

CHRISTMAS 2013



It's that time of year again when I have the pleasure of writing my annual Christmas letter to family and friends. The lights are up, the tree is decorated, and the shopping has begun. Again this year I had many opportunities to travel around the country and discover some beautiful and amazing places that I would like to share with you. I hope that you have some stories to share as well.

My sister Lynn spent the Christmas holidays with us again here in southern California, rather than spend the time shoveling snow back in Illinois. While she was here we took a trip to some of my favorite places in southern California. We began with an overnight stay in the First Class staterooms aboard the Queen Mary luxury ocean liner now moored in Long Beach harbor. While Lynn and Leslie visited the special Princess Diana exhibition with its extensive collection of royal family memorabilia and historical photos, I joined a "behind the scenes" tour that included many areas of the ship that are not open to the general public. Included in the tour were many of the areas that were reserved exclusively for First Class passengers. Our tour guide, "Mr. James", was a wealth of information having guided tours of the ship for more than 12 years. Some of the most interesting information included the fact that the decks are shaped like a long banana so as to give the huge vessel extra strength and flexibility



while navigating the rough seas of the North Atlantic. The First Class areas are all located in the middle of the ship on several decks because these areas have the least motion at sea. Second Class is located at the aft of the ship for somewhat less motion, but having the vibration from the engines made these areas less desirable. Finally, Third Class areas were located at the bow of the ship where most of the motion occurred during rough weather. Each class of service was kept separated and passengers were often "reminded" by the stewards to remain in their class of service,

and the stewards also had to remain in their areas as well. If the stewards saw someone who was from a lower class they would say "*Mr./Mrs. _____, please return to your accommodations*". James took us into many of the First Class ballrooms, dining rooms, and lounges decorated with beautiful tropical woods, Italian marble, and Art Deco stained glass. A couple of years ago Mr. James had a former member of the Queen Mary crew join his tour group, a steward who had worked in Third Class, and at the end of the tour the man said "Mr. James, this is the first time I've been able to see the First Class accommodations". After the tour I joined Lynn and Leslie for a drink in the *Observatory Bar* as the sun was setting over the harbor. The bar has been restored to the Art Deco period when it was the First Class lounge, complete with walnut paneling and stained glass sculptures. Later on we had dinner aboard ship in the



Chelsea Chowder House overlooking the lights of downtown Long Beach. I ordered the "New England Clam Bake", a delicious combination of shrimp, lobster, clams, mussels, chicken sausage, potatoes, and corn on the cob, all served in a spicy broth with crusty French bread. We finished dinner by sharing Crème Brûlée and Bread Pudding before retiring to our staterooms for the night. The next morning Leslie got a call from her sister Tracey to say that their father had been hospitalized after suffering a mild stroke, so we made our way to the hospital to pay him a visit. Thankfully he was in good shape and high spirits when we arrived. Leaving Long Beach we drove south under beautiful blue skies to San Juan Capistrano to visit the mission and its lovely gardens, as well as to tour the old



town that traces its origin to the late 1700's when the Spanish Missionaries were developing the El Camino Real (*The King's Road*) to link all the missions along the California coast. Leaving San Juan Capistrano we continued our journey south along the coast to San Diego, with beautiful views of the Pacific Ocean. But just north of Camp Pendleton all five lanes of I-5 suddenly became one monstrous parking lot, and unfortunately there were no exits for many miles



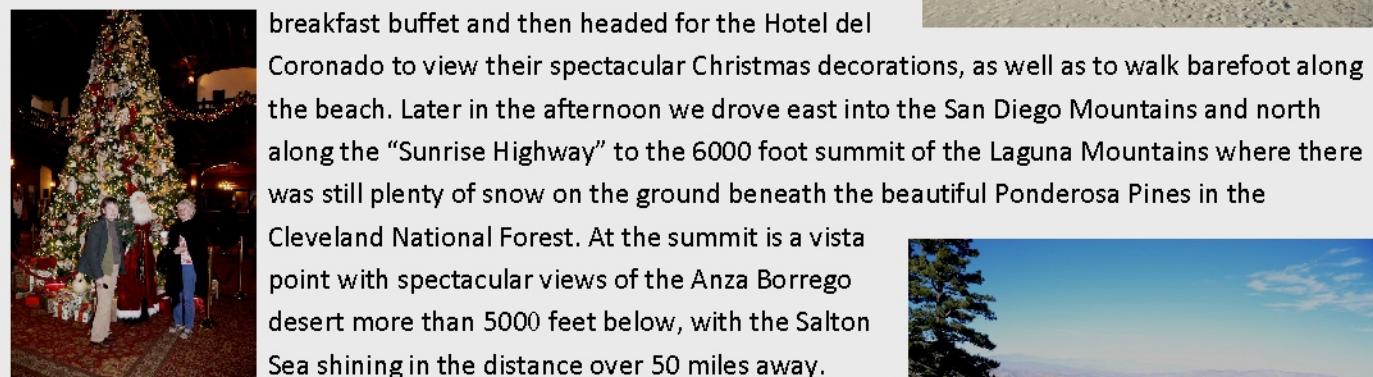
until we came to Oceanside where we finally were able to turn off the freeway and on to highway 78. It was an alternate route to San Diego through Escondido, but for the people still on I-5 trying to get to the "Holiday Bowl" football game in San Diego where UCLA would play Baylor University, it would be several



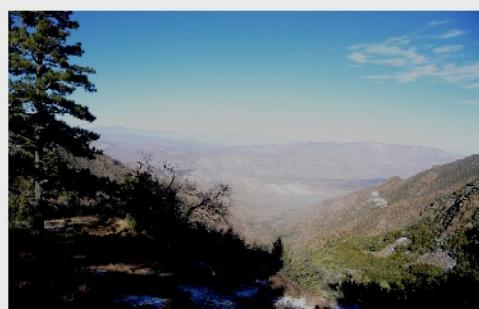
more hours for them, stuck in horrendous traffic. Once we arrived in San Diego we checked into the lovely Coronado Marriott Resort with rooms overlooking San Diego Bay and downtown. That evening we walked along the waterfront to *Poehle's Chart House* for dinner that included a trio of shrimp and Hot Lava Cake,



compliments of the chef. As we walked back to the hotel, we were treated to a beautiful moonrise over the bay. The next morning we enjoyed a great



Eventually we came to the small mining town of Julian, set among the tall Ponderosa Pines, and checked into our rooms at the historic Julian Gold Rush Hotel. We had arrived just in time for the afternoon tea served in the Victorian parlor where Lynn and Leslie played an old version of scrabble while other guests played checkers and card games. The sun began to set and the air became quite chilly as we walked around the old town before having dinner at the Julian Grille, a lovely small restaurant in an old





Victorian home along the main street. Lynn and Leslie had huge chicken salads while I ordered a house specialty, Chicken Spinoza with olives and caper cream sauce. The glass of local Menaghen Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc went quite well with dinner. The following morning dawned clear and cold, with a heavy frost in the air. We enjoyed breakfast at the hotel with their homemade granola and French toast served with apple compote and fresh fruit. From Julian we drove north through the beautiful Santa Ysabel valley

and then east over the 6000 foot summit of the Santa Ysabel Mountains before descending over 5000 feet down a steep, narrow, twisting road toward Borrego Springs. There were magnificent views of the desert and Salton Sea from almost every turn in the road. Finally we reached Borrego Springs and stopped by the State Park Visitor Center to view a spectacular film that traced animal and plant life in the park through all four seasons of the year. In the afternoon we checked into our rooms at the Borrego Springs Resort and Spa where we had gorgeous views of the lush golf course set against the stark contrast of the barren Santa Rosa Mountains behind. I spent some time walking around the extensive grounds of the resort and spotted a couple of large Jack Rabbits among the cactus and Ocotillo before joining Lynn and Leslie in the coffee shop.

While Lynn and Leslie were engaged in conversation I decided to take a drive into the State Park near Yacqui Pass to the ancient site of a Kumeyaay Village located among huge boulders at the base of the rocky hills. Here I discovered several large granite stones with deep holes in them,



formed by generations of Kumeyaay Indians who used them to grind mesquite seeds into flour. After hiking around the area for a while, I headed back to the resort to join up with Lynn and Leslie so that I could show them the unique, huge metal sculptures of wild horses and woolly mammoths that sit among the cactus just outside the town. The sculptures are the work of a local artist, Ricardo Breceda, who immigrated from Mexico several years ago to pursue his artistic passion. As evening fell across the desert we had dinner at the resort where Lynn and Leslie

had the Prime Rib, a specialty of the house, and I chose mesquite grilled salmon, both dishes being excellent. Late that night a storm front moved through the area, with a few light showers, which is not that unusual for this desert region in the winter. Following breakfast we drove over Yacqui Pass to the small town of Ocotillo Wells where hundreds of huge RVs were camped with their off road vehicles. Then it was a lovely drive north along the shore of the Salton Sea, with a short stop at the Salton Sea Beach Marina to walk down to the edge of the huge water body. All along the shore were hundreds of seagulls and brown pelicans hunting for fish. At the north end of the sea is the small farming town of Mecca surrounded by huge fields of produce and groves of tall date palms. From here it was a long drive back to Redlands on I-10 in the midst of heavy vacation traffic and very strong Santa Ana winds, but we all agreed it had been a very enjoyable and memorable trip that spanned the incredible diversity of southern California, from the ocean to the mountains to the desert.



In mid-January was the annual meeting of PCMA (*Professional Convention Management Association*), and as I am on the Board of Directors for the Southwest and Pacific Chapter, I am always invited to attend. This year's meeting was held in Orlando, home to a great many industry meetings and events, as well as being a top tourist destination. When I checked in at Ontario airport for my flight to Salt Lake City and on to Orlando, I was told the flight was delayed over 2 hours, meaning that I would miss my connection to Orlando. Since it was the one and only connecting flight that day, the Delta agent tried in vain to book me on another airline, but without success. So I ended up taking the delayed flight to Salt Lake City, staying overnight and catching the Orlando flight the next day. As we arrived in Salt Lake that evening, there was already a foot of fresh snow on the ground and more was on the way, so I hoped my flight to Orlando the next day would not be cancelled. As I stood outside the terminal waiting in the frigid 20 degree air for the Marriott Hotel shuttle, snow was beginning to swirl around me. The clerk at the hotel front desk suggested I dinner at *Robert's Restaurant* nearby, so I hiked through the snowstorm and found a small, family owned restaurant with a warm cozy atmosphere. I started dinner with an excellent bowl of clam chowder, followed by a delicious Chicken Cordon Bleu served with a huge Idaho baked potato and steamed fresh winter vegetables. The cold pint of local Unita Cutthroat Pale Ale finished the meal well. Meanwhile outside the steady snowfall continued. The next morning I awoke to find a heavy snowstorm in progress and temperatures hovering around 18 degrees! Although our flight to Orlando was delayed 45 minutes for de-icing, we did depart in

spite of the storm, which thankfully Salt Lake City was prepared for.

The flight to Orlando was very nice and we were served a delicious Philly Cheesesteak for lunch. I watched a fascinating documentary film about a young extreme skier who tackled a dangerous route down a very steep glacier in Chamonix, France on which his father had died in an avalanche many years before when his son was just a young boy. It was a very emotional and inspiring film. Once I arrived at the Orlando Hilton Hotel I joined some of my colleagues from the board for drinks and dinner. We were seated among many Denver



Bronco fans, but unfortunately Baltimore ended up winning the game and securing a spot in the Super Bowl. However, my order of Haddock fish and chips and a cold pint of local Florida Pilsner were fabulous. I awoke the next morning to a gorgeous sunny, warm day with temperatures in the mid-80's. (Lovely Florida winter weather) I met up with my Canadian cousins, Lorraine and Barry, for lunch at a new Disney town development south of Orlando called "Celebration". The town



incorporates several classic styles of architecture typical of south Florida and the Caribbean, with spectacular gardens and lagoons everywhere. And of course, being Disney, it is always clean and spotless. After walking around the village we stopped for lunch at the New Town Tavern across from the lagoon. My order of chicken tenders turned out to be more like whole chicken breasts, but the spicy Buffalo sauce was very tasty. Lorraine ended up having to take half my plate home with her. I arrived back in Orlando in time to catch the world famous "March of the Ducks" in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel, led by the "Duck Master" who was dressed in the bright red uniform of a classical Circus Ringmaster. The ducks almost flew down the red carpet to jump into the



fountain where food awaited them. This is a daily event in the hotel and never fails to draw a large crowd. Next on my schedule was our Chapter Reception, also in the Peabody Hotel, where we had over 60 people attend to join in conversation and enjoy good food and drink, especially the Yuengling beer. Following the chapter reception we all boarded buses that took us to the PCMA Opening Reception being hosted at SeaWorld, where the entire park was closed for our event. There were food stations and bars everywhere serving all sorts of delicious fresh seafood dishes. At one of the food stations I met a young lady named Annette who told me about having just been married on December 21, 2012 – the end of the world according to the ancient Mayan calendar. And not only had she arranged her wedding on such an auspicious date, the ceremony was conducted in an ancient Mayan garden – talk about tempting fate! A short time later I rode to the top of the SkyTower for spectacular views of the park, the lights of Orlando, and far beyond. And to top off this incredible view was a gorgeous crescent moon rising on the horizon! Then at precisely 8:30pm we were all invited to an incredible and stunning private performance of "Shamu Rocks", featuring five killer whales performing amazing feats of choreography managed solely by hand signals from their trainers, all while a loud rock band performed on stage above them. The show was very impressive, especially with



the four giant 20' x 30' HD screens behind the stage. After the party at SeaWorld I was invited by my friend Lora to a reception at the *Funky Monkey Wine Bar*, hosted by PSAV. There was an abundance of excellent wines and even more food as PSAV staff were handing out small, fuzzy stuffed toy Manatees. During the evening I spotted two beautiful young ladies, each carrying a large pink stuffed toy Flamingo, and I had to take their photo, so ended the evening of day one. The next day began with an excellent opening general session featuring a presentation by Morten Hansen in which he drew many comparisons between the South Pole expeditions of Admunsden and Scott, as well as some very interesting stories about how Southwest Airlines copied the model of Pacific Southwest Airlines and became very successful, whereas PSA eventually went out of business. Lunch was unique in that it was served in four separate sections of the ballroom, each according to a different cuisine. The choices were "Fresh and Healthy", "Small Bites – Big Tastes", "Comfort Food", and "Classic French", which is where I ended up sitting. I enjoyed a delicious menu of Caesar Salad, Chicken Wellington served with Rosemary demi-glace and rice, baby carrots, parsley potatoes, and asparagus, followed by the dessert course featuring a luscious vanilla crème brûlée! After an afternoon reception hosted by the Anaheim Convention and Visitors Bureau at the Rocks Bar in the Peabody Hotel, where I met up with my friend Debbi See, I walked over to the Capitol Grille in Pointe Orlando for a fabulous dinner in a private dining room, hosted by my friends from the Singapore Convention and Tourism Bureau. Following Champagne and cocktails we sat down to an amazing dinner that began with several huge trays of chilled shellfish, lobster, crab, and shrimp on ice. (I could have made an entire meal of this appetizer) Then came the main course of Porcini rubbed "bone-in-dry" aged sirloin steak, served with 12 year old balsamic – it was out of this world! In addition were large bowls of potatoes au-gratin, roasted wild mushrooms, and fresh steamed vegetables. And if that weren't enough, the dessert tray





came piled high with a luscious selection of flourless chocolate cake, fluffy ricotta cheesecake, and crème brûlée. A number of great wines accompanied dinner, thanks to my Singapore friends! Following dinner we all boarded the bus bound for the Hard Rock Live at Universal Studios CityWalk for the PCMA Party with a Purpose. Again there were abundant offerings of food and drinks, as if we hadn't already been stuffed earlier in the evening. But the highlight of the party was a performance by the legendary 50's – 60's retro rock-n-roll band from Austin, the Spazmatics,

who kept people dancing until midnight. The next morning I awoke to another beautiful, warm, sunny day and spent much of the morning walking among the gardens surrounding the Convention Center where there were beautiful life size metal sculptures of Florida's endangered animals. Of special note was a pair of gorgeous Florida Panthers. Later in the day I was invited to the Global Reception hosted by the Ireland Tourism Board where I sampled delicious miniature Shepard's Pie and smoked Salmon dip on crispy bread, in addition to several Irish whiskies. Leaving the Global Reception I boarded a bus to the Networking Reception being hosted at Universal Studios, where once again it was closed for the PCMA party. As we walked through the main gate there were food stations and bars everywhere! Luckily we were given a map in order to find all of



them. Among the most popular places was the "Rocket", an extreme roller coaster that begins its journey by going straight up a 100 foot tall tower before plunging into several corkscrew turns at an incredible speed! (Fun to watch but frightening to ride) This year Universal Studios was celebrating its 100th year anniversary and at the end of the evening they put on a spectacular illumination show with clips from famous Universal films of the past projected on to a giant wall of falling water, while fireworks exploded in

the sky above. All throughout the park were characters from many of the Universal films posing for photos with the guests. My friend Dawn posed with a giant Egyptian Pharaoh who suddenly snatched her Snickers bar! After leaving Universal Studios I was invited to the "Cuba Libre" nightclub in Pointe Orlando for a party hosted by Destination DC. They called the party "Salsa in the Nations Capitol". As I entered the club I found myself in a beautiful and authentic reproduction of Old Havana where



they were serving cold glasses of "Tropical" Cuban beer (now brewed in Ft Lauderdale) and food that one would find on the streets in Havana. A lovely couple of professional Salsa dancers were giving lessons as they demonstrated their exotic dancing skills. The evening ended with a large group of people doing a "line dance" to Hip Hop music. (It was a lot of fun to watch, but I

wondered if it would fly in Texas?) The next morning there was an excellent presentation by Thomas Friedman where he compared the current situation in the US to the Space Shuttle – lots of energy in the rocket (aka the American



public), but with pilots at the top who were fighting over the flight plan (an obvious reference to our politicians in Washington). He also told us a fascinating story about the construction of the new Beijing Convention Center that was built in just 8 months, compared to the 6 months it took to repair 2 short escalators at the Bethesda Metro Station near his home! The closing luncheon was hosted by the Boston Convention Bureau, the site of next year's meeting. While we savored a delicious meal of baked short ribs and poached Atlantic Cod, we watched a fascinating film highlighting the amazing "firsts" in Boston history, of which there were a great many. The closing keynote was delivered by David Novak, CEO of YUM brands, which has over 40,000 restaurants worldwide, including such well-known brands as KFC, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut. He told us a fascinating story about his rise to

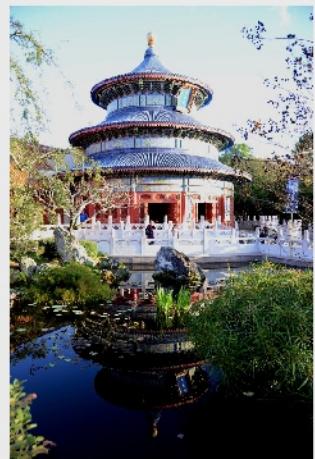


leadership in the company. At one point in his career, when asked by the Pepsico marketing VP to come up with an idea for a new product to compete with flavored waters, he proposed "Clear Pepsi". While test marketing it, the President of Pepsico advised against the name because it didn't taste like Pepsi, to which David responded, "It's not meant to taste exactly like Pepsi". After the President repeated himself several times and David kept

repeating himself, Clear Pepsi was launched at the Super Bowl, with a massive nationwide ad campaign. Six months later the product was pulled from the market because the consumers said "it doesn't taste like Pepsi"! David learned a big lesson from this experience – "listen to people, even if you think your idea is a great one". Following the closing session I decided to go to Epcot Center since it was a beautiful,



warm, sunny afternoon. At Epcot there was a new "Universe of Energy" pavilion with a fascinating video presentation starring Ellen Degeneres and Jamie Lee Curtis. Further on I found a new China pavilion had been added since my last visit, in which there was an incredible exhibit of the famous Terra Cotta warriors from the Qin Emperor's tomb in Xian. The display and presentation about how the warriors were discovered and excavated was absolutely fascinating, and almost as exciting



as when Leslie and I saw them in Xian many years ago. For dinner I was seated with a group from New York for a traditional German buffet of sausages, beef roulade, schnitzel, apple strudel, and black forest cake as we listened to old German songs being played by a classic Bavarian polka band.

Before leaving the park at the end of the night I stopped at the Rose and Thistle English Pub for a pint of Boddington's Ale and listened to a musical group from Scotland dressed in their traditional kilts. Their name, "Off Kilter", was quite appropriate as they played beautiful renditions of traditional Celtic folk music. The end of the evening came with a spectacular show of lasers and fireworks under a clear sky over the lagoon.



