

CHRISTMAS 2014



I can't believe 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. Once 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 planned to join us for Christmas again this year instead of battling with the snow and cold back in Illinois. I had put together an itinerary of travel to Los Angeles, San Diego, and Joshua Tree National Park and confirmed all of the travel arrangements. On the day of her arrival we received an urgent message that she would not be coming to California after all. It seems that when she went to board the flight at the Bloomington airport she slipped on the wet floor inside the terminal building and broke her wrist, as well as banged up her knee pretty badly. Luckily her injuries weren't more serious but they ended her trip to California even before it began. A week or so before this Leslie had started a training program for a new job so her time was going to be very limited for travelling anywhere. So now I was sitting with hotel reservations and train tickets for 3 people, two of whom couldn't travel. To make a long story short, I travelled to Los Angeles, San Diego, and Joshua Tree National Park on my own. One bright spot was on Christmas Day when Leslie and I enjoyed a sumptuous holiday buffet at the beautiful and historic Mission Inn in Riverside.

The first week of January Leslie asked if I could deliver one of her gift baskets to a client in Carlsbad and I thought this was a good opportunity to check out the Hilton Hotel at Torrey Pines. After dropping off the gift basket I checked into the hotel and joined the crowd in the bar watching the Orange Bowl game between Ohio State and Clemson. Ironically the couple seated next to me at the bar had a son attending Clemson and the father was a Ohio State alum, so either way one of them was going to claim a victory. (Clemson won for a huge upset) The next morning I watched the hotel staff set up the rose garden for a Hindu wedding ceremony while out on the golf course the grounds crew was setting up for the Buick



San Diego Zoo Safari Park

Open. That afternoon I stopped at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park on my way home and got to see the new enclosure for the Lemurs. The enclosure is unique in that one is allowed to go inside, and if the Lemurs are active they often will walk around among the visitors. You are not allowed to touch them, but they are most certainly allowed to touch you, which they often will do.

The following weekend I decided to take the train to Santa Barbara on an overnight trip. I started by boarding the MetroLink train in Riverside enroute to LA Union Station to connect with the northbound Amtrak Pacific Surfliner. Shortly after leaving the Riverside station a couple of LA County Sheriff's deputies came through checking tickets and one young woman without a ticket received a citation for a penalty of \$1500. (better to buy the \$7.00 ticket!) I had about 45 minutes to wait at Union Station so I went to the Amtrak Metropolitan Lounge for some coffee. There was a HGTV program on the TV about a couple with two young children who bought a house for \$580,000 and then spent another \$175,000 and 6 months completely changing every room in the house! (I'm still not sure why) The Pacific Surfliner train follows the coast from Ventura to Santa Barbara and the views of the sunset across the ocean were spectacular. Arriving in Santa Barbara that evening I checked into a great room with an



Botanical Building - Balboa Park



Santa Barbara

ocean view at Hotel Oceana on the waterfront. Then it was time for dinner so I walked down to the harbor for a delicious dish of fresh steamed black mussels in a broth of bay leaf, thyme, and garlic. After that came a fresh grilled local rockfish sandwich with sliced red onion and heirloom tomato. The view of the harbor lights at night from the restaurant balcony was gorgeous. I watched a fishing boat unload a large catch of sea urchins before walking back to the hotel along the beach as waves crashed on the shore. The next morning was a beautiful warm sunny day as I walked up State Street where old Spanish style historic buildings have been restored as trendy shops, restaurants, bars, and galleries. The most amazing building was the county courthouse whose mission style architecture is regarded as one of the best examples anywhere in the country. Inside the courthouse are many old paintings and murals depicting the history of the county that dates back to the 1500's when the Spanish explorers arrived.



Santa Barbara Courthouse

From the top of the clock tower one has a panoramic view of the entire city, the mountains and the ocean. The tower houses a huge old clock mechanism that came from Europe over 150 years ago and still keeps accurate time. My last stop in Santa Barbara was the historic old mission, one of the most beautiful and best preserved of all the California missions. With the train running an hour late I decided to have a beer at the Enterprise Fish Company near the station. What I found was a beautiful old red brick building that was built in the late 1800's as the "Enterprise Laundry" that serviced all of the local tourist hotels and fish canneries for several decades. It was saved from demolition in 1977 and then opened as a seafood restaurant and bar. When the train finally arrived the attendant for the business class car hopped out and greeted me by name, which I thought was pretty unique. Her name was Kathy and she made a point of remembering everyone's name as she made her way through

the car. At one point she called her boyfriend on her cell phone and asked one of the passengers named "Pandora" to explain the origin of her name. It seems that Pandora's mother wanted her daughter to have a name that was strong and unique, not something ordinary like Suzie or "Kathy"! Although most passengers were frustrated by the long delay, Kathy made the trip enjoyable.



Old Granary Burial Ground - Boston

During the second week of January I boarded an American Airlines non-stop flight to Boston for the annual PCMA conference. For lunch we were served a delicious dish of chilled shrimp tikka with garam masala, jalapeno pepper and mango chutney, along with a lentil salad topped with Thai vinaigrette dressing, all of which I had been able to pre-order when I checked in online. After the meal the flight attendants handed out Samsung Galaxy tablets with Bose headphones as the entertainment option. I watched a very interesting sci-fi film by the title of "The Europa Report" about a future NASA mission to Jupiter's moon where the crew encountered a complex marine life beneath Europa's surface of ice. During the final hour of the flight I tuned into a video of the Rolling Stones concert in Hyde Park last summer, and it's amazing to see them still strutting their stuff at the age of 70! (*just goes to show there may be hope for all of us still!*) As we landed in Boston there was still a fair amount of snow on the ground leftover from the huge storm the week before that had buried most of the city. The conference was held in the

Hynes Convention Center which connects to the new Prudential Center Mall that has well over 75 shops, one of which is a huge Barnes and Noble bookstore that I visited several times. The first evening I was invited to a reception and dinner hosted by the historic Omni Parker House Hotel whose theme was "The Rajin Cajun Party" and sponsored by the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau. I arrived in time to join several people in the lobby bar watching the NFL playoff game between Seattle Seahawks and New Orleans Saints, but unfortunately for New Orleans the Saints lost



Santa Barbara Harbor



Santa Barbara Mission



Old North End Taverns - Boston

and Seattle went on to play in the Super Bowl. However the party was a big hit with everyone, having tables piled high with boiled Gulf shrimp, corn on the cob, roasted potatoes and lots of Andouille sausage for a true Cajun shrimp boil! The next day I joined a tour of the city with the "Boston Duck Tours" aboard a classic WWII army amphibious vehicle commonly referred to as a duck. Our local driver/guide was hilarious, dressed in a doctor's outfit and referring to himself as "Dr. Phineas



Paul Revere Statue - Boston

P. Duck". He was a native Bostonian and knew virtually everything about the historical sites that we passed, including some real trivia that none of us had heard before. We learned that the Back Bay was filled with dirt from the western suburbs over a span of 40 years back in the late 1800's. In addition, he told us how the first world series in baseball between Boston and Pittsburg was held in an open field near what is today the classic Fenway Park. The game was organized by the "World Newspaper" and hence the name "World Series" came about. Dr. Phineas P. Duck provided us with one of the most fascinating and enjoyable tours I've ever experienced, as well as giving us tips about his favorite bars and restaurants in the city. That evening we had our chapter reception together with the Northern California, Pacific Northwest, and Mexico chapters in the restaurant at the top of the Prudential Center. The 360 degree view of the city at night from the 50th floor was nothing short of spectacular and the lobster rolls were incredible. From the chapter reception we took a bus to the new convention center on the waterfront for an evening of more food and

entertainment in a huge facility large enough to hold 16 NFL games simultaneously. Afterwards I was invited to a reception hosted by PSAV at the historic Boston Public Library where we gathered in the beautiful old map room among stacks of books and walls covered with antique maps. The next morning began with an inspiring presentation on innovation and change, followed by afternoon sessions on some of the new technology for planning and managing large meetings. That evening saw me making the rounds of several receptions, all of which were conveniently located with a couple of blocks from the hotel. First was a reception at the "Towne Stove & Spirits" hosted by the Freeman company, followed by a reception hosted by the Disney company at "Abe and Louie's Restaurant", one of Boston's oldest and most respected, where the lamb chops were amazing. Then I walked across the street to "L'Espalier", an elegant and sophisticated classic French restaurant to join my friends from the Singapore Tourist Board for a delightful dinner that ended with a fantastic chocolate soufflé for dessert. The next day I attended a fascinating session on new cutting edge technology presented by David Pogue, the host of the Nova series on public television. One of the most interesting aspects of his session was the book that he wrote called "The World According to Twitter" in which he compiled the responses to his post of a different subject line on Twitter each day for 100 days. Some of the responses were both hilarious and thought provoking, such as the ones he received when he posted the subject line "Write an Ancient Chinese Proverb". Responses included "*the pit is always smaller than the plum*" and "*one should never attempt to leap a chasm in two bounds*". Another of his posts was this one – "Write a Title for a Prequel to a Famous Movie" and one of the responses was "*We're Running Low on Mohicans*"! Then he showed some of the latest and most unusual smartphone apps, the best one being one where you can play a South American flute by pressing buttons on your smartphone screen. But what makes this app so unusual is that you have to "blow" into the phone's mic to make the



Old State House - Boston



Old North Church - Boston

music happen. And if that weren't enough he then brought up a world map on the screen of his smartphone that showed places around the world where other people were currently playing the same app. We were all pretty blown away by this time, but suddenly he tapped on one of the icons displayed on the map of Japan and we heard the person playing the flute app in real time! His session was by far the best I've ever seen to be sure. That evening I was invited to the Global Reception hosted by "Visit Scotland" and had the opportunity to taste some great Highland whiskies, along with some fabulous smoked salmon as well. The Closing Reception was held at the historic Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market in the old North



Quincy Market - Boston

End of Boston. As we boarded the bus at the hotel it was raining heavily and the temperature hovered around 35 degrees. Unfortunately the traffic was a serious problem as there was also a Boston Bruins hockey game going on just two blocks from where the closing reception was being held. But once we arrived it was a delightful evening of food and drink at an Irish Pub in Quincy Market. Later I was invited to join Wendy and a couple of her friends for a reception hosted by the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau at a very unusual oriental restaurant called "The Red Lantern", located in an old red brick building that combined the best of the old and new in its Asian inspired décor and cuisine. The

pork, shrimp, and chicken pot stickers were incredibly delicious as well. The following morning was a special general session presentation by Sal Khan who started his "Khan Academy" for online learning when he had to tutor his young brother in math. Now there are over 1 million people who learn online at his "academy" and hundreds of education professionals who develop online courses for him. It was truly an amazing and inspirational story. The closing luncheon was sponsored by the city of Chicago where next year's conference will be held. Each dish on the menu was presented and described by the Chicago chef who designed it, via a video, which was both a unique and fascinating way to serve food. At the end of the luncheon the Chicago staff picked up guitars and played the Beatles song "8 Days a Week" as we made our way to the closing session. That evening I had a delicious dinner of Haddock and chips at Legal Seafoods restaurant in the Prudential Center mall that was served by Anastasia who came from southern Russia a couple of years ago. The next morning, with the conference over, I decided to explore the Back Bay area of the city by starting at the large complex of buildings near the hotel which serve as the world

headquarters for the Church of Christ Scientist. The church was founded in Boston



Faneuil Hall - Boston

by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879 to "reinstate primitive Christianity and its lost element of healing" following a personal healing she claimed as the result of reading the Bible. Besides the fascinating history of the church, it also houses a most unique "map" of the world known as the "Maparium", a 30 foot diameter stained glass globe that you walk through. It is absolutely an amazing experience to stand inside the globe and look up, down and around at the countries displayed in different colors of stained glass. From the church I walked down to the Isabella Gardner Museum that occupies a beautiful 4 story brick mansion built in the early 1900's and designed in the style of a wealthy merchant's home in Venice, Italy. Inside the mansion is a lovely courtyard and atrium that extends 4 stories up to a gorgeous stained glass roof. Ms. Gardner had the house built to display her huge collection of art from around the world, including rare ceramics, paintings, sculpture, furniture, and



Historic Meeting Room, Old State House - Boston

jewelry. Among her extensive collection of books are many first editions from famous poets and authors, including some of their personal letters dating back to the 1600's. Her private living quarters were on the 4th floor and the museum was open to the public whenever she was in residence. In 1998 the museum suffered a devastating loss of artwork when thieves stole at least 15 of the most valuable and important paintings by such world famous artists as Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Cézanne, and Monet. None of the paintings have been recovered but a couple of years ago a young artist put together an exhibit about the missing paintings in which she asked people to look at the empty frames which still hang in the museum and write down something about what

they "saw". Her exhibit shows a photo of each empty picture frame, a photo of the missing painting, and the comments of what people saw. It's an absolutely fascinating piece of work. From the museum I walked up to the Boston Public Library to check out the Map room once more and discovered an exhibit of antique maps of Boston and New England dating back to the 1600's, as well as the world's first globe from the late 1400's that was really amazing indeed. That evening, after a delicious dinner of Pad Thai at a restaurant in the Prudential Center mall, I headed across the street to a small bar by the

name of "Bukowski's" that Dr. Phineas P. Duck had recommended as a glimpse of the local side of Boston. Here I had a couple of pints of locally brewed Harpoon IPA while I soaked up the local atmosphere of the place. A sign at the door read "cash only – no stinkin credit cards", while on the wall behind the bar was a large lottery wheel that had the names of 24 beers on it. The bartender told me how it worked. You put down your money, spin the wheel and you get whatever beer where the wheel happened to stop, which sounded simple enough. But here's the catch – there was one place on the wheel which had the picture of a hand with the middle finger raised with the words "you're f___ked", meaning you got no beer and just lost your money! (I chose not to play the game) There was also a one page menu that listed draft beers on one side and "today's f___king specials" on the other side, making this definitely a local dive bar! I awoke the next morning to a beautiful, clear sunny day so I decided to walk the entire length of the "Freedom Trail", a route that starts in Boston Commons, continues through the North End and finishes in Charlestown at the old Naval Shipyard. It's marked by a line of red bricks in the sidewalk to guide you to all of the most important historical sites in Boston which are also well marked with informational signs detailing the significance of each site. Among the most prominent were the Granary Burying Ground with the graves of John Hancock and Paul Revere, the first public school established in 1635, the Old South Meeting Hall where a great many of the free speech debates took place prior to the revolution, the Old State House that is the site of the famous "Boston Massacre", the Old North Church where Paul Revere began his "midnight ride", and of course Faneuil Hall, known as the "Cradle of Liberty". It was a great experience to be able to visit all of these legendary places that most of us only read about in the history books, and to know that the National Park Service is actively preserving them for future generations. For lunch I stopped at Ned Devine's Irish Pub in Quincy Market for a plate of Maryland crab cakes and a pint of Guinness. Then I walked across the bridge to Charlestown and visited the USS



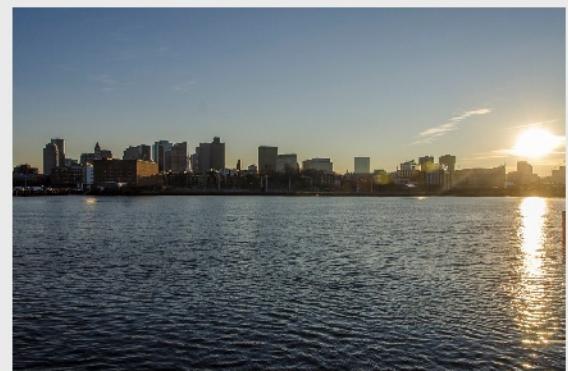
Naval Commandant's House - Charlestown



"Old Ironsides" - Charlestown Naval Shipyard

Constitution, otherwise known as "Old Ironsides", built in the late 1700's and still remains a commissioned ship in the US Navy. I also discovered a very interesting museum that detailed the "life of a sailor" aboard the tall sailing ships of the 1800's. The exhibit was geared more toward children where they could actively participate in some of the daily routines of the sailors. By this time the sun was nearing the horizon so I hopped aboard a small ferry that took me across Boston harbor to the waterfront downtown, and on the way there were beautiful views of the city skyline highlighted by the setting sun. As I walked back toward Boston Commons I stopped for a beer at the "Durgin Park Irish Pub", the oldest one in all

of Boston with some fascinating old photos of the city on its walls. Just as I was leaving the pub, I saw there was a basketball game between the Celtics and the Lakers about to start at the TD Garden a couple of blocks away so I thought I might try to get a ticket at the last minute. The game was virtually sold out but I managed to get a single seat that a season ticket holder had made available. As I went to find my seat I was totally surprised to find I was sitting center court in row 2! Needless to say it was an "up close and personal" view of the game like nothing I had imagined from watching basketball games on TV. After the game, which Boston won, I walked over to the "Union Oyster House", the oldest restaurant in America, for a delicious bowl of clam chowder that was perfect for the cold evening. The following morning started with heavy rain and slowly changed to snow as I made my way to the Museum of Fine Arts, one of the largest and finest collections in the country. Within the huge old building are 4 floors of art from virtually every period in history and an extensive collection of American artists from the 18th and 19th centuries. I spent the entire morning in the museum and barely saw a quarter of it. After having lunch in the Great Hall of the museum I walked back to my hotel and took the shuttle to the airport to board my return flight to LAX.



Boston Harbor at Sunset

At the beginning of February I decided to take a short trip to Death Valley to experience the desert in "winter", though temperatures there were in the lower 80's. Late in the afternoon I pulled into the Furnace Creek Ranch located at 178 feet below sea level and checked into a very nice room overlooking the snow covered Panamint Mountains to the west. As chance would have it I arrived just in time to see the start of the Super Bowl game being shown in the "Corkscrew Saloon", along with a number of locals. In the very first play of the game, the Denver Broncos center missed the hike to Peyton Manning and Seattle scored a safety on the play. The odds in Las Vegas of a safety in the first play of the game were 2000 to 1, and when Seattle scored the safety the guy sitting next to me at the bar suddenly jumped up and screamed. It seems he had placed a bet of \$5 on it and had now won \$10,000! What a great start to a football game. But as the game



Old Steam Locomotive - Death Valley Railroad

continued, and probably many of you already know the outcome, it was a total blowout with Seattle winning 43 to 8! In fact, Denver was scoreless for the entire first half, which was very embarrassing for the Broncos fans in the saloon. The featured beer on tap was the "Badwater Pale Ale", brewed especially for the saloon by the Death Valley Brewery in Inyokern, California. After the game I ordered a pizza from the bar and had dinner on the balcony of my room under a beautiful night sky of a million stars. The next morning I awoke early to capture a gorgeous sunrise that highlighted the snow covered summits of the 11,000 foot Panamint Mountains from

my room. After a monster cowboy breakfast in the café I visited the Borax Museum next to the ranch and discovered a perfectly restored old Baldwin 2-8-0 steam locomotive that once transported borax ore on the Death Valley Railroad south to connect with the old Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad for shipment on the Southern Pacific Railroad at Mojave, California. A few miles north of Furnace Creek Ranch is the site of the now abandoned Harmony Borax Works where the famous 20 mule team wagon trains transported Borax ore to railheads at Mojave and Daggett. It was very slow going across the desert and



Abandoned Mine

mountains for the heavy wagons that took 3 weeks to reach their destination at an average pace of just 2 mph. On down the road I stopped at the Visitor Center where there was a fascinating exhibit about the tribal history and cultural heritage of the local Timbisha Shoshone tribe that have called Death Valley their home for many generations. One of the park rangers recommended I drive to the old Eureka mine for one of the best views of the valley. I found the old mining road which was pretty rough and unpaved for 20 miles, but when I reached the abandoned mine the old rails leading into the side of the mountain were still in place, as was the huge stamp mill nearby. Then it was a short distance up to the summit at Aguereberry Point where I had a spectacular 180 degree view of the entire valley over 7000 feet below. On the return

to the main road I passed the site of the Harrisburg Mining Camp that was in operation until 1945 when the mine closed. As I explored the old camp site there were old refrigerators, gas stoves, and even a couple of flush toilets, so this place probably had a lot of luxuries that most mining camps never had. A couple of hundred yards away were the remains of an old 1950's Buick "Roadmaster" that had certainly seen better days. On the way back to Furnace Creek Ranch I stopped to visit "Scotty's Castle" near the north end of the park. The elaborate castle structure was built in 1922 by Walter Scott who came from Kentucky to establish a mining claim but ended up building a ranch instead. The castle sits along the banks of a perennial stream in Grapevine Canyon and is a beautiful hidden gem of the park. It even had its own



20 Mule Team Wagons - Death Valley



Death Valley - Panamint Mountains beyond



View of Death Valley from Aguereberry Point



Old 1950's Buick Roadmaster

small hydroelectric generating station powered by a natural spring above the ranch. That evening, back at Furnace Creek I sat on the balcony with a cold glass of local Mojave Gold Lager and watched the sun set over the snow covered Panamint Mountains and the moon rise over the Funeral Mountains across the valley. The next morning I took some photos of "Old Dyna", a huge old steam powered tractor that was designed to replace the mule teams to haul Borax ore to the Mojave railhead. But after only a few years and countless mechanical breakdowns, it too was replaced, this time by a railroad. As I drove south on highway 178 along the eastern

edge of the valley I came upon "Badwater Basin", a small alkaline lake at 282 feet below sea level, the very lowest point in all of North America. From the edge of the lake the view of snow covered Telescope Peak at 11,090 feet high reflected in the still



Badwater Basin & Telescope Peak

water was spectacular. High above the road on the other side was a sign reading "Sea Level" on the side of the rocky cliff. From here I took the back roads through the Mojave Desert to Barstow and then home.

