a relationship with me almost immediately. He was on my lap craving attention at every opportunity – very friendly!

The next day, Tina and I walked down to the beach and spent an hour enjoying the sound of the surf crashing on the rocks. Back at her condo, she suggested we visit “Dana Point Harbor”, one of her favorite places. The weather was lovely, sunny and 70 degrees. We walked along the harbor and then stopped for a delicious lunch of shrimp tacos at “What a Dish Café”. After lunch, as we continued our walk around the harbor, a half dozen harbor seals loudly declared one of the piers to be their home! All too soon it was time for Tina to drive me to the San Juan Capistrano train station where I would catch the train to Fullerton and on to Riverside. We had some time to walk around the old part of town and share a coffee at “Hidden House Coffee” before Tina had to return home. I walked over to “Trevor’s at the Track’s Restaurant and Bar” for a cold pint of IPA before boarding the train to Fullerton. There I connected with the Southwest Chief train to Riverside while it continued on to Chicago. As the train made its way east through the Santa Ana Canyon there were lovely views as the sun was setting. I almost wished I was travelling all the way to Chicago that night!

In late September I boarded a flight to Anchorage on Alaska Airlines via Seattle using some of my miles to upgrade to first class. The route took us directly over Yosemite National Park, where there was a spectacular view of Half Dome, El Capitan, and Yosemite Valley! Shortly after that lunch was served, a fantastic Korean BBQ chicken sandwich which I had pre-ordered the week before. Along with the sandwich came a “killer” double chocolate brownie for dessert! The weather in Seattle was partly sunny, but haze prevented a view of the Olympic Mountains to the west. I spent a couple hours in the “Alaska Lounge” in the North Terminal where I had a very nice local “Lush IPA” from the Georgetown Brewery in the South Seattle industrial area.



Alaska Lounge – Sea Tac Airport



Then I picked up a decaf Americano coffee before heading to Concourse C where the flight to Anchorage departed. As the plane flew over the Olympic Mountains we had a great view of the snow-capped peaks, and further north was a lovely view of Victoria, BC before we encountered thick clouds all the way to Anchorage! I ordered a Gin Tonic with a lime before dinner was served, a delicious fruit and cheese plate I had also pre-ordered. For most of the flight I listened to music on my phone since there was nothing to see but a solid layer of dark clouds below. About an hour prior to landing in Anchorage, a snack was served, and I chose a small bag of “Popcorn with Pink Himalayan Salt” – incredible! When we landed in Anchorage the weather was cloudy, wet, and cold – much as I had expected! There were also signs of fresh snow on the highest peaks of the Chugach mountains east of the city. I picked up a rental car at Dollar and was given a new Toyota Rav 4 Hybrid SUV – very nice to drive. Then I drove downtown to the Wyndham Wingate Hotel located on Ship Creek near the Alaska Railroad station. When I checked in the front desk gave me a large 2 room suite on the top floor that had a full kitchen, not just the usual microwave and small fridge. From the hotel I walked up to one of my favorite places, “F-Street Station” for their famous “Halibut and Chips”! The halibut was perfectly cooked and delicious, but the fries were “dead on arrival”! (note: seriously overcooked and almost burned to a crisp – very disappointing) My server offered to replace them with a new order, but I was already full! Walking around downtown I began seeing a lot of “Pirates” and “Wenches” on the street! As it turned out, that night was the annual “Pirate Pub Crawl” to benefit the Anchorage Blood Bank which entailed visiting each of 13 pubs and bars downtown to collect stamps on one’s Pirate Map, enabling you to be entered in a raffle for 80,000 Alaska Airline miles. Needless to say, downtown Anchorage was very crowded and there were a lot of people dressed in some very impressive outfits. At one point I spotted an older couple pushing a small pirate ship as they moved among the crowd – and I just had to get a photo of them!



A Pirate and Wench – “Pirate’s Pub Crawl”

Eventually I went to “Humpy’s” for a couple of beers and to listen to a band trying their best to play songs that had something to do with pirates! Pirates and wenches were everywhere in the bar and the bartender was dressed as “Peter Pan”! It certainly was a fun evening, but I couldn’t believe that some of them had filled their “Map” with all the stamps, which required them to buy a drink in every one of the 13 pubs and bars!

The next morning, I was awakened at 5am by the sound of trains passing by the hotel, several of which were passenger trains being readied for the trip to Denali National Park and Fairbanks. After breakfast I decided to drive down to “Potter’s Marsh” to photograph the birds that stopover on their migration south for the winter. There were a lot of ducks, but no Trumpeter Swans which had probably already headed south. After a long walk on the boardwalk, I drove south on the Seward Highway to Beluga Point overlooking Turnagain Arm, and then up the Indian Valley Road as clouds were clearing and rays of sunshine began to appear, highlighting beautiful fall colors.

Later, back in Anchorage, I drove to Point Woronzof on the edge of Cook Inlet and took several photos of the snow-covered peaks of the mighty Alaska Range as they emerged from the clouds. While I stood there, I

suddenly saw something move in the water below. To my surprise, it was a “pod” of half dozen Beluga Whales moving down Cook Inlet toward the ocean! It was a lucky moment to be there as they slowly swam out of sight and were gone just 10 minutes later.



Alaska Range – View from Pt Woronzof



Beluga Whale in Cook Inlet

On my way back to town, I stopped at Barnes & Noble to buy a book titled “F in Exams – The Very Best Totally Wrong Test Answers” to give to Marion and Michael. The book is truly hilarious to read and here are a couple of examples.

- **History question:** What is the difference between the New Testament and the Old Testament? *Answer that was given by the student: The New Testament was a better version!*
- **Math question:** What is conditional probability? *Answer that was given by the student: Maybe, maybe not!*
- **Biology question:** What does “terminal illness” mean? *Answer that was given by the student: When you become ill at the airport!*

The book is filled with a couple hundred questions and student answers like this – really fun to read!