In late January I paid another visit to Joshua Tree National Park to see some of the sites I hadn't seen before. I started by driving up to the Eagle Mountain Mine, one of many old mines within the park, however, it is the only one still operating. An old abandoned railroad ran parallel to the narrow, unpaved access road, and at the height

of mining activity in the 1930's the railroad hauled thousands of tons of iron ore to the nearby mainline of the Southern Pacific Railroad.

From there the ore was transported to the huge Kaiser Steel Mill in Ontario, California. Today the operations at the mine are a fraction of the past and now less than 50 people still live in the company town of Eagle Mountain. Nearby the mine is a massive pumping station on the Colorado River Aqueduct that enables huge volumes of water to cross the mountains and reach San Diego and all the surrounding cities.



From Eagle Mountain I drove into the southern portion of the park and stopped at the site of "White Tank" and "Grand Tank", both natural depressions in the desert which collect water during the rainy season to be used by



local ranchers and miners in the dry summer. Further on I came to a trail that lead up to the Lost Horse Mine located near the summit of the mountains. It produced more than 10,000 ounces of gold and 16,000 ounces of silver while it operated from 1894 to 1931. Several structures remain on the site, including the stamp mill, headrig, water tanks, and foundations of several buildings. The sun slowly set as I left the park and I stopped at the Joshua Tree Saloon, a local bar with a lot of character, cold beer, and good food, as well as a fascinating collection of friendly locals

playing darts and pool. For that night, I had booked a beautiful 2 bedroom villa at the Westin Mission Hills Resort in Rancho Mirage for almost the same price as the Motel 6! The villa had a full kitchen, dining room, living room, two bedrooms, two baths and two balconies overlooking the golf course and Santa Rosa Mountains. In addition there were two fireplaces and a gas grill on the balcony – hard to beat! For dinner I went to the hotel's Bella Vista restaurant where I savored the grilled fresh salmon served with a light

salsa of parsley, garlic, onion, and black pepper, along with delicious roasted fingerling potatoes. A chilled glass of Frog's Leap Sauvignon Blanc accompanied the salmon perfectly. As I was finishing dinner, my server insisted I try the special dessert, Italian donuts cut into thin strips and served with a tart raspberry sauce which was an incredible way to end the meal. And so ended my short trip to Joshua Tree.



In mid-February I woke up one bright sunny morning and quickly decided to visit Whitewater Canyon and take some photos. It was the start of the long President's Day weekend so the traffic on the freeway was heavy, but once I turned off on to the narrow winding road leading into the canyon north of Palm Springs, there was virtually no one. As I entered the wildlife preserve I had gorgeous views of the 11,000 foot peaks of the San Bernardino Mountains covered in fresh snow. There was a strong flow of water coursing through several channels of the





rocky river bed, but six months from now, it would be totally dry. I hiked along a portion of the Pacific Crest Trail that follows along the edge of the river before coming to a lovely fish pond filled with beautiful rainbow trout in crystal clear blue water. From Whitewater Canyon I drove up highway 62 to Yucca Valley and into Joshua Tree National Park. Once inside the park I drove the “Geology Tour Road” to visit a remote part of the park. The tour is an 11 mile loop on a very sandy, unmaintained dirt road that starts with a sign reading “4-wheel drive highly recommended” –

need one say anything more? After driving 4 or 5 miles on a flat, corrugated dirt road it suddenly descended several hundred feet into Paradise Valley where I found the trailhead to an old mine a few miles up the “Fried Liver Wash”. Along the trail, which used to be an old mining road, I discovered the remains of a small ore processing mill. About 4 miles further up the trail I reached the summit of the high, barren hills surrounding the valley and was rewarded with a spectacular sunset and beautiful views of Joshua Trees silhouetted against the brilliant orange and red sky. On the way out of the park a couple of Coyotes casually trotted across the road in front of me, hardly paying me any mind. Once again I stopped at my favorite watering hole in the high desert, the Joshua Tree Saloon, for a very tasty burger, fabulous baked beans, and a cold pint of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. It was just my luck that I arrived in time for Karaoke Night, which was run by a man named Troy Hogland who had an amazing singing voice. As I looked around the bar, it was filled with an incredible variety of locals, including old timers, young tattooed college kids, and several groups of Marines from the nearby 29 Palms military base, and everyone was having a great time listening to people “trying” to sing their favorite songs. There was “Smitty”, an old geezer who recited the lyrics to several Johnny Cash songs. Then came Christina, a very pretty young lady with many tattoos and quite drunk, with no singing voice whatsoever. In addition was Carol, an old sidekick of Smitty, who tried in vain to sing some classic 1940’s romantic tunes. Just as I was coming to the conclusion that none of these people would ever be seen on “America’s Got Talent”, a young, very overweight blonde girl stepped up to the mic and belted out a very professional performance of Cindy Lauper’s classic “Time After Time”! It was the highlight of the evening and a fitting end to my day.



The following week I rode the train into downtown Los Angeles to attend a PCMA Chapter meeting at the California Plaza Omni Hotel. From my corner room on the 12th floor I had a great view of the Hollywood Hills and the snow covered San Gabriel Mountains in the distance. As I stood in the lobby, a large group of beautiful women in long black evening gowns and handsome young men in black tuxedos were gathering. The concierge told me they were here for the “Guess” company party, which then brought the whole scene into focus for me. I got a recommendation to go to Casey’s Irish Pub for dinner, but once I got there it was closed for the filming of an episode of the TV series “Castle”. Just across the street however, was the “Water Grille” where the entire menu featured fresh seafood, and my choice of Pacific Cod and chips was delicious. The next morning I joined my friend Jeff Leung from the Los Angeles

Convention and Tourism Bureau for our PCMA lunch program. The highlight of lunch was a superb dessert of Orange Mousse Sherbet served inside a fresh orange. Later in the day I walked around California Plaza taking



photos of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Walt Disney Concert Hall, and the 100 year old cable car known as "Angel's Flight". The plaza is located on top of "Bunker Hill" a small hill in downtown LA where a wealthy developer built many lavish Victorian homes in the late 1860's, most of which have disappeared, to be replaced by modern, high rise office buildings.



At the beginning of March I was invited to a luncheon in Palm Desert hosted by the University of Illinois Foundation, so I decided to drive over the day before by way of a scenic route through Moreno Valley and the Santa Rosa Mountains. Along the way I stopped in the small farming town of Hemet to visit the historical museum housed in the old Santa Fe Railroad depot. The area used to have many packing houses that shipped everything from olives and citrus to roses and eggs. Today there is still a thriving agricultural economy, including several huge dairy farms, but products are shipped by truck rather than rail. Nearby is Ryan Airfield where pilots trained during WWII and now is a base for sky jumping and gliders. As I drove up the mountain through Idyllwild and Garner Valley to Keen's Camp summit there were large areas of snow under the tall Ponderosa Pines in the San Bernardino National Forest. Then the highway suddenly descended over 4000 feet through a series of tight hairpin turns down to the floor of the Coachella valley and the city of Palm Desert. That evening I met up with some of the Foundation folks who were also staying at the Marriott Shadow Ridge resort. Later we shared a fabulous dinner at "Jillian's", a lovely old adobe ranch house that dates back to the early 1920's. The beautiful courtyard is surrounded by charming rooms resembling small wine cellars, with arched ceilings and white washed walls. Dinner began with a bowl of spicy pulled pork and black bean soup, followed by a superb filet of whitefish that was simply breaded, seasoned, perfectly sautéed and served on a bed of fresh steamed spinach and garlic mashed potatoes! The dessert course was a combination of fresh lemon tart and pineapple cheesecake. I



I ended the night sitting on my hotel balcony watching a full moon rising while listening to beautiful music – very relaxing. The next day we all went to the beautiful La Quinta Country Club for the Foundation luncheon, and afterwards I strolled around the grounds taking photos of the many lovely gardens set against a backdrop of the snowcapped Santa Rosa Mountains. Later on in the afternoon massive dark clouds "boiled" over the crest of the mountains, foretelling the coming of large storm system from the North Pacific.

Mid-March saw me on my way to Santa Fe, New Mexico for a 4 day workshop on "Fine Art Digital Printmaking". I had chosen the workshop because in spite of having purchased an expensive professional printer my photos were

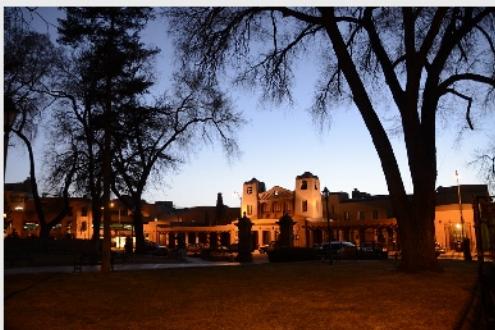


not coming out as good as I had expected, so I was determined to find out what I could improve. (*I learned the problem was not with the printer, but rather with the operator!*) I boarded the Southwest Chief train at Los Angeles Union Station for the overnight trip to Albuquerque, and shortly after departing the station I was in the dining car having roasted herb chicken, garlic mashed potatoes, and fresh steamed green beans, along with a chilled glass of Pinot Grigio. After dinner I sat in my compartment listening to beautiful music and looking up at the

Big Dipper and Orion constellations in a gorgeous night sky as the train quietly rolled across the vast Mojave Desert. I awoke early the next morning as the sun was rising over Winslow, Arizona and as we passed through Flagstaff there was still a foot of snow on the ground. For breakfast in the dining car I was seated with Amanda and Tim, a couple from Chicago having their first experience riding the train. Tim had suffered a serious accident while riding an ATV in Phoenix that left him with several fractured ribs and a punctured lung which prohibited him from flying home. He was also taking heavy painkillers every two hours, so this was going to be a long 2 days for him to reach Chicago. Upon arriving in Albuquerque it was a short shuttle ride to Santa Fe where I checked into the historic La Posada Resort just a couple of blocks from the plaza in old town. The weather was clear but being over 7000 feet in elevation, it was quite chilly with patches of snow still on the ground. I spent the remainder of the afternoon exploring the old town and discovered a series of plaques detailing the history of the city. Santa Fe is the oldest state capitol in the nation and this year will be celebrating its 402nd birthday, having been established in the early 1600's during the first Spanish expeditions. As the sun was setting I headed back to the hotel and had a delicious bowl of "Buffalo Texas Red Chili" with fresh baked cornbread and a cold glass of local beer. The



next morning I arrived at the workshop that occupies one of the buildings on the grounds of a Catholic Convent, which makes for a quiet and peaceful setting. Our instructor was Mac Holbert, who has been a professional photographer for more than 35 years and worked with Adobe Systems to write several of the algorithms used today in Photoshop, so he knew his stuff for sure. Mac was not only extremely knowledgeable, he was also a very patient instructor who spent a lot of his time during the workshop working one on one with each of us, which really made a huge difference. It came as a big surprise to all of us to learn that Mac spent almost 20 years as the



road manager for Crosby, Still, Nash, and Young! Truly an amazing man. Back at the hotel that evening I sat in the bar listening to a grey-haired cowboy named Willy Jim play very traditional cowboy songs. At one point he told us a fascinating story about the history of the well-known cowboy song "Don't Fence Me In". Apparently the lyrics came from an old poem written by a Montana rancher around the late 1800's and the music was written by Cole Porter. The song was first sung and made famous by Roy Rogers. Later in the evening I bought Willy Jim a couple

of drinks and found out that he's been asked to play for St Patrick's Day, since he also plays the fiddle and knows a few Irish tunes – should be interesting! The next day was another very interesting but challenging session in the workshop. Lunch was provided by a local catering company and featured a fantastic spicy soup with chicken and



rice, along with a wonderful Pistachio and cardamom cream cake for dessert. We were invited into the kitchen by the chef to watch her prepare and grill Prickly Pear cactus for tomorrow's lunch. For dinner I went to the Marble Brewery Tap Room in the old town where I had a seat on the balcony overlooking the Plaza. My server recommended that I try the house special pizza with prosciutto, applewood smoked bacon, pepperoni, jalapenos, and 4 kinds of cheese to go with a cold glass of their local IPA. Back at the hotel bar I overheard a guy named "Moose" talking with the bartender about the movie he was going to start working on in a couple of days, so I mentioned to him that Leslie's brother-in-law was also in the film industry. He asked who it was and when I said Andy's name he almost fell off his barstool. It seems that Moose and Andy worked together a great deal and were very good friends. So you never know who you might meet in a bar.

The next day was the last day of the workshop and we spent most of the time working on our final two large format fine art prints that we would display at the closing dinner this evening, along with the work of students in the three other workshops. I received several compliments on my two photos, one of a bristlecone pine in Great Basin National Park and the other being the face of an iceberg from Tracey Arm Fjord in Southeast Alaska. After the workshop I headed north on highway 285 and as I passed the sign for the Camel Rock Casino I looked to my left and saw a large rock formation that looked exactly like a camel lying down. Further north I took the turnoff for Los Alamos, which is famous as the site where research and development took place during WWII for the first atomic bomb. The existence of the national lab was so secret that the scientists working there all arrived in Santa Fe and were transported to Los Alamos under the cover of night. The postal address for the lab and the entire town was PO Box 1663 in Santa Fe. I stopped at the Visitor Center in the "Historic District" in order to pick up a highway map, but the very friendly old lady at the desk pounced on me right away and asked about what I would like to see. Then she proceeded to fill my arms with loads of brochures about every historical site within a hundred miles! She was very proud of Los Alamos and has lived here for over 30 years. She was also full of interesting stories of the town and the national lab, but the most humorous one was about a bank robbery several years ago in which a man dressed in black with a black ski mask robbed the local bank and as he drove off, one of the tellers recognized him as a local resident. Once the police were called in they immediately knew who he was, and not wanting to spark a shootout at the man's home, they used another, very ingenious tactic. Apparently the man's wife had recently passed several bad checks around town, so the police called her and asked that she come down to the station to explain the circumstances surrounding the bad checks. Not long after, she arrived at the police station,



accompanied by guess who? Yep – her husband, who was promptly arrested! Then the lady at the Visitor Center said, "It's a small town you know"! Before leaving the Visitor Center she recommended that I drive up to the rim of Valle Grande, a massive caldera that resulted from a super volcano which exploded 10 million years ago leaving huge areas of lava flows that eventually formed the extensive mesas of northern New Mexico that we see today. The road to Valle Grande passed through the grounds of the National Lab, where I had to show

my driver's license to be allowed to pass. The road climbed steeply up the slope of the ancient caldera through a forest of tall Ponderosa Pines to over 8000 feet before descending into a beautiful valley that was home to a large herd of Roosevelt Elk. Just after I stopped to take some photos, a strong wind came up and suddenly I found myself enveloped in a whirlwind of snow. The snowstorm lasted only 10 minutes, but it was enough to remind everyone that winter was still in charge up here. I managed to hike a couple of miles around the valley before heading back down the mountain. Further south along the top of the mesa I came to Bandelier National Monument, a place where native people had built adobe settlements and cliff dwellings more than 2000 years ago.



The National Park Service has done a great job in preserving the place and has even provided wooden ladders at some of the cliff dwellings to allow visitors to actually step inside to experience what it must have been like to live here hundreds of years ago. An old lodge of adobe buildings that were built in the 1930's by the CCC still remain and are now used as a café and gift shop. Back in Santa Fe that evening I once again savored a fantastic pizza at the Marble Brewery Tap Room, this time topped with lobster, shrimp, crab, caramelized leeks, ancho chile peppers, truffle oil, and 4 kinds of cheese! I ended the night back at the hotel bar listening to Willy Jim doing his best to play some old Irish jigs on his fiddle in celebration of St Patrick's Day. The next morning I explored the "Railyard District" of Santa Fe with its historic old warehouses that have been turned into an upscale market area, along with the Second Street Brewery. As I stood next to the old Santa Fe railroad depot, I spotted a

group of Prairie Dogs that had made their home on a very small patch of ground in between a major street and the railroad tracks, and what was so interesting was that nobody driving by even noticed them! Then it was time to make my way to Albuquerque to board the train for my return journey to California. Dinner on the train that evening was the Chef's special, a spectacular dish of ancho chile BBQ braised short ribs, which I savored before heading to my compartment as the train rolled on into the night across the Arizona desert under a dark sky filled with millions of stars.



Near the end of March I was once again in Palm Springs to attend our Business Partner Conference and meet with some of our International Distributors, in particular my old friend Jorg from Germany. After checking into the hotel I met up with Jorg at the pool bar where we spent time catching up on all of the things that happened since my



trip to Germany last year. Later that evening we joined our colleagues Myles and Phil for dinner at the "Steakhouse" in the Spa Casino next door to the hotel. My order of petite filet mignon with Gorgonzola crust, served with fresh steamed asparagus and brussel sprouts was absolutely fabulous! (Thanks Jorg) Following dinner we went back to the hotel bar to join the rest of the Germans for a nightcap. A day later I made a visit to the Living Desert, a huge 600 acre preserve showcasing the plants and animals of the

world's deserts, from North America, Africa, and the Middle East. A highlight of the park was the herd of California Bighorn Sheep, led by a large ram who stood on watch near the top of the hill, which made for a great photo. There were also several wild cats from Arabia which looked very much like our domestic cats. As I hiked up one of the trails into the surrounding desert, I came upon several large Jack Rabbits, small lizards, and two Roadrunners. The whole park was fascinating and very interesting – certainly worth a longer visit next time.



At the end of March I was invited to Borrego Springs to attend the grand opening of the "Desert Club", hosted by the Anza Borrego Desert State Park Foundation, of which I am a member. Rather than take the freeway, I chose to travel the scenic route via highway 243, a narrow, twisting road up the steep slope of Mt San Jacinto to the small mountain village of Idyllwild. All along the way were spectacular views of the valley below and the snow-capped San Bernardino Mountains. The highway eventually climbed above 6000 feet through groves of tall Ponderosa and Jeffery Pines in the

San Bernardino National Forest. From Idyllwild the highway wound its way through the Santa Rosa Mountains and the Anza Valley, which was first settled in 1774 when Juan Batista Anza lead an expedition north to claim all of California for Spain. Further south the road made its way through the beautiful meadows of Warner Springs Ranch, alive with yellow and orange wild flowers, a sure sign of the approach of spring. Soon the highway descended several thousand feet down to the desert floor and the small town of Borrego Springs. After checking in to my room at the Borrego Springs Resort, I drove to the Desert Club, an historic house built in the classic post-modern style popular in the early 1950's, and now the home of the Anza Borrego Desert State Park Foundation. I sat at a table with one of the original founding families and learned they had bid \$11,000 for an African Safari at a fundraiser for the San Diego Natural History Museum last year, and this will be their first trip to Africa. Dinner featuring lots of delicious grilled dishes was served outside on the patio as the stars began to shine. (The Big Dipper was directly overhead) The next morning I drove south to Calexico and then west along the border with Mexico to a rough jeep trail that took



me into the barren hills to reach the old abandoned tracks of the San Diego and Arizona Eastern Railroad that once transported agricultural produce from Yuma and the Imperial Valley through northern Mexico to San Diego. The railroad had to pass through half a dozen tunnels and when two of them collapsed during an earthquake in 1957, operations ceased. Today only a short section west of Campo is active as an historic tourist railroad. There is talk around Campo that the line may be reopened one day and excursions to Tijuana will again be offered. But for now it remains an abandoned railroad.