In the middle of February I took a day hike into the Chino Hills State Park near Pomona and found a lovely trail up to the top of the ridge overlooking the Santa Ana River where I had a panoramic view of most of Orange County, all the way to the coast. On a really clear day it's said that one can see Catalina Island as well. On the way down through Telegraph Canyon I spotted a large covey of Quail just a few feet away, as well as many hummingbirds and song birds. Further down the trail as I came around a sharp bend, a coyote trotted on down the trail ahead of me and then turned around to stare at me. As I looked off to

the side of the trail there were two more partially hidden by the brush. So much wildlife and so close to a large urban area.

The following weekend I drove to Borrego Springs to attend a concert by a local classical guitarist and stayed the night at the Borrego Springs Resort. The concert was an intimate affair at the Historical Society and was well attended by local artists and musicians. Afterwards I was invited to join a couple of people at a bar down the



Sculpture by Ricardo Breceda - Borrego Springs

street named "Carlee's", which had a great rock-n-roll band of a father and his two sons. They played some excellent renditions of vintage 50's and 60's music that got a lot of people dancing that night. I finished the evening with a cold beer on the patio of my room under a starlit sky.

A few days later I took a short day trip to the small town of Claremont that is well known for its collection of private colleges. It's also an historical town for the citrus growing and packing industry during the late 1800's and early 1900's. The largest of the packing houses that ceased operation in the 1960's has been restored to a small museum and a center for small shops, restaurants, and galleries. Late in the afternoon I stopped at the "Heroes and Legends" bar for a cold glass of local "Hopocalypse IPA". A few minutes later a young Latino guy sat down at the bar and was in an argument with his girlfriend on his cell phone. Apparently she kept hanging up on him and he was getting very frustrated. As he started talking with the bartender his story came out. His girlfriend had taken his debit card but he had the keys to her car, so it was becoming pretty much a "standoff". After more phone calls with her, things became a bit weird as he began telling me and the bartender how he was making his living by selling illegal drugs "globally" through the US Postal Service! Finally his girlfriend showed up and they exchanged the debit card and car keys. As I was leaving the bar he was still talking with the bartender, but now the subject was his plan to go to college and his passion for cooking. So went my visit to Claremont.



Scotty's Castle - Death Valley



Borrego Springs Resort

In early March I attended a brunch in Indian Wells sponsored by the University of Illinois Alumni Foundation. It was a beautiful sunny day in the desert with the mountains covered in a thick blanket of new snow from a recent strong Pacific storm that had dumped over 3 inches of rain on Redlands. In addition to a great lunch buffet at the country club, there was a fascinating presentation by the Director of the Neuroscience Program at the university on the subject of "Nutrition, Brain Health, and Cognition". Their extensive research proved there is a strong link between good diet, exercise, and brain health. In addition there is proof that new neurons can be formed in the brain as a result – who would have guessed.

During the first week of March I signed up for a seminar in LA on the subject of "Adobe Photoshop for Lightroom Users" presented by one of the instructors from Kelby Media. The seminar got off to a bit of a rough start when the instructor's laptop and the video projectors wouldn't sync with each other. But after 10 minutes or so the problem was resolved and the session was great. At the lunch break I joined my friend Jeff at the Palm Restaurant nearby, one of his favorites. It's a historical property downtown that has been popular with Hollywood stars and local politicians whose caricatures fill the walls of the restaurant. Jeff explained how people get their face on the wall though they may not be famous or well heeled. Once you spend \$15,000 over time at the restaurant, you get to have your face painted on the wall. Jeff said he has just over \$13,000 in points so he expects to reach his goal in 2 or 3 more years. (go for it Jeff!) After the seminar concluded I headed for the Yard House at LA Live and joined a packed bar to watch the Lakers game going on at Staples Center across the street, which they unfortunately lost to Phoenix.

The second week of March was the Esri Business Partner Conference in Palm Springs where I met up with some of my international friends from Germany, Dubai, and Croatia. I joined Myles and Jorg for a beer in the lobby bar of the Renaissance Hotel, which is where everyone meets during the conference. For dinner that evening I ended up at the Kaiser Grill downtown where the young bartender recommended the steak and feta cheese pizza, along with a cold glass of local Coachella Valley IPA that went perfectly with the delicious pizza. On the big screen TV in the bar was a very close match at the BHP Paribas International Tennis Tournament being played in nearby



Renaissance Hotel - Palm Springs



Wildflowers - Joshua Tree National Park

Indian Wells. The next morning I met with several of our international distributors regarding their plans for the user conference in July and then spent the afternoon in Joshua Tree National Park photographing the beautiful wildflowers in Pleasant Valley. The valley was virtually a carpet of bright pink, purple, yellow, blue and white blossoms as a result of heavy rains two weeks before. I decided to drive the entire length of the unpaved road (aka jeep trail) through the south end of the park down into the Coachella Valley. On the map it was designated as the "Berdo Canyon Road" that

connected with Dillon Road on the outskirts of Indio. The first 15 miles or followed a narrow sandy track slowly rising up to the summit of a high ridge in the Little San Bernardino Mountains that overlooked the Coachella Valley. However, as the "road" descended into Berdo Canyon it suddenly became very steep, rough and rocky. My first encounter with large boulders came as the track dropped steeply into a very narrow canyon with no more than a few inches of clearance on either side of my jeep. I got out to survey the path ahead over the two foot high rocks. Then I put my jeep into 4 wheel drive low gear and proceeded to negotiate my way ever so slowly over the boulders. At this point there was really no option of turning around so I was definitely committed to going all the way down the canyon, and hoping conditions didn't get any worse. But to my dismay the worst was yet to come as I made my way slowly down the rocky track at 5 mph in 4 wheel drive and first gear. After more than 10 miles of this "off road" experience, which seemed like a hundred miles, I finally came to the bottom of the canyon and on to the remains of a paved road that had once existed but had been washed out long ago. Apparently the lower portion of Berdo Canyon was the site of an old construction camp during the building of the huge tunnel under the mountains for the California Aqueduct. At last I reached Dillon Road and the route back to Palm Springs, no worse for the wear but definitely



Berdo Canyon "Road"

not taking the Berdoo Canyon Road ever again. That evening Jorg invited me to join the German contingent for their traditional dinner at LG's Steakhouse which is known as the best in the entire valley. More than 100 people showed up and we had a fantastic dinner outside on the terrace with the beer and wine flowing freely all evening. I had a wonderful time talking with Jorg, Michael, and Guenther in between their conversations in German. The next day I had lunch with the folks from Croatia and discussed some details of the upcoming European User Conference that will be held in Split, a lovely historic town on the beautiful Dalmatian coast. Back in the early 1990's I had conducted a couple of software training classes for the UN office in Split, so I knew of its beauty and history well. After lunch I decided to visit the "Living Desert Zoo" in



Bighorn Sheep - The Living Desert Zoo

nearby Palm Desert. It's situated on more than 2000 acres at the base of the Santa Rosa Mountains and has an extensive collection of animals and plants from desert regions around the world. One highlight of the zoo is the natural enclosure for the resident herd of California Bighorn Sheep which roam over several acres of mountain habitat. It's a very interesting and unique place that deserves another, much longer visit. I returned to the Renaissance Hotel in time for dinner with the all of the international distributors outside on the terrace by the pool. Later on in the evening Jack came around to our table and showed me a short video of the "wake" he attended in memory of our great friend and

colleague Dr. Roger Tomlinson in Ottawa a month ago. Then we talked about how best to honor Roger at the User Conference in July. I finished the evening at the lobby bar talking with several of my Esri friends who I rarely have the chance to see these days. It was a fun evening for sure.

At the end of March I was invited to the "Spring Gathering" of the Yosemite Conservancy that was being held at the Yosemite Valley Lodge. The drive up to Yosemite National Park is by way of Bakersfield and US Highway 99 through the heart of the San Joaquin valley to Fresno and then by California Highway 41 that winds its way up into the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Range, a very scenic route but by no means fast. Once into the forest of huge Ponderosa and Jeffrey Pines, I began to encounter large patches of snow alongside the road. About 25 miles inside the park the road passed through a large tunnel and upon exiting there was one of the most spectacular views of the entire Yosemite Valley framed by El Capitan and Half Dome! It's one of the most popular and well known spots for taking the classic photo of Yosemite. Once down in the valley I checked into the lodge and then joined a group of Yosemite Conservancy members for a reception on the Garden Terrace. Later on in the evening I sat on the patio outside my room among the tall Ponderosa Pines with a glass of local



View of Yosemite Valley from "Tunnel View"



Upper Yosemite Falls

Mammoth Pale Ale as the wind softly caressed the trees. The next morning we all met at the Yosemite Valley Visitor Center for the opening session before joining smaller groups for workshops and walks. This year marks the 150th anniversary of the "Yosemite Grant" that was signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1864, setting aside 600 square miles of land for the benefit of the public forever. This act near the end of the Civil War was the very first of its kind anywhere in the world and provided the framework for the establishment of "national parks". I had signed up for a photography workshop titled "In the Footsteps of Ansel Adams" lead by one of the

National Park Service staff photographers who had the good fortune to have met Ansel and even assisted him in his darkroom. I learned a lot about photographing landscapes in Yosemite Valley, as well as many things about Ansel Adams I never knew, such as his love for the Polaroid Instant camera when it was first introduced on the market. Apparently Ansel was always on the forefront of using new technology but never abandoned his roots in dramatic black and white images for which he is so famous. Strangely enough, in our small group of 12 people, two of them



Half Dome from Cook's Meadow

didn't even have cameras. We were fortunate enough to come upon a small herd of Mule Deer grazing in the meadow by the lodge with a doe and two fawns as well as a young 6 point buck. Another highlight of our walk in the meadow was the gorgeous view of both upper and lower Yosemite Falls shining bright in the midday sun. After lunch I explored a fascinating exhibit about the cultural heritage of the local Miwok Indians who made their summer home in the valley, hunting animals and collecting various plants from the forest and the meadows. The most highly prized food was the acorn of the large Black Oak trees along the river banks. The last afternoon session was titled "A Walk with

Galen Clark", the man who became the first Superintendent of the park. One of the NPS rangers had dressed up as Galen Clark and spoke from Mr. Clark's journal about growing up on the east coast and ending up being one of the first white men to see the Yosemite Valley. The ranger spoke as if he were Mr. Clark himself, never "reading" from notes, only from memory. It was a fascinating new side to Yosemite. Later on that evening we were treated to a showing of the highlights from the recent "Range of Light" film festival that was held in Yosemite Valley. There were many lovely films portraying the beauty and history of the valley, including one about the Buffalo Soldiers who were stationed in the park after the Civil War to protect it from poachers and miners. In the last part of the film a young African-American park ranger gave a mesmerizing performance as a Buffalo Soldier relating his experience of being in Yosemite Valley for the first time. Ironically, less than 1% of all National Park visitors are African Americans. One film that really stood out was about a young rock climber from Sacramento who climbed the three highest vertical rock walls in the valley, over 8000 vertical feet, in less than 18 hours. And what makes this feat so remarkable is the fact that he was climbing solo and without



Along the North Fork of the Merced River

ropes, or what's known as "free climbing". It was literally unbelievable watching him scale sheer rock faces thousands of feet above the ground with nothing but his hands and feet – it was like watching a real "Spiderman"! Back at the lodge that evening I sat outside on the patio and listened to the soft sounds of rain falling through the tall Ponderosa Pines and Giant Sequoias. Within a half hour it slowly became silent as the rain gradually turned to

snow. The next morning I awoke early as the sun was rising over a snow covered landscape with all the trees and bushes covered in a thick white blanket. I grabbed my camera and walked into the beautiful winter scene and on to the places I had visited yesterday in the photography workshop. Although the places were still familiar it was like a totally different world this morning. In Cook's Meadow I

encountered another small herd of Mule Deer and took lots of photos of the "new" landscape enveloped in patches of fog and mist. The classic Yosemite icons of Half Dome and Yosemite Falls were partially hidden from view as if behind a thin veil, adding mystery to their shapes. I tromped all around the snow covered landscape of the valley for more than 3 hours until the sun began to melt the snow from the trees which caused an almost steady downpour of water underneath them. Occasionally large "clumps" of cold, wet snow would fall from the branches like small "bombs". Then I made my way back to the lodge for a hearty breakfast before packing my bags for my return home. As I checked out the information board in the lobby that listed the weather and road conditions, I was a bit surprised to see that of the three access roads



Early Spring Snowfall on the North Fork of the Merced River



Yosemite Valley Chapel



Reflection of Upper Yosemite Falls

into the park, two of them were requiring chains. But luckily the route I was taking to Fresno, highway 140 was clear. It followed the course of the Merced River as it dropped steeply into a narrow canyon through a series of huge rapids. In many places alongside the highway were gorgeous Redbud trees in full bloom along with large fields of red and orange poppies. Quite a spectacular sight indeed, and a brilliant announcement of the coming of Spring!

The beginning of April saw me on a flight to Atlanta to attend the Photoshop World Conference. I rode the train into downtown LA and then took the express bus to LAX which cost me a total of \$12.50 as opposed to \$175 for the limo, and although the travel time was a bit longer the cost savings were substantial. It was a nice nonstop flight on Delta to Atlanta with a delicious lunch of Caesar salad together with a grilled chicken breast, feta cheese, sun dried tomatoes, and olive pizza. During the flight I watched a new film called "Ender's Game" with Harrison Ford and Ben Kingsley as they had to deal with a future in which an alien species "swarmed" like insects. It wasn't a blockbuster by any means but entertaining none the less. We arrived a bit early and I picked up my bag right away, however, the shuttle to the airport Renaissance Hotel was jammed with young female high school volleyball players. (later I found out there was an international women's volleyball tournament going on in Atlanta) I had dinner in the lobby bar along with a local Sweetwater 420 Pale Ale while I joined the crowd watching the NCAA "Final Four" basketball game between Kentucky and Wisconsin. Kentucky had trailed most of the game but made a 3 point shot with 5 seconds remaining in the game to win 73 – 72. Meanwhile Connecticut beat number 1 ranked Florida to go into the championship game against Kentucky. It certainly was an enthusiastic crowd in the bar that night. The next morning I took the MARTA train from the airport to downtown Atlanta to meet up with my cousins Sandi and Dwight who live just outside Atlanta in Douglasville. We met at the Food Court in the CNN Center which was packed with the high school volleyball players competing in the Georgia Dome next door. So we headed for a restaurant adjacent to the Food Court named "Dandanna's Steak and Seafood" where we I had a fantastic bowl of seafood stew that had several kinds of fish, shrimp, mussels, and crab in a hearty broth, while Dwight had a grilled salmon sandwich topped with fried green tomatoes. After lunch we walked through the "Olympic Centennial Park" amid the gorgeous blossoms of the Dogwood and Redbud trees to the new Georgia Aquarium. I was totally amazed by the size of the place and all of it housed under one roof. Apparently it's now the world's largest aquarium and I could certainly see why as we explored seven different ocean, riverine, and coastal environments from around the world, each one of them sponsored by a major corporation such as the Southern Company, Georgia Pacific, and Home Depot. There were some incredibly beautiful displays and exhibits with phenomenal numbers of colorful fish in massive tanks. The largest tank held four monster Whale Sharks, each of which was the size of school bus! (they are actually fish, not sharks, and they feed exclusively on microscopic plankton) Also in the huge tanks were several giant Manta Rays with wingspans over 16 feet, and they too feed on nothing but plankton. The thing that was most impressive was probably the large glass tunnel beneath the largest of the tanks where the giant Whale Sharks and Manta Rays slowly swam overhead! Later in the afternoon we went to a marvelous show of Dolphins doing spectacular feats of aerial acrobatics as their trainers guided them with nothing but hand signals. Then there were some bizarre fish in the form of "Dragon Fish" from Australia that looked like they had been created for a Disney film, the lovely Sea Horses which one could somehow imagine being able to ride on their backs through the ocean, and the Razor Fish that swim upside down in a vertical position which is very weird to watch. After an incredible visit to the Georgia Aquarium we walked up the street to the Legal Seafoods restaurant, one of our favorites, for dinner and quiet conversation. My dinner of Maryland lump crabcake, grilled Gulf shrimp, and scallops was absolutely fantastic. We finished off our dinner by sharing a luscious Key Lime pie. As we walked back to the CNN Center to catch the MARTA train we all agreed it had been a wonderful day that we will always remember. The next morning I awoke to find heavy rain falling outside as I packed my bags to board the shuttle that would take me to the Cobb Galleria northwest of downtown. During the trip a commercial came on the radio for a "non-drug" alternative for ED and went on to describe in some graphic detail about a "penile implant". Now this was the first time I've ever heard an advertisement for such a device. Besides me and the shuttle bus driver I don't think anyone else was aware of it. Thankfully it was a short 20 minute drive to the Sheraton Hotel at Cobb Galleria and I checked into a nice room



Upper Yosemite Falls

on the top floor, then walked over to the conference center in the galleria to register for the conference. During the lunch break I went to one of the restaurants in the galleria called "Jocks and Jills" for a burger and a glass of Yuengling Beer. The young black bartender was very chatty and funny as she talked with one of the servers about her young daughter discovering her breasts for the first time and the subsequent discussion of cup sizes. Meanwhile I think everyone in the place heard the conversation. That evening I sat in the lobby bar of the Sheraton with a large number of other people watching the NCAA championship game between Kentucky and Connecticut in which Kentucky lead most of the time but sadly lost in the last 3 minutes of the game. All of the "coaches" in the bar agreed that had Kentucky made their free throws they could have won. (ironically, the next evening the NCAA women's championship game was also won by Connecticut, a first in several decades) The next morning was filled with a couple of really good sessions on ways to use Lightroom and Photoshop together. Then for lunch I thought I would try a new restaurant in the Galleria called the "Big Chow Grill – A Stir Fry Evolution", which turned out to be a make your own stir fry. I was given two bowls and told to fill one with all of the veggies I liked and fill the second bowl with proteins like chicken, beef, and fish, plus a choice of sauces and seasonings to go with the meal. At that point I was to put the numbered stick I had been given at the beginning into one of the bowls and hand both of them to a chef who promptly dumped them on to a huge grill for cooking. Once I had returned to my place at the bar my cooked bowl of veggies and proteins was served to me. The food was delicious and they even provided "recipe" cards when entering the restaurant in case you have no idea of how to combine the myriad of ingredients. It was very tasty, quick and quite unique, but the instructions/explanation given by my server at the beginning didn't make a lot of sense for a "first timer", so I just joined the line and started putting things in my bowls. In contrast, for dinner that evening I went to the "Toscu Blu Bar" in the Renaissance Hotel and ordered a delicious grilled chicken and sun dried tomato panini, along with a pint of the local "Red Brick IPA". The following day I was up early to catch the first session with the Kelby Media instructors, including a special presentation by Moose Peterson titled "50 tips in 60 minutes" that had some really cool and useful stuff since Moose doesn't mince words. In the final wrap up session of the conference there were several really nice prizes given away, none of which I won, but neither did 4,985 other people in the room. That evening I walked over to the "Stony River Steakhouse" in the Cumberland Mall for dinner and ordered two small filet mignon, together with a Maryland lump crabcake and a fantastic Au Gratin potato casserole, all of which were incredible. The chilled pint of local "Gangster IPA" went very well with the meal. After dinner I walked back over to the Jocks and Jills bar for a beer and as I started to sit down at the bar the bartender requested that I move to the next seat since a "regular" named John would be arriving in a few minutes and that I was in his favorite seat. So far be it from me to disturb John. And right on cue, a few minutes later John sat down in his seat next to me and the young black DJ began a trivia contest where there were 4 rounds of questions, each round based on a different subject, such as "who are the famous celebrities in these four old high school prom photos" or "who starred in the film based on the novel written by Lee Harper". A lot of the "regulars" in the bar were helping John with the answers, and I even helped him on the question of a photo of one of the Three Stooges, which I recognized instantly as "Mo". The atmosphere in the crowded bar was one of fun and lively interaction among the patrons, and John won the prize for the most correct answers. The next morning I packed my bags, boarded the shuttle bus to the airport and checked in for my return flight to LA. My flight happened to depart from the new international terminal which gave me an opportunity to spend an hour in Delta's flagship lounge where I checked my email and savored some great food and drinks. To my surprise the nonstop flight to LAX was aboard a Boeing 777 with the new International Business Elite cabin that had fully flat beds and a fantastic meal service. After lunch I watched the movie "Osage County" starring Meryl Streep and Julia Roberts in a very "gritty" story about a dysfunctional family growing up in rural Oklahoma. Despite the nasty characters in the story the acting was absolutely superb. With a couple of hours left in the flight I tuned in to an episode of the TV series "Brew Dogs" featuring two young guys from Scotland who travel the world seeking to brew very unique, one of kind beers from the local influences they find. In this episode they were in Seattle to brew a beer with the strongest caffeine as possible using coffee and chocolate. They gathered their ingredients from the historic Pike Place Public Market and then brewed their batch aboard the ferry to Bremerton, which required them to make 4 round trips. On each trip they asked passengers to sample different local microbrews and give their opinions. It was a very interesting and funny program. Once I landed at LAX I took the express bus to Union Station in downtown LA to catch the train back to Riverside. Since I had about an hour to wait I went to the Traxx

Bar in the station and had a beer as I watched an old movie on the big screen TV starring Judy Garland and Gene Kelley, from an era when Hollywood stars regularly travelled from Union Station between LA and New York.