As dinner time approached, I went to another one of my favorite restaurants, “Simon and Seaforts” for their signature dish of “Crab and Artichoke Dip” served with hot, crusty sourdough toast! I was very fortunate to be seated at a table next to the window with a spectacular view of the Alaska Range at sunset! It’s a view that everyone hopes to have when they go to the restaurant, but it doesn’t happen very often – my lucky day!



Sunset view from Simon & Seafort's Restaurant

As night fell on the city, I walked over to the “Glacier Brewhouse”. The place was jammed, but I was fortunate to spot an open seat at the bar – the only open one! I ordered the house IPA and asked the bartender for a recommendation from the menu. He immediately said the “Seafood Chowder” was exceptional, so I ordered a bowl. As soon as I tasted the first spoonful, I knew it was the perfect choice. It was thick and creamy

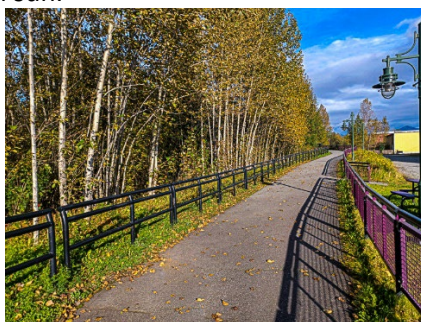
with loads of fish, shrimp, scallops, calamari, and crab – along with applewood smoked bacon! Absolutely the best seafood chowder I’ve ever had anywhere! To complete the evening, I walked to Humpy’s once again for a beer and to enjoy the live music. As I sat at the bar, I noticed two things – the bartender was no longer “Peter Pan”, and seated on the other side of the bar was a rather weird looking “trans-gender” dressed in “skimpy” pink shorts, pink silk blouse, pink boots, and with bright pink hair! (perhaps a wig) Even unusual for Alaska!

After breakfast at the hotel the next morning, I drove back to Point Woronzof for more incredible photos of the snow-covered Alaska Range, now shining under clear skies! I spent the remainder of the morning visiting the “Native Heritage Center”. Besides a fabulous display of the cultural history of Alaska native tribes, there were fascinating and beautiful exhibits of native arts and crafts. In addition, some very interesting films were shown in the theater, including (1) the building of a traditional wooden canoe from a single huge cedar tree, and (2) the annual “Native World Championship Games” that are based on traditional Arctic survival skills – incredible! Outside on the grounds of the center was a large lake surrounded by replicas of traditional villages representing each of the tribes. It was fascinating to walk around the lake and visit each village where there were explanations of how each was built and the daily lives of the people. The center is a must-see highlight of visiting Anchorage!



“Native Heritage Center”

Later, I joined Marion and Michael for lunch at “49<sup>th</sup> State Brewery”. (formerly the “Snow Goose Brewery”, and before that the “Sleeping Lady Brewery” – so brewing beer has always been in its past) We had a great time catching up on all that had passed since my visit last year. I always enjoy hearing about what their sons Ben and Sam have been up to and where they are now. Both Marion and Micheal looked great and were still very much enjoying life in Alaska! (note: since my visit in September, Anchorage was hit by a huge snowstorm in mid-November with a record snowfall of 36 inches!) As we wished each other the best for the coming year, I looked forward to my next visit to Alaska – it’s still in my blood even after more than 30 years! After lunch, I hiked for a couple of miles along the Ship Creek Trail behind the hotel. Along the way were many places designated as salmon fishing spots that could be “reserved” by registering with the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department. One of the many interpretive signs beside the trail had a very interesting story about the long history of Alaska natives fishing for King Salmon during the spring and summer salmon runs. The trail followed the creek for many miles and there were constant lovely views. The trees were just a bit beyond their prime fall colors, but still beautiful in the afternoon sun.



Ship Creek Trail



Later in the afternoon, I walked up the hill to downtown and discovered a new bar, “Tent City Taphouse”. It was named in honor of the fact that Anchorage was founded in 1912 as a collection of tents by prospectors in search of gold in the surrounding mountains. As I entered the small bar, it was quite crowded, which was surprising on a Monday, but I managed to find a seat at the bar. When the bartender asked me what beer I wanted, his accent sounded a lot like Russian. When he served my cold pint of local IPA, I asked if he was from Russia, and he replied that he was actually from Serbia – but he admitted that since Serbian is a “Slavic” language it sounds similar to Russian. Then he told me that he and his brothers had immigrated to America two years ago, and hearing about the opportunities in Alaska, they headed north to seek their “fortune” – hopefully by opening a bar that would serve Serbian food, as well as local craft beer. Since the place was becoming a bit too loud, I decided to find another place for dinner. But before leaving, I wished him and his brothers the best of luck! (note: it will be interesting to find out if they survived their first winter when I visit Marion and Michael again next year!) Then I walked across the street to Humpy’s for a delicious plate of “King Crab Nuggets” which were mini crab cakes! Meanwhile, Monday Night Football was playing on every big screen TV in the bar – pretty much what I had expected. Afterwards, I walked back down the hill to the hotel and retired for the night, being that I had an early morning departure on the Alaska Railroad to Seward the next day!



“Humpy’s Great Alaskan Ale”

I was up at 5:30am to be at the railroad station for the departure at 6:30am of the “Coastal Classic” train to Seward. When I checked in at the Goldstar counter, I was assigned seat 1A at the very front of Car B. The train consisted of two locomotives, baggage car, two “Goldstar” dome cars (A&B), dining car, and three “Adventure Class” coaches. Shortly after pulling out of the station, we were called to the dining car for breakfast, which was included in my Goldstar ticket. I was seated with a couple from Florida who were on their first visit to Alaska. All of us ordered reindeer sausage with biscuits and gravy, along with sourdough toast, huckleberry jam, and coffee. As the train made its way south along the shore of Turnagain Arm, the skies were clearing, and the sun made its appearance! The views of Turnagain Arm and the Kenai Mountains were beautiful in the early morning light. The train made a short stop at the alpine skiing village of Girdwood to board a few more passengers, before continuing on toward Seward. South of Girdwood we encountered several patches of thick fog as we passed Portage Glacier. Along the route through the Kenai Mountains there were spectacular views of rugged, snow-capped mountain peaks, deep rocky gorges, huge waterfalls, and several glaciers! In order to get the best photos, I had to stand outside on the open platform at the rear of the car, and it was very chilly – heavy frost covered the ground! But the views were outstanding! As the train followed the shore of Upper Trail Lake, we had a wonderful view of the snow-capped mountains reflected in the lake!