In early April I attended an educational conference in San Diego, organized by three chapters of Meeting Professionals International (MPI). They arranged for a special car on the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train from Los



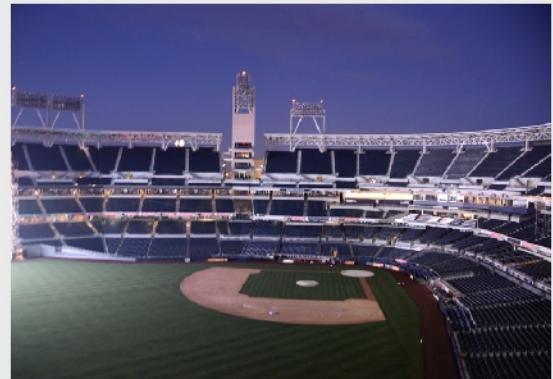
Angeles to San Diego that was hosted by the Azunio Tequila Company which served great "Lemonita" drinks (tequila with lemon and crushed fresh basil) during the entire trip. The party started even before the train departed Union Station in LA and was nonstop for the next 2 hours to San Diego. The Amtrak crew was serving snacks and soon they too got into the party mood. The conference began with an evening networking reception on the top level of the Western Metals Company building at PETCO Park where we dined on delicious Mahi Mahi fish tacos and chicken spring rolls as we looked out over the baseball field. Following the reception the party moved to an old warehouse that had been recently renovated called the "Block 16 –

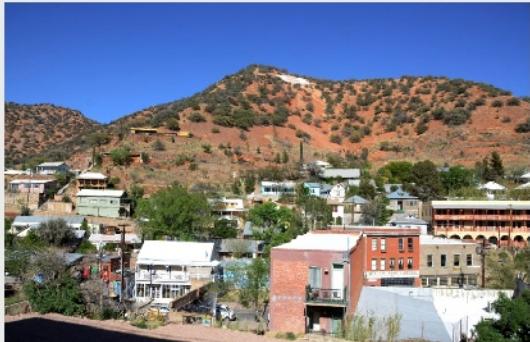
Union and Spirits Bar", located across the street from the stadium, and here we were offered some fantastic BBQ pork sliders and BLT sliders. The next day the conference began with very emotional and inspiring presentation by an Iraq war veteran who had lost an arm and now works with the Wounded Warriors organization to assist other veterans come to terms with their disability and move on to live very productive lives. Following a marvelous session on future mobile computing technology, we had delicious grilled salmon for lunch in the expo area. One of the afternoon sessions was absolutely fascinating in which a couple of corporate meeting planners told us some of their "war stories", and one in particular was amazing. The meeting planner was tasked with incorporating two very different themes, Ginza and Tribal Africa, into the closing party on the same studio backlot



with only 3 minutes for the transition and during a complete blackout! After hearing her story we all were glad we didn't have her job. Another meeting planner had the job of preparing a party for 600 VIPs during the 2005 SuperBowl in Dallas, which under ordinary circumstances would not be a big problem. But on the day of the game an unexpected snow and ice storm hit the city, resulting in the collapse of the huge tent just an hour before the party was to begin. And if that weren't enough trouble, the pavement buckled to where the buses were unable to reach the site of the party, at which point the meeting planner found a steam roller to flatten the pavement. (Very clever thinking indeed) The closing session featured a presentation about "passion" by a motivational speaker from South Carolina. She told us some very funny stories of her family to illustrate her point, and every so often she would pause with the typical phrase from the South, "bless her heart". We were all inspired by her passion as well.

As the middle of April came around, I had made plans to attend the PhotoShop World Conference in Orlando, as well as a National Geographic Photography workshop in Scottsdale, Arizona afterwards. But rather than take the most direct route I chose to leave a couple of days early and see some of Arizona I hadn't visited yet before catching a flight from Phoenix to Orlando. As I stopped over in Yuma, I watched a wedding ceremony taking place in a park overlooking the Colorado River at the Yuma Crossing national Historic site as the sun was beginning to set. Earlier I had seen the bride and bridesmaids doing Tequila shooters in the bar at the Hilton Hotel nearby, most likely to ready themselves for the ceremony. I continued my





journey through Tucson and Tombstone to the small mining town of Bisbee in the very southeastern corner of Arizona. The old town is situated at 5300 feet elevation, surrounded by mountains and several large open pit copper mines. I checked into the historic Copper Queen Hotel that was built in the early 1900's by the Phelps Dodge mining company as a residence for VIP guests. It is still in beautiful original condition with special rooms available

where famous celebrities have stayed, including John Wayne and Ava Gardner. The old Phelps Dodge corporate headquarters building is now a fine local mining museum with displays from the days when copper was king. I walked around the steep, narrow streets of the old town taking photos of the many lovely Victorian buildings, some of which date from the late 1800's. At one point I came upon a long wooden staircase leading up a steep slope with a sign at the bottom that read "Bisbee 1000 Race". It



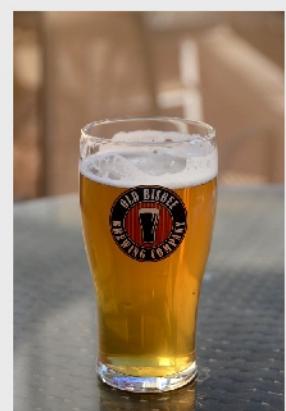
refers to a footrace that makes a 2 mile roundtrip up all of the wooden staircases in the town for a total of 1000 steps.

Eventually I made my way to a part of the old town called "Brewery Gulch" and sat on the patio of the "Old Bisbee Brewery", sipping a cold glass of their Pilsner while watching the birds flying above me. Huge vultures soared on the warm afternoon thermals (like the 747's of the avian world), while swallows darted effortlessly to and fro at lightning speed (the F-14's among the birds), and then there were the sparrows flitting among the buildings (being the Cessna's of the sky). As evening came upon Bisbee I returned to the Copper Queen Hotel for a delicious pulled pork BBQ sandwich and a cold pint of local "Industrial IPA" while a group of local musicians played some nice Irish tunes in one corner of

the bar. At one point another woman joined the group, pulled out her trombone, and proceeded to play a pretty good New Orleans jazz piece. Early the next morning I awoke with a full blown case of the flu, which required a stop at the local drug store for some medication. Despite feeling like crap, I did enjoy the drive under beautiful sunny skies through the lovely landscape around Sierra Vista, with golden grass and tall green shrubs surround by stark, barren mountains. Just north of Fort Huachuca I turned on to I-10 headed for Phoenix and my flight to Orlando. And in spite of my congested sinuses I was able to enjoy the wonderful lunch onboard the flight that included BBQ chicken served with roasted corn and black beans, mashed sweet potatoes, Caesar salad, buffalo mozzarella, fresh basil, and tomato, followed by lemon cake for dessert. A large group of pro golfers were also on board for a PGA



championship match in Orlando. After arriving in Orlando I took the shuttle to the Rosen Centre Hotel across from the convention center, checked in and headed for the lobby bar where a large tour group from Austria and Germany had just arrived from one of the many cruise ships. I ordered a local Florida Pilsner while most of them were drinking Budweiser, which is an "imported" beer for them. The next 3 days were filled with great sessions and workshops presented by some of the world's top professional photographers, all of whom



were more than happy to make themselves available for questions. One afternoon I had a portfolio critique with a well-known concert photographer, and as soon as he finished looking at my photos of Alaska and the Great Basin, he said my collection was very solid and the best he had seen during the reviews that day. I left the session feeling pretty darn good! That evening I had a fabulous dinner in the hotel's Everglades Restaurant, with an amazing Caribbean Crab Cake that had huge lumps of crab meat on top of a watermelon sauce, with roasted corn and mango salsa. For the main dish I ordered the Thai Style Red Curry Seafood Stew – an unbelievable, flavorful red spicy coconut curry with a whole lobster tail, jumbo gulf shrimp, scallops, mussels and clams served over noodles!! The next morning the weather had changed to cloudy skies and the threat of rain, but it was still quite warm. As I entered the convention center to attend some great technical sessions I stopped at the "Cuban Coffee" cart and ordered a large decaf coffee, at which point I was told they don't offer it anymore. So then I asked why it was still listed on their menu, for which they had no answer. Later in the afternoon I received a text message from my friend Lora inviting me to join her in Las Vegas after my workshop in Scottsdale. The following morning I took the shuttle to the airport, checked in for my flight to Phoenix, and then went to the United Airlines Red Carpet Club for some coffee and to check my email. A few minutes later I got a call from Lora asking if I had been in the Army with someone named Mike O'Brien, and my first reaction was "so how do you know Mike", to which Lora responded that they had been friends for many years in the AV industry. I had lost contact with Mike over 20 years ago, so when he came on the phone it was a great surprise and wonderful to be back in touch. It was then that I planned a stop in Las Vegas on my way home from Scottsdale. Soon it was time to board the plane, which was fully booked of course, as most flights are these days. As the boarding door was closed there was the announcement "we expect an on time departure", but after sitting at the gate for 20 minutes it was clear to all of us it would not be an on time departure. Then came an announcement from the Captain that we were waiting to be re-routed around a large storm system west of Orlando, so another 20 minutes went by. Finally the plane slowly pulled out of the gate and on toward the runway, but then suddenly we stopped. After another 15 minutes went by with no announcements I asked one of the flight attendants if we could get an update from the flight deck. Shortly after that the Captain came on the PA to say that we were number 10 for takeoff and the tower was spacing planes 30 miles apart on takeoff due to the weather, so it would be a "few minutes" before we depart. I did a quick calculation and determined that with 10 planes ahead of us and 30 miles between them, the next plane to take off would have to be 300 miles away before it was our turn on the runway, which would certainly take more than a few minutes! At last we did takeoff, more than an hour and half late, but it was a smooth flight with a nice lunch of beef teriyaki over rice and New York cheesecake with caramel sauce for dessert. Once I arrived in Phoenix I



picked up my jeep and drove to the Montelucia resort in Scottsdale, the site for the workshop starting the next day. The resort was a beautiful property located at the base of CamelBack Mountain and my room had a patio with a great view of it. That night I fell asleep as the Coyotes began to howl in the distance under the bright full moon. Our workshop



began the next morning with a wonderful breakfast buffet around the pool before we gathered in the room for the start of the session lead by two well-known National Geographic staff photographers, each with more than 25 years of experience. Both had their own unique and contrasting styles as well, with Jim Richardson doing more with landscapes and nature, whereas Catherine Karnow was an expert in photographing people. That afternoon we boarded a bus that took us



to the KD Quarterhorse

Ranch in the mountains northeast of Scottsdale for a session of photographing the operations on the ranch, the people handling the horses, and the horses in training. All during the shoot our instructors were always with us to guide us in how best to capture the scenes, so it was a very productive exercise.

The next morning we were up at



5:00am for another shoot in the Squaw Peak Nature Reserve to get photos of the beautiful sunrise over the mountains and desert. Upon returning to the resort we spent the rest of the day editing and processing our photos so that we could pick our 4 best shots for the evening class presentation and critique. I fared quite well with my photos and learned a lot from Jim Richardson about photographing landscapes that I can take with me on my next trip.



That evening we all gathered on a private patio for dinner under the stars and to share our experiences with each other. Later on in the evening Jim and Catherine lead us on a photo shoot around the grounds of the resort for some lovely shots at sunset, a fitting conclusion to the workshop. Before leaving Scottsdale the following morning, I visited the "Paradise and Pacific Railroad Park" and saw a beautiful restoration of a famous luxury Pullman car that was used by several US Presidents

including Herbert Hoover,

Franklin Roosevelt, and even Dwight Eisenhower. There was a lot of history to be found in that railcar. From Scottsdale I drove north on I-17 to Flagstaff through the spectacular Verde Valley, then on to I-40 to old route 66 and the Hulapai Indian Reservation east of Kingman. Finally I crossed Hoover Dam and on to Las Vegas where I met up with Lora in the lobby lounge at the MGM Signature Towers. Although she had been there just one night, the bartenders knew her by her first name. Then she introduced me to some of her new friends in the bar, especially a guy named Murray from Canada who was here in Las Vegas with his two sons to exhibit at the International Car Wash Association trade show. They were celebrating their recent acquisition of the Turtle Wax Company, so I posed a trivia question to them. *There's a town without a single car wash and it's the 4th largest city in the state – what is the name of the town? (answer: Ketchikan, Alaska which receives over 120 inches of rain each year)* As I left Las Vegas the next day the winds were really howling, as if a storm was approaching. I drove south on US 95 across Railroad Pass and down through the little desert town of Searchlight, with a population of less than 150 but with a casino in one corner of the convenience store and gas station. (It



(begs the question: Is there any town in Nevada that doesn't have at least one casino?) South of Parker, Arizona I turned on to a rough unpaved BLM road leading toward an old mining ghost town by the name of Swansea. Every couple of miles were signs warning it was a "primitive" road and drivers were at their own risk. *(As if one needed to be "reminded" of that every 5 minutes)* Suddenly the road climbed a steep twisting grade over a rough, rocky summit and began a steep descent into the broad valley of the Bill Williams River before ending up at the remains of the old abandoned copper mining town of Swansea. I walked among the old foundations and remains of the ore processing mill, the best preserved structure being a classic red brick building where copper ore was crushed for shipment to smelters near Prescott. At the height of mining activity in the late 1930's there were over 3000 people living in the town, but after WWII the price of copper dropped sharply and the mine closed. On the eastern edge of the town site was an old adobe structure that was the railroad depot, along with some of the old abandoned railroad tracks that connected Swansea with the town of Bouse 25 miles to the south. There it connected with the Arizona and California Railroad to Phoenix. Nearby the depot were massive piles of slag leftover from the smelting operations, including several old rail cars filled with slag. I spotted a BLM sign pointing



to a dirt road running parallel to the old railroad grade that would take me back to Bouse, but by a different route, so I headed that way. The dirt road quickly turned into a narrow, sandy jeep trail through the hills, making it necessary for me to engage 4-wheel drive. After several miles of the rocky trail, sometimes with only inches to spare on each side of my jeep, I finally emerged into the desert and a paved road. Upon reaching Bouse I visited a very interesting display about "Camp Bouse" where troops were trained during WWII. It was a top secret site for

training men to operate a new special weapon known as the CDL (Canal Defense Light). In actuality the weapon had nothing to do with defending canals at all, rather it was a very intense beam of light that flashed 60 times a second and was designed to disorient troops on the battlefield. It was never used as such and ended up being deployed near the end of the war as an enormous searchlight. Even today it remains unknown to virtually everyone, and so ended my trip.

In the first week of May I attended a very interesting photography seminar in Sherman Oaks, lead by two instructors from National Geographic Traveler Magazine on the topic of travel photography. The next day I drove into downtown LA to attend the Adobe Max conference which opened with a spectacular display of imagery and video from hundreds of Adobe software users around the world. Over the course of the next couple of days there were more than a hundred different technical sessions on each of the programs in the Adobe Creative Suite of software. Of particular interest for me were sessions on Muse, a new product for designing web sites, which enabled me to re-design my own website later on. Beside the great sessions there was a fabulous evening reception in a vacant lot across from the LA Convention Center where they had setup a large "play area" in which people could use the Adobe software to create all sorts of graphic designs and videos that were displayed on huge screens throughout the party. Upon returning to the hotel that night I was in the elevator with a large number of attendees, when suddenly a soft warm voice of a woman announced "this elevator is crowded, thank you for your patience". On the last day of the conference, the work of several professional photographers, graphic artists, and video producers were highlighted in presentations at Nokia Theater. Of particular note was the presentation by

Rob Legato who showed us some of his incredible computer animation that he used to produce the unbelievable special visual effects in the films "Titanic" and "Hugo", as well as the TV series "Star Trek: Deep Space Nine". It was absolutely amazing to see some of his techniques that combined computer animation and live film sets. The conference ended with "sneak peeks" into some of the latest research projects from Adobe software engineers, and as an added bonus, every attendee was given a complimentary one year subscription to the Adobe Creative Cloud service worth almost \$500. So it was a very worthwhile conference for me.

In mid-May I finally had some time to make use of a gift I had received in a PCMA event the previous summer, a one night stay and dinner at the Rancho Santa Fe Inn and Resort. On the way to Rancho Santa Fe I stopped at the Orange Empire Railway Museum in Perris where they were celebrating "Spring Rail Fest". All of the railroad exhibits were open for viewing and there were free rides on the steam trains as well as the vintage electric trolley cars from the old Los Angeles Railway Company, also known as the Pacific Red Cars that served a lot of the communities in southern California before freeways overtook them in 1963. Later I checked into a beautiful garden cottage at the Rancho Santa Fe Inn, complete with a stone fireplace and patio overlooking the gardens. I spent the afternoon walking around the



small village and the grounds surrounding the resort taking photos of the lovely flowering shrubs with their fresh blooms of white, pink, yellow, and purple. Also throughout resort and village were huge Brazilian Pepper trees that had grown into some very unique shapes. As the sun was setting I spotted several hot air balloons in the evening sky, many of them in colorful shapes resembling film characters which really thrilled the children who were watching them slowly float overhead. Dinner at the resort was fabulous, starting with a cornbread and Dungeness Crab cake

appetizer, followed by the main dish of sautéed Diver scallops served with roulade of pork belly and mustard sauce that was an amazing combination. The chilled glass of Joel Gott Sauvignon Blanc went very well with dinner. Later I walked across the street to the bar at the "Mille Fleurs" restaurant where a small group of people were dressed in the style of the Roaring 20's to celebrate a Great Gatsby theme party – very interesting to watch as they sipped their martinis and played out their Gatsby roles with one another. I ended the night sitting outside on my patio in the cool air under a beautiful full moon. The next day I was invited by my dear friend Maureen to attend the graduation ceremony of a group of amazing inner city high school kids who had worked very hard for the past year to overcome many obstacles they faced in their impoverished neighborhood and rise to the level of being accepted into colleges and universities around the country. Listening to their stories was a very inspirational and heart-warming experience that was shared by their families as well. Thanks Maureen! After the ceremony I drove downtown to the Hilton Bayfront Hotel for the night using a free room night courtesy of Hotels.com. I had a spectacular view of downtown, San Diego Bay, and Coronado Island from my room on the 26th floor. As the sun was setting across the bay I walked





along the Embarcadero taking photos, and came across a sign near the 10th Avenue Marine Terminal, headquarters for the Dole Company. Basically the sign was a list of fascinating facts about the shipments of bananas that arrive in San Diego every week from Central and South America. There are two ships arriving every week, each carrying 500 containers that hold 1000 boxes of bananas and each box has 100 bananas. So if you do the math – 100 bananas X 1000 boxes X 500 containers X 2 ships per week X 52 weeks it totals a whopping 5 billion 2 hundred million bananas

each year! (the people in San Diego don't eat all those bananas, the fruit is shipped from San Diego to cities all over the western US and Canada) After a delicious plate of Maryland crab cakes at Joe's Crab Shack I called it a night. The next morning I went to the Zoo to view the new enclosure for the Polar Bears and arrived just in time to see two young bears having a wonderful time munching on carrots and yams as a large group of schoolchildren with their noses pressed against the glass were having a fun time watching the bears play with their food. That afternoon I drove north to the DoubleTree Hotel in Anaheim where I had to make final preparations for the PCMA educational program the next day. Just after I arrived at the hotel I got a call from Scott Klososky, our speaker for the program, saying that he was stuck in Oklahoma City airport due to some massive, devastating tornadoes. (*later on the evening news we found out just how bad the damage was when an entire town was destroyed by one of the largest and strongest tornadoes ever recorded!*) Luckily Scott was able to go standby on a later flight to LAX and join us the next morning for a fascinating presentation about the future of mobile computing applications in our industry. Later that evening I walked over to the Orange Center Mall and discovered the Alcatraz Brewing Company where I had an amazing and very unique brew called "Imperial Belgian IPA". It was a fantastic combination of tastes, from the traditional Belgian Trappist Ale together with the distinctive hops characteristic of an IPA. At the beginning of his presentation the next day, Scott told us about what it's like to live in Oklahoma during the summer where everyone has a plan of where to go when a tornado is coming, and it's not a question of if but rather when. Following our PCMA board meeting I headed back home.



At the end of May my dear friend, Tina had arranged to visit us from her home in Saudi Arabia before going to the Esri Germany user conference in Munich. We arranged to meet in Temecula to spend a couple of days touring the wine country, so I headed that way through the lush agricultural fields around Hemet, just north of Temecula.



After checking in at the Temecula Creek Inn I strolled around the grounds taking photos of the golf course and the mountains surrounding the property. Late in the afternoon Tina and I met on the patio overlooking the golf course for a beer and a chance to catch up on what had happened since her visit to the US last fall. After a long conversation we headed for the nearby Pechanga Hotel and Casino to have dinner at "Kelsey's Ale House" where we discovered that the Pechanga casino is the largest one west of the Mississippi, which was really surprising



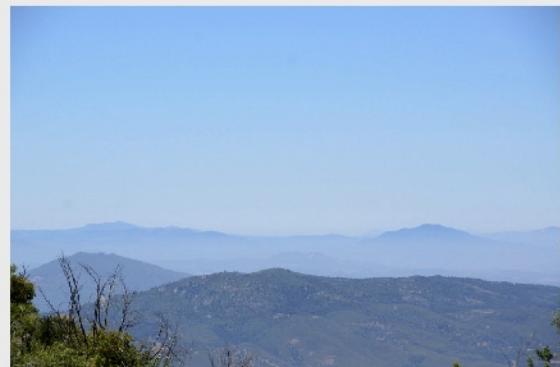
given the large number of casinos in Las Vegas! The next morning, after sharing breakfast at the hotel, we headed to the Vail Ranch south of Temecula to visit the studio of Ricardo Breceda, a fantastic sculptor of huge metal objects that he exhibits in the deserts all over southern California. Tina and Ricardo hit it off right away and we learned a lot about his art and his life, which are almost one in the same. Tina bought a couple of his beautiful pieces, a lizard and a turtle, small enough to fit in her suitcase for the trip back To Saudi Arabia. From Vail

Ranch we drove north through the vineyards and horse ranches of the Temecula Valley to the Ponte Winery, a small family owned estate. Tina and I shared a wine tasting of some very nice wines, including a special and unique Port made from local Zinfandel grapes. But the most unusual wine was a new one they named "Angry Wife". It was a pretty good wine but we weren't able to find out the origin of the name. Then Tina started a conversation with the server and a couple standing next to us at the bar regarding the fact that she was working in Saudi Arabia and had developed a talent for making her own wine. Unfortunately she can't share it with anyone outside the country because alcohol is forbidden in the Kingdom. We drove back to Redlands through the wine country and the agricultural fields of the Hemet



valley. Along the way we passed Gilman Hot Springs and the international headquarters of the Church of Scientology before arriving back home. Later that evening we joined Leslie and Kathleen for a fabulous dinner at Romano's Macaroni Grill and shared a large bottle of house Chianti wine that was served at our table on the "honor system", meaning we had to mark down each glass on the paper tablecloth with the crayon provided. We finished the evening back home, sitting on the patio sipping a glass of Port.