Santa Fe Steam Locomotive #3751 - San Bernardino

In early April the historic railroad station in San Bernardino held an open house to showcase the new restoration and the re-opening of the museum that highlights the history of the railroads and the city. Several model railroad clubs from southern California had set up some elaborate displays that were very popular with both children and adults. But the main attraction was Santa Fe 3751, the only surviving 4-8-8-4 steam locomotive still in operation, along with several vintage passenger cars, all privately owned. There was the "Ocean View", a full dome observation car from the Santa Fe Railroad, the "Acoma", a luxury parlor car also from the Santa Fe, and the "Tioga Pass", a luxury Pullman sleeper/parlor car from the Southern Pacific Railroad. After taking a lot of photos we boarded the special train for the short trip into LA Union Station along the main BNSF tracks. There were lots of railroad buffs on board with their short wave radios listening in on the conversation between the train crew and the BNSF dispatcher, so we had a continual update on the trip. As the special excursion train passed through the towns and cities on the way to LA there were always plenty of people out to watch it, many of which had probably never seen a huge steam locomotive running under full steam before.



Santa Fe #3751



Interior of the Tioga Pass Pullman Sleeper Car

Near LA is a section of the track which runs down the center divider of Interstate 10, so as the train paralleled the freeway, westbound traffic suddenly slowed down to watch. It was fun seeing people taking photos with their smartphones. Upon arriving into Union Station, the smoke and steam from the locomotive made it feel like it must have been back in the 1930's and 40's when steam locomotives pulled the famous passenger trains like the "Broadway Limited" and the "Super Chief" to Chicago and New York. I had only 10 minutes to catch the MetroLink train back to San Bernardino, but there were several people who had chosen to stay overnight in LA.

On Easter weekend I drove to Joshua Tree National Park, along with half of the people in LA I think, but once in the park the crowd seemed to disappear. I saw the sign for the "Old Dale Road" and decided to explore it as I hadn't been in that area of the park before. It was designated as a 4-wheel drive only road and given the patches of soft sand and rocks it was clear why. After about 12 miles I came to the abandoned site of "Mission Well" that had been drilled in 1934 to a depth of 442 feet in order to supply water to the surrounding mines. Another half mile north were the remains of the "Sunrise Mill" that processed the ore from several mines in the Pinto Mountains. About this time along came a Landcruiser and we chatted for a while about the condition of the road ahead as it climbed its way into the mountains. According to his book on jeep trails in the area it



Spin & Margie's Desert Hideaway - Joshua Tree



Spin & Margie's Desert Hideaway

was rated as a number 7 on a scale of 10. At that point, not wanting to repeat my experience in Berdoo Canyon, I chose to turn around and head back to the main road. Being Easter weekend it had been difficult to find any accommodations within a hundred miles of the park, but I had lucked out in finding a room at an obscure place outside of the town of Joshua Tree by the name of "Spin & Margie's Desert Hideaway". After passing the access road a couple of times I finally found a beautiful old adobe ranch house not far off the highway and surrounded by a large grove of trees. My room was actually two small rooms, with a kitchenette, bathroom, and a private patio – a very nice surprise indeed. For dinner that

evening I went down to the Joshua Tree Saloon for a delicious bleu cheese burger and a pint of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. There was also a local band playing that night, but they kept playing every song with the same 4 chords which became monotonous and depressing after a while so I went back to my room and sat out on the patio with a cold beer while the stars came out for the night. The next morning was another lovely, warm sunny day and I walked around the



JoshuaTree

old ranch property taking photos of all the artwork and old automobile memorabilia that had been collected over the years. As I was leaving I ran into Margie who gave me some of the history of the place that she and her husband Spin had inherited from her grandmother. She delighted in meeting people from all over the world that had stayed there over the years. On the drive back to Interstate 10 I spotted a sign for the "Big Morongo Canyon Nature Reserve" so I thought I would investigate the place. What I found was a beautiful grove of large Cottonwood trees, a luscious green meadow and marsh in the shadow of the San Bernardino Mountains. It is a very unique natural environment for southern California that was formed by the

meltwater from the snow covered mountains that flows deep underground until it reaches a layer of bedrock near the surface and wells up to form the meadows and marshland that supports an amazing plant and animal community not usually seen in the desert. As I hiked around the canyon there were lots of wild flowers in bloom, as well as the bright red and pink flowers of the cactus. From here it was a short drive to Black Rock Canyon and the summit of Eureka Peak for a spectacular view of Palm Springs, the snow covered San Jacinto Mountains, and all the way down the



Big Morongo Canyon Nature Preserve



Ocotillo Cactus in Bloom



Thousand Palms Oasis - Coachella Valley

Coachella Valley to the north end of the Salton Sea. Just before reaching the freeway I saw a sign for the "Coachella Valley Nature Preserve and Thousand Palms Oasis" and decided to take a look. What I found was a large oasis surrounded by hundreds of giant California Fan Palms. The oasis was formed by a natural underground dam along the San Andreas earthquake fault that forces ground water to the surface. Walking along the trail among the huge palms was akin to walking through a grove of Giant Sequoias but on a smaller scale. It was a really unique area and one that I have probably passed many times without realizing it.

At the end of April I took a couple of days to drive to the California Poppy Reserve in the Antelope Valley north of Los Angeles. The flowers would be near their peak this time of the year so I was really looking forward to visiting an area I had only seen in magazines before. Unfortunately there were two things not working in my favor, the huge crowd from LA and the fierce winds out of the northwest. Due to the large crowd I wasn't able to get into the main entrance of the reserve, but just a couple of miles down the road I found some large fields of brilliant red poppies covering the hills, and in the background were the snow



California Poppy Reserve - Lancaster



Union Pacific 4-8-8-4 Steam Locomotive - Cajon Pass

covered peaks of the Tehachapi Mountains that form the southern extent of the Sierra Nevada Range. I hiked up a narrow jeep trail and got some beautiful photos of the poppy fields before heading east to Saddleback Butte State Park. It's a small but interesting park with a grand view of the high desert from the summit of the butte and along the trail I spotted hundreds of Monarch butterflies that must have just returned recently from their winter grounds in Mexico. Then I made my way back home via highway 138 to the junction with I-15, and just before the junction with the freeway were a large number of cars parked alongside the road and people



UP 4-8-8-4 "Big Boy" Steam Locomotive - Cajon Pass

everywhere with cameras. I was about to ask what was going on when I saw a Union Pacific train coming around the bend and as it got closer I could see it was towing a giant 4-8-8-4 steam locomotive, which was why so many people had been waiting at this point. I found out later that Union Pacific was moving the old locomotive to the railroad shops in Cheyenne, Wyoming to undertake a full restoration that would put it back in operation for special excursions. The project would take 2 years and several million dollars to complete, but it's a one of kind locomotive for sure. And as the UP train was climbing the grade northbound to the summit at Cajon Pass, a monstrous BNSF freight train was passing southbound on the adjacent track with a mile and a half long line of

tank cars headed by four large diesel locomotives and two trailing. I was just lucky to have been driving down the highway at the right time to capture the moment.

In early May I made a day trip to the "RailGiants Museum" in Pomona, an outdoor display adjacent to the fairgrounds, having some of the largest steam locomotives ever built. Among the giant beasts were a Union Pacific 4-12-4, the world's largest "articulated" steam locomotive that pulled huge freight trains across the Great Plains, a Southern Pacific 4-8-4 and an SP 4-10-4. The Union Pacific 4-8-8-4 "Big Boy" locomotive that once stood here among these giants had been moved to Cheyenne for restoration a month before. In addition to the monster steam locomotives there were several large diesel engines, including one of the largest diesel locomotives in the world from the Union Pacific Railroad. But one of the most unique and unusual steam locomotives was an old engine from a



Southern Pacific 4-6-6-4 Steam Locomotive - Pomona



Vintage Deluxe Pullman Car - Pomona

logging railroad in northern California that had what was referred to as a "climax" type of drive mechanism where the steam cylinders were located under the center of the locomotive in order to drive a series of gears that transferred power to all the wheels, including those located under the coal tender. Later on I joined a small tour of a vintage deluxe Pullman sleeping car that had accommodations for 14 passengers and crew, together with a galley, dining room, lounge, bar, and showers. It was built in the early 1920's for Southern Pacific Railroad executives and later purchased by a private owner for use on special excursions. The interior was in splendid condition just as when it ran on the rails. There was also a UP caboose where copies of the 1954 freight

train timetables were displayed. Here is where I also learned about the origin of the term "caboose". Apparently it originated from the Dutch or German word for the place where the cook stove was located aboard the old 18th century sailing ships, on the top of a stone surface, much the same as the old cook stove used in today's caboose. Just before I left the museum, the staff fired up one of the huge diesel locomotives with its two 16 cylinder engines and let visitors watch it at work. Later on in the afternoon I visited the "Pacific Railroad Museum" in nearby San Dimas that is located in the old Santa Fe railroad depot. It was a small museum but it had collected a lot of history about the Santa Fe railroad and the citrus packing industry in San Dimas.



SP Caboose - Pomona

In the middle of May our chapter of PCMA joined with the northern California chapter to put on a full day of education for meeting planners. We were very fortunate to have the new "LA Hotel Downtown", a Hyatt property, host us for most of the event. I checked into a beautiful corner suite with a fantastic view of the Disney Music Hall and the Hollywood hills beyond. Then I met up in the lobby bar with my colleagues and the folks from northern California to go through the agenda and logistics for the event. As soon as we finished we joined a reception in the lobby sponsored by the Convention and Visitors



Downtown Los Angeles

Bureaus from Los Angeles and Las Vegas. The hotel's executive chef had prepared some delicious appetizers such as goat cheese crostini, seared tuna and wasabi toast, and a wonderful sweet and sour chicken pot sticker. The next day we had a full agenda of different sessions in a unique room setup that allowed people to move around to whatever topics interested them. Our lunch was in the lobby and began with a very refreshing watermelon "shooter", a fresh salad with Buffalo mozzarella, followed by a very tasty flank steak served with garlic mashed potatoes, and finished with a lovely Crème Brûlée custard. At the end of the day everyone remarked how well the event went and how much they enjoyed it. It's become an annual event and next year will be hosted by the northern California chapter on their home turf.

The next week I headed for Joshua Tree National Park again to explore another part I hadn't seen before, the area along the "Boy Scout Trail". On the way I stopped for breakfast at Carl's Jr in Yucca Valley and as I was eating my meal I overheard a conversation between two old cowboys seated across from me. It went like this – *"tell me how much it's gonna cost to repair the engine and put it back in my car?"* – *"how much do you have to spend?"* – *"I don't have any money, I need to find it, so I need to know how much it will cost me"*. This same back and forth dialogue went on for the entire time I was in the restaurant, and it was still going on when I left! Once I was in the park, the clouds started forming thunderstorms and as I hiked up the trail a light rain had begun to fall and the air became very chilly. I saw a sign for "Willow Spring" and followed it a few miles to a beautiful box canyon with some very unusual rock formations and a lovely pond with a grove of Willows surrounding it. Always surprising and enjoyable to find such a water feature in the middle of the desert. Leaving the park I drove to the small town of 29 Palms which is named for an oasis on the edge of town with 29 large California Fan Palms, though the town is probably better known as the home of the US Marine Corps training base. My reason for coming to 29 Palms was to check out a place Margie had told me about earlier in the year called the 29 Palms Inn. I found a collection of old, historic cabins surrounding a beautiful large pond in the middle of the oasis. I was staying in an old miners cabin



Boy Scout Trail - Joshua Tree National Park



Faultline Cabin - 29 Palms Inn

named "Faultline" that had been moved here from its original location at a mining camp in the park. The old wooden cabin had two rooms, a bathroom, and a lovely private deck outside with an old bright red refrigerator. After exploring the oasis and walking around the pond among the tall palm trees I headed for the dining room. I was very surprised to find it serving excellent food and drink amid the rustic surroundings. I ordered the seafood special, a grilled swordfish with mango salsa and basmati rice that was a dish I would have ordered in any fine dining restaurant. As the evening went on a couple of local musicians began to play some great acoustic music on guitar and violin with excellent renditions of songs from

the 50's and 60's, including of all things, music from Pink Floyd! I finished the evening sitting on the deck outside my room in the warm night air. The next morning as I was leaving, several rabbits were still munching away on the grass down by the pond.

Later in May I sold an antique chandelier on eBay that was purchased by a lady in the small high desert community of Llano, so rather than ship it to her I decided to deliver it instead. It was a beautiful clear day as I drove up highway 138 toward Palmdale and I took some nice photos around the town of Wrightwood among the tall Ponderosa Pines in the San Bernardino Mountains. Although I had her address and directions from Mapquest, I searched in vain for a street sign marking Panorama Road. Finally after a couple of misses I spotted the small sign and an unpaved road leading off across the desert. After a few miles of looking for "1911 Panorama Road" I came to a narrow dirt track heading up the slope between a couple of Joshua Trees and some brush to a "collection" of small shacks with old broken outdoor furniture scattered everywhere –

could this be the place I wondered? An old SUV was parked with its engine running and jumper cables connected to a battery beside the larger structure. Since I couldn't see anyone outside when I stepped out of my jeep I walked up to what I assumed to be the front door and knocked. A few minutes later an elderly lady in a red satin bathrobe came to the door and I delivered the chandelier to her. The place was cluttered with artwork and boxes of household goods which she hadn't unpacked yet, just having moved in a few months ago. When she showed me the place where she intended to hang the chandelier, all I could think was that the ceiling was much too low, but I said nothing, took the cash in her hand, and made my back down the narrow dirt track back into the desert!



"Pacific Sands" Vintage Pullman Sleeper Car - San Diego

In early June I signed up for a special trip to San Diego aboard a private vintage Pullman railroad car that was organized by the owner from LA. The private railcar was connected to the rear of the regular Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train that departed LA Union Station at 9:05am. It was a beautiful trip down the coast as I sat in my roomette part of the time and joined other passengers on the open vestibule for a unique view that one can't get on board the Amtrak train. Once we arrived at the historic Santa Fe depot in downtown San Diego, our private car was parked on a siding beside the station. This was also to be our "hotel room" for the night. I walked over to Anthony's Fish House on the waterfront for lunch and then explored the

historic old 4 masted sailing ship named the "Star of India" which is still sea worthy and has made over 35 voyages around the world since being commissioned in the 1880's. Its last commercial sailings were as a salmon cannery ship traveling to Alaska during summers in the 1930's. There was also an interesting new exhibit in the Maritime Museum on the arts of tattooing and scrimshaw, and surprisingly they are often quite similar in their designs. Later on in the afternoon I walked along the waterfront to Seaport Village where the annual "Oyster Festival" was going on in the Embarcadero Park. There were lots of scantily clad young people, many of whom were "three sheets to the wind", listening to the bands on stage. Scattered around the park were many bars and food stalls, some of which were actually serving oysters. Among the young crowd were lots of dogs eagerly chasing each other which made it hard for some of the drunks to navigate their way back to the bar! One dog in particular was a beautiful cross between a Golden Retriever and a French Poodle which turned out to be a "Golden Poodle". That evening I had dinner at one of my favorite San Diego restaurants, the "Top of the Market" near the harbor where the boats in the tuna fleet are moored. The "Dungeness Crab Cioppino" was fantastic with lots of mussels, clams, fish, shrimp, and of course crab. And to accompany the seafood stew there was hot fresh sourdough bread served with a light sauce of spinach, garlic, and cilantro. It was fascinating to sit at the bar and watch the five chefs work the line in such a coordinated fashion, as if their movements were skillfully choreographed. My "alarm clock" the next morning was a huge BNSF freight train passing by our railcar on the adjacent track at 5:30am. I walked back down to the waterfront and saw there were ships from the Japanese Navy docked near the USS Midway aircraft carrier, which I thought was very ironic considering the WWII history of the defeat of the



Star of India - San Diego



Wedding Ceremony at the Midway Aircraft Carrier

Japanese Navy at the battle of Midway. One of the large ships was a training vessel and the whole waterfront and downtown area was alive with young Japanese Navy cadets looking exceedingly handsome in their crisp, spotless white uniforms. In the small park beside the Midway was a beautiful setup of tables covered with white linen and flowers, as well as a large buffet table and a podium where a senior US Naval Officer stood. As I was about to take a photo a man standing next to me said it must be a "changing of the guard" ceremony, but in actuality it was the wedding of the Naval Base Commandant's daughter. Then two elderly Japanese ladies insisted on having their photo taken with the Commandant and he graciously allowed



Coronado Island Waterfront

the photo. Later I took the ferry to Coronado and spent time walking along the seafront where there were gorgeous views of the San Diego skyline across the bay. Lots of families were setting up BBQs in Tidelands Park to celebrate Father's Day. A short distance away were softball games being played as part of the Coronado Girls Softball Tournament and although there was plenty of enthusiasm from the parents and spectators, there were not a lot of softball skills among the young elementary school girls. Still, everyone was having a lot of fun. I found a great spot on the waterfront for a cup of coffee where I could watch the skateboarders, runners, and cyclists passing by on the boardwalk. At

one point a huge US Navy warship slowly steamed by just a couple of hundred yards away, which caught everyone's attention. Next door to the coffee shop was a small liquor store with a sign out front reading "If life hands you lemons, look for someone with Tequila", a simple but elegant view on life. I took the ferry back to downtown and then walked over to the Midway to see some of the ship I hadn't seen before. There were lots of



Flight Deck of USS Midway

children and quite a few Japanese tourists on board which made for tight quarters in some areas below decks, but when I went up to the flight deck it was a different story with lots of open space among the aircraft parked there. I was fortunate to catch two presentations by former Navy pilots describing various operations that take place on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier, such as the details of how jets are launched and recovered. Before returning to the railcar I walked

over to the Karl Strauss Brewhouse for a cold pint of their Pintail Ale and a burger. On the big screen TV above the bar was an ESPN talk show where one of the commenters told a joke that went like this "Past, Present, and Future walked into a bar – it was Tense". Leaving the bar I joined the rest of our passengers to watch the Amtrak locomotive as it coupled to the car, very gently, as the owner watched closely. We departed San Diego at the rear of the



San Diego Mission

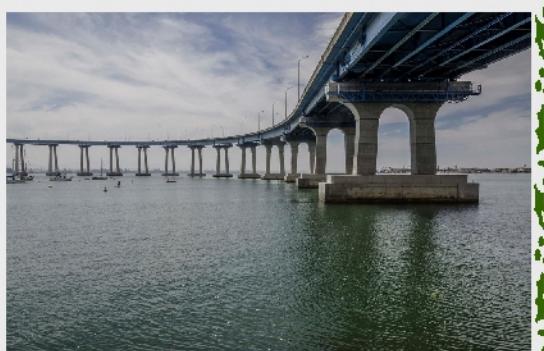
6:45pm Pacific Surfliner and had some amazing views from the open vestibule platform at the end of the train, as well as some beautiful photos of the sunset across the ocean. We arrived in LA after the last MetroLink train to San Bernardino so I was invited to stay on board that

night as the railcar was moved to the Amtrak yard where it was coupled to the "Silver Splendor", another private dome dining car on a siding in the yard. The next morning I watched the Amtrak Southwest Chief train arrive in the yard and go through the giant "car wash" before the owner Doug, took me to Union Station where I connected with a MetroLink train back to Riverside.