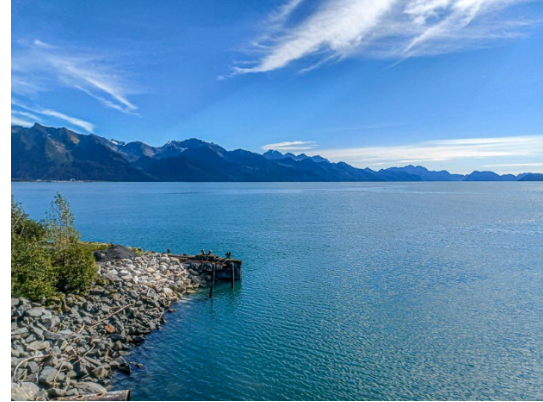


Spencer Glacier



Reflections of Kenai Mountains – Upper Trail Lake

Upon arriving in Seward, I walked along the bike trail that followed the shore of Resurrection Bay to “downtown” Seward. (note: somehow, I had missed seeing the sign at the railroad station about the shuttle bus to downtown) But the long walk along the bike trail gave me gorgeous views of Resurrection Bay and the rugged mountains surrounding it.



Resurrection Bay - Seward

As I approached downtown, I passed by the old railroad station which had survived the tragic 9.2 earthquake of 1964, the most powerful ever recorded in North America, and devastated the town of Seward, destroying the railroad. After the earthquake, the railroad station was moved to its present location about a mile north of downtown, and the old station is now a historical center. Then I walked over to the “Seward Brewing Company” on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the main street of Seward, and sat on the deck in the warm sunshine with a cold pint of their “Pinbone IPA” - the view of Resurrection Bay was amazing! After that, I walked across the street to visit the “Alaska Sealife Center”, a magnificent aquarium highlighting the vast array of marine life in the state of Alaska, from the Arctic Ocean in the far north to the Pacific Ocean, Prince William Sound, and Southeast Alaska. The exhibits and displays detailing the life and importance of Salmon in Alaska were really amazing and very informative.



Alaska Sealife Center - Seward



There was also a “discovery zone” where one could actually touch some of the marine life such as starfish and sea urchins – very popular with children. In one of the huge tanks, seals and sea lions swam around, often coming right up to the edge of the thick glass, as if to say hello to people watching them. I spent over two hours roaming around the center and it was a wonderful experience. After leaving the center, I walked up 4<sup>th</sup> avenue taking photos of some of the historical buildings, many of which dated back to 1907 when the town was incorporated. Of particular interest was the old “Van Gilder Hotel” where I had once stayed many years ago during the annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration that draws several thousand people to the town for the “Mt Marathon Race” and the “Silver Salmon Derby”.



Van Gilder Hotel



Mount Marathon

As I walked around the old town, I noticed a great many beautiful and colorful murals, many of which displayed the history of Seward. When I got near the railroad station, I had time for a beer at the “Mermaid Grotto and Cafe” on the harbor. The place was decorated in a most unusual maritime theme – metal sculptures of Octopus tentacles surrounding the bar! The owner told me the building was once a boat repair shop, which was interesting but didn’t explain the reason for the Octopus tentacles. And just as I was about to leave for the train station, the bartender and owner suddenly pointed to the huge window and exclaimed, “look at the bears”! Sure enough, a mama Black bear and two cubs were outside on the patio rummaging through the trash dumpster for food. We all walked outside for a closer look and to get some photos of the bears. It wasn’t long before some of the train staff and passengers were gathered to watch the bears as well. It was a fitting way to end the visit to Seward as we boarded the train for the trip back to Anchorage!



Black Bear Cub – “Mermaid Grotto & Café”



Coastal Classic Train in Seward

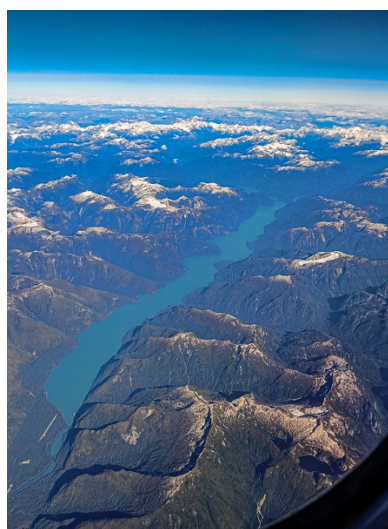


As the train left Seward, the sun was beginning to set, and the views were beautiful along the route through the Kenai Mountains. About an hour after our departure, we were called to the dining car for dinner, which was also included in my Goldstar ticket. I was seated with a couple from Pennsylvania who were on a three-week tour of Alaska, and I took the opportunity to give them some of my recommendations about where to go and what to see, which they really appreciated. Then, upon the recommendation of our server, a very attractive young woman from Italy, I ordered the chef's signature dish – a very traditional dish of pot roast with mashed potatoes and green bean casserole, which was superb! After dinner, I went back to my seat in car B and had a bottle of "Twisted Creek IPA" from the small bar at the rear of the car. I found out that the bartender was a young man from Serbia, in Alaska on a summer job. I told him about the Serbian brothers in Anchorage who owned the Tent City Taphouse, of which he was unaware but grateful for having been told about it. It was early evening when we arrived back in Anchorage, so I walked up to the Hilton Hotel for a beer in the lobby bar. It happened that the bar was nearing closing time but the young bartender from Istanbul, Turkey offered me a free beer since it was the last one from the keg. When I told him that I had been to Istanbul many times and loved the city, we ended up having a long conversation about his life now in Alaska, a far cry from the culture and history of Turkey. But he was happy to be in America and especially to be making his home now in Alaska.