At the beginning of June we were invited to the San Diego Safari Park Member Appreciation Evening, so I decided to leave early and visit Mt. Palomar State Park nearby. The route to the State Park was by way of a steep, winding road climbing over 5000 feet from the Pauma Valley below, passing through grass and brush before entering the Ponderosa Pine and Douglas Fir forest near the summit of the mountain. I parked in the picnic area surrounded by huge old Redwood and Cedar trees, and then hiked up the trail to



Boucher Lookout Tower through a meadow of beautiful wild flowers in full bloom. Upon reaching the tower I had a spectacular 180 degree view of the entire region, all the way from Temecula to Escondido, a distance of more than 60 miles. At the base of the tower was a very interesting exhibit depicting the life of a typical US Forest Service fire lookout, and as I stared at the old photos, memories of my summer on Selway Mountain lookout in Montana over 40 years ago came flooding into my head. That summer still remains as one of the best times in my life! On my way back down the mountain I stopped at "Mother's Country Store" to pick up some iced tea and as I entered the place I saw a huge stuffed toy bear in one corner, on "sale" for \$850! Later in the afternoon I met up with

Leslie and Kathleen at Safari Park where we enjoyed a picnic buffet of hot dogs, salads, chips, potato salad, chili, and ice cream for dessert. As the sun was setting we walked to the outdoor theater to watch the performance of several species of birds doing amazing tricks, all while flying freely around us in the open skies. Meanwhile, high above the arena were a group of wild vultures circling the area, but it didn't seem to bother the birds as they performed.



In mid-June Leslie and I travelled to Lexington, Kentucky to visit with her family. (*We skipped the Rolex Kentucky 3-Day Equestrian event this year so as to make the trip in June in order for Leslie to assist her brother in caring for their mother.*) Our flight from John Wayne Airport to Atlanta was delayed for 30 minutes as we waited for the Captain to arrive, and no one wanted to leave without him! Once in the air the flight was very nice with a delicious breakfast of pimento cheese omelet, sausage, potatoes, fresh fruit, and bagel with cream cheese. Our connecting flight to Cincinnati departed from the new international terminal in Atlanta, a beautiful huge open space with a great new Skyclub where we spent the next hour enjoying drinks and hors-devours before boarding the flight. We quickly picked up our rental car in Cincinnati and drove south on I-75 through the gorgeous Bluegrass countryside to Lexington, where Joyce had prepared a wonderful dinner of roast chicken and Greek salad. We sat around the dinner table for the rest of the night catching up on all the things that happened since our last visit. The next day while Leslie spent time with her mother, I drove through the rolling hills and past countless horse farms to the little town of Paint Lick and on to Richmond to visit my old Army buddy Pat and his lovely wife Kathy. We shared some great conversation about their recent trip to Santa Fe as their cat Macie sat nearby watching with curious eyes. That evening, back in Lexington Joyce had fixed a lovely pecan crusted salmon filet, grilled on a cedar plank, which went perfectly with the Greek salad. Then we all retired to the living room to watch a video of her son's performance as Dr. Seuss, and I must say his singing and acting were superb. Joyce had every reason to be very proud of him that night. After everyone headed for bed I sat outside on the deck with a cold beer watching the lightning from thunderstorms in the distance and the soft glow of fireflies in the garden. The next morning Kent suggested I drive to a place called "High Bridge" that was an engineering marvel.



Several miles southeast of Lexington I found the narrow, winding road that lead down the steep escarpment of the Kentucky River Palisades to the edge of the river where I had a spectacular view of the 1200 foot long, 160 foot high steel cantilever bridge spanning the gorge and carrying double tracks of the mainline Norfolk Southern Railroad. Back on top of the gorge I stopped at the High Bridge Park and took photos of the magnificent bridge as a couple of mile long freight trains crossed over the river. The sound of the trains as I stood directly under the

bridge was thundering and I could feel the vibration as they passed. From High Bridge I proceeded west to Camp Nelson Historical Site where over 25,000 slaves enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War in order to gain their emancipation. Ironically, slavery was still legal at the time in Kentucky and was so until July of 1865 when the 13th constitutional amendment ended slavery. On my way back to Lexington, I stopped at the William Whitley





Historic Site near Lancaster where I found out that Mr. Whitley had constructed a large circular race track for horse races that he held every Sunday. This was in 1790, so it is believed to be the origin of horse racing in Kentucky and the grandfather of the famous Kentucky Derby today. From Lancaster I stopped at the Richmond Battlefield, a Historic Site of one of the largest victories for the Confederate Army that took place early in 1862 as part of Robert E. Lee's "invasion of the North" which ended in the battle of Gettysburg. During the battle of Richmond, almost 80% of the 9,000 men in the Union Army were killed, wounded, or captured. Needless to say, it was a disaster for the Union. Upon returning to Lexington there was a reunion with

almost all the Ostrander family, including Grant, Kendall, and their two young children Cally and Riley. Eric was also there keeping Cally and Riley entertained. Later Kyle and his girlfriend arrived to join the dinner of BBQ ribs grilled outside on the deck. We all enjoyed the company of family that evening. The following

morning I bid my farewells to the family and began a 2 day drive through Indiana to join the Henderson family



reunion in Illinois. My journey started with a visit to the Buffalo Trace Distillery in Frankfort, Kentucky which remains the oldest distillery in America. As I walked among the old red brick buildings, many dating back to 1812 when the distillery was first established, I not only sensed the long history of the place but also the sweet fragrance of the bourbon as it matured in thousands of oak casks stored in the old warehouses. According to

historical records, the name of the distillery originates from the fact that on this site in ancient times was a major Buffalo crossing of the Kentucky River.

Of course I had to participate in the tasting of the product and I must say it was exceptionally smooth and full of flavor. Leaving Frankfort I travelled north to the Ohio River and crossed over into the historic town of Madison, Indiana. Alongside the river I found a lovely old yellow brick mansion and beautiful formal gardens that date back to the early 1800's and is now the Lanier Mansion State Historic Site. It was built by a wealthy banker named James F. D. Lanier who during the Civil War made several unsecured loans totaling more than \$1 million to the State of Indiana to enable the government to keep up the interest payments on its debt. In other words, he literally bailed out the government! Besides the elegant mansion, Madison has

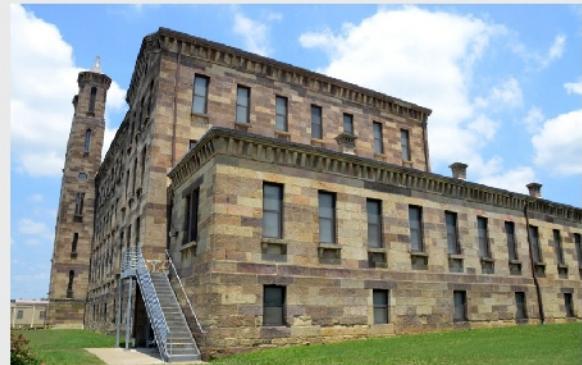


hundreds of historical buildings preserved downtown from the mid to late 1800's that now make up the largest contiguous National Historic Landmark in the United States. Pretty impressive for such a small town. From Madison I drove east along the Ohio River Scenic Byway to Charlestown State Park which was a former US Army Ammunition Depot, and down by the river's edge I came upon some huge old pumping facilities that were known as "Ranny" pumps. They used to draw water from the aquifer below the river to supply the depot in



manufacturing the ammunition, until the facility was closed in 1995. The facility is huge, with over 1000 structures occupying almost 20,000 acres, and during WWII it was the largest smokeless powder plant in the world, employing over 3000 people. Today most of the plant remains as an enormous complex of abandoned buildings looking like something from a Hollywood film about the end of the world. Also remaining on the site is an old railroad with railcars still on the tracks that were used to transport the gunpowder to ports on

the Ohio River. Further west on the Ohio River Scenic Byway I came to the small town of Cannelton, which was home to an old cotton mill built from beautiful yellow cut limestone. The mill was built in 1849 and at time was the largest industrial building west of the Allegheny Mountains, producing more than 200,000 pounds of cotton batting and 4 million yards of cotton sheeting. Today it's both a National Historic Landmark and an apartment complex for low income families. As I was walking around the grounds taking photos, a little old lady in a wheelchair stopped me to tell the story of her mother working in the old mill, how she grew up in the small town, and went on to work in the mill as well. From Cannelton I turned north and headed for the resort town of French Lick where I had



been given a recommendation for a place to stay for the night. As I drove into the small town I could see a large 8 story yellow brick building that dominated the surrounding area. This was the French Lick Springs Hotel that was built in 1901 and quickly became a celebrated haven for the rich and famous. The name French Lick derives from the fact that there are several salt deposits in the area that attracted large numbers of wildlife, as well as being a source of salt for Native Americans. Nearby was

a second resort by the name of West Baden Springs Hotel, built in 1902 and on an even grander scale, prompting me to enquire if there was a room available. After checking in I walked through the enormous atrium that is 6 stories high and surrounded by the guest rooms, all of which overlook the atrium. The stained glass domed ceiling was incredible as the sunlight streamed down from above to light the huge atrium as if it were outside, and the dome remained the largest in the world from 1902 until 1913. Even



today it is larger than St Peter's Basilica in Rome. Both hotels are surrounded by natural hot springs that once provided bathing and spa facilities for people on holiday from all over the world, most of whom arrived on the Monon Railroad from either Louisville or Indianapolis. Even today the area still bottles the natural mineral spring water under the label "Pluto Water" with its distinctive image of a red devil on each bottle. For a brief time in the history of the West Baden Springs Hotel it was used by a group of Jesuits and became West





Baden College, before returning to private ownership and renovation back to its original grandeur as a luxury hotel and resort. That evening I had a fabulous dinner in the main dining room that began with a bowl of Lobster bisque, followed by an entrée of Bison filet topped with bleu cheese and served with roasted corn and red pepper risotto. After dinner I sat on the veranda with a chilled glass of Cloudy bay Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand and listened to the sound of crickets and frogs in the warm night, with thunder and lightning in the distance.

The next day I visited the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial near Gentryville southwest of French Lick, which is the site of the Lincoln family home where young Abe lived from 1817 until 1830 until the family moved to Illinois. It was here while Abe was a young boy that his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, became ill and died from a case of "milk sickness", which today is very rare but was unfortunately quite common in the early 1800's. The memorial is housed in a lovely native limestone building



where a large number of artifacts and family heirlooms are on display. In addition there is a beautiful trail through the woods surrounding the memorial where 12 stones have been placed alongside the path, each one coming from a place where Abraham Lincoln lived, including a portion of the stone pillar from the house in Washington, DC in which he died. Just north of



Santa Claus (yes, *there is a town in Indiana with that name, and with a large theme park based on Christmas!*) I came to the small town of St Meinrad which is home to an incredible "Archabbey" that looks like it came directly from the Bavarian Alps. It has a beautiful cathedral and an active Benedictine Monastery with a large guest house for visitors who want to experience the life of a monk, for a short time anyway. The Abbey was founded 1854 by

monks from the Abbey of Einsiedeln, Switzerland and today there are almost 100 monks living in the monastery. From the monastery it was



a short drive west to the historic town of Vincennes on the banks of the Wabash River and the George Rogers Clark National Memorial that pays tribute to the man who lead American forces in 1779 to capture the strategic French fort at Vincennes and secure the Northwest Territory for the US. Later Clark would join Merriweather Lewis on the legendary expedition from 1804 to 1806 to the Pacific Ocean and the discovery of the source of the Missouri River. There were many other historic sites in the town, including the original state capitol of Indiana and the old printing

press from the late 1700's which Abraham Lincoln used for a brief time while travelling to Illinois. Just outside the town are the remains of Fort Knox, originally built after Clark's victory over the French to defend the new land during the War of 1812. It was near here at the village of Tippecanoe that Governor William Henry Harrison and a young Army Captain John Tyler defeated



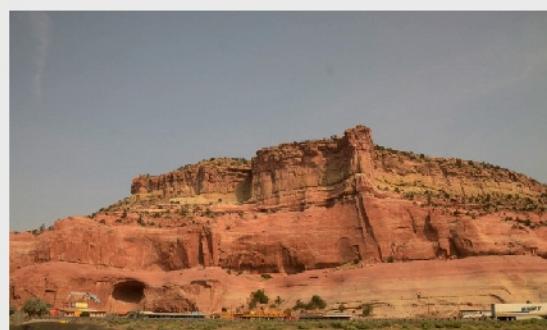
a large force of Indians led by the legendary Shawnee chief Tecumseh, and later when Harrison ran for President in 1840 he chose John Tyler as his running mate. This gave rise to the political slogan of the Whig party "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!" Leaving Vincennes I travelled northeast to Greene County to find an engineering marvel known as the "Tulip Trestle", a 160 foot high, half mile long steel railroad bridge that is still in operation today. The bridge was built in the early 1900's by the Illinois Central Railroad and remains the second largest steel railroad trestle in the world. Later I drove northwest through Indianapolis



and on to Champaign, Illinois for a meeting with some University of Illinois alumni working to raise funds for the renovation of a historic building on campus. After our meeting I was invited to join a tour of the Arboretum where we visited the new Japanese Garden and were fortunate to be able to view the interior of an authentic Tea House with 500 origami cranes hanging from the ceiling. It was an absolutely beautiful and peaceful corner of the Arboretum. That evening I shared dinner with Stan, an old buddy from my Forestry class, with both of us hoping to reconnect with other guys from our class someday soon. The next day I joined my sister for the Henderson family reunion in the small town of Assumption where we shared a lot of stories and old family photos. There were some heavy thunderstorms during the day, but we all had a great time catching up from the last reunion many years ago. The following day Lynn and I



joined our cousins from Georgia to tour several of the cemeteries and visit the graves of our family members. I also recorded the sites with photos that I plan to put into an album for the rest of the family. Soon it was time for me to drive to Cincinnati for my return flight to California. It was a straight route on I-74 through Indianapolis and on to the airport across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. As I sat in the Delta Airlines Skyclub with a cold glass of Stella Artois, I reflected back on my trip and all of the amazing places I had seen.



At the beginning of July I once again travelled to Santa Fe, New Mexico for a week of photography workshops on the topics of designing photo books and the fine art of travel photography. Rather than drive I decided to take the Amtrak Southwest Chief train from Los Angeles to Albuquerque, an overnight journey of 20 hours. The departure of the train was delayed for an hour so I had a glass of IPA in the classic Art-Deco Traxx Bar at Union Station while I waited for the announcement. Once onboard I went to the dining car for a delicious dinner of roasted chicken with garlic mashed potatoes and fresh steamed vegetables, along with New York cheesecake for dessert. Then I

returned to my compartment and sat with a glass of wine as the train slowly climbed up over Cajon Pass and on into the vast expanse of the Mojave Desert under a brilliant full moon. I fell asleep somewhere after we left Barstow and awoke the next morning as the train pulled into Williams Junction in northern Arizona as the sun was rising over the peaks of the San Francisco Mountains. For breakfast I was seated with George and Shirley, an elderly couple on the way to their 60th high school reunion in

Philadelphia. The rest of the morning the train rolled on through the Navajo Reservation and into the colorful red mesa country of northwestern New Mexico before arriving in Albuquerque on time. I hailed a taxi at the train station to go to the airport and pick up my rental car. Just after I got in the taxi the driver got a call on his cell phone about some issue with T-Mobile concerning his billing information. So here he was driving through downtown Albuquerque trying to juggle the cell phone, his credit card and the steering wheel, which began to scare me a bit, especially since he also had a "tic" which made him jump in his seat every couple of minutes! Thank goodness it was only a 10 minute ride to the airport. It was a pleasant drive north to Santa Fe but huge, dark storm clouds hung over the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east. I had booked a special rate room with my Hilton points at the Homewood Suites north of the city, and it happened to be located adjacent to the Buffalo Thunder Resort and Casino, also a Hilton property. For dinner that evening I went over to the Red Sage Restaurant in the



casino and had a marvelous southwestern version of a crab cake that was served with grilled bits of pork belly, unusual dish but very tasty. The workshop the next day really encouraged me to think seriously about making some photo books about some of my favorite places where I've travelled over the years. That evening I returned to the Red Sage Restaurant for another fantastic dinner, this one starting with fresh baked cornbread with red chiles and served with delicious tomato butter. Then came the main dish of perfectly grilled scallops on top of roasted corn and avocado puree and served with sliced bananas on a sautéed parsnip topped with fried pancetta – what a divine combination of flavors! The dessert was a deconstructed lemon meringue pie consisting of graham cracker crust, lemon curd, and toasted meringue on separate small plates. And to top it all off, I had a glass of white wine from Ponderosa Vineyards near San Ysidro, New Mexico. (yes, they do make wine in New Mexico) Then

I sat outside on the patio with my wine and watched the swallows darting to and fro as the sun was setting. Next day I was able to make two complete photo books using the Adobe Lightroom software, so it was a very enjoyable and productive workshop. In the evening there was a reception for everyone attending the workshops and loads of fresh shrimp, chicken satay, salads, and the locally brewed Santa Fe Pale Ale, as well as a chance to meet the instructor for my next workshop, Mark Harris, who turned out to be a very eclectic and fascinating photographer. The start of his workshop on the fine art of travel photography was very interesting as he showed us a couple of his books on North and South Korea. He's travelled all over the world and photographed almost every imaginable subject, yet he still has the same passion he began his career with more than 40 years ago. He lead us on a field trip



one afternoon to the Upaya Zen Center on the edge of Santa Fe and encouraged us to photograph familiar subjects from new perspectives, and it was a great learning experience for all of us that day. The following day he took us downtown

to the old plaza to photograph the traditional 4th of July pancake breakfast, such a different subject from the previous day at the Zen



center, but that was a point that Mark wanted to make. That evening, back at my hotel I had a spectacular view of huge thunderstorms over the Jimenez Mountains across the Rio Grande valley from Santa Fe. Another day Mark had us do a photo shoot at Eaves Ranch south of Santa Fe where a great many Hollywood movies have been



filmed, including even scenes from the classic "Easy Rider". The ranch is a collection of old buildings that are a re-creation of an old western town from the late 1800's, including a main street with saloon, bank, dance hall, general store, hotel, and of course the Sheriff's office. We had five professional models

who posed for photos according to how each photographer wanted to stage them, and despite our lack of experience dealing with a model they were extremely patient and helpful. Of particular note was an old cowboy by the name of Thomas who looked the quintessential rugged image of the cowboy from so many Hollywood films with his long grey hair and hat that had



seen many hot summers on the range. He was very easy to work with and even gave us many ideas for capturing some great shots using the setting of the old west town, so the whole afternoon was delightful as well as being a real learning experience. That same evening the whole class joined together to have dinner at a well-known local establishment called "Cowgirls" for a delicious BBQ buffet and to share our experiences over the past few days. On the final day of the workshop I drove south to Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument where the landscape has been formed into some very strange and unique shapes over thousands of years of wind and water erosion. Just as I arrived at the site I was immediately

enveloped in a very intense thunderstorm that poured down rain for over 30 minutes before the storm finally passed over. I was able to take a few photos from the viewpoint before park rangers showed up and said we all had to vacate the area because a flash flood was expected within the next half hour from the upper reaches of the canyon which would make the access road impassable. Later on I was able to hike

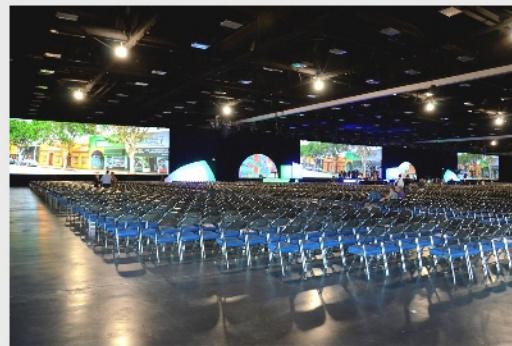


along one of the trails through the tent shaped rock formations taking photos as the sun began breaking through the clouds. That evening I checked out of the Homewood Suites and into the Inn at Loreto near the old town plaza where I had a beautiful room with a balcony overlooking St Francis Cathedral. Later I went over to Del Charro (*Spanish meaning the Cowboy*) and had their special for the night, the Red Chile burger and it was excellent, along with a cold pint of Santa Fe Pale Ale. I finished the evening at a local bar called "Evangelo's"

listening to a great band named "The Jakes" that played some classic rock-n-roll. A sign on the wall read "No Credit Cards – No Tabs – Cash Only – and No F**kin Buds", which stated the policy of the bar in no uncertain terms. The next morning I drove back to Albuquerque and boarded a flight to Salt Lake City where I connected with a flight to San Diego. There was a couple in the seats across the aisle from me who did not look happy with each other at all, and the flight attendant was spending a great deal of time talking quietly with the woman. Her husband was sleeping by the window, and he looked very old and not healthy. As we were getting off the plane in San Diego, the man who had been sitting next to me told me that the elderly man was the actor Richard Dreyfuss with his wife. All I could say was Richard had not aged well at all. The following day was the opening session of the Esri



International User Conference and I was there mainly to watch the plenary and to meet with some of our International Distributors. Of special note was the keynote speaker “will.i.am”, the world famous rap star who no one expected would have any interest or connection with GIS technology, but lo and behold he spoke eloquently and passionately about how Jack and Esri had changed the lives of so many inner city kids in LA by the donation of mapping software to their schools. I think the entire audience of 15,000 people was totally and pleasantly surprised by his presence on stage. Another highlight of being at the conference this year was the fact that I was finally able to accept the invitation from my great friends, Roger and Lila Tomlinson to join them for their annual client dinner, and this year they chose a magnificent restaurant in La Jolla by the name of Trulock’s. Dinner was outstanding, starting with a huge platter of seafood on ice, followed by a main dish of sweet and spicy roasted Halibut, and finished with a huge carrot cake for dessert – Thanks Roger and Lila for a wonderful evening of good food and great company!