Near the end of June I was invited to a University of Illinois Alumni Foundation dinner at the Universal City Sheraton Hotel where the new President of the university was to speak. Rather than driving I rode the train to downtown LA and then the Metro which took me directly to Universal Studios where I checked into a nice room on the 19th floor of the hotel overlooking the San Fernando Valley and the Hollywood hills, as



Down town San Diego Skyline from Coronado



Bridge to Coronado Island



View of the Backlots - Universal Studios

well as some of the Universal Studio back lots. I joined a large reception in the Grand Ballroom then on to a more intimate dinner on the terrace where President Easter spoke. I was wearing my "international" tie that has flags of many countries around the world and it drew a fair amount of attention, especially when I told people I got it in Omaha, Nebraska.



Coastline near San Luis Obispo - Coast Starlight Train

That next weekend I arranged to meet my old army buddy Mike in Seattle where he had some business meetings, so instead of taking a flight to Seattle I took the Coast Starlight train instead. Being the summer season the train was fully booked but having a roomette for the overnight journey made it much more enjoyable. The weather was clear and sunny with beautiful views of the coastline all the way to San Luis Obispo and over the coastal mountains into the Salinas Valley with its endless fields of produce and fruit orchards. Lunch on board was a

fantastic dish of Kung Pao Chicken and a southwestern shrimp salad for dinner in the Pacific Parlor Car, along with a nice selection of wines. That night I sat in my roomette and listened to music as the train climbed silently into the mountains of northern California. I woke up the next morning at 5:00am as the train pulled into Dunsmuir where the clouds obscured the summit of Mt Shasta, however the lower snow covered slopes were beautifully highlighted by the rays of the early morning sun. As the train made its way into eastern



Pacific Parlor Car - Coast Starlight Train



Southern Oregon near Klamath Falls

Oregon the views of Klamath Lake and the Oregon Cascades were gorgeous, with a lot of migratory waterfowl on the lake. As we climbed into the mountains and crossed over Willamette Pass there were light rain showers and lots of mist in the heavy forest of Douglas Fir and Spruce on the steep slopes. After a short stop in Portland we crossed the mighty Columbia River on our way north to Seattle. As we approached Olympia the view of the sunset along the shore of Puget Sound was spectacular, as was the sight of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge with the setting sun reflecting from the massive steel girders as the train passed under. Soon we arrived at the newly

restored, historic King Street Station and I walked a couple of blocks to the

new Marriott Courtyard Hotel in Pioneer Square. Although the hotel is new, the building is the historic old Alaskan Building dating from the late 1880's, the first all brick and steel high rise structure in Seattle, which has been beautifully restored. After checking in I had a cold pint of local Manny's Pale Ale in the lovely white marble lobby bar before calling it a night. The next morning I joined Mike for breakfast at his hotel a few blocks away and then we walked up along the waterfront to the Pike Place Farmers Market, which on Saturday morning was jammed with both locals and tourists. So after battling our way through the crowded market for a couple of blocks I suggested we go back out into the street and stop by the original Starbuck's so Mike could take a photo. A light rain began to fall as we walked over to Cutter's Restaurant to have lunch. Mike asked the host if he could find a table by the window for a couple of "old vets" and sure enough we were seated by the window with a gorgeous view of Elliot Bay and Bainbridge Island. My crab and artichoke dip with hot, crusty sourdough bread was outstanding, while Mike felt an urge to have a hot dog, but all they had was a grilled Italian sausage to go with his "tall Bacardi and diet coke". After lunch as the skies began to clear we walked down to the ferry terminal and boarded the boat to Bainbridge Island to meet up with my dear friends Debbie and Brian whom I hadn't seen for at least the past 15 or more years. The views of the downtown Seattle skyline and Puget Sound from the ferry were beautiful on the 30 minute voyage.



Tacoma Narrows Bridge - Puget Sound, Washington



Downtown Seattle from Bainbridge Island Ferry

Unfortunately for Mike the bar on board only served beer and wine, no "tall Bacardi and diet coke"! Upon arriving at the dock on Bainbridge Island we walked up to the main street and found the "Harbor Wine Shop" where the owner helped us to choose a very nice local Merlot to go with some special cheeses and crackers that we would give to Debbie and Brian. Then we found a nice shaded bench that just happened to be in front of the Police Station. (I had to wonder what people driving by must have thought, seeing the two of us seated on that bench, and perhaps thinking we must have just been freed from jail!) A short time later Debbie and Brian drove up in a classic

old Volvo Station wagon and jumped out to greet us. And it was great to see them again and especially Debbie's beautiful smiling face that made me feel like it was only yesterday and not 15 years ago. Then we all went to the Bloedel Estate and Preserve where Debbie used to work and walked along the trails through the gorgeous Douglas



Bloedel Estate Gardens

Fir and Western Red Cedar forest, past a couple of small ponds and a waterfall to the main house, the former summer residence for the Bloedel family. The view of Puget Sound from the veranda is stunning and the elegant gardens flow down the slope to the shore. Leaving the estate we drove to the Squamish Indian Reservation on the northern tip of the Kitsap Peninsula to pay a visit to the grave of Chief Seattle. Recently the tribe had built a new casino and museum/cultural center. On the return to their house for dinner, Debbie took us on the scenic route around Bainbridge Island with all of its lovely coves and hidden harbors along the shore. There had been many additions and improvements to their house since last time I visited them more than 15 years ago. Brian grilled a filet of Salmon and Debbie baked a French version of a pineapple upside down cake which we shared around the kitchen table as we caught

up on all that had happened over the years. After the delicious dinner and a peek at Brian's classic 1950's Studebaker, a car whose futuristic design was far ahead of its time, Debbie drove us back to the ferry terminal and we bid them both a fond farewell. The view of the city lights from the ferry were absolutely spectacular as the boat slowly glided

across the quiet waters of Elliott Bay. The next morning Mike and I took the hotel shuttle van to Westlake Center to board the Monorail that would take us to Seattle Center. But what we found at Westlake Center was the entire length of 5th avenue blocked off for the massive Gay Pride Parade, along with a huge crowd of spectators and participants dressed in all manner of wild, brightly colored outfits. We were finally able to cross the street, in between a couple of long floats, and make our way to the Monorail station for the short 5 minute ride to Seattle Center. As we got off the Monorail I suggested that we visit the EMP (Experimental Music Project) which had been built by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, in the weird shape of a giant broken guitar. Mike and I spent a couple of hours among the dozens of displays and exhibits of various music genres from Rock-n-Roll and Blues to Grunge, Heavy metal, and Rap. In every exhibit were personal items, most of which were priceless, from famous artists and musicians, such as the first guitar owned by Jimi Hendrix, letters and cards from Kurt Cobain, and original handwritten music sheets from Muddy Waters. One area of the

huge complex was called the "Sky Church" and it had a gigantic video wall showing music videos from famous performers of the past, and standing there beneath the massive screen I could have watched it for hours. But Mike had purchased tickets for the baseball game that afternoon, so we made our way back to the hotel which was conveniently located across the



Summer House - Bloedel Estate



Grave of Chief Seattle



Guitar Sculpture at the EMP

street from the stadium. We grabbed a hot dog and a beer in the Terrace Club before sitting down to watch the game between Seattle and Cleveland, Mike's home town! Our seats were 10 rows up from the Mariner's dugout along the first base line so we had one of the best views in the stadium. It was a great time with all the action around us, such as the peanut vendor who threw sacks of peanuts to people from behind his back and his aim was right on every time. The Mariner's mascot, a guy dressed in the costume of a moose, kept the crowd cheering for the team, and when the young father seated next to Mike bought his little daughter a stuffed toy moose, the mascot came by for a photo with her and gave

her a big hug – she was thrilled! After the game Mike and I made our way to "Jimmy's on First", the hotel bar, for a tall



Seattle Mariners Baseball Team Mascot

Bacardi and diet coke for Mike and the local IPA for me. Mike had a load of stories to tell about growing up in Cleveland and all of the times when things could have gone so bad for him but didn't, which is the true "luck of the Irish". The next morning we met for breakfast and then Mike had to catch a taxi to the airport for his return flight to Las Vegas. As I looked outside at the gorgeous sunny weather I decided to extend my stay for one more day and visit some of my favorite places in the city. From Pioneer Square I walked up to Union Station which is across the street from the King Street Station. Union Station was constructed shortly after King Street Station for the Union

Pacific and Milwaukee Road railroads as they competed for passenger traffic

with the Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads using the King Street Station. I found Union Station to be a beautiful restoration of the gorgeous white marble interior, but it is no longer used for train travel, rather used as a venue for events and conferences now. Leaving the station I walked up to First Hill and then over to Capitol Hill where the city's new light rail system is being extended. At the construction site for one of the new stations there were several old photos and maps of the neighborhood in the 1880's showing the original streetcar lines and some of the rails are still embedded in the street even



Madison Park Neighborhood

today. Further on I walked through my old neighborhood near Volunteer Park and stopped for lunch at a small bar named the "Hopvine" on 15th avenue before heading down the opposite side of the hill to the University of Washington Arboretum on the shore of Lake Washington. Just north of the Arboretum along the lake shore is the small



Botanical Gardens - Volunteer Park

neighborhood of Madison Park with its magnificent old homes from the late 19th century. I found a table on the terrace of a small bar by the name of McGuillvary's where I had a local Breakwater IPA as I looked out over Lake Washington to the snow covered peaks of the Cascade Mountains to the east. At the southern end of the lake was the massive summit of Mt Rainier shining brightly in the afternoon sun. As evening fell I boarded a city bus that took me back to downtown where I had dinner at the Merchant's Café in Pioneer Square, Seattle's oldest bar and restaurant. The next morning I packed my bag and checked out of the hotel in preparation for my return flight to LA. Rather than take a taxi to the airport which would have cost me around \$50, I decided to try the new light rail system that runs from downtown all the way to the airport. The regular one way fare is \$2.75, which is pretty inexpensive, but when I went to purchase the ticket I found the fare for people over 65 was a mere 75 cents – what a bargain! The trip took around 25 minutes and dropped me off right at the main airport terminal, so it was not only inexpensive, but also very convenient. I had time for a delicious lunch of fresh Halibut and chips at Anthony's Fish House in the main terminal before boarding the flight. As the plane departed we had spectacular views of Puget Sound, the Olympic



View of Mt Rainier from Lake Washington

Mountains, Cascade Mountains, Mt baker to the north and Mt Rainier to the south, as well as Mt Adams and Mt Hood, for one of the most scenic flights I can remember.

When the middle of July came it was time for our annual International User Conference in San Diego, but instead of fighting the freeway traffic I decided to take the train. I boarded the MetroLink train in Riverside that runs to Orange County and eventually to Oceanside. Being a Saturday morning, there were a large number of people boarding the train, carrying everything from fishing poles and tackle boxes to picnic baskets, coolers, and beach blankets! I left the train in Irvine in order to connect with the

Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train to San Diego. As always, the views along the coast from San Juan Capistrano to Torrey Pines State Park were stunning with huge waves crashing on to the beaches. Just as the train passed the Sorrento Valley station a group of 15 – 20 people having a picnic in a park adjacent to the tracks suddenly formed a line and “mooned” the train! When I arrived in San Diego I checked into the Westin Hotel and then walked down to the Convention Center to pick up my staff badge. As I walked through the convention center, setup was well under way and it looked fabulous. I ran into many of my colleagues from the regional offices I hadn’t seen since last July and we chatted briefly. Later in the afternoon as I walked along the waterfront back to the Westin, I saw a couple of kites in the sky, one of which was very high, almost out of sight. I looked around the small park trying to spot the person flying the kite and suddenly saw a young couple lying on the grass under a small tree and the guy had something in his hand that he was barely moving. As I got closer I could see it was a holder for the nylon line attached to the kite. When I asked him how high his kite was flying he said he had 2100 feet of line and it was all out! Incredibly it only took him 15 minutes to get the kite to that height. That evening I joined my good friend Lora for dinner at the Athens Market downtown for a delicious Greek meal, along with a cold glass of “Mythos”, the



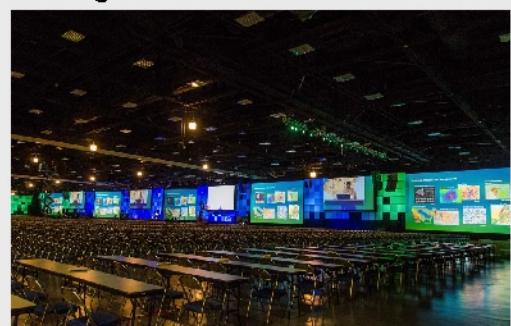
New Waterfront Park - San Diego

national beer of Greece. The next day I joined a large crowd in the bar at the hotel to watch the final game of the World Cup between Germany and Argentina. (the day before Brazil had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Netherlands and the Brazilian fans booed their home team as it ended up with a 4th place finish) In contrast, the final game was very competitive with the score at 0 – 0 following regulation play. Germany finally won the match with a goal in the last 3 minutes of the second overtime. What really made the game enjoyable were all of the “coaches” and “referees” sitting at the bar! Later on in the afternoon I met up with my dear friend Maureen for a glass of wine at “Seasons 52”, a new restaurant in

the old Police Headquarters building which has been completely renovated into some great restaurants, bars, shops, and galleries. After that I joined some of my colleagues for dinner in the restaurant and we all agreed it was fantastic. To finish off the dinner there was a large desert tray with a series of small shot glasses filled with classics like Pecan pie, Red Velvet cake, Lemon tart, and Chocolate Mousse. Monday morning I gave a presentation to members of our Southwest & Pacific Chapter of PCMA on the topic “behind the scenes of the Esri User Conference”, followed by a tour backstage at the conclusion of the morning plenary session. Everyone was very impressed and really enjoyed seeing what happens on the other side of the curtain. As we walked through the huge exhibit hall during the final stage of setup, no one on my tour was run over by a forklift so I deemed it a success. In the afternoon I met up with Basanta, a longtime friend from Nepal and



The Old San Diego Police Headquarters Development



Esri User Conference Opening General Session

sat in his session where he joined people from NASA, US State Department, and the UN to present some of the new projects being conducted in the Hindu-Kush Himalaya region. That evening I had dinner at my favorite Indian restaurant in San Diego with Rajesh, my friend from Esri India. After dinner he made the comment that the food was as good as any fine restaurant in New Delhi. The next morning I spent some time visiting some of the booths in the exhibit hall and browsed through the conference store before heading back to the hotel to pack my bag and catch the train to Riverside. (I really miss not seeing my old friend Roger Tomlinson at the conference, but there was a lovely display in the convention center as a tribute to his life and legacy)

In mid-July Lynn came to visit us, this time to escape the heat and humidity of Illinois and not the cold and snow. Along with Leslie we took the train from Riverside into LA Union Station and had lunch outside in the courtyard of the Traxx Restaurant. Then we boarded the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train bound for Santa Barbara. Along the way were beautiful views of the fields and orchards of Ventura County, as well as the coastal beaches between Ventura and Santa Barbara. We checked into the West Beach Inn across from the harbor, just in time for their complimentary wine and cheese by the pool. That evening for dinner we walked over to the Harbor Restaurant on Stearns Pier where we had a fabulous Lobster Mac-n-cheese while watching a gorgeous sunset across the harbor, with the Channel Islands silhouetted in the distance. The next day started with a hearty breakfast of chicken fried steak, eggs, hash browns, and toast at Sambo's Restaurant near the hotel. Then we all walked over to the Maritime Museum where there were some very interesting exhibits and displays about deep sea diving, the sea urchin fishery, and the Channel Islands National Park. There was a great video about lighthouse keepers and their life of isolation along the Pacific Coast. One



View of Channel Islands from Maritime Museum - Santa Barbara

of the most unusual exhibits was a detailed history of the "Honda Disaster" in which 7 US Navy destroyers were running "silent" at full speed from San Francisco to San Diego on a very foggy night in 1923 when they all ran aground on the rocks of the "Devil's Jaw" entering the Santa Barbara channel. It became the worst peacetime disaster in US Naval history. From the rooftop terrace of the museum we had a spectacular view of the harbor, the city, the mountains and the Channel Islands under the brilliant clear blue sky. From the museum we walked up State Street lined with its many fine old Spanish style buildings that have been turned into lovely art

galleries, shops, and restaurants. Near the center of the old town were several full size metal sculptures, including one of Ben Franklin seated on a park bench reading a newspaper and nearby was the statue of a tall black man washing a large shop window and aptly titled "The Window Washer". As we passed the railroad station the "Santa Barbara Wine Train", a collection of private vintage railcars, rolled into town. A few blocks further on we came to the historic Santa Barbara County Courthouse with its spectacular views of the city from the top of the clock tower and the magnificent murals in the assembly room detailing the history of the county founded in the early 1700's. Then I left Lynn and Leslie to let them do some shopping on State Street while I headed for the public market where I discovered an interesting collection of small shops and food stalls surrounding stalls of fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers. I browsed through the shops that were selling everything from fresh seafood, bread, and pasta to artisanal olive oils and vinegars. When I came to the shop called "Wine + Beer" I stopped for a cold pint of "Weihenstephaner" beer on draft from the world's oldest brewery in Freising, Germany. It's one of my very favorite beers in the world and not easy to find outside of Germany. Late in the afternoon I walked back down to Stearns Pier and had a chilled glass of "Deep Sea Chardonnay" at the Conway Vineyards



Enjoying Wine & Cheese - Santa Barbara



Historic Movie Theater in Downtown Santa Barbara



Santa Barbara Mission

tasting room as I sat on the deck watching the sailboats in the harbor. I arrived back at the hotel to meet up with Lynn and Leslie but I got a message they were already at the Enterprise Fish Company where we had planned to have dinner. The restaurant was doing a land office business but our server was very good about making sure we didn't have to wait very long for our food and drinks. I had a grilled seafood skewer that was perfectly done and we shared a key lime pie and crème brûlée for dessert to finish off a great meal. The next morning we had breakfast at the nearby Harborview Inn and then

took a city bus up to the historic Santa Barbara

Mission, one of the largest and best preserved of all the California missions. In the parking lot were dozens of large chalk paintings of various religious scenes on the pavement. We were able to see the beautiful Chapel just before it was closed for a large wedding ceremony and then toured the small museum before catching the bus back to downtown in time to board the train to Los Angeles. As the train made a stop at the Van Nuys station a large Opossum suddenly came out of the bushes beside the platform, dashed under the train and back into the bushes on the other side. Upon arriving in Union Station we took a taxi to the Omni Hotel at California Plaza downtown



Ninja Turtles painted on Figueroa Hotel

where a stage was being set up for an outdoor concert that evening as part of the LA Summer Series of free public performances. That evening a series of Latino bands played to a large crowd, mostly Latino families who were really enjoying themselves. The following morning we took the hotel shuttle to LA Live to tour the Grammy Museum. Across the street from the JW Marriott Hotel were three giant Ninja Turtles being painted on the side of the Figueroa Hotel to advertise the upcoming premiere of the film. Each Ninja Turtle was at least 150 – 200 feet tall and could be seen from several blocks away as well as from the freeway. We spent a couple of hours in the Grammy Museum experiencing an incredible amount of music and displays from all different genres and generations. At one display about documentaries I listened to Martin Luther King Jr's entire "I have a Dream" speech from the March on Washington, and it was very emotional and inspirational. There was also a special film and display about famous musicians who took up residence in Laurel Canyon during the 1960's, including Jim Morrison and Frank Zappa. Before leaving the museum I spent some time in the new "Music Studio

Lab" that had a number of interactive consoles where you could work alongside real technicians to do tasks such as "mastering tracks" and "sound compression" to produce a final recording. Really a lot of fun and a great learning experience. On our way back to the hotel to check out we walked by the Disney Music Hall with its futuristic architecture gleaming in the afternoon sunshine. Outside the hall were a large number of men dressed in black tuxedos, some of whom were much younger than the rest. At first we assumed they were all members of the LA Philharmonic whose home is the Disney Music Hall, but later we discovered the young tuxedos were part of a wedding party on one of the upper terraces. We strolled through the beautiful roof top garden with gorgeous views of the downtown skyscrapers before heading back to the hotel and our taxi to Union Station. On our way to the station our driver told us about his favorite restaurant in LA called "The Pantry", an iconic LA landmark that has never closed its doors in over 90 years! (in fact, it's said there is no lock on the front door!)