The next morning, I checked out of the hotel and drove to the airport under a heavy overcast and light rain which was a dramatic change from the clear sunny weather of the past two days. After turning in the rental car and checking in for the flight to Seattle and Ontario, I grabbed a decaf Americano coffee from Starbucks and roamed around the terminal where there were a lot of great new shops and restaurants. The flight to Seattle was very nice with a lunch of "White Bean Chili" that I had pre-ordered. It was basically a vegetarian dish of smoky white beans, grilled polenta, jasmine rice, scallions, and pepita seeds – delicious! Dessert was a wonderful "cinnamon apple crisp bar" – a perfect complement for the chili. Heavy overcast followed us all the way until we approached the lower part of Southeast Alaska and the coast of British Columbia where we had spectacular views of the rugged snow-capped peaks of the Coast Range.



Unique Alaskan Souvenirs – Anchorage Airport



Coast Mountains – British Columbia

Further south there were great views of Vancouver and the San Juan Islands with ferries sailing among the islands. We landed in Seattle under partly cloudy skies, and I had to transfer from Concourse C to the North Terminal for the connecting flight to Ontario. The flight to Ontario was very smooth, and as the sun was setting dinner was served – "Roasted Guajillo Chicken Rice Bowl", toasted corn, black bean salsa, jasmine rice, and roasted pepper sauce which was absolutely delicious! Alaska Airlines continues to have some of the best food of any domestic airline and all of it can be pre-ordered several days before departure. Leslie picked me up at Ontario airport and soon I was back home with lots of stories to tell.

In mid-October I travelled to Illinois to attend the 60<sup>th</sup> year reunion of my high school class, as well as to visit my sister in Shelbyville, Illinois. The American Airlines flight to Bloomington, Illinois with a stop in Dallas was very nice, especially the “Charcutier Plate” for lunch that I had pre-ordered the day before. However, changing planes in Dallas-Ft Worth airport was a hassle when the departing gate was changed three times in one hour! (B22 – B26 – B36) I arrived in Bloomington at 8pm in the evening and the hotel shuttle was over 30 minutes late in picking me up at the airport – not happy! But the “Country Inn and Suites” near the airport gave me a very nice room on the top floor. When I went to look for a place to eat within walking distance of the hotel, there was virtually nothing open at that hour! In addition, there were very few sidewalks in the area which frustrated me. I ended up walking across several stretches of grass to the “Thornton’s” gas station where I picked up a hot dog and small bag of chips for “dinner”. When I got back to the hotel, I felt like the trip was not off to a great start!

The next morning, I woke up to find the weather very cold and windy, so I waited at the hotel until my sister Lynn arrived to meet up with me. Then I called John, my high school best friend, to let him and his wife Ginny know that we were on our way to visit with them on their farm located about 10 miles north of Bloomington. John was waiting for us at the end of the lane and led us up the hill to the house. Then he grabbed a bucket of apples and called to his horses in the pasture down the hill. Three horses and two young colts ran quickly up to greet us as John and Lynn fed them apples. Lynn had a great time feeding the colts.



Lynn and John feeding the horses

Later, John showed us his horse barn behind the house where a number of cats and kittens called home. Then, while Lynn and Ginny had hot tea and long conversation in the large living room, John took me on a tour of his barn and introduced me to his breeding stallion who had sired all his colts. And even though the stallion is 28 years old, he still services John’s mares every year! In fact, 12 years ago he sired a world champion Quarter Horse! As John and I went into the house, Lynn and Ginny were still engaged in conversation about the years that had passed since their high school days. (note: both of them were in the same high school class but had never met!) John was very proud to show me the building he built next to the house for Ginny’s workshop and a place to store his huge fishing boat that he takes to Canada every summer for a fishing trip. It was indeed well outfitted, and he was particularly proud of the modifications he had made to make it more comfortable for Ginny and their friend Pat, who often accompanied him on his fishing expeditions.

Later, John and I sat at the kitchen table and talked about the upcoming high school class reunion, and the unfortunate news regarding classmates that have passed away over the years. All too soon, Lynn and I had to bid farewell to John and Ginny in order to return to Lynn’s home in Shelbyville, a two-hour drive, before dark. Driving back to Shelbyville, we accidentally missed the exit for US Highway 51 south and ended up going almost all the way to Champaign on I-74. When we finally realized our mistake, it took us another half hour to get back on the route to Shelbyville. Being the height of the harvest season for corn and soybeans, we passed a lot of combines in the fields and massive semis hauling grain to the elevators for shipment on railroad cars. For dinner that evening, Lynn had fixed a vegetable beef stew in her crockpot, and it was nice to share dinner around the kitchen table. Memories of the days when as a family we always had dinner together around the kitchen table filled my