In late July I joined my fellow PCMA board members for our annual event in Del Mar, a “Day at The Races”. On the way down to Del Mar I stopped at Mission San Luis Rey to take photos of the beautiful white cathedral that dates back to the early 1800’s when it was part of the “El Camino Real” (*Spanish meaning the King’s Road*) that connected all of the Spanish missions along the coast of California. Then I drove south on the Pacific Coast Highway to the glider port at Torrey Pines State Park to watch the para-gliders sail effortlessly on the strong updrafts from the ocean. (meanwhile, the pelicans, seagulls, and ravens were doing the same thing, but without the expense of all the gear!) Since I still had plenty of time before our event began, I drove down to the very end of the road, a place called Border Field State Park that is a large estuary of the Tijuana River literally on the border with Mexico. Not only is it an important nature reserve for migratory birds, it is also the most southwesterly point in the US. As I hiked out to the beach, I had a clear view of the massive 30 foot high steel fence that separates us from Mexico, and beyond the fence were thousands of houses along with a few hotels and casinos on the bluff, in sharp contrast to the undeveloped estuary below. As the sun began to set I headed back north to Del Mar and had dinner at the Brigantine Restaurant overlooking the race track. The macadamia nut crusted Halibut served on a bed of Porchini mushrooms and herb polenta was amazing, and the homemade key lime pie for dessert topped off the evening for me. Our event the next day featured a very fun educational program presented by Milo Shapiro who lead all of us in a series of “improve” games designed to make us think and communicate in some very different ways. At the end, everyone had to agree that improve was a lot harder than they had thought. Following the educational program, a “retired” bookie gave us a short lesson in how to read a racing program and bet on the horses before we all went over to the race track in an old London double-decker bus that had been used on the Battersea route. While everyone else was thrilled about riding in a real London bus, I reflected back on my days of living in London and actually riding on the buses, perhaps even the one I was riding on now. At the race track we enjoyed drinks



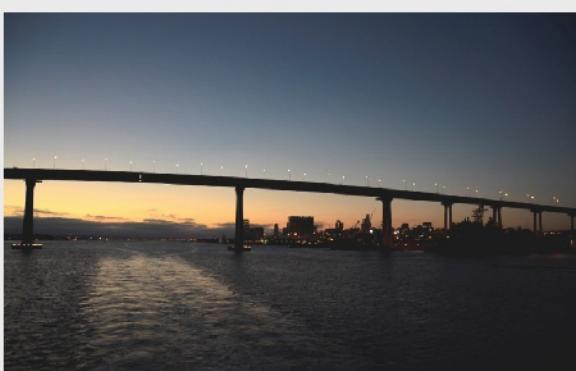


and snacks while watching the races, and a few people actually won some money betting on the horses. In the sixth race, the longest of all at one and a half miles, the horse that won the race was running dead last until the final two furlongs when he dashed to the finish line to win by a nose! I finished the evening with delicious dinner of baked Dungeness crab and artichoke dip served with fresh baked sourdough rolls at the Fish Market across the street from the hotel. On my

way home the next day I stopped at the San Diego Safari Park to see the new exhibit called the "Lemur Walk", which is an enclosure with beautiful Ring Tailed Lemurs from Madagascar. But what makes this so unusual is the fact that you are allowed to walk into the enclosure and get face to face with the little guys – truly an amazing experience!



Early in August I was invited to a social event in San Diego known as the "All Industry Cruise" which is hosted by several meeting and conference management industry organizations. There happened to be a baseball game scheduled in the afternoon so I decided to get a ticket and watch the game before the cruise departed in the evening. As I walked over to PETCO Park I saw the Barnum and Bailey Circus train sitting on a siding in the BNSF railyard. Once in the park I headed to "Hodad's Burgers" for lunch and found the restaurant packed with people, but I was able to find one seat open at the bar. The guy sitting next to me was doing a pretty good job of putting away a massive double bacon cheeseburger when he got a text message from one of his employees. He called the man back and got his voicemail, and at that point I overheard him say "answer your phone dude, I can see you standing at the gate". Turns out he was also looking at a video feed on his iPad from one of the surveillance cameras at his company's warehouse in Las Vegas! San Diego was playing Baltimore and the game was tied 1-1 in the 6th inning, but San Diego changed pitchers in the 7th after the starting pitcher allowed the bases loaded. Ironically, the very first pitch by the relief pitcher was a home run for Baltimore scoring 4 runs, and the game ended with San Diego losing 10-1. After the game I walked over to the waterfront where I boarded the Hornblower Cruise ship and met up with my friend Maureen and two young guys who were helped by her organization to become the first in their family to graduate from college. They shared their stories with me and it was quite inspirational, and by coincidence, the name of the ship was "Inspiration Hornblower". There were over 1,000 people on board and on all 3 decks were lots of food stations and bars, as well as live entertainment to encourage everyone to mingle and network. I spent a lot of the time on the top deck as the ship slowly cruised



around San Diego Bay and south toward the huge US Navy shipyard. As we passed under the massive Coronado Bridge we had spectacular views of the San Diego skyline with the sun setting over Point Loma, which created some beautiful reflections in the bay. Later I headed downstairs to get some food and listen to beautiful Spanish guitar music by a local artist before the ship docked back at the cruise ship port. The next day I drove north through the San Diego Mountains and the small towns of Ramona, Julian, and Warner Springs to the Santa Ysabel



Mission. It was founded in 1818 as part of the expansion of Spanish Missions in southern California and was rebuilt around 1850. The small chapel, with lovely stained glass windows is surrounded by large old live oak trees and still functions today as the religious center for the San Ysabel Indian Reservation. From Santa Ysabel I continued my journey north through the Anza Valley and across the summit of the Santa Rosa Mountains before descending 5000 feet down the very steep, twisting highway to Palm Desert and the Coachella Valley. The entire valley was filled with thick smoke from a large wildfire burning to the west of Palm Springs. I had booked a room at the Westin Mission



Hills Hotel and after checking in I headed to the Bella Vista Restaurant in the hotel for dinner. I started with an appetizer of prosciutto and olives served with balsamic vinegar and rustic Italian bread, followed by the main dish of huge juicy pork tenderloin that was grilled to perfection and served with a fantastic lemon mustard sauce, roasted fingerling potatoes and crispy bacon. The chilled glass of crisp, fruity Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand

paired with it very nicely. I finished the night on the patio of the lobby bar in the warm desert air with another glass of wine while I listened to a local musician playing some beautiful music on an acoustic guitar. The next day, on my way back home I stopped to visit the Air Museum in Palm Springs and found it had a marvelous collection of aircraft and very interesting displays

from WWII in Europe and the Pacific. Of special note

was the fully restored B-17 bomber and the detailed history of its bombing raids over Germany. This was the same type of plane in which my father was a radio operator during the war, and by chance I was able to find out exactly where he was stationed with the 457th Bombardment Group of the 8th Air Force at Glatton Airfield south of Peterborough. It's an excellent museum and well worth another visit.

In mid-August I discovered there is a true "wilderness area" called O'Neill Regional Park located in the Cleveland National Forest at the foot of the Santa Ana Mountains of Orange County, not far from the city of Irvine. Much of the area is covered in chaparral and mountain oak forest with some beautiful old groves of huge live oak trees in the valley. I hiked one of the many trails that wind their way through the forest and grassland, with lovely views of the mountains. Along the way were several signs posted warning of frequent Mountain Lion sightings in the area, unfortunately the lions were nowhere to be seen but that doesn't mean they weren't there perhaps watching me. Leaving the park that afternoon I stopped at "Cook's Corner", a rustic old bar that dates back to the late 1800's when it served the local ranches as a general store. These days it's a popular bar with bikers and there were several "hogs" parked outside, as well as a lot of flyers pasted on the walls advertising motorcycles for sale. The bar served up a delicious crispy chicken sandwich and a cold beer that I enjoyed outside on the patio as lots of Harleys roared by.





At the end of August I made a trip to Santa Paula and Fillmore to check out the Fillmore and Western Railroad, and on the way I stopped at Placerita Canyon County Park and Preserve located south of Santa Clarita. The valley is surrounded by beautiful hills of tall golden grass and small groves of oak trees, with the rugged San Gabriel Mountains and Angeles National Forest beyond. Despite the 100 degree weather I hiked up a trail through the tall grass to the top of the ridge for a great view of the area, but with no shade around I didn't stay very long

before heading back down the mountain. Near the base of the ridge, among a grove of huge old live oaks, I discovered the remains of the Walker Homestead dating back to the early 1900's when there were several large ranches in the region. All that is standing today are the stone pillars on the front porch and 3 concrete water storage tanks. The drive from Santa Clarita to Fillmore and Santa Paula passed through the beautiful Santa Clarita valley with agricultural fields and vineyards so reminiscent of the landscape of Tuscany. In Santa Paula I had booked a room at the historic Glen Tavern Inn near the old Southern Pacific Railroad depot in the center of the small town. The Inn was built in 1911 using a design from 18th century England with large timbers and whitewashed walls – very pretty indeed. Over the years it has had many ups and downs as the fortunes of the town rose and fell, but during the 1930's it was the location for several Hollywood westerns. On one occasion it hosted such notable guests as Carol Lombard, John Wayne, Harry Houdini, and even the canine legend "Rin Tin Tin". It is also a favorite haunt for ghost hunters who claim to have seen several former guests who for unknown reasons have preferred to extend their stay. Across the street at the Railroad Plaza is a very interesting outdoor display of local history detailing the founding of Santa Paula which was based on the citrus industry and oil production. In fact, this area was the first place oil was discovered in California, which lead to the founding of the Union Oil Company in Santa Paula. As a result of the extensive agricultural industry in the region, the majority of the population is of Hispanic origin, which accounts for most of the signs being in Spanish. The downtown area has a lot of old stores that have been turned into shops selling cheap second hand merchandise, including the "Old El Paso Department Store" which had an enormous stuffed toy shark wearing a large sombrero with the words "Viva la Mexico" in the window. It was a surprise for me to find "Garman's Irish Pub" just a few doors down the street where I had a grilled chicken and extra sharp cheddar cheese "boxty" for dinner, along with a pint of Guinness. So what is a boxty you ask – a potato pancake/crepe stuffed with something savory, such as grilled chicken, beef, or salmon. I can tell you it was absolutely delicious and served with fresh steamed veggies as well. I finished the evening with a glass of wine at the Rabalais Bistro across the street, a new Cajun restaurant in an old building that was once the



California Hardware Store in the early 1900's. Old photos of the store showed the walls stocked with all manner of hardware with a nut, bolt, or screw nailed to the front of each of the drawers which were reached by climbing a tall ladder. It was a fascinating look at the history of the old building. The next morning I visited the Oil Museum that is housed in a lovely red brick building downtown, the original headquarters of the Union Oil Company. There were many fascinating and interesting displays of everything to do with the oil industry, from exploration and drilling to

production and marketing, including a large number of old oil company signs and gas pumps, some of which still had the prices listed, like 13 cents a gallon! A highlight of the museum was a full scale reproduction of a wooden drill rig from the late 1800's that became a working display as soon as one approached it. Besides being able to see the rig in operation there was a fascinating video explaining every detail of how it worked. In the afternoon I drove to Fillmore a few miles east of Santa Paula and boarded the Fillmore & Western Railroad's weekend excursion train that took us on a 2 hour journey through the lush farmlands of the Santa Clarita Valley with large fields of vegetables, extensive lemon groves, avocado orchards, and many vineyards marching up the hillsides. It was like travelling through a small bit of Italy. During the short stopover in Santa Paula I paid a visit to the Ventura County Agricultural Museum and learned a lot about the history and importance of agriculture in the



county, all the way from the earliest Mexican ranchos to the modern day family and corporate farms. There were lots of vintage tractors and farm equipment including an old steam powered threshing machine and one of the first caterpillar tractors manufactured. I also found out that the number 1 crop in the county last year was strawberries, followed by lemons, tomatoes, and beans. Other important crops were avocados, walnuts, and celery. It was abundantly clear that agriculture in Ventura County was an extremely important part of its history as well as its economy today.

At the beginning of September I made preparations to attend the Photoshop World Conference in Las Vegas, but rather than go directly there I decided to leave a few days early and travel by way of northern Arizona and southern Utah to see some of the National Parks in the late summer. As I drove east through the Mojave Desert there were heavy thunderstorms over the mountains as a result of the strong flow of moisture from Baja California, known as the "Arizona Monsoon", which also made it quite warm and humid. I crossed the Colorado River at



Parker, Arizona and drove along the shore of Lake Havasu surrounded on both sides by rugged barren mountains made even more spectacular with the huge thunderstorms and brilliant sunshine streaking through the rain clouds over them. I took a short detour into Havasu City to see the famous London Bridge which now has a huge resort surrounding it, before continuing north to Kingman and the junction with I-40. Along the way I ran into a couple of short but very intense thunderstorms that slowed traffic to a crawl for a few minutes, and then it was back to 75 mph again. I pulled into Williams that evening, checked into the Grand Canyon Railroad Hotel, and walked over to "Cruiser's 66 Café" on Main Street for one of their delicious grilled chicken sandwiches and a cold pint of local Grand Canyon Pale Ale. The bartender recommended that I try their new stout which had a distinctive chocolate malt flavor and it was fantastic. The next morning was clear and sunny as I drove east on old route 66, which runs parallel with



I-40, to Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument, where there was a recent eruption just 900 years ago, which is a blink of the eye in geologic time. It is surrounded by a forest of tall Ponderosa Pines in the Coconino National Forest and many lava flows that still bear the marks of the eruption.

Further north I made a

brief stop at the east gate of Grand Canyon National Park before heading east across the Navajo and Hopi Reservations to the small town of Chinle where I booked a room at the Sacred Canyon Lodge located at the entrance to Canyon de Chelly National Monument. In the evening there was a beautiful sunset and views of huge thunderstorms and lightning in the distance. As night fell I drove up to a viewpoint and sat alone on



the edge of the canyon to watch the lightning storms over the mountains, which were really spectacular. Suddenly I looked up and directly overhead the sky was perfectly clear and filled with millions of bright stars in the Milky Way. After breakfast at the lodge I drove back up to the south rim of the canyon where there were incredible views of the lush green valley below that has been cultivated by the Navajo people for hundreds of years. On the north side of the canyon I could see some ancient remains of cliff dwellings just below the rim of the

canyon, almost a thousand feet above the valley. There were several viewpoints along the canyon rim and at "Sliding House Rock" I met two young Navajo guys, Calvin and Mark, who were selling their rock paintings. Calvin took time to explain all the intricate details of his painting that represented the heart and soul of his culture and heritage. I wanted to buy the painting but I had only \$3.00 cash and it was clear that Calvin had no way to accept a credit card. Then Calvin said "please take the painting and come back after you go to the



bank in Chinle", but since it was more than 25 miles back to the town I was reluctant to drive there and back again. At that point Calvin said he



would go with me so that I didn't have to come back up the road again. So he and Mark piled into my jeep with all of their artwork and we headed for town. Along the way they told me about their life on the reservation and that they both had family who lived in the canyon, still farming in the ways of their ancestors. It was fascinating to hear the history of the canyon from people who lived there, and we had a great time "going to town" together. Later on at the eastern end of the canyon I met another young Navajo man who was a musician and had recorded a CD of traditional Navajo flute music which

he had performed in one of the old cliff dwellings, once home to the Anasazi people, so I had to buy a copy. I also found out he had learned to play the native flute while attending the Sherman Indian School in Riverside, California. As I drove north along the border with New Mexico, the sun was brilliantly reflected off the colorful red rock cliffs, in sharp contrast to the lush green irrigated fields in the valley below. From here I turned west across





the red desert of northern Arizona toward the town of Page where I stopped at the "Big Lake Trading Post" to fill my gas tank. As I walked in to pay I noticed the clerk was packing a sidearm, which isn't that common a sight at most convenience stores. When I asked about the road south going south to Marble Canyon, my destination for the night, he said the highway was only open during daylight hours, and as it was now getting close to sunset, I might have to take the detour through Kanab, Utah. Seeing as how that would add almost 4 hours to my journey I decided to take a chance on the highway south still being open. From the trading post I followed several cars south on the highway and after a couple of miles we came to a large sign in the road saying that it was open to local traffic only, at which point most of the cars turned around, but one car from Texas went on around the sign and so

I followed. The highway was brand new and straight as an arrow, but there were speed limit signs for 35 mph which seemed incredibly slow, so the Texas car continued on down the highway at 75 mph and so did I. After about 25 miles we came over a hill and suddenly found ourselves behind another line of cars that were going 35 mph. This continued for another couple of miles before the guy from Texas got frustrated and pulled around the line to pass everyone. But he barely had time to pull back into the right lane before a car came over the hill ahead, and wouldn't you know, it was the Arizona State Patrol! The cop pulled over the Texas car and the rest of us drove on



by, knowing that the man from Texas had "taken the bullet" for us. By this time I reached the junction with highway 89A west to Marble Canyon, my destination for the night. The entire town consists of a lodge, gas station, convenience store, laundromat, and post office all rolled into one. I was up early the next morning and drove down to the historic Navajo Bridge, a 1200 foot steel arch bridge built in 1929, the first one to cross the Colorado River for more than 300 miles up or down the river. Until that time the only way to cross the river was by

ferry at a location known as Lee's Ferry, where the water was wide and shallow. This was also the site where Native Americans had crossed for centuries past. In 1994 a new bridge was built to handle the increased traffic, and it was built in the same design as the original 1929 bridge. On the west side of the bridge is a beautiful sandstone visitor center that was built in the 1930's by the CCC as a rest stop on the "Arizona Road", now US 89A. Today the highway still remains the only paved road across an area of more than



2.8 million acres of northern Arizona and southern Utah.