At the end of July I took a trip to Palm Springs by a different route over the Santa Rosa Mountains that on the map is labeled "Bautista Canyon Road" east of San Jacinto and the Moreno Valley. I passed through an extensive area of large citrus groves and fields of produce before the road entered the canyon following Bautista Creek. Along the creek were stands of



Chapel - Santa Barbara Mission



Disney Music Hall - Los Angeles



Bautista Canyon

tall cottonwood trees in stark contrast to the barren brush covered slopes on either side of the canyon. The road was paved and in good condition until I came to the Bautista Conservation Camp correctional institution when the road suddenly turned into a rough gravel track climbing up the steep slope. Eventually after some very tight corners and rocky stretches I came to the top of the plateau and entered the Anza Valley and back on pavement again. Then I drove northeast on highway 74 to Palm Desert following a twisting route through hairpin turns on a steep descent from the summit of the Santa Rosa Mountains.

Where the temperature had

been a pleasant 75 degrees at the summit it was now a blistering 115 degrees in the Coachella Valley below. Later in the afternoon I took the tramway up to Mt San Jacinto State Park and found it to be a delightful 70 degrees at the Mountain Station located at 8500 feet elevation. I spent the next couple of hours hiking among the majestic Ponderosa and Jeffery Pines in Long Valley before returning to the Mountain Station for a cold



View of Palm Springs from Tramway Hilltop Station

beer in the bar. That evening I joined my good friends and colleagues Patrick and Galen for a lovely dinner at "Lulu's Bistro" in downtown Palm Springs. We had a marvelous time talking about how things went at the San Diego user conference this year as well as some of their inside stories of behind the scenes.



Mt San Jacinto State Park

At the beginning of August I drove up to Cajon Pass to take photos and video of some of the 80 – 100 freight trains that travel over the pass every day. There were several Union Pacific and BNSF trains headed northbound

near the Mormon Rocks and I was able to get some good video footage of a very long BNSF train that had four leading locomotives and two trailing. Some of these massive trains are more than a mile and half long and it's pretty exciting to stand alongside the tracks just a few feet away as they thunder past. Leaving Cajon Pass I drove along highway 138 east near the crest of the San Bernardino Mountains to Silverwood Lake and then on through the lush forest of tall Douglas Fir, Western Red Cedar and Ponderosa Pine to the small mountain community of Crestline. Then my route home followed highway 18 down a precipitous descent of more than 4000 feet through a series of hairpin turns to San Bernardino. (all I can say is I don't know how people make this "commute" to work every day, especially in winter when snowstorms hit the mountains!) As



Southbound Union Pacific Freight train at Mormon Rocks



Silverwood Lake - San Bernardino Mountains

I approached San Bernardino the skies to the southeast looked very threatening. (this is the time of year when we can have monsoon storms moving north from Baja California as Pacific typhoons strike the west coast of Mexico) I stopped at BJ's Brewhouse for a delicious dinner of Parmesan Crusted Chicken and a cold glass of their IPA. On one of the big screen TVs above the bar was a live news broadcast of a severe thunderstorm over Palm Springs. The barmaid asked me if I thought the storm was headed our way, to which I replied "it just might be". About 20 minutes later rain began to fall outside the restaurant and in a matter of minutes it became a torrential downpour. As it continued I wondered if I might have to order

another beer to wait it out as it was impossible to consider venturing outside. Another half hour went by and it was still a raging storm, so I finally I had to grab my umbrella from my backpack and make a dash for my Jeep. Even though it was only a matter of 20 yards away, I was soaked by the time I got there. The drive home on I-10 was horrendous – lots of water on the road and traffic crawling at 15 – 20 mph. By the time I finally got home the rain was still very heavy and many streets were flooded. As I parked in front of my house the water was over a foot deep at the curb and our trash cans were lodged against the front of Leslie's car. The heavy rain continued for another 15 – 20 minutes before slowly tapering off as the storm moved west. Even in the strongest winter storms here I had never seen it as intense as this! Later on I found out the storm had dumped more rain in one hour than we had received since the beginning of the year!



San Gabriel Mountains - Angeles National Forest

The second week of August I attended a University of Washington Alumni Foundation dinner in Los Angeles, so rather than take the train as I usually do, I decided to drive the scenic route through the San Gabriel Mountains and the Angeles National Forest on California Highway 2, better known as the "Angeles Crest Highway". The route begins in the small mountain community of Wrightwood near Cajon Pass on the north slope of the San Gabriel Mountains and slowly winds its way up through the forest to the crest of the mountains. Then it follows a twisting route along the 6,000 – 8,000 foot mountains on a steep, narrow road skirting the highest peaks,

with spectacular views of the high desert to the north and the Los Angeles basin far below to the south. It's a very popular route with motorcyclists, especially the road racing bikes that navigate the road at high speed. I made a short stop at the US Forest Service Visitor Center in Grass Valley and hiked along a trail through the forest of tall Jeffrey Pine and Incense Cedar, which are quite rare to see this far south. Later on I came to the "Chilao Visitor Center" where there was the first forest ranger cabin built in 1910 on display. Just beyond the visitor center was an old roadside bar where at least 200 – 300 motorcycles were parked alongside the highway for the annual "Angeles Bike Run". Further on was the junction with the Mt Wilson road so I decided to pay a visit to the observatory that sits at the 8,500 foot high summit of Mt Wilson. Adjacent to the observatory is a large array of



100 Inch Telescope - Mt Wilson

tall antennas that must be from every TV and radio station in southern California. At the observatory are several large telescopes, including the huge 100 inch telescope made famous by Edwin Hubble who discovered the technique for measuring the distance to far off galaxies. (the original wooden chair that he used as he peered through the telescope is still there beside the huge mirror) The views of the LA basin and skyscrapers of downtown Los Angeles over 8000 feet below were incredible. Leaving Mt Wilson I got back on highway 2 and down the mountains into the hustle and bustle of downtown LA where I checked into the Westin Bonaventure Hotel for the night. That evening I walked over to the "Jonathan Club", a beautiful, historic old gentleman's club established in 1895 and whose members have included Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon. The University of Washington Alumni

Dinner was held on the club's rooftop terrace overlooking downtown. The event began with a cocktail reception, followed by a salmon BBQ dinner. Later in the evening I walked back to the Westin and went up to the revolving bar on top of the hotel for a beer and small plate of "Cajun boiled peel-n-eat Gulf shrimp" that was fantastic. The views of the downtown lights and the Hollywood hills at sunset were stunning. The next morning I awoke to a gorgeous day and decided



Radio & TV Antennas atop Mt Wilson



Downtown Los Angeles

to visit Echo Lake Park just north of downtown near Dodger Stadium. It's a beautiful lake and wetland in a small canyon with stunning views of the downtown skyscrapers as you look down the lake. There were lots of ducks, geese, and a couple of Great Blue Herons amongst the wetland and lily pads. I walked along a path around the shore of the lake before stopping for a delicious cheddar and bacon scone with coffee at the cozy "Lakeside Café". What a lovely peaceful place in the heart of a city of 10 million people – a true gem to discover!



Echo Lake Park - Los Angeles

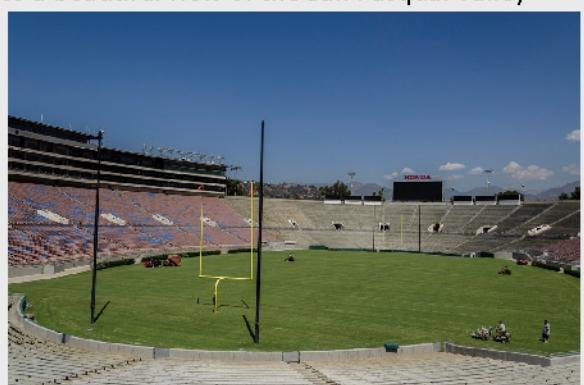
Near the end of August I was invited to attend a meeting with folks from the Balboa Park Conservancy and the San Diego Parks and Recreation Department to look at some additional options available for our 2015 User Conference party. As it turns out, 2015 will be the 100th anniversary of the 1915 Panama – California Exposition whose buildings were to become the foundation for Balboa Park as we know it today. Our meeting took place outdoors on the terrace of the beautiful Prado Restaurant where I ordered the "Pig Burger", a delicious combination of pulled pork and chorizo sausage. Both the Conservancy, together with Parks and Recreation have plans for a big celebration in 2015, of which our user conference party would be invited to participate. After lunch we walked through some areas of the park that could be made available for our party next summer. From Balboa Park I



San Pasqual Valley from Valley View Hotel & Casino

drove north to Escondido and then on highway 56 that took me to the "Valley View Hotel and Casino" in the mountains on the San Pasqual Indian Reservation. This is where I had booked a deluxe suite for \$119 a night inclusive. (no taxes, no resort fees, free valet parking and free WiFi access – an offer that I couldn't refuse) The casino has a separate gambling area, along with a full bar and dining room for non-smokers, which is highly unusual for a casino but certainly welcome. (it was also quite popular that night) That evening I went to the casino buffet for dinner that featured a huge selection of fresh seafood, including Maine lobsters, Alaskan Snow Crab, Prince Edward Island mussels, and Little neck clams from Chesapeake Bay! As I savored dinner, every

5 minutes someone's name was announced over the PA system as having just won \$100. As I did a quick calculation it amounted to a give-a-way of \$34,000 every night! The next morning I awoke to a beautiful view of the San Pasqual Valley covered in fog, with the Palomar Mountains rising from the clouds in the distance. From Valley View I drove north to Pasadena by way of the 15/91/71/210 freeways to do a site inspection at the Rose Bowl stadium where our next PCMA meeting would be held in mid-September. Monique, the sales manager, gave me a great tour of the historic venue, including the Press Box and private hospitality suites, as well as an opportunity to step on to the field. The Rose Bowl stadium has been the site of the annual New Year's Day Rose Bowl game for almost 100 years. It's really a beautiful place with a very rich history as a National Historic Landmark that our PCMA attendees were able to appreciate.



Rose Bowl Stadium - Pasadena

In the middle of August I took the train down to San Diego to attend the annual "All Industry Cruise" that brings together people who work in the hospitality and meeting planning industries. On the train journey I was seated across from a family on vacation from Dubai, but rather than look out the window at the beautiful scenery along the Pacific coast, they all spent the time on their smartphones and with the window curtains pulled shut. I wonder what they will tell their family and friends back home about their "vacation"? Once the train arrived in San Diego I walked over to the new "Wyndham San Diego Bayside", which is a renovation of the old Holiday Inn Harborside, on the waterfront near the dock where the cruise would board in the evening. My room was on the top floor overlooking the bay with a great view of the historic tall sailing ship the "Star of India". I thought I would check my email before heading to the dock, so I asked the hotel front desk for the Internet

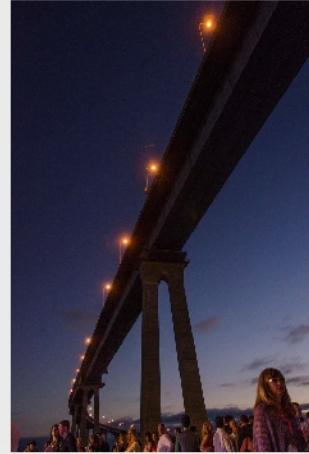


View of Downtown San Diego from the Inspiration Hornblower

access password and they gave me a slip of paper with the words “WiFi-DRPP” written on it. But when I entered the exact spelling of the words I got the error message *Invalid Password*. After several more unsuccessful attempts I went to the hotel concierge and asked why the Internet access was not working, to which they replied, the correct password is “DRPP”! I think the word “WiFi” in front of the “password” was very confusing, to say the least. Then I walked over to the waterfront and boarded the “Inspiration Hornblower” which is the flagship of their fleet as well as being the largest. Already there were hundreds of people

on board and when I went up to the top deck I

ran into DeeAnne and my friends from the San Diego Convention Center. I joined their table and chatted with Andy about the plans for the expansion of the center that includes a unique and innovative green space on the top of the roof that will be a public park. As the sun was setting across the bay the ship departed and began a two hour cruise around the bay with incredible views of the city lights and the huge aircraft carriers moored at Coronado Naval Base. As we passed under the massive Coronado Bridge the views were spectacular in the fading light of the evening. The next morning I met up with DeeAnne to sign my book she had purchased on Amazon.com, then I joined Dawn and Neil for lunch at the “Tin Fish”, one of my favorite seafood restaurants, to discuss logistics for our September PCMA program at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. My order of the fish and shrimp “appetizer” was delicious but enough to feed a family of four.



Sailing under Coronado Bridge

After our meeting I took the trolley to the Santa Fe station to board the train back to Santa Ana where I had parked my car the day before. From Santa Ana I drove to the Shore Break Hotel in downtown Huntington Beach for the “Summer Social Event” being sponsored by the Orange County chapter of Meeting Professionals International (MPI). The Shorebreak is a small European style boutique hotel located across the street from the beach and the pier, and the complimentary upgrade to a suite overlooking the ocean was much appreciated. The social was held in the courtyard of the hotel where a Mexican buffet was set up that had some fantastic shrimp grilled with lime and garlic. Later in the evening the new chapter president did an “ice challenge” to the other MPI chapters around the country in which he allowed himself to be doused with a large bucket of ice water! Luckily there were several people with towels standing by to make sure he was able to make a presentation afterwards. Later on in the evening I walked over to “Gallagher’s Irish Pub”, the place where Mike and I had their famous Irish breakfast a couple of months earlier. It was “comedy night” as I entered the bar and as it turned



The Pier at Huntington Beach

out, I happened to be sitting next to the first comedian for the night. On stage he was very funny as he talked about his relationships with his girlfriend and his dog, which were so strikingly similar at times. When the next comedian was introduced as having been on several late night TV shows like David Letterman and Conan O’Brien I was expecting a very funny guy, however he was anything but funny, even bordering on being terribly boring. After less than 5 minutes of his performance I finished my Guinness and left the bar, after having given my compliments to the first comedian. I ended the evening sitting on the balcony of my room listening

to the sounds of the ocean surf crashing on the beach.

At the end of August I made plans to attend the “5th Annual Sausage & Beer Festival” at the historic Highland Springs Resort about 30 minutes east of Redlands. On the way to Highland Springs I received a phone message from Leslie telling me about a 6.0 earthquake in the area early this morning and that I should avoid going through Napa. Her message didn’t make much sense to me since Napa is a couple of hours north of San Francisco, nowhere near Redlands. (Later I found out she had gone online to find out where Highland Springs was located and it came up as a small town in northern California!) The Highland Springs Resort is a beautiful old historic property that was established in the 1860’s as a major stop on the overland



Lavender Fields - Highland Springs Resort

stage route from St Louis to California. Many famous people have stayed there, including Wyatt Earp, Elizabeth Taylor, Bob Hope and even Albert Einstein. Several hundred people were already enjoying the festival when I arrived and many more were on the way. I took some time to explore the grounds of the resort, originally established as a large ranch, before joining the festival in a grove of tall pines. There were several vendors serving all kinds of sausage, from traditional German bratwurst to the All-American hot dog. Amongst

the food vendors were at least a

dozen craft breweries from southern California, including Hanger 24 in Redlands. I grabbed a cold beer and a bratwurst then sat down in the shade of the pines to listen to a local folk song group performing on stage. Later I walked among the lavender fields for which the resort is well known and took photos of the antique farm equipment. Following a trail through the lavender fields I came upon an old Coastal Live Oak tree that was well over 1100

years old. Back at the festival grounds a contest was going on to determine who could hold a full liter stein of beer in their outstretched arm for the longest time. It was a lot of fun for the crowd cheering on their favorites. That evening I checked into my room at the resort and sat on the patio overlooking the lavender fields as the sun was slowly setting – a perfect end to a delightful day.

At the beginning of September I attended the Photoshop World conference in Las Vegas and rather than taking the Interstate I decided to drive the back roads through the heart of the Mojave Desert. As I drove old route 66 to Amboy there was a lot of sand and gravel on the road from flash floods in August that were the

result of heavy thunderstorms during the “Arizona Monsoon”. Just south of Amboy is the National Chloride Company of America processing plant with its massive evaporation ponds that extract an exotic mix of chemical compounds from the saline water just below the surface of the huge dry lake bed. Every 100 yards or so there was a shallow ditch to collect the saline water rising to the surface and the brilliant turquoise color of the water was stunning. From the almost abandoned town of Amboy I headed east to the totally abandoned town of Essex before turning north on to the Black Canyon road to “Mitchell Caverns and Providence Mountains State Recreation Area” which was unfortunately closed. The road was paved for the first 18 miles to the “Hole in the Wall” campground and Visitor Center, which was also closed and even looked like it had been abandoned. I stopped and hiked down the “Banshee Canyon Trail” where very steep, jagged rocks formed the walls of the narrow canyon. The name “Hole in the Wall” refers to the fact that rustlers often used the canyon to hide the cattle they had stolen since it was almost impossible to find the entrance. Beyond the campground the road became a very rough and



Historic Route 66 in Amboy, California

rocky gravel road, but the surrounding desert landscape of lush new grass and blooming cactus was beautiful. Along the way I passed only a couple of remote ranches until I finally came to the junction with the Cedar Creek Road and back on to pavement at last. The road took me through lovely rolling hills of scrub cedar and grass to the junction with Interstate 15 at the border with Nevada. Then it was a steady 75mph all the way to Las Vegas where I checked into the Mandalay Bay Hotel, site of the Photoshop World conference. I had a beautiful suite on the 28th floor overlooking the airport. That evening I went to “Johnny Rocket’s” diner in the hotel food court for a classic burger, fries, and beer. The



Sausage & Beer Festival - Highland Springs



National Chloride Company



"Hole in the Wall" Canyon

burger was delicious but far too much for me to eat, however, the guy seated next to me at the counter finished his burger in less than six bites! I ended the evening with a pint of Guinness at "RiRa", my favorite Irish bar in Las Vegas. The next morning I went to the opening session and was given a front row seat as an "alumni", having been to 5 of the conferences before. I spent the rest of the day in some great workshops lead by expert instructors. In the evening I went to "Rick Moonan's Seafood Restaurant" in the Mandalay Bay Shoppes for a fabulous dinner of steamed Little Neck clams in a savory broth of garlic, white wine, and red pepper flakes, followed by a wonderful Maryland Blue Crab lumpmeat crabcake served with a tangy Asian slaw. I finished the evening at RiRa Irish Pub with a pint of Guinness as I listened to Celtic folk music by the "Black Donnelly's" from Dublin. The next day was a series of excellent workshops, and for lunch I had an amazing Jalapeno smoked bacon BLT at the "Flier Café" in

Mandalay Bay. Late in the afternoon I walked to the Wells Fargo Bank tower to get some cash from the ATM since those in the casinos charge an outrageous fee of \$6.00! Then I took a taxi to downtown Las Vegas to meet up with my old army buddy Mike and his son Jay for dinner at "Oscar's Steakhouse", locally known as "Beef, Booze, and Broads". (Mike tipped the Maitre'D \$100 to get us a table by the window having the best view of Fremont Street and its overhead arcade with the world's largest LED display) My filet mignon topped

with crab béarnaise sauce was absolutely superb. After dinner Mike and Jay strolled down Fremont Street, which tonight was for adults only, while I had to get back to Mandalay Bay. There were huge crowds everywhere which made it virtually impossible to find a taxi. But a couple of blocks away on Las

Vegas Boulevard I saw a city bus called the "Deuce" which took me all the way back to Mandalay Bay for a fare of \$6.00, compared to a \$40.00 taxi ride. The bus was pretty crowded with some weird looking people, but hey folks, this is Las Vegas! The next morning after the conclusion of the conference I drove back to downtown to explore the "Main Street Station" where I discovered a couple of vintage Pullman railroad cars, one of which had private suites that had once been occupied by such famous people as Annie Oakley, Buffalo Bill Cody, and Teddy Roosevelt. There were a lot of historical items on display in the Main Street Station Casino and Hotel, which also houses a working brewery. My return home was once again on the back roads across the Mojave Desert.