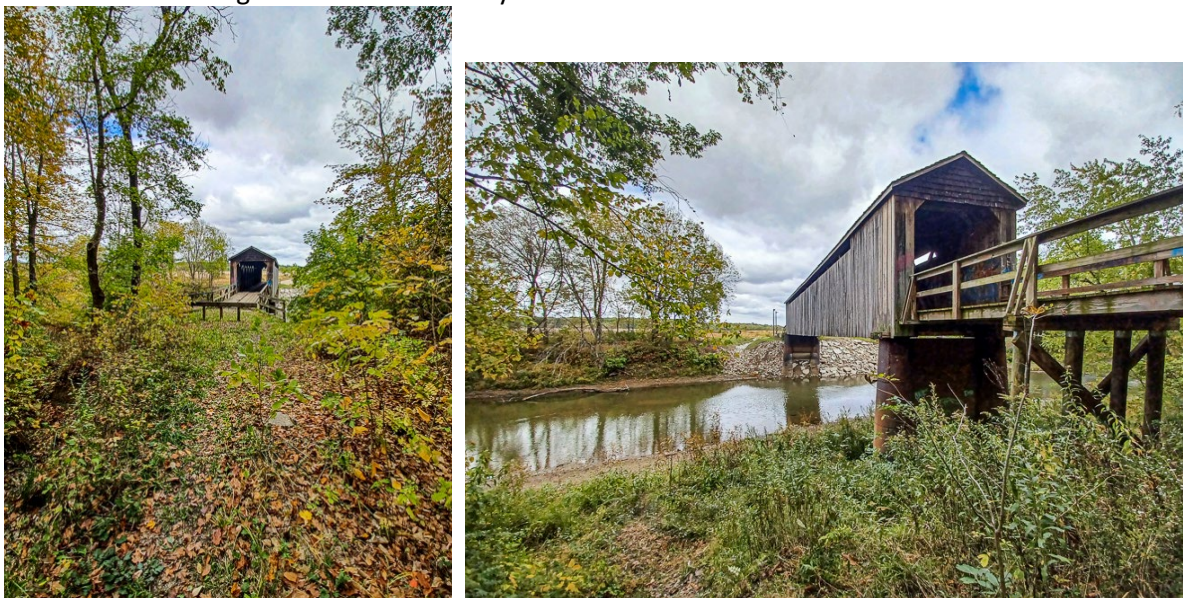
mind. (note: it was especially nice since Lynn doesn't often cook) As we enjoyed dinner together, we had a nice long conversation about our Illinois family and her desire to move back to Baker City, Oregon to be closer to the Christensen family. Her stepsons, Wes and Dan, call her every week to stay in touch – Wes on Saturday evening and Dan on Sunday evening, without fail! And while she longs to move back to Oregon, the cost of housing there is a potential problem. All I could do was listen and wish her well! After dinner, I walked up to Main Street in search of a bar that was open, but I found everything closed, except for the "Iron Keg Bar". Just as I was about to enter the bar, I realized I had left my phone and reading glasses back at Lynn's house. So, after a 10-minute walk back to Lynn's house to pick up my phone and glasses, I returned to the Iron Keg and ordered a pint of local beer from the "Door 4 Brewery" in Decatur, Illinois. Being a Sunday evening, the bar was pretty quiet. Then, as I walked back to Lynn's house, a couple of huge grain hauling trucks rumbled down Main Street.

The next morning, Lynn and I shared breakfast of toast and jam before we drove to Pana to visit the graves of our family. At Linwood Cemetery we visited the graves of our Aunt Pearl, Uncle Frank, and cousin Bruce. Then we went to Mound Cemetery on the east side of Pana to honor the graves of our parents and many of the Henderson family, including our grandparents.



Mound Cemetery – Pana, Illinois

Later in the afternoon, I borrowed Lynn's Dodge SUV for a drive to the small town of Cowden to photograph the historic old "Thompson's Mill Covered Bridge" that was built in 1868. The bridge was a beautiful restoration of the old wooden structure that was once a main route across the Kaskaskia River to Springfield. Meanwhile, a huge combine was harvesting a field of corn nearby.



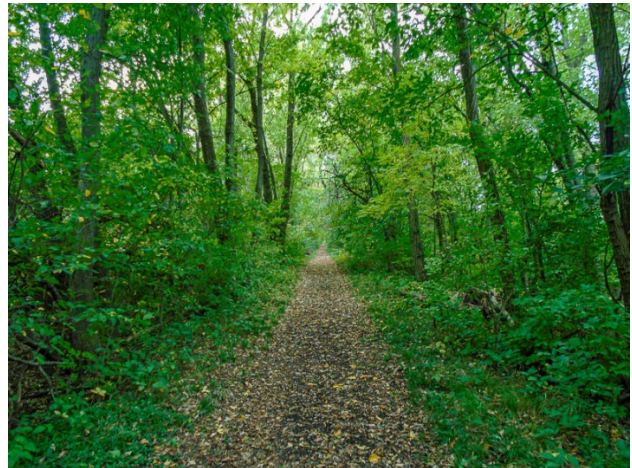
"Thompson's Mill Covered Bridge" – Cowden, Illinois



Then I drove through Cowden to Herrick, another tiny town south of Pana where I discovered several graves of the “Frailey” family, cousins of the Hendersons, in the Herrick Cemetery. The drive back to Pana took me through a very hilly and heavily forested area along Beck’s Creek, a beautiful area in stark contrast to the surrounding flat prairie. When I got to Pana, I spent a couple of hours roaming around the old town trying to find places I remembered as a child growing up. Unfortunately, a lot of the old downtown area was in bad shape, so it was hard to recognize old places. In fact, one entire block in the center of town where the old Moose Lodge, Rexall Drugstore, and other historic buildings had been located was now totally demolished to build a huge “truck stop”! The town was just a “shadow” of its former glory and even the Walmart had closed down! I did find one place, now called “Muck’s Place”, that I remembered from the old days when it was called “Butter’s Tap”, a small bar once owned by my uncle Lloyd, known to everyone as “Butter”. The building was much the same outside, but inside had changed a lot, the old bar now being on the opposite side. I stopped in to take a look and sat down at the bar. There was no IPA, only Budweiser, Bud Light, Coors Light, and Miller Light, so I ordered a cold can of Budweiser for \$2.00! Then the bartender informed me there was a \$10.00 minimum for using a credit card. (note: three beers and a tip came to \$10) When I told her that my uncle used to own the bar many years ago, she showed me an old photo of my uncle Butter standing behind the bar. He used to keep a collection of old beer steins behind the bar for regular patrons. When I first entered Muck’s Place there were only three customers, but just before I left, a large group of 25 – 30 guys suddenly showed up, sat down, and ordered several rounds of beer. The bartender told me it was a group of golfers from Shelbyville who made it a regular stop after they finished on the golf course!