From Marble Canyon the highway passed through dry grassland following the base of the spectacular Vermillion Cliffs and then climbed 3000 feet up to the top of the Kaibab Plateau, into tall Ponderosa Pines at 8000 feet elevation in the Kaibab National Forest. I stopped at Jacob Lake for some coffee and when I went to pay I found I was a penny short, but the young



cashier said it would do since the difference wouldn't affect her "college fund". Several miles further north I came to an overlook on the edge of the plateau that had an incredible view of Hurricane Valley more than 3000 feet below and brilliant red cliffs beyond in southern Utah. I stopped to fill up with gas in Kanab and then followed the highway into Zion National Park with its spectacular 1000 foot sheer



cliffs of red rock forming the narrow canyon of the Virgin



River. The highway must descend through a mile long tunnel and a series of very tight, steep switchbacks to reach the floor of the canyon and along the way are several places where one has incredible views of unbelievable proportions, almost like entering another world. It is one of the most spectacular drives I've ever seen and I look forward to a time when I can return to the park for an extended stay. But I had to

move on in order to be in Las Vegas by the evening. Eventually I reached St George, Utah and I-15 that would take me south to Las Vegas. Along the way I stopped briefly at a small town called Bunkerville on the banks of the Virgin River and happened to see a street named "Hopeless Way". Imagine having an address like that! As I-15 crossed over a high ridge the skyline of Las Vegas came into view below, with a dramatic backdrop of rugged mountains and huge clouds rising thousands of feet above them. Soon I found myself in the midst of the Las Vegas traffic on my way to the MGM Grand Hotel where I checked into a suite on the 28th floor with a beautiful view of the city lights. That evening I went to the Steakhouse for dinner and



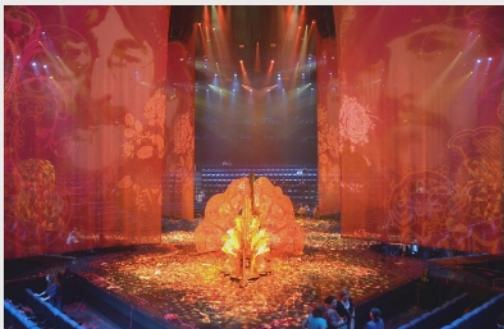
ordered the Lobster bisque to start. It was superb and served with large chunks of Lobster and cilantro in the bottom of the bowl over which a rich tomato bisque was poured, along with fresh baked dinner rolls in the baking tin. For the main dish I had fresh Halibut poached in a savory garlic stock and served over fresh steamed vegetables and roasted fingerling potatoes – a fantastic dinner. The next morning I walked over to the Mandalay Bay Hotel to check in for the Photoshop World Conference and was



given an alumni ribbon with my badge that allowed me to take advantage of the VIP lounge before the start of the opening session, as well as being able to sit a special section at the front of the hall. There were many great sessions during the day and once again I learned a lot that will help me further elevate the level of my photography. Late in the afternoon the storm clouds rolled in with a brief but intense thunderstorm directly over the city. Later I had dinner in the Rainforest Café and savored a delicious honey glazed tempura Mahi Mahi and shrimp dish along with fresh steamed veggies. Suddenly the gorillas and elephants throughout the restaurant came to life for a few minutes as African tribal music played in the background and then they returned to their "off" position. It startled some of us, but the kids were thrilled to see them move and make sounds. The next day was another great learning experience and I was able to talk with a couple of the software engineers from Adobe Systems regarding questions I had about designing my new website, so it was a very productive day. In the



evening I met up with my old Army buddy Mike and we shared old stories of our days stationed in Germany as we had dinner at the RiRa Irish Pub in the Mandalay Bay Hotel. It seems he had spent a few hours at the penny slots at the MGM before we met up, and as Mike's philosophy goes "if you break even you've beat the house". As we left the hotel after dinner Mike insisted on going to the shopping center at Planet Hollywood to show me an incredible clock that he almost bought for his new house when he moved to Las Vegas. Since the price of the clock was just under \$10,000 he asked me to knock him over the head if he attempted to buy it this time. As we entered the store I had to admit the clock was an incredibly unique artistic piece of work, with lots of rotating gears and levers. There were several other gorgeous pieces by the same artist, but when Mike turned the corner and suddenly saw a stunning white marble wall sculpture of a beautiful nude woman lying down and seeming to come halfway out of the wall, he fell in love! (*I believe she must have reached and grabbed him*) After half an hour of discussion with the salesman, Mike decided it would be perfect for the wall above his fireplace so he bought it for



\$10,000. I asked him if he wanted me to knock him on the head but he was too much in love with the sculpture. The following day I wished myself a Happy Birthday and enjoyed several more great sessions at the conference. At the closing session that afternoon it was announced that Adobe was giving every one of the 5000 attendees a free year's subscription to the entire suite of software in the Creative Cloud which normally costs \$500, so now my subscription is extended until May of 2015. In the evening I had a fabulous Italian dinner in the Onde

Restaurant at the Mirage Hotel before going to the Cirque de Soleil production of "Love", a spectacular tribute to the Beatles. It was a stunning performance in all aspects, from the set designs to the costumed characters. The show proceeded from the early Beatles songs to the later ones and the interpretation of each song by the Cirque de Soleil was absolutely amazing – adding great depth to the understanding of each one. The show was truly a creative experience for all us. The following morning I checked out of the hotel and headed for home by way of old route 66 through the Mojave Desert rather than joining the crowd on I-15. Along the way I stopped at the Kelso Depot for a hotdog and iced tea from the Beanery Café, which used to be a major rest stop for the passengers on the Union Pacific Limited steam trains travelling between Chicago and Los Angeles.

Kelso was also the place where the steam locomotives took on fuel and water, as well as



helper engines for the steep 2.2% grade heading east to Las Vegas. During the height of activity there were more than 10,000 people living in Kelso, but today the town is home to less than 200, most of them work for the railroad or the National Park Service. Several miles west of Kelso I saw a large white marble statue of a Chinese lion sitting less than 100 yards from the road, so I stopped to

investigate. There was nothing to indicate why it was sitting alone amidst the vast barren desert, or who was responsible for putting it there – a real mystery. Further on I saw several railcars that seemed to be lying on their side near the mainline tracks of the BNSF railroad. I stopped and walked over to see what had happened and discovered the twisted remains of a big derailment that must have taken place recently. As I walked among the overturned, wrecked railcars, two long freight trains rumbled past me travelling at least 60 mph. Soon I was back on old route 66 to Barstow on my way home.



In mid-September I began my annual trek north to Alaska to visit family and friends, but rather than fly this time I decided to go my other means of transportation. I began by taking the Metrolink train into Los Angeles to connect with the Amtrak Coast Starlight train that would take me to Seattle, a journey of 2 days. The route up the coast of California to San Luis Obispo gave us gorgeous views of the beaches and ocean on one side and the rugged Santa Monica Mountains on the other. There was also a large group aboard as part of Great Western Tours heading for Klamath Falls and Crater Lake National Park. I had lunch in the Pacific Parlor Car, and the smoked salmon with horseradish cream cheese and sliced red onion on a honey cranberry multi-grain bagel was fantastic. Leaving the coast behind, the train slowly climbed up and over the Coast



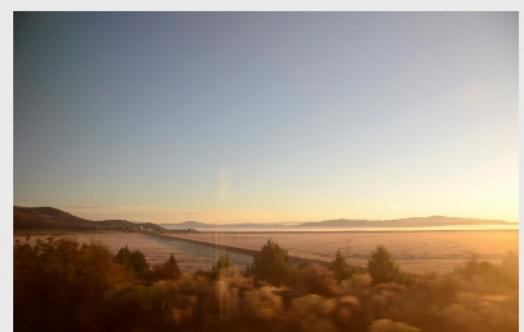
Range to Paso Robles and into the Salinas Valley as we sat in the Parlor Car tasting four wines from California and three cheeses from Oregon. For many miles the train rolled on past large fields of produce, vineyards, and cattle ranches. As we approached San Jose the fog from the ocean began to roll in and the wind picked up significantly, almost gale force at times, stirring up huge clouds of dust from the fields. Later that evening I had dinner again in the Parlor Car and enjoyed a delicious meal of braised short ribs in a spicy sauce of ancho chile and molasses. Then I sat in my

compartment with a cold Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, listening to music as the train quietly rolled through the night across the Sacramento River Delta on its way to Redding and Mt Shasta. The next morning I awoke as the sun was rising over the lava plains of northeastern California and the fog from Tule Lake made it look like a mystic landscape in the early morning light, especially with some of the volcanic hills rising above the fog as if they were "islands" in a sea of clouds. We arrived in Klamath Falls over an hour early under a clear sky and with traces of frost still on the ground. There was plenty of time to walk around, and as I approached the end of the platform a massive Union Pacific freight train pulled into the station headed southbound. Two UP employees with their travel bags stood next to the track as the lead locomotive slowly stopped at exactly the point where they had placed their bags. I found out later it was sort of a game with the incoming crew, to see how close they could bring the



huge train to a full stop. The crews changed within a few minutes and the southbound freight was underway again. I stood in the morning chill and watched as the massive train, lead by 4 locomotives, slowly made its way south, and disappeared into the dense fog. But the long line of railcars continued to pass me for what seemed forever. I walked over to one of the locomotive engineers who had brought the train into the station and asked him about its length. He told me the train was 6,840 feet long and weighed just over 94,000 tons! Just then the rear of the

train passed us, powered by two more locomotives. He also told me he started his trip last night in Eugene and he would spend the next 12 hours at the hotel in Klamath Falls before taking a northbound freight back to Eugene. (no one else on the Amtrak train had any idea what had taken place on the adjacent track) Soon it was departure



time for the Coast Starlight and we had some spectacular views of Lower Klamath Lake filled with all kinds of migratory waterfowl and the peaks of the Cascade Range in the distance. Beyond the huge lake the route passed through the Winema National Forest and large stands of beautiful Ponderosa Pine under clear blue skies before turning west to begin the slow climb over the Cascade Mountains to Willamette Pass. We continued through several tunnels and snowsheds as the forest slowly changed from Ponderosa Pine and



Lodgepole Pine to Douglas Fir and Englemann Spruce. A long, slow twisting descent down the steep western slopes of the Cascades brought us into Eugene – but not before suddenly coming to a screaming halt just short of the station as the train horn blared continuously. Obviously something was wrong and several minutes later the conductor made an announcement that we had made an emergency stop because a homeless man was lying on the

track! After a short stop in Eugene the train continued its journey north through the lush Willamette Valley, passing countless fields of produce, large numbers of orchards, and of course, many vineyards. The afternoon wine tasting in the Parlor Car featured wines from Oregon and Washington. Of special note was the "Hogue Genesis Syrah" from Washington's Columbia Valley that paired perfectly with the "Lavender Touvelle" cheese from Oregon's Rogue River Creamery! After a



brief stop in Portland we continued north across the Columbia River and on to Seattle, with beautiful views of Puget Sound as the sun was setting behind the Olympic Mountains. As I walked into the King Street Station I was blown away by the gorgeous white marble interior which had been restored to its former grandeur since my last visit when it looked more like an old warehouse. I took a taxi to the

Sheraton Hotel downtown and checked into a nice corner room with a lovely view of the Space Needle shining in the night. The next morning the skies were clear and sunny so I headed down to the Pike Place Farmers Market to take some photos of the activity and it was very crowded with tourists as well as locals. From the market I walked north to the University District to meet up with my old friend and forestry professor Gordon



Bradley for lunch at the Faculty Club on campus. We spent a couple of hours catching up on all that had happened since we last met several years ago, and it was a marvelous time. From the campus I walked up to the top of Capitol Hill by way of beautiful Interlaken Park to see the old apartment building across from Volunteer Park where Marion and I lived for a few years after returning from our overland trip in Africa. As I walked along the lovely, quiet tree lined streets I noticed very little about the neighborhood of grand old homes had changed. Before



returning to the hotel downtown I stopped for a beer at a classic local bar on 15th Avenue called the "Hopvine" and sat outside watching people going about their daily life in the city. Later that evening I walked over to Lake Union to visit my old friends Bob and Blair on their charming houseboat for dinner with our old friends Lynne and Michael. Blair prepared a fantastic array of delicious dishes, including roasted peppers, humus with fresh veggies, paella, and an amazing fresh berry and peach pastry for dessert. We all had a lovely time enjoying dinner and sharing stories on the deck of the houseboat, with incredible views of the Seattle skyline across the lake as the sun was setting. It was absolutely one of the most beautiful settings in the city. Before we departed, Blair showed us some of her latest art work with wire that only reveals the subject as a shadow as light is projected on it – very unique and fascinating! The following day I took a shuttle to Bellingham to board the Alaska ferry for the next leg of my journey. As I boarded the ferry passengers were informed that the



ship runs on Alaska Daylight Time, so we all had to set our watches back one hour before departure. After checking into my stateroom I made my way to the cafeteria and had a delicious dish of baked Alaskan black cod with a tartar mayonnaise soufflé sauce, along with a cold glass of Alaskan Pale Ale. There were around 150 passengers on board the large ship which has a capacity of 700 passengers, and at this time of the year very few tourists travel north so most of the people were "locals". For those of you who have not travelled on the Alaska ferry, known as the Alaska Marine Highway System, the ships are pretty basic, having a cafeteria, bar, and observation lounge, as well as a small movie theater. So it means that one has a lot of time to relax, watch the magnificent scenery slowly pass, and look for wildlife. Somewhere along the coast of British Columbia during the night the weather had changed significantly and I awoke to find light rain and fog enveloping the ship as it slowly made its way among the hundreds of small islands that make up the "Inside Passage". The large breakfast of corned beef hash and eggs prepared me well for the chilly wind as I stood outside on the deck. The route of the ferry follows the entire length



of the Inside Passage, roughly 1200 miles, of which 95% of the time is smooth sailing, but there is one place north of the Queen Charlotte Islands where it must cross the open ocean and the sailing can be a bit rough for a couple of hours. The journey along the coast of British Columbia took us past steep mountains with heavy forest and rocky shores, and only a few small fishing villages along the way. Our first stop was the port of Ketchikan, about 37 hours sailing time from Bellingham and as we docked the weather had turned to a steady rain that is so typical of



southeast Alaska. After Ketchikan the ferry continued northward, threading its way through a myriad of remote islands and only occasionally passing another vessel, one of which was a tugboat towing a huge barge of containers stacked 6 high. Dinner in the cafeteria was always something to look forward to and one evening I had a fabulous dish of baked salmon topped with jalapeno cream sauce. Later in the bar as I sat with a glass of Alaskan IPA and wrote in my journal, one of the young soldiers on his way to Fort Richardson, seated at the bar got up, walked over to the old upright piano in the corner and proceeded to play a beautiful piece of classical music, to the surprise and delight of everyone. The ferry made stops in the small fishing towns of Wrangell and Petersburg before pulling into Juneau at 5:00am to disembark a large number of passengers and



unload several truck trailers, which made for a lively scene in the early morning light. As we left Juneau the sun was rising and clouds were beginning to break up, so the prospects for a clear day were promising. After taking a shower and having breakfast in the cafeteria, I spent most of the rest of the day outside on the deck taking photos of the spectacular scenery of rugged snowcapped mountains and

glaciers that came down to the sea. The further north we went the more spectacular it seemed to become, and to our joy, some dolphins and killer whales decided to follow us for a while. There were times when the huge ship had to navigate a very narrow passage formed by the steep, rugged mountains rising several thousand feet above the water. Just before



reaching our final stop, the old gold rush town of Skagway, I spotted several bald eagles perched in the tall trees that carpet the lower slopes of the Coast Mountains. To everyone's surprise, we arrived in Skagway exactly on schedule after sailing for over 67 hours – pretty impressive, especially considering some inclement weather conditions along the

route. Skagway is a very small town so it's easy to walk to just about anywhere you need to go. After checking into my room at Sgt Preston's Lodge I strolled around town taking photos of the lovely restored old Victorian buildings built in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Many of the old historic buildings were restored by the National Park Service when it established the Klondike National Historic



Park, including "The Mascot", one of the most famous old saloons that now has a very realistic exhibit depicting a typical bar scene from the gold rush days of 1898, complete with sound effects. In fact, many people walking by thought it was a real bar and went in to order a drink! As I walked around the town I saw only a few people and quite a few closed signs on the shops and restaurants, so it was clear this was near the end of the tourist season. There were some very interesting displays and exhibits about the 1898



Klondike Gold Rush at the National Park Visitor Center, as well as a fascinating film that told the story of 100,000 people who "stampeded" to reach the Klondike and less than 30,000 actually made it all the way to Dawson City in the Yukon Territory. That evening I went to the Red Onion Saloon, reputed to be Skagway's favorite watering hole, for a delicious dish of fresh rockfish served with pineapple

mango salsa and black bean chipotle sauce. The historic old bar has a very rustic interior with a long row of "bedpans" of various sizes and shapes nailed to the top of one long wall, while painted portraits of Skagway's most notorious "ladies of the night" hung on the wall above the bar. About a half hour later a large group of young people and their families filled the place and a bell was rung behind the bar that signaled the pouring of shots of Jameson whiskey for everyone. I soon found out that I was in the middle of the company party for employees of the Skagway Brewery, but what confused me was the fact that the Red Onion Saloon did not serve any Skagway beer! However it didn't seem to matter to the party as the night went on and the local band called the Windy Valley Boys began to play some great Irish and Cajun music. The little kids of 5 and 6 years old were having a ball "dancing" to the music while their parents celebrated the end

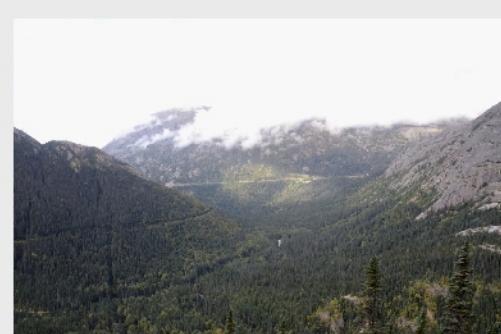


of another successful tourist season. Before I left the bar I asked the bartender what the place was like when the big cruise ships pull into port, and she said all the servers get dressed up in tight corsets and dance hall gowns, and as I was trying to visualize the scene she handed me a copy of their 2014 calendar with "pin-up" photos of each girl. The next morning I was up early to board the historic White Pass and Yukon train that travelled to the summit of White Pass on the Yukon border.

Just as I turned to corner on to the main street I suddenly found myself in the midst of thousands of people who had arrived on two large cruise ships in the middle of the night! The journey on the train up to White Pass climbed over 3000 feet in less than 20 miles, which is a very steep grade for any railroad. The first half of the trip climbed slowly up the narrow valley along the banks of the Skagway River before starting the much steeper ascent up the rocky slopes of a side canyon where we had absolutely spectacular views of the railroad high up on the far side of the canyon as it crossed several bridges that were literally "clinging" to rocky ledges. Soon we were on the other side of the canyon looking down over a thousand feet to where we had come from, and in the distance we saw Skagway and the ocean, the huge cruise



ships looking like tiny white boxes. Nearing the summit of White Pass we came to one of the many engineering wonders on the railroad, an enormous wooden trestle bridge spanning the canyon in a long arc. It was very impressive, but it had to be replaced many years ago by a new steel girder bridge. Nearing the summit the landscape changed abruptly to low brush and tundra scattered across the very rocky terrain, with many small lakes. A few feet below the railroad tracks we could see the remains of the original "Trail of 98" that tens of thousands of





"stampeder" followed over the White Pass to Lake Bennett and the headwaters of the Yukon River where they still faced a 500 mile journey to Dawson. The train stopped at a replica of the Northwest Mounted Police station where the gold seekers had to show the Mounties that they had the 1200 lbs of supplies required to entire Canada and continue their quest north for gold in the Klondike. As our locomotives changed position for the return trip to Skagway, we heard the announcement that it was the last trip of Erin's first season as a guide on the railroad, and as tradition holds, she would have to take a "plunge" into the near freezing waters of Summit Lake. Now most of us thought it must be some kind of marketing stunt, but we all watched as sure enough she dove into the icy waters. The whole train broke out in applause and cheered as she quickly rose from the lake. The return journey was equally spectacular and we arrived back in Skagway to brilliant sunshine, though the temperature was still not that far above 50 degrees. In the afternoon I hiked up to the "Gold Rush Cemetery" where the infamous gang leader "Soapy Smith" is buried, along with Frank Reid, the man who killed him in 1910. Soapy died almost immediately, but Frank lived on for 12 agonizing days from a gunshot wound in the groin. As our guide on the train had put it, Frank lost his golden nuggets. Just up the mountain from the cemetery was a beautiful waterfall surrounded by a thick stand of tall Sitka Spruce, which in this location was the northernmost extent of its range. Back in town that evening I had a cold pint of *Chilkoot Trail IPA* at the Skagway



Brewing Company just before a large group of cruise ship passengers from Australia invaded the place. The bartender invited me to try a sample of their new seasonal beer called *Spruce Tip Blonde Ale* that was brewed with a bit of the actual needles from the spruce tree. It was certainly a unique and interesting taste but not something I would be drinking very often. However he did turn me on to a delightful little Indian restaurant around the corner called the "Curry Bowl" where I had a very tasty and authentic Chicken Tikka Masala, not something I would have expected to find in Skagway. Meanwhile, all through dinner "Bollywood" movies played on the big screen TV in the corner. As I was leaving the restaurant I was told that tomorrow was officially the last day of the tourist season and more than half the town would be packing up for their trip south until the next summer season. The following day I packed my bag, picked up my rental SUV from Avis, and drove over to the Dyea National Historical Site and the beginning of the famous Chilkoot Trail. Very little of the old town site remains but the National Park Service has done an excellent job to display historical photos from the boom days of 1898 when several thousand people made it their home, at least for a short time. Leaving Dyea I drove up the Klondike Highway and over White Pass to the Canadian Customs post in Fraser, BC.