Mike & Jay at Fremont Street



Mandalay Bay Hotel - Las Vegas

On my return from Photoshop World in Las Vegas I headed south to the Temecula Valley Wine Country to celebrate my birthday. There were some heavy thunderstorms around the area but by the time I arrived at the Ponte Vineyard Inn the rain had ended and the sun was shining, however there were huge areas of water everywhere. After checking in to my room where I had a private patio overlooking the vineyard and the mountains beyond, I walked over to the winery's tasting room for a complimentary flight of their signature wines. The Inn, built in 2012 as a beautiful replica of a Tuscan Villa, is the only 4 diamond property in the Temecula Valley. It has a large courtyard and is surrounded by vineyards that



make it look and feel very much like being in Tuscany. That evening I sat outside on the terrace under a full moon and had a fabulous dinner of sautéed scallops with a basil balsamic reduction and wild rice, as well as a delicious Tangerine mousse for dessert. After dinner I sat on my patio overlooking the vineyards in the warm evening air and sipped a glass of the Ponte Merlot to finish a perfect day.



Ponte Vineyard Inn - Temecula Valley



Departing Union Station in Chicago

In mid-September I had the good fortune to be invited to join a special train of private railroad cars traveling from Chicago to Portland, Maine for the annual convention of the American Association of Private Railcar Owners (AAPRCO). As I left southern California the weather was still ridiculously hot with temperatures around 115 degrees, so I was looking forward to much cooler weather. On the flight to Salt Lake City there was a great view of the gigantic open pit copper mine in Bingham, Utah and the brilliant yellow and red colors of the Aspen forest on the mountains surrounding the mine. After a quick bite to eat at Squatter's Brewpub in

the airport I boarded the flight to Chicago and as we approached the city I had a

stunning view of Lake Michigan and the skyscrapers downtown. From O'Hare airport I took the train downtown to the LaSalle Street station, which turned out to be faster than a taxi in the rush hour traffic. I checked into the Hilton Hotel on Michigan Avenue where I had a great corner room with a beautiful view of Grant Park across the street and Lake Michigan just beyond. The next morning I was up early to take a taxi to Union Station where the special train would be departing later in the morning. When I got to the station I asked the Amtrak information desk where to board the AAPRCO train and they directed me to the Metropolitan Lounge where I joined a large group of people waiting for the boarding announcement. The special train was named the "Pine Tree Limited" and designated as Amtrak train #984 since it was being powered by three Amtrak locomotives. The train consisted of 31 private railcars, all of which were vintage passenger cars, mostly from the 1940's and 50's, but a few were even older and dated from the early 1920's. There were a variety of cars from classic Pullman sleepers and dining cars to domed observation cars and business cars that had been built especially for the railroad executives. Most all of the cars had come from passenger service on railroads that no longer are in operation, having been merged with one of the big four railroads we now see today, being Union Pacific, BNSF, CSX, and Norfolk Southern. Some of the cars came from such historic railroads of the past as the Wabash, New York Central, Great Northern, Illinois Central, and the Boston & Maine. I had been invited by the owner of the "Salisbury Beach", a classic Pullman sleeper that saw service on the Boston and Maine Railroad in the early 1950's, and is now located in Los Angeles as part of a group of private cars known as "LA Rail". As I settled into my compartment the special train left Union Station and slowly made its way south through the industrial areas among a staggering maze of railroad tracks that seemed to be going in every direction from the city. At times there were railroad tracks above us and below as at the same time which made it easy to see why Chicago is the railroad hub of the nation. Eventually we turned east following the main line along the south shore of Lake Michigan and past the massive



"Pine Tree Limited"



Steel Mill near Gary, Indiana

steel mills of Gary, Indiana on our way to Cleveland where we would park for the night. Our route followed that of the historic "Lakeshore Limited" train that ran from Chicago to New York on the old Nickel Plate Road and was later restored as the Amtrak route of the same name. We passed through many small towns in northern Indiana and Ohio where we could see some of the old railroad depots that were stops for the passenger trains of the 1940's and 50's but have since been abandoned or repurposed as shops and galleries. Our arrival into Cleveland was delayed by heavy Norfolk Southern freight train traffic, but as our train entered the main yard near downtown we had a great view of city skyline and Lake Erie. For dinner the

owner's wife Carol and their niece Julia prepared a delicious chicken pot pie and a Dutch apple pie for dessert, all in a very limited space at the rear of the car. We were up early the next morning for a 6:00am departure from Cleveland on our way to Erie, Pennsylvania and Buffalo, New York following the old Erie Railroad tracks along the shore of Lake Erie. As we passed through a lot of the small towns in the "rust belt" there were many abandoned mills and factories which one might expect to

see, but something else about them caught my eye. Many of the old brick smokestacks had been “repurposed” as cell phone towers! It was such a contrast of the outdated and the modern. Once again we experienced some delays along the way due to the heavy freight train traffic, but the sight of the trees turning fall colors was a delight, especially since we were able to stand on the open platform of the car as we passed through the eastern hardwood forest and rolling farmlands. Many of the Sumac trees and shrubs had turned to a brilliant scarlet red. As



Northern Ohio Farmlands

we approached Buffalo I caught sight of dozens of giant concrete silos which were once used for the storage of grain that had been transported from the Midwest down the Great Lakes aboard huge ships and offloaded in Buffalo for transfer to trains for markets on the east coast. In recent times the grain has been transported directly by train or river barge.

Beyond Buffalo our train made its way through the “finger lakes” region of western New York to Ithaca where the fall colors were

nearing their peak. Along the way were many old abandoned railroad lines that I’m sure could tell some very interesting stories of the past if they could talk. Later that evening we arrived in Binghamton, New York to park in the Norfolk Southern yard for the night. There was time for some of us to walk downtown and see some of the historic old buildings that have been restored as restaurants, shops, bars, and galleries. One of the old buildings had been converted into the Galaxy Brewing Company, so of course I had to try out their IPA and it was pretty good. The next morning we departed Binghamton at 6:00am on our way north to the



Western New York State

university city of Syracuse under cloudy skies and a few light showers along the way. Our route followed the tracks of the New

York, Susquehanna, and Western Railroad through rolling hills and small towns where lots of people were waiting with their cameras, not having seen a passenger train rolling through their town since the 1950’s. All the kids were very excited as the train slowly passed by, and as I stood on the open platform

waving to them I had to wonder just how many people now have photos of me

now? From Syracuse the Pine Tree Limited headed east on the tracks of the Pan Am Railroad toward Schenectady, New York. Yes, you heard me right – Pan Am Railroad. It’s a combination of the old Boston and Maine, Maine Central, the Delaware and Hudson, and the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroads. Apparently the new owner had purchased the name and logo of Pan American Airlines when it went out of business many years ago and decided to use the same name and logo for his new railroad company. But having flown aboard Pan Am Airlines a couple of times in the past, it’s still hard for me to reconcile the Pan Am name and logo painted on the side of the railroad locomotives now. Several miles east

of Schenectady we crossed the Hudson River north of Albany on a massive bridge over a hundred feet above the river and the view up the narrow gorge was nothing short of spectacular. Further east our route took us through the southwest corner of Vermont before entering the state of Massachusetts for the journey to the Pan Am Railroad yard in Deerfield where the train would be parked for the night. Just beyond the town of



Pan Am Railways Locomotive



Old Smokestacks



Approaching Buffalo, New York



Crossing the Hudson River



Entering the Hoosac Tunnel

North Adams we came to the historic Hoosac Tunnel under the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts. Construction of the tunnel was begun in 1851 and completed in 1871 at a total cost of \$21 million, and at a length of 8.5 miles it was the second longest tunnel in the world. Even today it is the longest active railroad tunnel in the US east of the Rocky Mountains, so for all the railroad buffs on the train it was a highlight of the trip to be able to traverse the tunnel and get photos of it. Once again we made an early departure at 6:00am the next morning headed for Portland, Maine on the old route of the Boston and Maine Railroad. Our route took us through the small towns of northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire, many of which had names of historic English villages, such as Falmouth, Portsmouth, and Southampton, and it became obvious why we refer to this part of the country as New England. Our special train always

drew large crowds in the towns we passed through, and at one point some people in the village of Salisbury excitedly cheered as our Pullman Sleeper named "Salisbury Beach" rolled by with the familiar name of the "Boston and Maine Railroad" on the side of the car. By the time we arrived in Portland the skies had cleared and the evening light reflecting on the waters of Casco Bay was gorgeous. As the train was moved to an old siding on the waterfront below downtown Portland, I made my way up to the Westin Harborview Hotel, the site of the AAPRCo conference, to check in for the next couple of days. The hotel was once known as the Eastland Hotel and has seen a lot of history dating back to the turn of the century, then being restored in 2012. My room was on the top floor overlooking the harbor and Casco Bay, with a view of the White Mountains of New Hampshire far off in the distance. The following morning was the start of the conference with a session



View of Portland, Maine from the Westin Harborview Hotel

titled "Ask Amtrak" in which senior staff from Amtrak headquarters in WDC gave a report on the status of some issues the owners of the private railcars had brought to their attention over the past year. It was a lively exchange of dialogue and I learned a lot about the challenges private railcars have in their travels on Amtrak and freight railroad trackage. One of the most important issues was related to the tremendous increase in freight traffic over the past 5 years, which has resulted in many delays on Amtrak routes that private railcars must travel. In one case, the single track of the BNSF Railroad across North Dakota has become so congested with long trains of tank cars carrying oil from the new oil shale deposits in western North Dakota and eastern

Montana that the Amtrak "Empire Builder" passenger train sometimes runs 6 – 8 hours late! The other most important issue for the owners was that of the fees that Amtrak charges them to transport and service their car while travelling on Amtrak routes. Later on I was to find out that the cost of transporting the 31 private railcars from Chicago to Portland and then on to Boston or Chicago after the conference was a whopping \$435,000! And when one considers that the cost of buying a private railcar can be anywhere from \$350,000 to \$1.2 million it becomes clear that owning a private railcar is not an ordinary hobby in the traditional sense of the word. However, I must say that travelling by private railcar is amazing and wonderful. That afternoon there were a couple of other fascinating presentations, the first one by the chef and director of the Maine Culinary Institute who talked about the challenges of cooking on board a moving train in very cramped quarters. He was followed by the "train manager" for the Barnum and Bailey Circus who is responsible for planning and managing the logistics of moving the two circus trains around the country on a multiple number of railroads to try and meet a schedule of performances during the



Berkshire Mountains - Western Massachusetts



"Pine Tree Limited" parked in the Portland Rail Yard

two year run of each train. Some of his stories about how the circus train operates and how the performers and animals are cared for were amazing to say the least. All of the performers and circus staff have to live on the train during its two year program schedule. In the evening we all gathered at the rail yard for the first "car party", where we were allowed to walk through the cars to meet the owners and see the interior of their car. A local catering company had spent the afternoon setting up food stations and bars in the cars, so as we walked from car to car it was like a large reception. Many of the owners told stories of how they came to own their car and the history behind it when it was in operation several decades ago. The oldest car was the "Georgia" that was built in 1922 and had been used by four US Presidents during their election campaigns. It was beautifully restored and furnished with items from the era when it was the most luxurious accommodations on the rails. It was a rare treat for us to see all of the cars which are not open to the public.

The following day was set aside for a trip on the Maine Eastern Railroad from Portland to Rockland along the coast aboard vintage coaches from the 1940's pulled by two original diesel locomotives from the same era. Our group of 50 people had



Maine Eastern Railroad enroute to Rockland

The old downtown area had a lot of beautifully restored buildings that dated back to the mid-1800's, and which have been converted to shops, restaurants, bars, and galleries. On the way back to the train I stopped for a pint of local Geary's Summer Ale at the "Timeout Pub", a local biker bar and sat on the deck overlooking the harbor. The return trip to



Rockland Harbor

museum had over a hundred old trolleys with some of them dating back to the late 1800's, including a couple that were horse drawn versions. After a short presentation by the museum director on the history of the place, we boarded a vintage 1927 trolley for a ride along part of the original track to Kennebunkport. Along the way our conductor/motorman explained the operation of the car and some history of the old line, including the fact that many trolley companies created amusement parks adjacent to the line to attract riders on the weekends. Another fascinating piece of history was how the streetcar got the name "trolley" associated with it. The term



Enjoying the "Car Party"

the whole train to ourselves, so there were plenty of seats available. The route followed that of the old Maine Central Railroad north through the coastal towns of Bath, Falmouth, Yarmouth, and Newcastle with gorgeous views of the bays and rivers as well as the stunning fall colors of the hardwood forest. At the old Warren Station we all got off the train as it did a "run by" for the cameras. When we arrived in Rockland I had a delicious lobster roll, homemade potato chips, and a cold Shipyard IPA for lunch at the Trackside Café in the historic old Rockland Depot before walking down to the harbor.

Portland was equally as scenic

and a great way to spend a crisp, clear fall day. That evening all of us gathered in the rail yard again for the second car party to see the rest of the cars, with one in particular being quite unique in that it had a wood fired grill in the galley. The next morning I took a long walk around downtown Portland and into some of the historic old neighborhoods with their fine Victorian homes and beautiful parks. Then I returned to the hotel to board a bus that took our group to the Seashore

Trolley Museum near Kennebunkport south of Portland. The large outdoor



Trackside Cafe - Rockland Depot



Seashore Trolley Museum - Kennebunkport



Old Trolley Control Tower

trolley refers to the small wheel at the tip of the pole that connects to the 600 volt DC electric cable which powers the car. As the streetcar approached, people could hear the noise of the small wheel as it rotated against the overhead cable before they could see the car, so they would say "the trolley is coming", and the name stuck. One of the most unusual facts we learned was how there were so many trolleys on the streets surrounding the baseball stadium in Brooklyn that on game days the people getting off the trolley had to dodge the other trolleys in order to cross the street and so they became known as "trolley dodgers". The original nickname for the Brooklyn baseball team was the "Robins", but soon the team adopted the name "Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers" and it was later shortened to "Brooklyn Dodgers". Many of the old streetcars at the museum were open to walk through and in remarkably good condition. The cars without windows and open to the outside were called "breezers". There was also a large collection of "trackless trolleys" which are essentially buses that run on electric power

from an overhead line but not on rail or track. Trolleys that run on rails use only one overhead cable since the positive charge comes from the cable and the negative charge from the rail to complete a circuit. Whereas trackless trolleys need two overhead cables, one with the positive charge and the other the negative charge since the rubber tires on the bus can't conduct electricity. As I walked around the museum grounds I spotted an old New York subway car that

had the team logos of the Yankees and the Mets painted on the side of the car, along with the words "Subway Series 2000". After we returned to the hotel in Portland I saw an old black man dressed in a faded suit

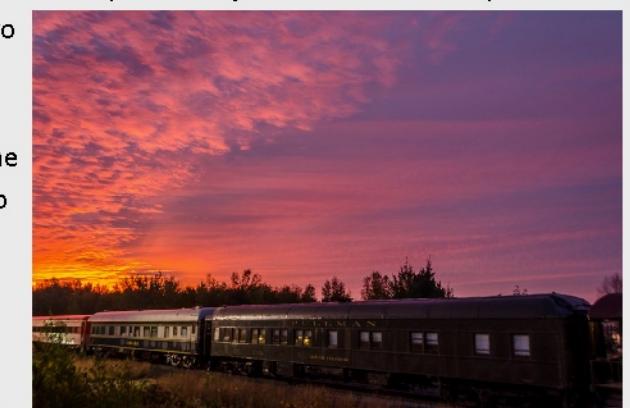
standing on the corner holding a sign reading "There is Life Through Jesus Christ" and preaching to no one in particular. And sitting right behind him in a wheelchair was a young man holding a sign that said "Cat Porn"! (don't ask me to explain it – it was just

too weird) That evening was the gala banquet featuring fresh Maine lobster among the many dishes available at the buffet table. I sat next to an elderly couple who were travelling on the historic "City of Spokane" private rail car that was once part of the original Great Northern Railroad "Empire Builder" train that ran from Chicago to Seattle. I remembered talking with the owner of the car the night before and telling him about my trip aboard the Empire Builder in December of 1967 when the train was still operated by the Great Northern. The evening's entertainment was provided by a local band that played music from the 1940's for dancing. I was up early the next morning at 5:00am to join the

train for the traditional 6:00am departure, and as I made my way down to the rail yard I was just in time to see a spectacular sunrise over the harbor. Amtrak and Pan Am railroad crews joined the two sections of the train for the next leg of the trip to Boston following the Amtrak "DownEaster" train. As we crossed the Charles River we had a great view of downtown Boston on one side and Harvard University on the other. As our train pulled into the Boston rail yard, the crew proceeded to split the train into two sections, one headed south to New York and the other headed west to Chicago. I was scheduled to stay on the western section of the train as far as Springfield, Massachusetts where I would depart and catch a flight back to Los Angeles. When I got off at the old Springfield station I couldn't believe how dilapidated it was, with only one active platform remaining from among the dozen or so that were now



Historic old Portland Neighborhood



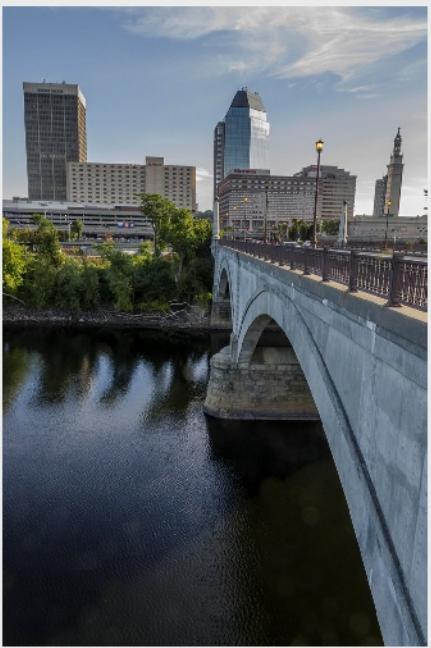
Sunrise - Portland Rail Yard

abandoned and rusting away. I found out later that the city will soon begin a large restoration project for the old station that will include a new commuter rail line to Boston and Hartford. I had several hours to spend in Springfield so I grabbed my camera and discovered a beautiful trail that followed the shore of the Connecticut River for a couple of miles upstream to the National Basketball Hall of Fame which was built in the



Basketball Hall of Fame Garden - Springfield, Massachusetts

shape of a gigantic basketball. Later in the afternoon I was fortunate to catch a ride on an airport shuttle with two pilots from Delta Airlines, and lo and behold, they were the pilots for my flight to Minneapolis, so there was no question of whether or not I might miss the flight. I arrived home that night with many stories to tell and photos to share from a wonderful and unique train trip.