Downtown Pana, Illinois



Trail along abandoned railroad tracks

Leaving the bar, I went in search of the trail on the abandoned railroad tracks that once connected the New York Central Railroad mainline with the old Peabody #17 coal mine, now abandoned, and it took me over a half hour before I discovered the trail. The old greenhouses that once grew roses for shipment across the country and were responsible for giving the city the nickname “Rose City”, had been demolished many years ago. I hiked a short distance along the trail which was beautiful as it wound its way through the trees along either side, but it was difficult to remember it when Dennis and I would walk down the railroad tracks to pick blackberries for his mother to make a pie. Just on the east side of town, I was very surprised to see a new sculpture in the shape of a “giant hand” alongside the road! Before leaving Pana to return to Shelbyville, I visited a few more places I remembered from my childhood. (1) the “Victory Tavern” where my parents would often take us to join family members for an evening of dancing, (2) “Field School” where Lynn and I went to grade school (note: the last time I visited, it was a flower and gift shop, but now out of business), (3) my Uncle Frank and Aunt Pearl’s house which still looked much the same from the outside, but with new paint and without the old trees that used to surround the house. As I drove back downtown, I spotted the old “Baltimore & Ohio Railroad” freight depot and the “Big Four” railroad switch tower that had been restored recently. (note: back in my childhood days in Pana, it was the place where four major railroads crossed – New York Central, Illinois Central, Chicago & Eastern Illinois, and the

Baltimore & Ohio! Today, the only railroad remaining through Pana is the Union Pacific which acquired the New York Central many years ago.

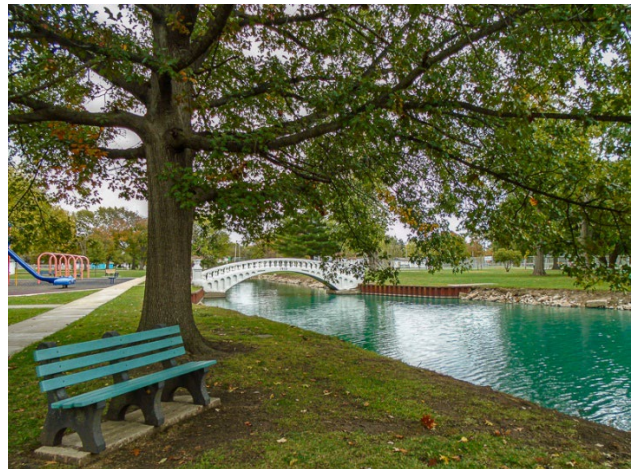


"Field School"



"Big Four Railroad Switch Tower"

On my way out of town, I stopped at "Kitchell Park" where, as children we often went to fish for "crawdads" in the lagoon. The park was also the place everyone went to watch the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks. Some things in the park had changed over the years, but the original slides were still there, and as I took a photo, the memory of using a sheet of waxed paper to get a faster ride down the slide came back to me!



Kitchell Park

Upon returning to Shelbyville, I invited Lynn for dinner downtown, only to discover that just two places were open on a Monday night, with the exception of McDonald's! We had the choice of "Monical's Pizza" or the "Iron Keg Bar", so I suggested we go to the Iron Keg. As we entered the bar, the bartender recognized me, and when I asked for her recommendation, she immediately said the "Badass Pork Tenderloin Sandwich" was incredible and her favorite – so we ordered one to share. When it arrived, she served it on two plates, along with a wide array of condiments, as well as a plate of deep fried portobello mushrooms which were outstanding. The pork tenderloin sandwich was absolutely the best I've ever had, and Lynn was very happy to finally find one of her favorite sandwiches in Shelbyville! I stayed after dinner for another beer as Lynn went back home. I moved to a seat at the bar and suddenly noticed what looked like an **AK-47** behind the bar! When I asked the bartender about it, she said it was actually a large bottle of whiskey in the shape of a gun! And since I expressed an interest in photographing it, she proceeded to show me some other bottles of whiskey in very unusual shapes. After taking photos of the weird whiskey bottles, I bid farewell to the bartender and walked back to Lynn's house – for a very quiet night.





"The Iron Keg Bar" – Shelbyville, Illinois

I was up early the next morning to do a walking tour of Shelbyville. What I discovered was that there were very few sidewalks in the neighborhood, and where they existed it was either old red brick or cracked concrete! (note: I ended up walking most of the way along the edge of the street) Once I got to Main Street, I had many opportunities for photos of the beautiful old red brick buildings with their ornate decorative ironwork – but unfortunately, too many of them had been neglected or abandoned. A couple of blocks off Main Street I came upon an old, historic hotel that had been abandoned decades ago, and was slowly crumbling into its demise – nothing but broken windows and a very dilapidated interior.



Historic buildings in Shelbyville

From there I walked around the "Historic District" taking photos of many beautiful old homes that were well over 100 years old. With the exception of Main Street, I saw virtually no one walking around! When I came to the courthouse, there was a very interesting statue of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in front of the building, honoring their debate in 1858.



Shelby County Courthouse



Lincoln and Douglas



On my way back to Lynn's house, I stopped for a cup of coffee at the "Iced Café" on Main Street – very nice and very local! Then I packed my bag and Lynn drove me up to Bloomington, past mile after mile of corn and soybean fields, and grain elevators where long lines of railroad cars were being loaded.

When we arrived in Bloomington, I had planned to rent a car from Enterprise, but they said there were none available! So, I was forced to rent one at the airport, which cost me \$150 per day vs \$40 in town! Obviously, I should have reserved one online! As we arrived at the airport, I bid goodbye to Lynn, picked up the rental car, and drove to the Country Inn and Suites again. The Indian family managing the hotel welcomed me back and gave me an upgraded suite. Later, I walked over to "Rob Dob's Restaurant and Bar" for the Normal Community High School Reunion "Meet and Greet" event. When I entered the restaurant, I wasn't sure if the large group in the bar was the Meet and Greet event, but as soon as I saw John, I knew it was the right group. When I sat down, Diane (Hubert) Jefferson, the woman who organized the class reunion, came over to introduce herself and welcome me to the group which numbered about 25 people. Over the course of the evening there were photos taken, introductions, and conversations about memories of high school 60 years ago! All of a sudden, a red-haired lady tapped me on the shoulder, and as I turned around, I recognized her immediately - it was Gaye Alt whom I had known since 7<sup>th</sup> grade! We had a fascinating conversation about world travel, and I was amazed to find out that she had visited over 30 countries with her husband! After the group left the restaurant, I stayed to have dinner, a delicious and authentic plate of German bratwurst, potato salad, and sauerkraut, along with a pint of Wienstephaner beer on tap.