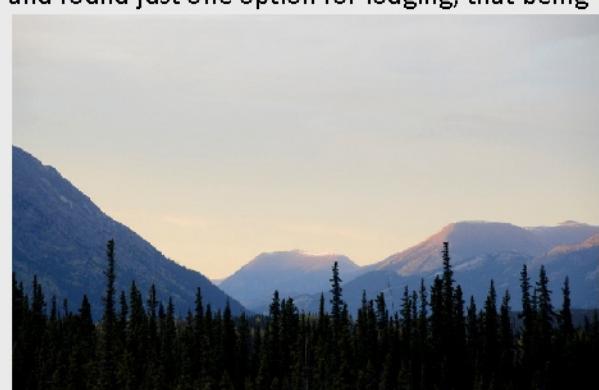
The drive along Tutshi Lake was spectacular with all of the Aspen trees in brilliant shades of yellow and orange, mixed together with the deep green spruce forest. Several miles down the highway I came to a road project where workers were hanging huge metal screens on the rocky cliff over a hundred feet above the road. We were stopped for quite some time and as I watched the progress of the operation I suddenly noticed a little chipmunk run across the road under a large truck for a handout from the flagman! Further on I passed through the small town of

Carcross which derives its name from being very close to a place where Caribou have crossed the river for centuries. A couple of hours later I came Whitehorse, the capitol of the Yukon Territory, and I stopped briefly to see the historic sternwheeler riverboat "Klondike" that operated on the mighty Yukon River from the late 1800's up until 1955. Near the center of town is the old White Pass and Yukon Railroad depot, and despite the fact that the tracks still remain in place, the railroad from Skagway now terminates in Fraser, BC. Perhaps one day the railroad will be reactivated and it will be possible to travel all the way to Whitehorse just as the stampeders of 1898 did so long ago. Then as I was leaving town I spotted the Yukon Brewing Company, and of course I had to pay a visit. I was just in time for a tasting and ended up buying a 6 pack of their "Lead Dog Lager" to share with friends in Anchorage. I headed west from Whitehorse to Haines Junction and then along the shore of beautiful Kluane Lake where the incredibly high, rugged peaks of the St Elias Range rose up to more than 18,000 feet. The snowcapped mountains formed a magnificent backdrop along the shore of the 50 mile long lake as



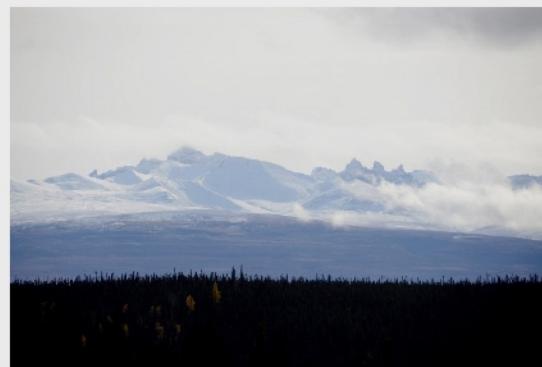
sunset was approaching. I stopped at a small café in Burwash Landing to get a cup of coffee and as I went to pay for it the clerk said there was no charge since they were going to throw it out soon anyway. When I replied "is it that bad" she just laughed and said "no, it's fine". As night fell I was still over 50 miles from Beaver Creek and 108 miles from the last gas station, which was not all that comforting when I checked the gas gauge and discovered it wasn't reading too much above empty. At this point the road went from paved to unpaved and it reminded me of my first trip to

Alaska with Marion in 1979 when more than 1000 miles of the Alaska Highway was unpaved. I pulled into the small town of Beaver Creek, westernmost community in Canada, and found just one option for lodging, that being Ida's Motel, and I was lucky to get a room since they were just about to close for the night. And the only option for dinner that night was across the highway at Buckshot Betty's where I had a giant burger and a cold glass of Labatt's beer. All during dinner the same infomercial about a special vacuum cleaner played continuously, over and over and over again, but no one else in the place seemed to notice it. Back at the motel I turned on the cable TV and when I went to change channels there were only 4 available, channel 99 (no signal), channel 93 (no signal), VID



(blank screen), and Channel 3 (CTV). So I resigned myself to watching the Canadian National News from Toronto on Channel 3, followed by the “local” news from Vancouver, BC over 1000 miles south of Beaver Creek! Needless to say, when it came to the local weather forecast, it wasn’t even close to reality. The next morning I woke up to light rain and 33 degrees, but after a huge ham and cheese omelet with a mountain of fried potatoes and a large cup of coffee at Buckshot Betty’s I was ready to hit the road. The highway to the US Customs

post 30 km west of the town was unpaved and pretty muddy from the rain and there was still a couple of inches of



snow alongside the road from a recent storm. But even under the cloudy skies the fall colors were still brilliant. Just beyond Northway and the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge the skies started to clear and some incredible views of the mighty Wrangell Mountains covered in a thick blanket of snow began to peek through the clouds. I picked up gas and coffee in Tok Junction and headed southwest toward the Richardson Highway at Glenallen. About 20 miles from Glenallen I

saw an elderly native man sitting in a wheelchair alongside the highway with his thumb in the air, so I stopped to pick him up since I

had seen very few cars on the road. His name was David Gene and he was trying to get to the hospital in Glenallen for an appointment so the doctors could check on his condition. It turns out that his right foot had been amputated last January as a result of severe frostbite. Along the way to Glenallen he told me his life story and it was a tough one to say the least. He spent most of his life addicted to alcohol and drugs until 5 years ago when he gave it all up to take the “straight road” as he put it. Then there was the story of his marriage which ended with him throwing his wife out of the house because she was doing drugs every day. Next was the story of his sister who is now in the Anchorage hospital dying of liver cancer. By this



time I was counting all of my blessings! David was a very nice guy who got a lot of bad breaks in life, but he keeps going, so when I dropped him off at the hospital I gave him \$20 to get him through the next couple of days until his welfare check arrived, since he certainly needed it more than me. As we shook hands and said goodbye, he invited me to visit him in his village the next time I was driving down the Alaska Highway. From Glenallen I was travelling southwest on the

Glenn Highway with gorgeous views of the Chugach Mountains and Tazlina Glacier before stopping at Sheep Mountain Lodge to search for Dall Sheep high on the mountain. I took out my binoculars and scanned the steep slopes and fortunately I spotted a group of a dozen sheep slowly making their way single file across the rocky face. So there is a good reason why this is named Sheep Mountain. Further on the highway descended into the upper reaches of the Matanuska Valley and some beautiful views of the Matanuska Glacier highlighted by brilliant rays of sunshine. Just before reaching Anchorage I stopped



at Reflections Lake State Park where I discovered a place with views of the jagged peaks of the Chugach Mountains perfectly reflected in the still waters, making for really gorgeous photos. Upon arriving in Anchorage I checked into the Captain Cook Hotel, my very favorite place to stay in the city, and then walked over to the Snow Goose Restaurant for a cold glass of IPA from the Sleeping Lady Brewery downstairs. The brewery is named in honor of a mountain on the far side of Cook Inlet that resembles a woman lying down in a sleeping position. The bartender also recommended their new seasonal beer, a pumpkin spice ale made with blackstrap molasses and pumpkin pie spices that turned out to be very tasty indeed and would be paired perfectly with chocolate desserts. For dinner that evening I walked over to the Glacier Brewhouse and had a fantastic meal of fresh halibut baked in Thai chili sauce, served over garlic mashed potatoes with sautéed kale and grilled bacon! The next morning I started the day with a



huge Dungeness crab omelet, along with sourdough toast and Alaskan huckleberry jam. I spent some time browsing through the books at Barnes and Noble and then drove south to Potter's Marsh to view the migratory waterfowl and late salmon run. In the evening I met up with Marion and Michael for dinner at Kinley's, a small seafood restaurant which Michael recommended very highly, having known the chef/owner for several years. We started with some amazing appetizers, including Calamari steak in mild chili sauce and a crispy

duck breast, both of which were fabulous and could easily have been our entrees. For the main dish I ordered the special of the evening, a beautiful Pistachio crusted fresh baked Alaskan black cod served with tomato risotto and a mix of sautéed local vegetables and Alaskan wild mushrooms – it was incredible! During dinner our conversation came around to the twin boys Ben and Sam, as well as Michael's new position as general manager of the Snow Goose Restaurant and Marion's new job as manager of the Bridge Restaurant. Just a few months before, Sam had made the decision to join the Army and would be "graduating" from boot camp at Fort Sill Oklahoma next week, so Marion, Michael, and Ben had plans to be there and celebrate the occasion with him. The next day I drove up to Hatcher Pass in the Talkeetna Mountains north of Anchorage to visit the Independence Mine State Historical Park. As I drove through the Matanuska Valley there were beautiful views of many farms where wheat and hay was being harvested, and beyond were the snowcapped peaks of the Talkeetna Mountains. The road to Hatcher Pass climbed 3000 feet to reach the mine,



and as I looked back down the mountain I could see most of the Matanuska Valley and almost all the way to Anchorage. Unfortunately the access road into the State Park was closed for the season, but the pedestrian trail was still open, so I joined a small group of people walking up to the old mine. Most of the old buildings dating back to when the mine opened in the 1930's have been carefully restored, with the exception of the ore processing mill that had crumpled under the weight of decades of heavy snowfall. As I



walked among the old buildings reading the history of the place I learned that the mine yielded over 150,000 ounces of gold from 1938 until it closed down in 1951. During its operation the town was home to more than 800 people and was among the most modern in Alaska at the time, having electricity, a school, and movie theater. Besides

being a fascinating historical site, the abandoned town is surrounded by spectacular mountains and alpine tundra in all of its glorious fall colors. On the edge of the park is the Hatcher Pass Ski Lodge where I had a delicious grilled sandwich of black forest ham and Tillamook cheddar cheese, along with a cold glass of Alaskan Pale Ale as I sat on the deck looking down at the Matanuska Valley, with the rugged snowcapped peaks of the Chugach Range beyond. Later in the afternoon I returned to Anchorage and checked into the Millennium Alaska Hotel on the shore of Lake Hood near the airport. For dinner I ordered my favorite dish of fresh halibut and chips in the Fancy Moose Bar where I had a great view of the lake and the many float planes taking off and landing. My flight to Seattle the next morning was quite bumpy



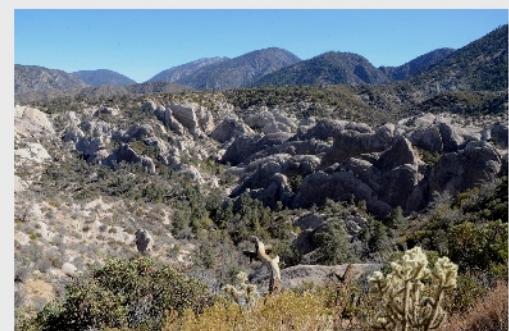
leaving Anchorage, but once we were above the clouds there were spectacular views of the entire Chugach Mountains, the tidewater glaciers in Prince William Sound, and the 18,000 foot peaks of the St Elias Range – so I was glad I had chosen a window seat. After a short stopover at SeaTac airport and a pint of Goose Island IPA in the bar of the Dungeness Bay Seafood Company, I boarded the flight to Los Angeles. It was a smooth flight and after lunch I ordered a Gin and Tonic with a lime. The elderly flight attendant returned with my drink

and said “sir, a gin and tonic without a lime is **not** a gin and tonic”, and I had to appreciate his remark since there have been so many times when I been served without a lime. Upon arriving in LA I rode the express bus to Union Station and boarded a MetroLink train to San Bernardino where Leslie picked me up. It had been a wonderful trip with many stories to tell and pictures to share.

In early October I decided to check out the town of Bakersfield, a place I had been “through” a few times in the past but never spent any time there. Rather than take the freeway I chose to go by way of highway 138 through the high desert along the north side of the San Gabriel Mountains. Along the way I saw a sign for “Devil’s Punchbowl County Park” in the Angeles National Forest, so I decided to take a look and was very surprised to find spectacular sandstone formations that had been uplifted thousands of years ago as



they lay between two fault zones. As I headed



north over the Tehachapi Pass I found myself in the midst of a large number of cyclists and their support vehicles, though it wasn’t clear which race was in progress. Near the top of the pass were hundreds of giant windmills spinning furiously in the high winds, generating power for towns like Tehachapi and Bakersfield. Just beyond Tehachapi I stopped at the famous railroad site where massive mile

and half long freight trains travel through a 360 degree loop to gain elevation over the summit on their way to Mojave. It's quite a sight to see a train loop over itself almost twice around the circle of track. Later on I arrived in Bakersfield as the sun was setting over the countless fields of vegetables, orchards, and vineyards in the San Joaquin Valley. That evening I had a great filet mignon at Logan's Roadhouse nearby the hotel, and oddly enough the 22 oz glass of beer was cheaper than the regular 16 oz pint – go figure that one!



The next morning I visited the Kern County Museum where I found a fascinating collection of historic old buildings that had been moved there from various locations around the county to form an outdoor museum. I spent over two hours wandering along the streets and among the old buildings, each of which had a sign detailing the history of the structure. There were many residences of different

periods in the history of the county, along with a bank, hotel, general store, and a couple of churches. At the far

end of one street was the old railroad depot with a massive Southern Pacific 4-8-0 steam locomotive sitting on a

short siding, not far from the mainline Union Pacific tracks.

Of special note was the display of old oil drilling equipment from the turn of the century when oil was first discovered in the county, including a full scale working model of a huge steam driven cable system drilling rig. The place was a real surprise and one of the best outdoor museums I've seen anywhere. Leaving Bakersfield I headed north on highway 65 toward the small farming community of Porterville and just a few miles out of town I was surrounded by thousands of oil rigs spread out across the rolling hills. Later I discovered that

Kern County has the highest production of oil of any county in the US, including those in Texas! Beyond the massive oil fields were large vineyards and groves of citrus, as well as extensive orchards of almond and walnut trees. By this time it was pretty clear that Kern County had not only a very productive oil industry but also a thriving agricultural economy. The sleepy town of Porterville was once a hub of activity centered on the packing and shipping of all sorts of agricultural products, but now only a handful of packing houses remain and the railroad no longer runs

through the town. East of the town are the Sierra Nevada Mountains and highway 155 climbed slowly through rolling

foothills carpeted with golden grass and small groves of mountain oak before entering the Sequoia National Forest. At this point it became a steep narrow road up into the mountains in a series of tight turns through the thick forest of redwoods. It was a very scenic route but also a very slow drive, in many places being no more than 10 – 15 mph. After more than 2 hours I arrived at Greenhorn Summit (elev 6180 feet) and alongside the road was the "Greenhorn Grill" – talk about a place being off the beaten path! The descent down the other side was an 11 – 16% grade, even steeper than it



had been coming up the mountain, with some hairpin turns at 5 mph (This is definitely one place you don't want your brakes to fail!) I was in 2nd gear the entire time until I reached Lake Isabella and the junction with highway 178. On my way back to Tehachapi I saw a sign for the Bakersfield National Cemetery and here were neat rows of white crosses spread across the rolling hills that made for a beautiful photo as the sun was setting.



The following week I was on my way back to Las Vegas for IMEX America, a huge tradeshow for the convention and meetings industry, and I was fortunate to have been invited as a hosted buyer which meant that most of my expenses were covered. I left home a couple of days early so as to be able to drive the back roads through the Mojave Desert and see some of the country I hadn't seen before. As I pulled into Barstow there was a "RailFest" going on at the historic Union Pacific depot and old Harvey House where several model railroad clubs from around southern California had set up large, elaborate working displays. Both children and adults were fascinated by the incredible detail of the model locomotives. There were also tours of the full scale versions as well, including a huge 1967 Southern Pacific locomotive that had an enormous 24 cylinder diesel engine. From Barstow I drove the old route 66 to the abandoned town of Cima and then north on an old BLM road toward the small town of Shoshone on the southern border of Death Valley National Park. It was paved for about 20 miles until I came over a hill and suddenly found myself at a fork in the road where one option was a rough gravel road and the other even rougher gravel. I took the better of the two options and continued my journey north across the upper reaches of the



Mojave Desert, but the further I went the worse became the condition of the road with signs reading "road not maintained". That was a bit of an understatement by the time I came to a steep, narrow section that climbed up over the summit of the barren, rugged Kingston Mountains. Near the top I came to a sign pointing to a detour in the road which lead me through the worst part of the trip as my jeep bounced over large rocks and into deep holes for several miles

before finally coming to a paved surface again as I passed the Beck Mining Facility. It was another 20 miles or so to reach highway 127 and the little town of Shoshone, my destination for the night. The town had one motel, the Shoshone Inn, a gas station, convenience store, and the "famous" Crowbar Café and Saloon – basically everything one needed and all within 100 yards of each other. After checking into the motel (I was one of only two guests staying that night) I walked across the highway to the saloon and had a delicious plate of fish tacos, along with a cold glass of Death Valley Pale Ale as I sat outside under the stars. There was virtually no traffic on the road so it was a very pleasant, quiet evening. Woke up early the next



morning to find it sunny and warm, but the day turned decidedly bad when I discovered a flat tire – not the way I wanted to start the day. I changed the tire using the “compact” emergency spare tire that now comes with almost every vehicle, but I hadn’t driven more than 50 feet when I felt something was wrong. I got out, looked around and saw the spare tire had come completely off the rim, which meant I wasn’t going anywhere soon. Luckily the gas station had just opened and I was able to inflate my old tire, but to my dismay, there was a large hole in the



tread that was leaking air badly. Then an old man came over and said he knew how to fix the tire using a “tire repair kit” available at the convenience store. Sure enough he was able to plug the hole and I was able to put it back on my jeep, but we both knew the fix would be temporary at best and would enable me to drive the 27 miles to Pahrump, NV where I could get a permanent repair. Being Sunday there was only one tire store open in the town and they were able to fit me in their busy schedule, but it wasn’t long before they informed me the tire had a large gash

inside that was not repairable. In addition they found two other tires on my jeep had separated tread which was also unrepairable, meaning I had to look at getting a new set of tires. However, the store in Pahrump did not have four tires of the size my jeep required, so the closest place to find them was 65 miles south in Las Vegas. To make a long story short, I ended up buying 4 new tires in Las Vegas and hopefully I won’t need to look for tires again for a few years. The traffic around the Strip was an absolute zoo by this time of the day, but I finally made it to the Palazzo Hotel and checked into a beautiful suite on the 28th floor overlooking the lights of the city with the mountains beyond. Dinner was a fabulous dish of spicy sautéed scallops served simply over brown rice at the Zine Restaurant in the hotel. The next day I was invited to a breakfast meeting hosted by the Park City Convention and Visitors Bureau with a huge buffet and a most inspiring presentation by the keynote speaker, Nikki Stone from Park City, Utah. She told us her story of overcoming some difficult challenges to become the first American woman to win the Olympic Gold Medal in freestyle ski competition during the winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. Even

15 years later she became emotional as we watched the video and she told us about the experience. Later on I attended sessions on the topic of creating better domestic and international meetings before returning to my room to change clothes for our PCMA Chapter dinner at Caesar’s Palace where we were honoring the achievements of two colleagues in the industry. The dinner was wonderful and everyone felt it was a great success for our chapter. The following day I had a full schedule of appointments with representatives of hotels and



destination management companies from several countries where we might be holding meetings and conferences in the future. Early in the evening I was invited to a reception in the Lavo Bar hosted by Delta Airlines where some great prizes were given away by several major cities served by the airline. Prizes included complimentary hotel and dinner packages along with complimentary first class flights on Delta, but as my luck would have it, the prizes were won by others in the bar. Following the reception I was invited to dinner at Wolfgang Puck’s restaurant

hosted by the Singapore Tourism Bureau where we dined on large cuts of Idaho raised “wagyu” New York steak served with béarnaise sauce, creamed spinach, wild mushrooms, and Japanese Shishito peppers. It was truly a fabulous dinner that was topped off with warm brioche doughnuts, autumn fruit compote, and “50 Bean” vanilla ice cream for dessert. The next day was once again a full schedule of appointments, and then at 4:00pm I was invited to a whiskey tasting at the “Visit Scotland” booth where a Scottish bagpiper by the name of Roddy guided us through a tasting of four distinct types of whiskey, from the light, smooth taste of Glenlivet through to a glass of La Phraig which had a very earthy taste and the fragrance of sea air. Then it was on to the Germany booth for a cold glass of Hofbrau, bratwurst, and the music of a traditional Bavarian “oompah” band, during which there was a contest to see who could hold a full liter of beer at an arm’s length for the longest period of time. It was won by “Mr Holland”, one of the performers at the Netherlands booth who was dressed in a bright orange suit and orange shoes, the national color of Holland. And after winning the contest he joined the band in singing a traditional German drinking song. A short time later I made my way to the Ireland booth where I had a pint of Guinness and listened to a local Irish band playing traditional Celtic music while a troupe of young ladies danced. It was a very popular place, especially with the music and the free flowing Irish whiskey. On the last day of the tradeshow I was able to



leave early and headed north to see the Valley of Fire State Park where the brilliant red rock has been transformed into very unique shapes by thousands of years of wind erosion. The park is a real hidden gem in the area and few people who visit Las Vegas have ever heard of it. I returned to Las Vegas late in the afternoon by way of Lake Mead National Recreation Area and some stunning views of the lake as sunset approached. For dinner that evening at

Emeril Lagasse’s new restaurant “Table 10”, I started with a delicious plate of mussels from Prince Edward Island, served in a creamy tomato sauce with chorizo sausage, followed by the main dish of lobster mac-n-cheese, together with a pint of Sierra Nevada Celebration Ale.