Connecticut River Bridge, Springfield, MA

At the beginning of October I headed north to Yosemite National Park to attend the "Fall Gathering" of the Yosemite Conservancy at the historic Wawona Hotel that was built in 1876 to serve tourists visiting the nearby Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. Since then additions have been added as well as several large cottages, all in the same white-washed style as the original building. Many of the rooms in the hotel are decorated with antique furniture,



Wawona Hotel - Yosemite National Park

but no telephones, radios, or TV in order to maintain the turn of the century feeling of the place. Every room opens on to a large covered veranda that has Adirondack wooden chairs perfect for sitting with a glass of wine or a cold beer in the evenings. The hotel is surrounded by a tall forest of Ponderosa Pine and Redwood trees, and at an elevation of 5200 feet the nights are delightfully cool. That evening after the reception I went to the lounge in the main building to listen to a local piano player who played popular songs from the late 1800's and early 1900's, and with the exception of the modern electric lighting in the room, one could be transported back

in time to 1890. The next morning I joined a small group for a photography session with Ranger Jeff who gave us some good tips about photographing in Yosemite. Then we walked over an old covered bridge across the Merced River to the "Pioneer History Village" where the National Park Service had assembled a collection of historic old cabins and buildings that once were scattered throughout the park. About this time an old stage coach came rolling by driven by Ranger Burl and a team of beautiful black Friesen draft horses. Until the 1920's when roads were constructed for automobiles, tourists arrived at Wawona by stage coach from Oakhurst or Mariposa, which was often a rough journey of 12 – 14 hours. One of the historical log buildings in the village was the old Wells Fargo office with the original telephone exchange still intact. I was told that back in 1912 the cost for making a telephone call from Yosemite was \$8.00 for 3 minutes which was incredibly expensive for that time and even so now. After lunch a bus took us up to the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias for a tour of the huge 2000 year old trees led by Ranger Bob who explained why the Giant Sequoias were growing in this particular part of the forest. Then he talked about the project funded by the Yosemite Conservancy to remove and/or relocate the existing roads, as well as to restore the wetland ecosystem so essential to maintaining the health of the grove. This year is the 150th anniversary of Yosemite National Park and the project is designed to ensure the survival of the Giant Sequoias for the next 150 years. As we walked among the majestic giants I felt like a tiny dwarf in comparison. At one point along the trail, Ranger Bob pointed out a huge tree named the "Fallen Monarch" that had



Old Stage Coach - Yosemite Pioneer Village



Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias

died and fallen over 200 years ago. We returned to Wawona in time for the afternoon wine and cheese reception where the president of the conservancy lead a ceremony that gifted a brand new stage coach to the National Park Service to replace the aging one that had seen much better days. I was quite surprised to find out that the new stage coach was not a restoration of an old coach but instead was built by a coach craftsman in Merced according to the exact design specifications of the original stage coach. (and who knew they still built new stage coaches today) After the ceremony I hiked along the Meadow Loop Trail above the hotel and along the way I saw a small herd of mule deer with a 6 point buck in the lead, grazing on the edge of the golf course. Further up the trail were gorgeous views of the meadow and the mountains surrounding it in the late afternoon sunlight. By the time I returned to the hotel it was time for dinner so I went to the restaurant and sat outside on the veranda where I had a fantastic dish of sautéed scallops, pan seared halibut, garlic mashed potatoes and tomato ragout with green beans and cauliflower. Later

that evening there was a “barn dance” in the old village horse barn where the square dances and circle dances were called by park superintendent Ranger Dean. Since there were quite a few more women than men it often got a bit confusing trying to know which woman was in the role of the man as a partner. Along with the period costumes that many people wore, the bales of straw for benches, and the smell of the horse manure outside, it was a real slice of history. There was a great deal of fun for all, and except for the electric lights it could have been back in 1880.



Sunset along the Meadow Loop Trail



Nokia Theater - LA Live

The next morning I left the peace and tranquility of Yosemite and drove south to join the chaos of LA for the Adobe Max Conference. I arrived in Los Angeles late in the afternoon and checked in to the JW Marriott Hotel, headquarters for the conference which started the next morning. As I walked out of the hotel to the area known as LA Live it was a sea of people with every bar and restaurant packed to capacity as people waited for the Elton John concert to begin at Staples Center. I had to walk a few blocks over to the Palm Restaurant in order to find a seat for dinner. As I sat outside on the patio an old one-legged veteran in a wheelchair was soliciting donations from the people passing by on their way to the concert. His line was “help out an old veteran tonight – I accept American Express – God Bless”, and it seemed to be working for him, though I never saw anyone try to pull out their American Express card! The next morning I walked over to the Nokia Theatre next door to the hotel for the opening general session where huge HD screens displayed amazing graphics and images as a pre-show survey appeared with a series of questions having two possible choices and a number to tweet for each choice. Then as the tweets came in there was a real time display of a bar graph showing the number of tweets for each choice. After a few minutes the graphics and images being displayed on the huge HD screens suddenly changed to show variations of the choice that was tallied as the most popular and a new survey question was posted. One example was the question “What is your favorite, beer or wine?” and when the results were tallied the most popular choice was beer, so all the graphics and images on the big screens were variations on the theme of beer. The



Staples Center - LA Live

pre-show survey continued for another 15 – 20 minutes with such choices as water or ice, tea or coffee, warm or cold, etc. It was a great way to keep the audience engaged until the session was ready to begin, and when it did, it did so with a huge crescendo of water being dumped on to the stage, or so it seemed from watching the huge HD screens. There were lots of cool and very impressive software demonstrations presented by the Adobe product engineers, but the most amazing part of the opening session was when the CEO of Adobe and the CEO of Microsoft came on stage together to announce a new strategic relationship between the two companies that would be based on the new Microsoft Surface Pro 3 tablet, on which



Lobby Bar - JW Marriott Hotel

they showed several very innovative new applications. Then as we all thought the session was over, the Microsoft CEO suddenly stepped forward and said "I have a surprise for you, I am giving each one of you a brand new Surface Pro 3 tablet and one year subscription to Office 365"! Well, there was a brief moment of silence as people tried to take it all in, but a few seconds later the audience burst into a standing ovation. I did a quick calculation in my head that came up with a total cost of the gift from Microsoft being over \$1500. Then when you multiply that times 6500 conference attendees it amounts to a grand total of well over \$10 million! I would guess that about half of the

attendees were Mac users, so this was a very shrewd move by

Microsoft to break into the Apple community. Later on in the afternoon between some excellent technical sessions I joined the crowd in the convention center to pick up my new tablet that turned out to be the top of the line model with keyboard included. (you couldn't ask for a better "surprise") Then I browsed through the expo area which had more than 30 exhibitors displaying some of the latest hardware technology and software applications. One of the most popular was the Wacom booth in which they sponsored a "Battle of the Hands" where two graphic designers were given the same resources and told to create a complete movie poster in 8 minutes, with the winner being judged by the reaction of the audience watching the contest. There were some pretty creative works that came out of the battles that day. For dinner that evening I walked over to a small Indian restaurant by the name of "Gills" located in the historic old Stillwell Hotel downtown. As I walked in to the place it looked like I was walking in to a local restaurant in New Delhi. The tables had the same plastic tablecloth, chairs of all sizes and shapes, and an old TV in the corner showing Bollywood movies, just as you would find in India. It was a small place but filled with a lot of Indian families having dinner or coming in for take-out food. I ordered the Chicken Tikka Masala, one of my favorite Indian dishes, along with lots of fresh baked naan and a cold liter bottle of Taj Mahal beer. Dinner was delicious and as I looked around the restaurant I saw an old man with a turban and very traditional dress sitting in the corner, three young children doing school homework on their iPads at one of the tables, the owner of the place at the cash register greeting customers, and a young man serving tables. From their appearance I gathered they represented four generations of the same family. The next day there was a special session titled "sneaks" in which some Adobe software engineers presented their latest R & D projects as sneak previews of what might come in the next year or two. It was a fascinating session with presentations of applications to remove atmospheric haze from photos, edit sound tracks with a visual display of the words with color tags, and 3D image compositions in Photoshop. That evening the area around LA Live was once again packed with people, but this time it was for the Clippers basketball game at Staples Center. I ended up watching the game on the big screen TV at Tom's Urban Diner across from the center. The following evening LA Live was once again packed with fans of the LA Kings to celebrate their winning of the Stanley Cup and to see the team's opening hockey game. It was virtually sold out with only a handful of tickets available at \$450 each, so I went to Wolfgang Puck's Restaurant and Bar to watch it on the big screen instead. After the game I had a delicious order of General Tso's Chicken and a cold Tsing Tao beer to go with it as I gazed at the downtown lights from the 24th floor.





View from Wolfgang Puck's Restaurant on 24th Floor

In mid-October our chapter of PCMA had organized a VIP dinner at the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas to honor one of our biggest supporters, in conjunction with the IMEX America trade show being held at the Sands Expo Center. Since I was driving to Las Vegas I was asked to pick up the signage in Brea rather than having it shipped. What I didn't realize was just how large the signs would be. When I saw the huge 4 x 8 foot box I knew I would have to come up with some way to secure the box to the roof of my Jeep, so I stopped by Home Depot in Brea to get some hefty tie downs and a sheet of plywood to go over the top of the box. I sure didn't want the box flying off on the freeway

during the 4 hour drive to Las Vegas! When I finally arrived at the Venetian Hotel where I had booked a room, the valet gave me a rather strange look as I drove up, probably wondering if I was going to ask him to take the huge box to my room. Later on that day I drove over to the Mirage Hotel's shipping dock to unload the box of signs and help with the setup for the dinner that evening. Then I went to the Double Helix bar for a beer and watched the football game between New York and Philadelphia. Three guys seated on my left were New York fans and the two guys seated to my right were cheering for Philadelphia. In the end New York got shut out by Philadelphia to the surprise of everyone. After the game a young couple from Yakima, Washington sat down at the bar and we struck up a conversation. They had just gotten married the day before and were now on their honeymoon in Las Vegas. Both of them had children from previous marriages and both worked on a hops farm in the Yakima Valley. Later on at the VIP dinner there were over 200 people to help "roast" our guest of honor and it turned out to be a blast. Our honoree was laughing as much or more than anyone else in the room so we deemed it a very successful event. The brilliant red décor in the banquet room was certainly in keeping with the theme as well. The following day, after visiting the tradeshow floor and meeting a few of the exhibitors from all around the world, I decided to drive up to Red Rocks Canyon to



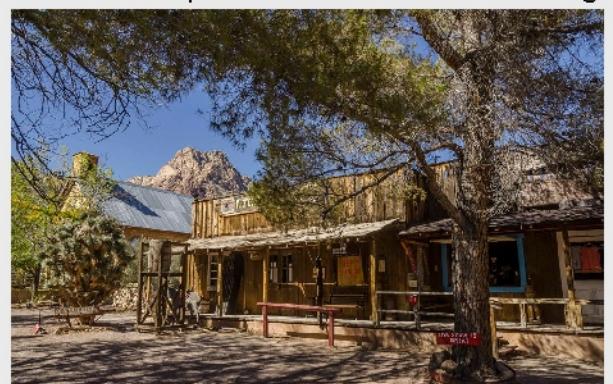
PCMA VIP Dinner at the Mirage Hotel - Las Vegas



View of the Spring Mountains from Bonnie Springs Ranch, Nevada

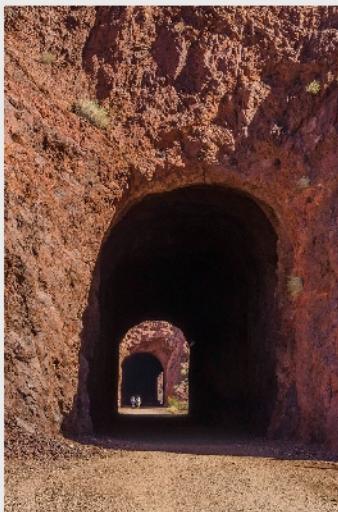
do a bit of hiking and take some photos of the colorful rock formations. The BLM Visitor Center had a great display on the geologic history of the area and an explanation of how the beautiful red rocks were formed from ancient sand dunes millions of years ago. On the way back to Las Vegas I stopped at the Bonnie Springs Ranch and discovered they had a reconstruction of an old west ghost town decorated for Halloween, complete with skeletons, scary monsters, and ghosts of course. The ranch was originally established in 1843 near a permanent spring at the base of the Spring Mountains to serve as a stopover point for wagon trains going to California on the Old Spanish Trail. It's a beautiful setting in a large grove of

Cottonwood trees and with spectacular views of the Spring Mountains and Red Rock Canyon. After exploring the old ghost town I stopped in at the bar and had a cold local beer as I watched the ducks and geese enjoying the small lake outside. That evening, back at my hotel in Las Vegas, I changed clothes and headed to the "Tryst Nightclub" in the Wynn Hotel for a party sponsored by "London and Partners". During the evening I happened to meet up with Roddy, the Scottish bagpiper from Edinburgh and he said he was disappointed that the vote to make Scotland an independent country had failed a couple of weeks before. The next



Old Ghost Town - Bonnie Springs Ranch, Nevada

morning I visited the tradeshow floor again and then took the afternoon to drive to Boulder City to see the Nevada Southern Railroad Museum. It was officially closed but one of the men working there let me walk around to take photos of the old steam locomotives and vintage rolling stock. Then I drove down to the Lake Mead National Recreation Area Visitor Center which had a very interesting video about the amazing construction of Hoover Dam, the lake, and surrounding Mojave Desert. From the Visitor Center I hiked for 3 miles along the "Historic Railroad



Tunnel #1 - Historic Railroad Trail

of Cajun corn chowder, hot fresh Louisiana sweet bread, and a cold pint of New Orleans Abita amber ale. During the evening Mike told me he had quit smoking after being a heavy smoker for more than 40 years, which I thought was not only remarkable but great news to share. When I asked him how he accomplished such a feat he said he had read a book titled "The Easy Way to Stop Smoking" that was written by a man who smoked 5 packs a day for 30 years and found a way to quit one day. I never saw him light up

Trail" which is the old roadbed for the railroad that hauled thousands of tons of resources to the site of the dam construction. The trail goes through five tunnels that railroad engineers had to blast out of the solid bedrock in order to reach the construction site. What makes these tunnels very unique is the fact that they had to be 20 feet high and 18 feet wide in order to transport the giant turbines and penstocks to the dam. Along the trail were spectacular views of Lake Mead and the Black Mountains on the Arizona shore. Later that evening I met up with my old army buddy Mike for dinner at "Emeril Lagasse's Table 10 Restaurant" in the Palazzo Hotel. For dinner I had Emeril's signature BBQ shrimp along with a bowl



View of Lake Mead from the Historic Railroad Trail



Grand Entrance to the Venetian Hotel - Las Vegas

ahead of the traffic from Las Vegas returning to LA. A few miles south of Baker, California I spotted the exit for "ZZYXZ Road" which I've passed many times and never stopped. So this time I decided to take the exit and find out what ZZYXZ was all about. The narrow road followed the base of the mountains along the edge of a dry lake to a collection of old concrete buildings among a large area of tall California Fan Palm trees surrounding a year round spring. It used to be an old health spa in the 1940's. Both it and the surrounding desert have a long and unique history. In 1944 an American

that evening but he did have several of his usual "tall Bacardi and diet coke". After dinner Mike insisted on trying his luck at 3 card poker, but after losing \$200 in less than 5 minutes he decided to head for the craps table since there was no else playing it at the time. His luck changed dramatically and after racking up fifteen hundred dollars in winnings he finally "crapped out". He ended the evening playing the new Michael Jackson penny slot machine and walked away with another \$120 in winnings. Mike's gambling philosophy is this – "you have to be able to lose money to win, and if you break even you've beat the house". The next day the tradeshow ended and I

headed south on I-15 just



Old Health Spa at ZZYXZ Springs, California



ZZYZX Springs

radio evangelist, self-proclaimed medical doctor, and Methodist minister named Curtis Howe Springer filed a mining claim in the area of about 12,000 acres around the natural springs and soon built the health spa based on the mineral waters from the springs. He named it the "ZZYXZ Mineral Springs and Health Spa" because the word ZZYXZ would be the last word in the dictionary. Soon he had famous Hollywood celebrities and everyday working families flocking to his new spa and resort. But in the early 1970's the federal government reclaimed the land since Springer had no legal rights to it. At that point the spa closed and was abandoned for several decades. As the story goes, Springer often described himself as "the last of the old

time medicine men", but the American Medical Association labeled him the "King of Quacks". More recently in the late 1990's the California State University system was given a lease on the property and soon established it as their Desert Studies Center for researchers from around the country to study the Mojave Desert environment. But before it became a health spa the area was the site of a US Army post in 1860 and later a stopover on the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad that ran from western Nevada and Death Valley to the Santa Fe railhead in Ludlow. As I walked around among the old buildings of the health spa turned university research center, I could see the evidence of the old railroad line and signs of an abandoned mill site that once mined and processed salt and minerals from beneath the surface of the dry soda lake. When I returned to the freeway on my way home I couldn't help wonder how many thousands of people drive by the ZZYXZ road sign every day and have no idea what lies just a few miles away. At least now I know!



Abandoned Route of the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad - ZZYXZ Springs

Two days later I headed for Santa Fe, New Mexico to attend a workshop titled "The Art and Science of Landscape Photography", a subject that really peeked my interest. I drove east on I-10 to Phoenix and then on to US highway 60 that would take me up through the Fort Apache Indian Reservation and the mountains in the Tonto National Forest on the way to Albuquerque. About 30 miles east of Phoenix I passed the spectacular Superstition Mountains which are famous as the legendary home of the Lost Dutchman Mine. On the outskirts of Globe, Arizona is the largest open pit mine in the country and the highway skirted around the edge of the monstrous pit before descending into the town. North of Globe the route climbed into the beautiful Pinion Pine and Juniper forest on the White Mountain Apache Reservation and then suddenly descended a long steep 6% grade over 3000 feet through a series of tight switchbacks into the massive Salt River Canyon. The views looking down the canyon were spectacular as the highway crossed over the river on a new bridge next to the beautiful old Art Nouveau highway bridge that was built at the turn of the century. Then the highway climbed up the other



Salt River Canyon - Arizona

side of the canyon back to the top of the vast plateau known as the Mogollon Rim that spans over two hundred miles across eastern Arizona. By this time the sun was beginning to set so I started looking for a place to spend the night, and when I drove into the small town of Show Low I spotted a new Holiday Inn Express that seemed to fit the bill perfectly. As I was checking in a group of motorcycle riders were also checking in at the same time. One of them made a comment about the delicious smell of BBQ as they had passed the Cattleman's Steakhouse just a couple of blocks away, so we all agreed that was probably the place to go for dinner this evening. The filet mignon was grilled perfectly and the baked potato was a great compliment for it as

well. Later that night some heavy thunderstorms rolled in and by morning the cool air was very refreshing. Before heading out of town I enquired about the origin of the town's name and found out it came about when two old miners who founded the settlement couldn't agree on a name, so they had a poker game with the winner deciding the name of the town. The poker game they chose was one known as "show low" in which the winning hand was the lowest one. As it turned out, the winner had a deuce of clubs, and decided to name the town after the poker game of the same name. At that point I realized why the main street of Show Low, Arizona was named "Deuce of Clubs Ave". It was a beautiful drive on US 60 through the mountains and high plains of eastern Arizona and western New Mexico with scattered thunderstorms along the way which made for some gorgeous cloud formations. I crossed the Continental Divide at 7,560 feet just west of a small town by the name of "Pie Town", which is home to the National Pie Festival, or so they claim. Then the highway began a slow descent into the Rio Grande Valley. A few miles west of Socorro is



National Radio Astronomy Observatory Very Large Array - Socorro, NM

the National Radio Astronomy Observatory Very Large Array, a collection of more than 25 large radio telescopes that monitor background radio waves from space. The site has been featured in several major Sci-fi films including "Contact" starring Jodie Foster. When I reached Socorro on the banks of the Rio Grande River I discovered the town was originally founded by Spanish explorers in 1626 and later was the site of a military post during the Mexican-American War of 1846. I walked around the old historic district and near the town square was an old Spanish Mission style hotel whose elegance has long faded but I'm sure its history hasn't.

Rather than join the weekend traffic on I-25 to Albuquerque, I opted for

the scenic route following State Highway 41 north through the beautiful golden grass plains on the eastern slopes of the Sandia Mountains. I reached Santa Fe just ahead of a huge thunderstorm and checked into the "Inn at Vanessie", a small boutique hotel only a block from the Plaza downtown. For dinner that evening I walked over to a local bar called "Del Charro" for their signature dish, a fantastic green chili burger, along with a cold pint of the local "Happy Camper IPA". As I sat at the bar, along with everyone else watching the Dallas Cowboys beating the New York Giants, a couple of guys at the end of the bar ordered an "Irish Bomb". The bartender knew exactly what it was and began pouring a pint of Guinness, to which he added



Bandelier National Monument - Los Alamos, New Mexico

two shots of Jameson whiskey

and a shot of Bailey's. Then he served the drinks to the guys who promptly chugged them in 2 seconds flat! (needless to say I did not order one) The next morning I joined 11 other people in the workshop for an introductory presentation by the instructor, Glenn Randall, on some of the topics he would be exploring in more detail over the next five days. Mornings were spent in the computer lab processing images that we had shot on location in the afternoon and evening. Our first location was Bandelier National Monument east of Santa Fe near the town of Los Alamos and the National Research Lab which is famous as



Thunderstorms in Northeastern Arizona



Eastern New Mexico



Rainbow Over the Rio Grande Valley - White Rock, New Mexico

the site where the first atomic bomb was developed in 1944. In stark contrast is the national monument that has preserved the site of an ancient civilization dating back to 1100AD when its inhabitants carved their homes into the sheer cliffs above the river and raised crops along the floor of the canyon. As I hiked along the trail past the old cliff dwellings the tall Cottonwood trees on the banks of the river were a brilliant yellow color that stood out against the deep blue sky above, making for some beautiful photos. Later we drove to a high point above the Rio Grande at a place called White Rock where we photographed the sunset and were rewarded with a spectacular double rainbow as huge thunderstorms passed over the valley.