After breakfast at the hotel the next morning, I drove around town in an attempt to locate the old high school, which became a problem with all the changes that had occurred over 60 years. According to Google maps, there were now two schools named Normal Community High School, one on the east side of town and the other on the west side, neither of which was where I remembered it to be. It took me a while, but following my instinct I found the old school; however, it had been changed to Kingsley Junior High School! Although there were some additions to the campus buildings, I recognized it as soon as I saw it and I felt satisfied I had found it. Then I drove north on Linden Road to the small town of Hudson where I had attended elementary school when we lived on the farm just north of town. I made a short tour of "downtown", which consisted of about three-square blocks and visited the old "First Baptist Church" which was still in amazingly good condition. Meanwhile, a constant stream of huge grain trucks and tractors pulling wagons made their way to the elevator that was once next to the Illinois Central railroad tracks, now abandoned. Driving north out of town I passed many new homes that occupied much of the farmland I used to cross when I would walk home from school in Hudson. Further east I drove by the farm where we used to live, but, unfortunately, our old house had been demolished several years ago.

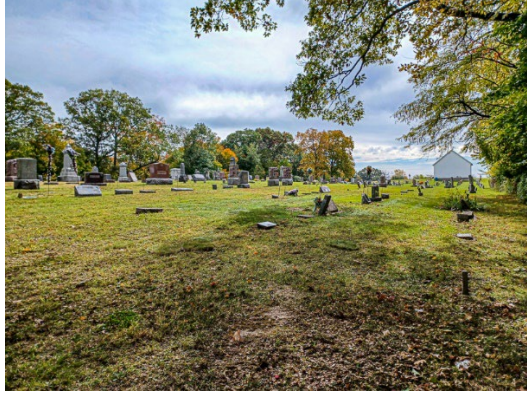


First Baptist Church – Hudson, Illinois



View of the old farm north of Hudson

I ended up stopping by the old Hinthorn Cemetery which John manages, and then drove around the shore of Lake Bloomington where the trees were starting to show their fall colors.



Hinthorn Cemetery

Later in the afternoon I drove back to the hotel to change clothes for the class reunion dinner at Rob Dob's that evening. I joined a table with John, Ginny, Ron Nord and his wife for a wonderful evening of conversation, delicious food, and of course, many photos. One of the guys I wanted to meet that had not been at the "Meet and Greet" event the night before was Ron Terven – he showed up with long white hair and a classic handlebar moustache! Back in our high school days, I would often join Ron and his twin brother Don in the summer to ride horses down to the creek where we would go swimming. Over the course of the next three hours, we all had a great time together and looked forward to perhaps another reunion in a year or two. The evening was a delightful time, and I was very glad I had decided to attend, but there were a few sad moments when Diane passed out a list of 37 names of classmates who had passed away that we knew about. (note: perhaps there were more that we didn't know about)



1963 Senior Class Reunion – Normal Community High School

The following morning, I was up very early to catch my 6:30am flight to Dallas-Ft Worth and on to Ontario. When the hotel shuttle arrived, the driver named Billie told me a story of how he used to play drums for Reba McIntyre in California before making a decision to move back to his hometown in Illinois and start a taxi business! Checking in for the flight was quick and easy, but the takeoff was pretty rough in the heavy rain. However, by the time we had reached 34,000 feet, it became a smooth flight all the way to DFW. The captain gave us a long "tour" of Dallas, including views of AT&T Stadium, Texas Rangers Baseball Stadium, and Six Flags Amusement Park before landing at the airport! The terminal building was very crowded and there was a 30-minute delay in departure of my flight to Ontario, so I sat down at "Cousin's BBQ" bar next to the gate and ordered a pint of "Yuengling" beer, rather than try to fight the crowd. Once we boarded the plane the captain advised us that we were number **12** for takeoff, which didn't sit well with passengers after the 30-minute delay. But after takeoff, the service in first class was very nice – I started with a Gin Tonic and a small dish of warm nuts, followed by lunch of Korean BBQ braised short ribs, which were incredible! Later, a scrumptious pumpkin cake



was served with whipped cream! An hour later we landed at Ontario airport under clear skies and 92 degrees – it felt good to be home again.

On the first weekend in November, I attended the 9<sup>th</sup> annual “Amber Waves of Grain Craft Beer Festival” in Corona – something I’ve done every year for the past 5 years. I drove down to Corona and checked into a nice suite at the “Home 2 Suites Hotel by Hilton” before walking over to the Dos Lagos Center where the event was being held. It began with the traditional parade of various military organizations dressed in historic uniforms, followed by vintage automobiles and military trucks, and concluded with the loud roar of motorcycles from the “All American Riders” motorcycle club which always organizes the event to honor and support veterans. Then the crowd entered the huge beer garden to explore and taste samples of beer from 47 southern California breweries, as well as several food trucks. Since I had a VIP ticket, I was able to take advantage of the VIP tent located in front of the stage where a band named the “K-Tel All Stars” played nothing but old favorites from the 1970’s - no rap, heavy metal, bubble gum, etc. Fortunately, the local Stone Church Brewery, a major sponsor of the event, had their booth set up next to the VIP area, so I was able to refresh my beer without having to make my way through the crowd! Another benefit of being in the VIP tent was the food, which included really delicious croissant sandwiches of black forest ham and Swiss cheese, as well as a variety of cookies – oatmeal raisin, chocolate chip, and pumpkin pie! Sitting in the VIP tent was fun, watching people stroll by, many with large baby carriages that looked more like wagons! Also seated at my table, was a Hispanic family having a great time taking “selfies” and dancing in front of the stage. (note: later I ran into them again at TGI Friday’s for dinner that evening) Just before the band took a break, they invited “Bob”, an 88-year-old Korean War veteran to the stage, and to everyone’s surprise, he sang an amazing version of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic”! And if that wasn’t enough, he sang “America the Beautiful” – his voice was incredible, and I believe he could have easily won first place on “American All Stars”! (note: that moment was a highlight of the event!)