After dinner I strolled along the Venetian Hotel’s canal to the Otto Café where I had a glass of Sauvignon Blanc and an order of hand carved prosciutto and fresh mozzarella served with wild honey, mandarin oranges, and stewed black cherries. Sitting at the outdoor café under a late evening sky and surrounded by a replica of St Mark’s square in Venice, it was sometimes difficult to tell that the sky was only a



giant painted ceiling that changed color and light was the evening approached. As I walked back to the Palazzo Hotel along the canal, the gondolas slowly glided by with gondoliers singing lovely arias from classical Italian operas, just as they would in Venice. I had been invited to a late night reception at the Tryst Nightclub in the Wynn Hotel hosted by “London and Partners”, and as I descended the long staircase to the ground floor of the club I saw that it extended outdoors to a large pool and waterfall, surrounded by a lush tropical



forest. It was truly like being in Hawaii and not in the middle of the desert! As always there was plenty of food and drink as well as music featuring Roddy the bagpiper and a lady playing the piano. And so ended my trip to Las Vegas and the IMEX America show. My plan after the IMEX event was to take a couple of days and drive up to central Nevada and then down the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada mountains back to southern California. As I drove north through eastern Nevada on US 93, I spotted a sign for Cathedral Gorge State



Park and I just could not pass up the chance to investigate since it was not far off the highway. What I discovered was an area of spectacular orange and pink rock formations standing vertically in a long series of tall spires, much



like the columns inside a cathedral. It was quite unusual and not visible from the main highway, making it really a hidden gem. Further north, past the junction with highway 318, I came to Paragansat National Wildlife Refuge, a series of beautiful lakes in a broad valley that forms part of the great Pacific Flyway where thousands of waterfowl stopover on their migration every spring and fall. The fall colors of the tall cottonwood trees along the lakeshore were spectacular! Just south of Ely I had some magnificent views of snow covered Wheeler Peak (13,000 feet)

across the broad valley, shining brightly under the clear skies. From Ely I headed west on US 50, known as the "loneliest road in America" across a couple of mountain ranges to the small historic mining town of Eureka, my destination for the night. There were only 3 places to stay in town and I didn't see a vacancy sign among them, but when I stopped at the Best Western Eureka Inn the elderly lady at the desk took pity on me and said that there might be a room at the Jackson House Hotel and Saloon, which was also managed by the Best Western. Fortunately I was given a key to the "White Pine Room" (none of the rooms had numbers, only names), and as I entered the historic old hotel and climbed the stairs to the second floor I found the room unlocked and as I entered I saw it had not been cleaned in what looked like several days. There were lots of empty wine bottles and remains of several pizzas lying on the table, so I hiked back to the Best Western and asked for another room. This time I was given the key to the "Diamond Room" and found it to be a very clean, charming room decorated in the style of the late 1800's, when the hotel was built. By now it was time to find a place for dinner and as I walked down the main street on the old boardwalk, I came to the "Owl Club" where it looked like a lot of the locals hung out. I entered the old place, found a seat at the bar, and ordered a local Ruby Mountain Buckeroo Pale Ale from a brewery up



north in Wells, NV. It was indeed filled with friendly locals and I was given a recommendation to try the homemade chicken, rice, and vegetable soup which was very tasty, especially as the temperature outside dropped below freezing. The next morning I awoke to beautiful clear skies and some pretty cold weather. (*I found a glass of iced tea in the front seat of my jeep was frozen solid*) When I went to start my jeep the engine

turned over just fine but it wouldn't fire, and as hard as I tried to figure out the problem it just refused to start. It seemed like a similar problem I had experienced with my 1991 jeep when the security system was armed and would not allow the vehicle to start. Finally after half an hour I walked over to the Exxon station and asked if there was an auto mechanic in town. The lady behind the counter gave me the number of a shop 4 miles out of town so I called the shop and about 10 minutes later David the mechanic showed up. We spent some time trying to override the security system to no avail and finally David called the jeep dealer in Reno to ask if they knew what might be the problem. Their response was that it must be an electrical issue and there wasn't anything they could do over the phone, so at that point it was clear to me that I had to enlist the aid of AAA to get a tow truck that would take me to the nearest jeep dealer, the choices being Reno, Las Vegas, or Salt Lake City. Seeing that Reno was the closest it was decided I would have the jeep towed there. As I waited for the tow truck to arrive from Ely more than 80 miles away, I headed for the



Owl Club to get breakfast, where a group of hunters were preparing for a trip into the mountains in search of elk. After breakfast I walked over to the town park where the annual "pumpkin festival" was in full swing, the highlight for the kids was a ride on the Pumpkin Express, a line of 55 gallon barrels being towed by a riding lawnmower. Despite the train's lack of sophistication, all of the kids were having a ball. Finally the tow truck arrived and my jeep was loaded for the long trip to Reno. As we drove west out of Eureka, the owner and driver, Denny, a nice

middle-aged man, proceeded to tell me a series of horrific stories about the countless crashes and wrecks that he's dealt with in his 18 years in the business. There were the head-on collisions at 90 mph, several car fires, and a large number of cases where he had to retrieve a car after the owner had committed suicide. All in all, not very pretty sights to see and certainly not what I expected a tow truck driver would normally encounter. Four and a half hours later we pulled into Reno just as the Jeep dealer was closing up shop for the day, but after unloading my vehicle a mechanic came over to



take a look at it. And wouldn't you know it, as soon as he tried



to start the engine it worked perfectly! At that point I decided to stay at hotel nearby that night rather than risk getting stuck somewhere down the road and having to call AAA again. The following morning I got up early and went out to start the jeep, and to my great dismay, it wouldn't start! Being that the temperature was near freezing again this morning I suspected

the problem must be related to the cold weather, so I figured to let it sit for a few hours and try again. In the meantime, rather than sit in the hotel, I grabbed my camera and walked downtown to take some photos. It was a beautiful clear day and I discovered a lovely park along the banks of the Truckee River with huge cottonwood trees in all their glorious fall colors. Just a block from the downtown business district the city had constructed a "whitewater park" in part of the river where people could test their skill with kayaks and rafts. A few yards upstream there were several people fly fishing as well. After getting a



latte at a coffee shop adjacent to the park, I headed back to the hotel to check on my jeep, and sure enough it started up right away. I quickly loaded my bags and headed south on US 395 through the Carson Valley and down the east side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Along the entire route the landscape was “alive” with the brilliant colors of fall set against the backdrop of snowcapped peaks, making the end of my journey a most pleasant one.



At the beginning of November I made a visit to the picturesque town of Solvang, about 35 miles northwest of Santa Barbara. Once again I took the back road through the high desert rather than fight the freeway traffic, and just north of Santa Paula I discovered the Thomas Aquinas College almost hidden in the mountains. It was a small but beautiful campus with all the buildings built in the style of the old California Spanish missions, and was established by the Catholic Church in 1975 on land donated by a wealthy rancher. I arrived in Solvang as the sun was beginning to set and checked into a lovely room at the Royal Copenhagen Inn which is built to resemble a small Danish village. In fact, almost the entire town is a replica of Scandinavia with lots of shops and restaurants offering authentic Scandinavian goods and food. I strolled around the town taking photos in the lovely evening light before stopping at the Solvang Brewing

Company for a beer and a plate of fish and chips. Outside the brewery stood a classic old windmill that really gave the place a lot of character. Later in the evening a local band called “Off the Grid” played some old rock-n-roll music that had a lot of people dancing. What really impressed me about the band was the fact that they were able to play a pretty decent version of Pink Floyd’s “Dark Side of the Moon”, which is not easy for any band. The next morning was another bright, sunny day and I had a delicious ham and cheese breakfast sandwich at Olsen’s Danish bakery just down the street from the hotel. I spent the rest of the morning wandering around the town taking photos of the many beautiful buildings before driving north through the Santa Ynez Valley, which is well known for its many vineyards and fine wineries. I stopped in Los Olivos, a small town in the heart of wine country, which was once the southern terminus of the Pacific Coast Railroad that ran north to San



Luis Obispo until ceasing operation in 1934. As I walked around the town I discovered the historic Mattei’s Tavern, a lovely old wooden building dating back to the late 1800’s. The tavern was also the place where passengers arriving on the stagecoach from Santa Barbara connected with the railroad to continue their journey north. Today the tavern still retains its charm while continuing to serve as a popular restaurant and bar. From Los Olivos I headed south toward Santa Ynez, making a brief stop at the

Clairmont Lavender Farm where they make a wide variety of products based on the lavender plant. In Santa Ynez is a gorgeous old Victorian inn and restaurant famous for its luxury accommodations and dishes based on local produce and wines. Returning to Solvang that evening I went to Randy’s Taproom a few doors down from the Solvang Brewing Company and had a great burger that went well with a pint of the local Telegraph Ale from the





Figueroa Mountain Brewery a few miles west of town. The next morning dawned chilly and overcast, quite in contrast to the lovely warm sunny weather of the past couple of days. I drove through the Santa Rosa Valley with many vineyards and farms scattered among the rolling hills, and although there were heavy clouds hanging

over the mountain tops and the fall colors were muted, it was still a beautiful scene. As I approached Lompoc the clouds began to break up and rays of sunshine peaked through. Just east of Vandenberg Air Force

base I saw a sign for La Purisma Mission State Historic Site so I decided to check it out. I found a large Spanish



mission that was founded in 1787 and restored to its original condition by the CCC in the 1930's using the traditional method of making adobe brick from mud and straw. The California State Parks staff have done a magnificent job of preserving much of the original furniture and tools from the days when the mission was full of activity. I spent a couple of hours exploring the many buildings that make up the heart of the mission and trying to imagine what daily life was like when several hundred people lived and worked here. The whitewashed adobe walls were brilliantly illuminated in the sunshine in sharp contrast with the deep blue sky. From Lompoc I drove south on highway 1 to Santa Barbara and then on to the freeway for the trip back home.



A couple of weeks later I travelled down to San Diego for another photography seminar with two instructors from National Geographic Traveler magazine. The topic of the seminar was about "story telling with photography" and once again I learned a lot from the instructors that I'll use later on. Since the seminar was held on the University of San Diego campus I chose to stay at a hotel in Old Town nearby. The evening before I went to the historic Cosmopolitan Hotel and Saloon in Old Town for dinner and while I sat at the bar I met a very interesting couple who were dressed in period costumes from the late 1800's. At first I thought they must be actors from the Old Town Playhouse next door, but that wasn't the case at all. They simply had fun dressing up in a manner befitting the

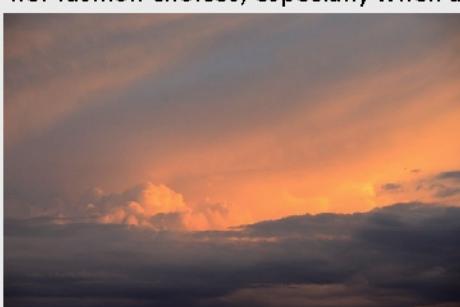


history and character of Old Town. Later an elderly English couple sat down at the bar and during our conversation they talked about their experiences travelling around the States, especially in the small towns, which were their favorite places to visit. Before leaving the bar they invited me to visit their quaint bed and breakfast in Northumberland near the border with Scotland. After the seminar I visited the Mormon Battalion Historic Site in Old Town and learned some fascinating history of the Mormons in California. Upon being told they had to leave Nauvoo, Illinois the Mormons began their long trek westward to the Great Salt Lake in Utah, a story that is familiar to most people, but what many don't know is the fact that as part of the agreement with the Federal Government for assistance in their move, 500 Mormon men were drafted into the army during the Mexican American War in 1847. They had to march 300 miles from Council Bluffs, Iowa to Fort Leavenworth,

Kansas where they received their uniforms and firearms. Then they had to march from Kansas all the way to San Diego, a distance of more than 1700 miles, and by the time they reached the end of the march, the war with Mexico was over so they never saw any action in battle. (*It remains the longest march in American military history.*) At that point they still had over 6 months remaining in their army service so they were ordered to build permanent structures in old town San Diego as a way of establishing the presence of the US in the California territory. Of particular note is the little known fact that once their tour of duty was over, a number of them headed north to the area around Sacramento and helped build Sutter's Mill where gold was discovered soon after by a couple of the Mormons. Part of the money that was used to build the temple in Salt Lake City came from the Mormon's share of the gold. For me it was a fascinating tour through a piece of history about which I knew nothing.



Shortly before Thanksgiving I travelled to Carlsbad to attend the PCMA Chapter Board of Directors Retreat where we would plan the programs for 2014. Through the efforts of our incoming President we were hosted for 2 days by the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort and Spa, a five diamond luxury property located on the hills overlooking the ocean. However, the drive down to Carlsbad was anything but luxurious when traffic on I-5 came to a screeching halt just on the north side of Camp Pendleton. All five lanes of traffic were backed up for miles ahead and barely moving at 2 – 3 mph, with no chance to exit and find an alternate route. Finally, after over an hour, the site of the problem came into view as more than a dozen highway patrol cars with lights flashing sat alongside the highway. As we slowly passed by I could see a large SWAT team spread out below the highway, but it was unclear what they were up to. However, at the point the traffic got back up to freeway speed and I was just glad it had. Meanwhile, the Marines were conducting a full scale combat exercise on the other side of the highway, complete with clouds of orange smoke, helicopters buzzing overhead, and tanks running all over the place! I arrived at the resort a short time later and checked into a beautiful room overlooking the golf course and the ocean beyond. Since there was a large group in house that night, the concierge recommended a favorite restaurant nearby the hotel called "Notorious Burgers and Craft Beers". It had a great lamb burger on the menu served with a spicy slaw, and the cold pint of "Lost Abbey Devotion Ale" from San Diego went perfectly with the lamb. As I was finishing dinner an elderly Jewish couple from New York sat at the table next to me and began an argument about her fashion choices, especially when and where she chose to wear sequins – of all the subjects to discuss! Over the



next two days we were treated to delicious lunches and a dinner that included cauliflower and parmesan soup, wild mushroom risotto, and roasted Jidori chicken, as well as chocolate polenta cake with Amerena Cherry gelato for dessert. The day after our meeting I spent some time hiking around the grounds of the resort taking some beautiful photos as the storm clouds were breaking up, before heading north to Santa Paula to join Leslie, Robert, and Luci for an excursion on the historic Fillmore and

Western Railroad. The long drive took me through the heart of LA and I was lucky that traffic wasn't too heavy for a Saturday morning, so I arrived in Santa Paula early in the afternoon and joined up with the rest of the group as they were finishing lunch at the Rabalais Bistro. Once we were checked into the Glen Tavern Inn we hopped into Robert's truck and headed north over the mountains to the picturesque town of Ojai where we found a charming little winery at the Old Creek Ranch just outside town and stopped for a wine tasting.

The winery featured wines made from grape varieties found in southern France, Spain, and Italy so we had a great time sharing the tasting. There was a gorgeous sunset on the way back to Santa Paula as we drove along the coast highway to Ventura. That evening we shared dinner at "Garman's Irish Pub" where Leslie and Luci tried the



specialty of the house, a traditional Irish dish called a "boxty". It's basically a potato crepe filled with savory items such as Guinness beef and gravy, chicken and sharp cheddar in rosemary cream sauce, or smoked salmon in dill cream sauce, all of which are really delicious. The next morning we were back at the Rabalais Bistro for a great breakfast before walking over to the Oil Museum that is housed in the old corporate offices of the Union Oil Company. Though I had visited the museum before, it was still very interesting to see all of the displays, especially the full scale

working reproduction of a wooden drilling rig from the late 1800's. On special display was a fascinating look at some of the prehistoric creatures that roamed over southern California and were discovered in the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles. Then we drove over to Fillmore and boarded the train for a 2 hour ride through the Santa Clarita Valley back to Santa Paula, passing countless fields of produce, groves of citrus, avocado, and almonds. Higher on the mountain slopes were several large vineyards as well. During our brief stopover in Santa Paula we visited the Ventura County Agricultural Museum where Robert and Luci took turns taking photos of each other seated on some of the vintage tractors and old horse drawn carriages.

On the return trip to Fillmore we shared a drink in the vintage dining car which once served as a "pie car" on a circus train. The lady running the dining car service informed us that in circus lingo a pie car was where meals were served for the circus performers. As we left the train at the Fillmore station we noticed a wine tasting room on the other side of the tracks so we shared another taste of local wines and agreed that we all had a wonderful weekend together before heading home that evening.



Thanksgiving rolled around the next week and we were fortunate to have Tracey and Andy sharing dinner with us. This was my second time at preparing the entire meal, with the exception of the fabulous stuffing that Tracey and Andy made for us, and I must say everyone seemed to enjoy the dinner, especially the persimmon and pecan pies I had baked the day before. As always this is a lovely holiday to share with family and friends.

At the end of the month I was invited by the Desert Illini Club to join a group of alumni to watch the football game

between our old alma mater, the University of Illinois, and arch Big Ten rival Northwestern. We met at "Burgers and Beer", a sports bar in Palm Desert to watch the game, and although Illinois lost in the last minute, we all had a good time together. I stayed in the bar for a while and watched the 4th quarter of the game between Alabama (ranked #1 in the nation) and their arch rival Auburn (ranked #4). With less than a minute left to play, the score was tied and everyone in the bar began ordering another drink, knowing the game would go into overtime. But the impossible was about to happen and no one could have predicted it.

With the clock showing 1 second left in the game, the ball on the Auburn 45 yard line and 4th down, Alabama attempted a 58 yard field goal. No one expected the field goal attempt would be good and sure enough the ball fell short of the goal posts. But amazingly an Auburn player caught the ball deep in the end zone and proceeded to run it back 109 yards for a touchdown, winning the game for Auburn. Not only was everyone in the bar in total disbelief, but the Alabama fans were in shock. Almost the entire Auburn crowd then flooded on to the field in celebration of the victory while the sports announcers were virtually speechless. It has to rank among the most amazing football games in the history of the sport, and I was glad I had stayed to watch it.



At the beginning of December we had our annual PCMA Chapter meeting at Disneyland and were treated to a special "behind the scenes" tour through Disney's California Adventure where we found out that day was Walt's birthday and he would have been 112 years old. Disneyland itself is celebrating its 52nd birthday this year as well. Ryan, from the Disney Institute, also told us some amazing things about how Disney operates in the parks, such as providing wider stalls in the restrooms to accommodate strollers, providing a roll of toilet paper next to the baby changing tables, and that the lights in the shape of spark plugs at Flo's Café in Cars Land are programmed to light up in the same sequence as the real spark plugs in a V-8 engine! Back in the meeting room, Ryan from the Disney Institute lead us in a fascinating exercise that was confusing at the beginning, but once he revealed the point of it, the exercise made a lot of sense. He told us we were now all employees of the Duckburg Company and had us take a seat in the room, instructing us not to speak to anyone. On each chair was an envelope with the name of a Disney character and inside were the instructions for the exercise. I was seated in the back row with two other people and there was one

person seated in front of us, with one person seated in front of them. As I read my instructions I was given a few blank note cards upon which I could write questions that I could only pass to the person in front of me. Ryan gave us 5 minutes to figure out the point of the exercise and when the time passed none of us had any clue. So then he gave us another minute and allowed us to talk with each other and that's when it started to become clear to everyone. The people in the back row were the worker bees in the





company, the person in front of them were middle management, and the person at the front of everyone was an executive in the company. The fact that we were only able to pass messages in one direction showed the communication problems many organizations face every day. It was brilliant and we all learned a lot from the exercise. After the program Robert was kind enough to give some of us passes into the park for the rest of the day. (Thanks Robert) That evening I had dinner at the Napa Rose Restaurant in the Grand Californian Hotel, a

fantastic fresh Arugula salad topped with fritters of lobster, shrimp and crab served on a bed of Thai beef and noodles. Simply an amazing dish!

Once again my sister Lynn will be joining us for the holidays, as well as some warmer weather, so we have a couple of trips planned to see more of my favorite places in southern California. Until next year then, I want to wish all of you a very happy holiday with your family and friends, and all the best for the coming New Year!