“Amber Waves of Grain Craft Beer Festival”



Stone Church Brewery



When the event closed, I headed to TGI Friday's for a delicious dinner of "pot stickers", along with a pint of Sculpin IPA, one of my favorites. As I sat at the bar, I couldn't help but notice so many overweight people ordering huge appetizers, followed by full dinner entrees, and even dessert! I still don't know how they manage it when I can barely finish an appetizer for dinner! Afterwards, I walked over to the Stone Church Brewery and joined a group of All American Riders for a couple of beers. Then it was back to the hotel for the night and the end of a great weekend.

When Thanksgiving rolled around, I once again prepared two pies, persimmon and apple, the day before, as well as cranberry-apple sauce. On Thanksgiving Day, I roasted a turkey stuffed with fresh herbs, thyme, sage, rosemary, and parsley, along with butternut squash basted with butter and maple syrup. Later I made herb stuffing with celery and water chestnuts, pan roasted brussels sprouts, garlic mashed potatoes and gravy, as well as dinner rolls with butter. As dinner time approached, our dear friend Kathleen came with a lovely plate of appetizers, and along with a nice bottle of wine we all celebrated the holiday in fine style!

Coming up in mid-December I will attend the annual Holiday Party of the Inland Empire Professional Photographers, as I have done in previous years. It's always a fun time meeting up with fellow photographers I haven't seen for a while, and there will be awards presented to the winners of the photo competition.

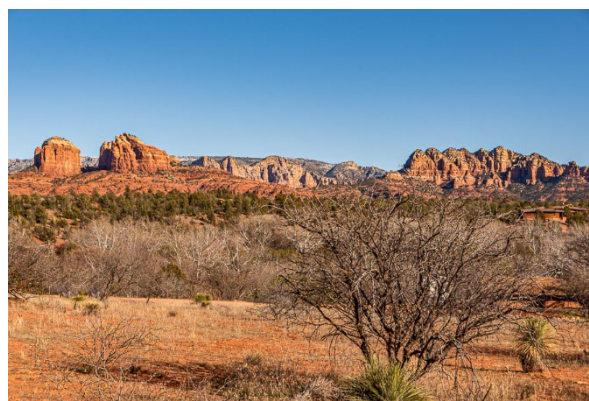
As Christmas approaches, my sister Lynn will once again be joining us to celebrate the holiday, which we all look forward to. And after Christmas I have planned an overnight trip for the three of us to Palm Springs and perhaps a ride up to the top of the San Jacinto mountains on the aerial tramway.

In the meantime, I wish you all the most enjoyable holiday and a very Happy New Year! And may we see Peace in the New Year!

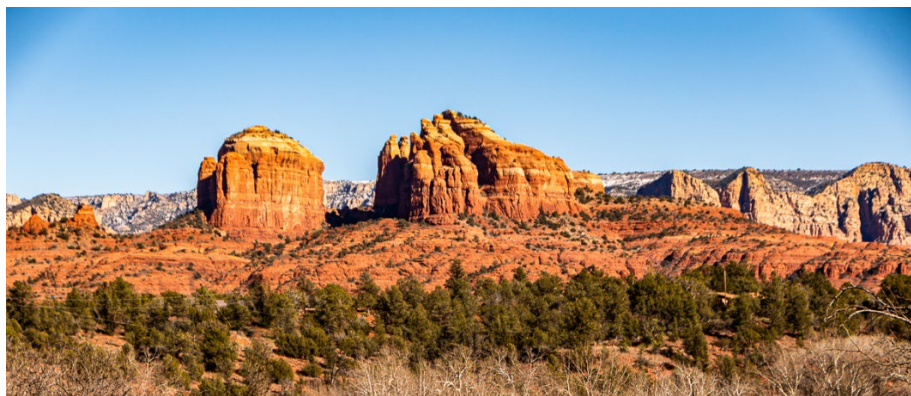
## PHOTO GALLERY



Route 66 Museum – Kingman, Arizona



Red Rocks State Park – Sedona, Arizona



Red Rocks State Park





Red Rocks State Park – Sedona



Graces Convent – Tucson, Arizona



Karchner Caverns State Park – Benson, Arizona



Chiricahua National Monument – Arizona





Downtown Lowell, Arizona (Bisbee)



Old Greyhound bus station – Lowell, Arizona



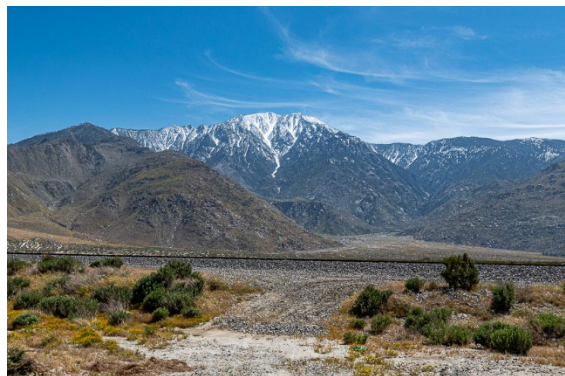
Sunset in Sierra Vista, Arizona



Continental Divide, New Mexico



San Bernardino Mountains – Panorama Point, Redlands



San Jacinto Peak – Palm Springs





Wild Flowers in Sand Canyon – Redlands



Whitewater Nature Reserve



Cabazon Outlets Mall



Gaslamp District – San Diego





Route of the Alaska Railroad Coastal Classic in the Kenai Mountains



Alaska Railroad – Anchorage to Seward



Old Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Freight Depot – Pana, Illinois



Fall Colors at Lake Bloomington, Illinois





"Historic District" – Shelbyville, Illinois



"Vrooman Mansion" – Bloomington, Illinois