Glenn gave us some tips on how to predict where a rainbow would appear, the science aspect of the workshop. Our next location the following day was at Plaza Blanca Canyon, a private ranch northeast of Santa Fe near the area where Georgia O'Keefe painted so many of her famous landscapes. We spent the afternoon hiking up the canyon and photographing the unusual rock formations that make this region unique. We stayed into the early evening to get some shots of the lovely sunset among the thunderstorms on the horizon. The next morning Glenn presented some very interesting information on the principles of light and exposure before we headed for our next location at a place known as "Ghost Ranch" northeast of Santa Fe and in the heart of Georgia O'Keefe country. Glenn lead us up a steep rocky trail and then along a ridge that took us to the top of a unique geologic formation known as "Chimney Rock" where we had stunning views of the valley, mesas, mountains, and Abiquiu Lake below. All around us were gnarly old Juniper trees and sagebrush that made for some beautiful photos, especially when they were in



Chimney Rock - Ghost Ranch, New Mexico



Sunset from Chimney Rock - Ghost Ranch, New Mexico

the foreground and the vast landscape of mesas and mountains was the background. As the late afternoon sun was setting over the Jimenez Mountains we got some of what Glenn called "alpenglow" light that showcased the surrounding landscape in deep red and golden yellow highlights. This is where I took some of my best photos of the workshop, and sitting on top of Chimney Rock at sunset was worth every bit of the tough climb up the trail. After some lecture and post processing of our photos the next morning we drove southwest of Santa Fe to Kasha-Katuwe National Monument, also known as "Tent Rocks", a name that refers to the very unusual shapes formed by wind and water erosion



Kasha-Katuwe National Monument - New Mexico

over thousands of years. Glenn directed us to hike up a very narrow "slot" canyon which was barely two feet wide in places so that we could get some photos of the most interesting rock formations. The narrow canyon walls were formed from beautiful pink and yellow sandstone and offered some very unique angles and textures for our photos. At the head of the canyon was a very steep, rocky trail up to the top of the mesa where I had a stunning view across the valley of the Rio Grande to the Sangre de Christo Mountains above Santa Fe. As daylight began to fade we all gathered at the bottom of the canyon to take

photos of the gorgeous sunset. That evening for dinner I walked to the "Zia Diner" where I had a superb plate of Blue Corn Chicken Enchiladas in red chili sauce, along with a cold pint of local Marble Brewery IPA from Albuquerque. On the last day of the workshop Glenn gave us a fascinating presentation on the "Evolutionary Preferences for Landscapes" that refers to certain elements in the natural landscape that appeal to people and how these elements are incorporated into a successful landscape photo. Then he showed us 16 of his landscape prints and asked us to decide whether each one was a "bomb", having sold less than 100 copies, or a "best seller" having sold more than 100 copies. At the end, as he displayed each print he asked which of us rated it a bomb and who rated it a best seller and why. As it turned out, most of us got close to the right answers, but surprisingly only about half of his prints were best sellers. It was a fun exercise that brought a lot of the things we had learned during the week into better focus. The workshop ended with Glenn doing a personal critique with each of us and showing a couple of our photos to the rest of the class that he felt were among our best shots of the week. Early in the afternoon on Friday I bid farewell to my classmates and headed for San Diego to attend a National Geographic Society seminar on the topic of travel photography lead by one of the senior photographers for the National Geographic Traveler magazine. On the way to San Diego I made an overnight stop in Flagstaff before continuing on early the next morning south through the spectacular Oak Creek Canyon to Sedona and then down to I-10 for the rest of the trip.



Mission Alacantara - San Diego

Once I arrived in San Diego I checked into the Mission Valley DoubleTree Hotel and walked over to BJ's Brewhouse to watch game 4 of the World Series between San Francisco and Kansas City. The bar was packed with baseball fans but I was able to find one seat near the end of the bar. As the game came on the big screen TVs around the place there was no sound, just the loud rock music as before the game. After a couple of minutes I asked the bartender why the sound of the game was not on and she said it was the policy of the restaurant not to put the sound of the game on in the bar unless it was a San Diego team playing. When I said that was absolutely ridiculous, especially since this was the World Series after all, she asked if I wanted to speak to the manager, which I did. When I told him I could go across the street to Applebee's and watch the game AND hear the sound, he agreed to turn on the sound of the game, which delighted everyone else in the bar as well. As I left BJ's after the game I had to wonder if I came back to watch game 5, would the sound be on or off – I guess I'll never know! The next morning, Eddie Soloway began his seminar with a very interesting presentation on the contrast of his "aesthetic" approach to photography versus the more "scientific" approach which Glenn Randall had given us the week before. It was nice to see how one is not necessarily better, rather we should strive to seek a balance that works for each of us.

At the conclusion of the seminar I drove up to West Hollywood to attend the meeting of the Sales Advisory Board for the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Bureau (LATCB). The Sunday afternoon traffic was horrendous and when I finally got to West Hollywood the streets around the Loews Hotel where the board members would be staying were closed off for a film premiere that night. It took some driving of back streets to finally get to the hotel and check in. I joined the rest of the board members in the lobby for dinner, which was to be at Rivera, a well-known restaurant downtown. Our LA hosts had arranged for each of us to have a ticket for the Metro rather than taking a shuttle bus, which I thought was a brilliant idea since it was very likely that most of the board members had never ridden on the Los Angeles Metro before. It was a quick 15 minute trip to downtown where we boarded a shuttle bus that took us on a fascinating tour of some historical places downtown which few of us had seen before. And our guide told us all about the history of the old theatres and stores that were abandoned many years ago but are now in various stages of restoration and new development that involves several billion dollars over the next 5 years. I had never been to many of these locations downtown and I must say I was very impressed. The dinner at



Sunset on top of Chimney Rock

Rivera was in their private dining room and featured a five star menu of authentic and traditional Mexican dishes. The appetizers included "Flan de Elote", corn custard with black Quinoa and squash blossom sauce, as well as "Piquillos Rellenos" which are Spanish peppers stuffed with chorizo, golden raisins, and Gruyere cheese. For the main dish I had "Yucatecan Puerco Pibil", a braised pork shoulder with Achiote chilis, that was superb. The next morning our group met in the hotel lobby for a short shuttle ride up the hill to Universal Studios where we were greeted by a red carpet and a delicious breakfast buffet on the terrace outside the Globe Theater. Most of the day was taken up with presentations by senior LATCB sales staff regarding new development planned in the city and opportunities for future growth. Following lunch outside on the terrace we were invited on a VIP tour of the backlots and sound stages, including a ride through the 3D King Kong Interactive Experience that features 30 of the world's largest HD screens! That evening we were hosted for dinner at the "STK Restaurant" in West Hollywood. The name STK is short for steak, so we all knew what would be top on the menu, and we were not disappointed in the least. The rare 12oz Filet Mignon I ordered was grilled to perfection



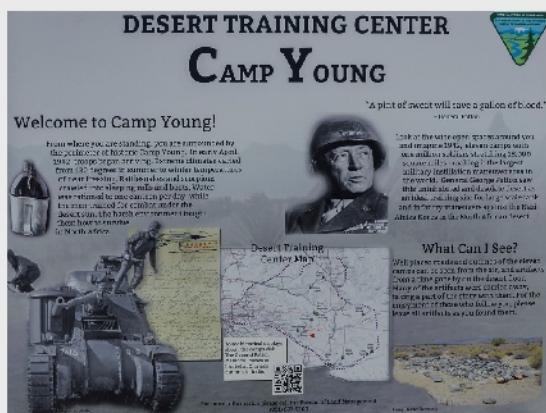
View of West Hollywood from the Presidential Suite

and the family style servings of garlic mashed potatoes, grilled fresh asparagus, and mixed roasted winter vegetables made it a memorable dinner. The Meyer Lemon Cheesecake was a fabulous finish. Upon returning to the hotel we were all invited for a nightcap in the Presidential Suite on the 20th floor where we had a spectacular view of the lights of Hollywood and downtown LA. The following morning we had breakfast on the terrace outside the Globe Theater, but this time the characters from the movie "Despicable Me" were there to greet us. Everyone had a lot of fun having their photo taken with the "Minions". It was another day of fascinating information from the LATCB staff, especially the unveiling of their new website which is to debut at the first of next year. Then it was back to the hotel to check out and join the traffic on the freeway heading home.



The Minions Joined us for Lunch

At the beginning of November I attended a meeting of University of Illinois Alumni that was arranged to coincide with the National Soil Science Conference being held at the Long Beach Convention Center. Later in the evening a number of us went for dinner at a great South American restaurant in downtown Long Beach where we met up with some new graduate students from Argentina and Chile. It was a fun time with conversations going on in both English and Spanish. The next morning I took some time to explore the waterfront and take photos before heading back home.



General Patton Museum - Chiriaco Summit

On Veteran's Day I joined a large number of people gathered at the General George S. Patton Memorial Museum for a special celebration to honor our veterans and active military. The museum is located a few miles east of Indio, California at a place called Chiriaco Summit just off I-10. Besides the museum there is little else there, save for a truck stop and coffee shop, so a lot of people must wonder why it's located in the middle of the Mojave Desert. The answer is simple – Chiriaco Summit was the location chosen in 1941 as the headquarters for a desert training center to prepare US troops for deployment to North Africa to join British forces fighting



The Queen Mary - Long Beach

against German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Corps. General Patton was given command of the training center where he spent several months working to establish camps throughout the Mojave Desert and setting up the training protocol for tank maneuvers. At the height of its activity more than a million soldiers were housed, fed, and trained for desert warfare, yet virtually nothing remains of the camps and training facilities now, except for the records and a few items displayed in the museum. One portion of the museum is dedicated to telling the life story of Patton and a short video that details the history of the Desert Training Center. Outside the museum are a number of tanks and military vehicles from WWII. All in all, though it's small and remote, it's a fascinating place to visit, despite my having driven by it so many times on I-10.



San Diego Safari Park

In mid-November our PCMA Chapter Board of Directors held its annual planning retreat which was hosted by the Rancho Bernardo Inn. On my way to the retreat I stopped for a couple of hours at the San Diego Safari Park to see the new "Tiger Trail" enclosure that was built especially for the five Sumatran tigers. I was totally amazed to see the tigers romping around in a very natural setting yet close enough for people to see them first hand. The enclosure was a beautiful design incorporating the architectural style and colors of Indonesia, with a small shop and snack bar within the center where one could sit and watch the tigers. I got some great photos of the big cats and I left the park being very impressed. That evening I checked into a lovely room overlooking the golf course at the Inn before joining my fellow board members Dawn and

Neil for drinks and dinner in the bar. The next

morning we all gathered in one of the meeting rooms and were pleased to find a delicious breakfast buffet provided by the hotel. Most of the day was spent reviewing our 2014 programs and discussing plans for next year. The Inn hosted us for a wonderful lunch outside on the terrace before we returned to our work on next year's plans. To our surprise, our incoming president, Kristen, had organized a team building exercise near



Rancho Bernardo Inn

the end of the afternoon that involved splitting up into two teams and assembling a "Ghost Busters" car using a Lego kit, which turned out to be much harder than we thought but a lot of fun too. That evening we sat down to a fabulous 5 course dinner in the private dining room where each course was paired with a great wine. Dinner began with creamy pumpkin bisque which had Brunoise Gruyere cheese, buttery croutons, and crème fraiche, paired with a Sauvignon Blanc from Sonoma Valley. The second course was "Carne Cruda Tuscan beef tartar" served with a Russian River Chardonnay. Next came a smoked medallion of wild King Salmon paired with a Willamette Valley Pinot Noir, followed by the fourth course of "72-hour braised beef short rib" and a Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley. And if that wasn't enough, the dessert course featured apple brown butter walnut tart along with a glass of Orange Muscat from Portugal. To say the dinner was a decadent feast for the palate would be an understatement. After dinner we paid our compliments to Executive Chef Margaret Nolan Carvallo for one of the most amazing dining experiences one could imagine. And then Kristen had another surprise for us, a showing of the Ghost Busters movie where we sat on bean bag chairs and reclined in hammocks while munching on popcorn and chocolate bars! It was part of her "dinner and a movie" theme for the retreat. During the night some heavy rain fell so that by morning



WWII Sherman Tank - Circa 1944



Sumatran Tiger - "Tiger Trail", San Diego Safari Park

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everything was pretty well soaked, yet the sun was breaking through the clouds and the golfers were ready to hit the course. There was another wonderful breakfast bar before our meeting and lunch on the terrace as well. By the end of the retreat we all felt it was probably the best one we've had, thanks to Kristen and the Rancho Bernardo Inn.

Soon Thanksgiving rolled around and we joined our next door neighbors Mike and Jenn to share the dinner. I roasted the turkey and baked the pies while Mike and Jenn prepared the veggies and cornbread dressing with cranberries. As we all sat outside on the deck in the 90 degree weather the conversation turned to the dreadful snowstorms that buried the Buffalo, New York area which had once been home for Mike and Jenn. We all had to agree that both Thanksgiving dinner and the weather were perfect!



Disney Leadership Seminar - Grand Californian Hotel

At the beginning of December was our PCMA Chapter program in Anaheim at the Grand Californian Hotel where the Disney Institute presented a fascinating seminar on "leadership excellence" based on the model they use in their theme parks to train their cast members. Robert, our contact at Disneyland, was gracious enough to provide accommodations for some of our board members and I certainly appreciated my lovely room in the Grand Californian Hotel. Being the holiday season the hotel was beautifully decorated for Christmas with a tall tree in the center of the 4 story high lobby. Before the main presentation at lunch we had a smaller event in the Blue Sky Suite at the top of the Disneyland Hotel for all of the meeting planners. The suite was decorated with vintage sketches of Disneyland that Walt Disney had done back in the 1930's as he was striving to communicate his vision to potential investors. We returned to the Grand Californian Hotel for a delicious lunch of herb and pecan crusted chicken breast served with roasted winter vegetables, and apple strudel together with vanilla bean ice cream for dessert. Ryan's seminar was very inspiring as he described the vision that Walt had for how park guests should be treated by cast members and how each cast member should be a leader in whatever role they played. All it takes is a visit to Disneyland or one of the other theme parks to understand and appreciate Walt's concept of leadership. After the program I had arranged to stay over that night and spend some time in Downtown Disney. For dinner that evening I went to the House of Blues and ordered an Abita beer from New Orleans and the signature dish of "Voodoo Shrimp", which was served in a spicy pepper sauce over a slice of warm Maple cornbread. It's a unique dish created by Chef Duke LaCicero of the Café Giovanni in the French Quarter of New Orleans.



Leslie with Judy Collins backstage



Lunch in the Garden - Rancho Bernardo Inn

The following weekend, Leslie and I went to the Segerstrom Center for the Performing Arts in Costa Mesa to hear Judy Collins live in concert as part of a special PBS "meet and greet" program. The concert began with a brilliant performance of classical and contemporary music by the "Passenger String Quartet" from Seattle, followed by a short intermission where we were able to meet Judy Collins in person backstage. She was very gracious in posing for photos with us and Leslie was able to get her autograph on a copy of the program. When Judy Collins went on stage and opened her performance with the beautiful song "Send in the Clowns", her voice was so perfect and clear that I could close my eyes and feel like it was 1965 again. Throughout the evening she sang many of her most memorable songs and her performance was nothing short of stunning. And to make the evening most memorable she ended with a solo performance of "Amazing Grace" that had the entire audience spellbound in silence. I won't soon forget the emotions of that moment.



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And now as we are approaching the Christmas Holiday we are looking forward to having Lynn share the season with us and to travel to a few of my favorite places in southern California that she was unable to see last year when her Christmas trip abruptly ended with a broken wrist. That is of course if "God's willing and the creek don't rise", as they say down south. Here's wishing all of you a very festive and wonderful holiday with family and friends!

I shall end this letter with sadness for a longtime friend and old army buddy, Howard Gray Dugas (aka Max) who died on November 18th after a long illness. He will be missed during the holidays – rest in peace Max!



MORE PHOTOS



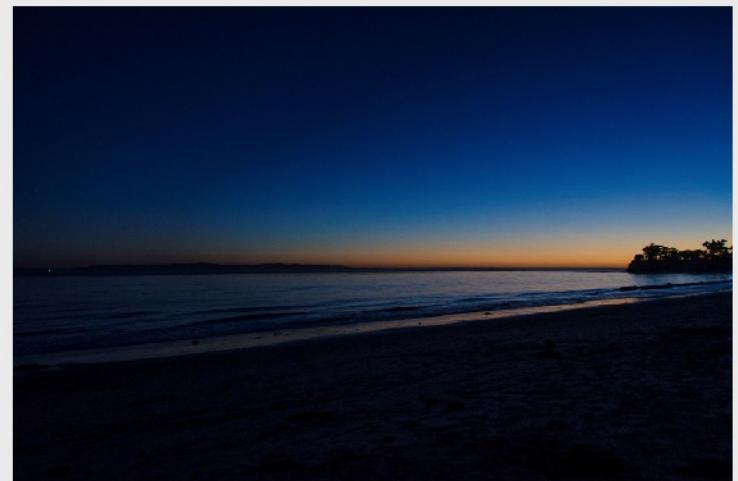
Pike Place Market - Seattle



Ferry to Bainbridge Island, Washington



Huntington Beach



Sunset on the Beach - Santa Barbara



16th Century Graveyard - Santa Barbara Mission



Boston Harbor



The Lights of Downtown Boston



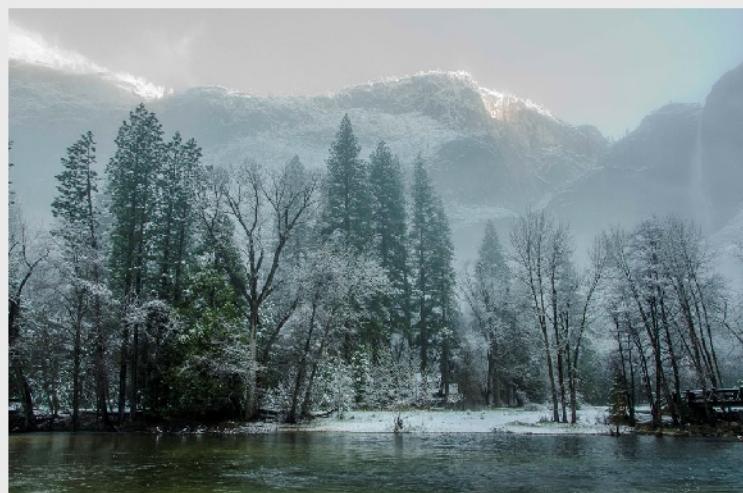
Funeral Mountains - Death Valley National Park



Chino Hills State Park - Yorba Linda, California



"Old Dyna" - Death Valley



Early Spring Snow on North Fork Merced River - Yosemite National Park



Saddle Back Butte State Park - Lancaster, California



Upper Yosemite Falls - Yosemite National Park



Upper Yosemite Falls - Yosemite National Park



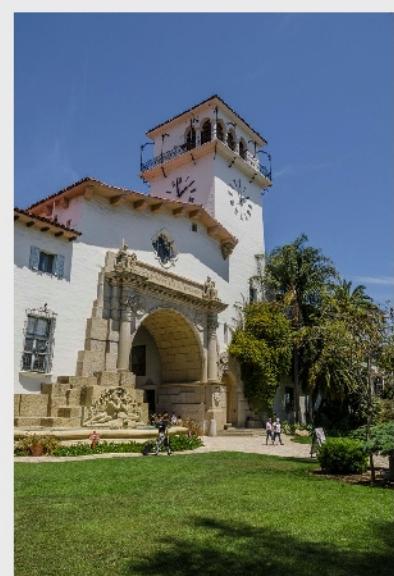
Half Dome - Yosemite National Park



Santa Ynez Mountains - Santa Barbara



Public Market - Santa Barbara



County Courthouse - Santa Barbara



Cactus in Bloom - Mojave National Preserve



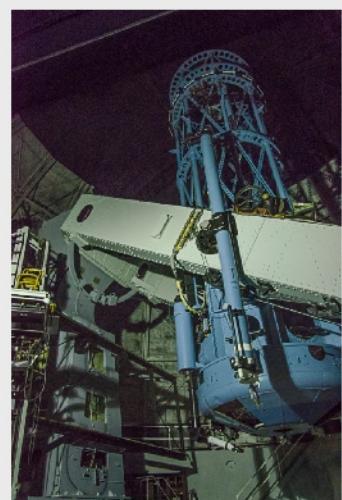
Sunset at Ghost Ranch, New Mexico



Palomar Mountains - San Pasqual Valley, San Diego County



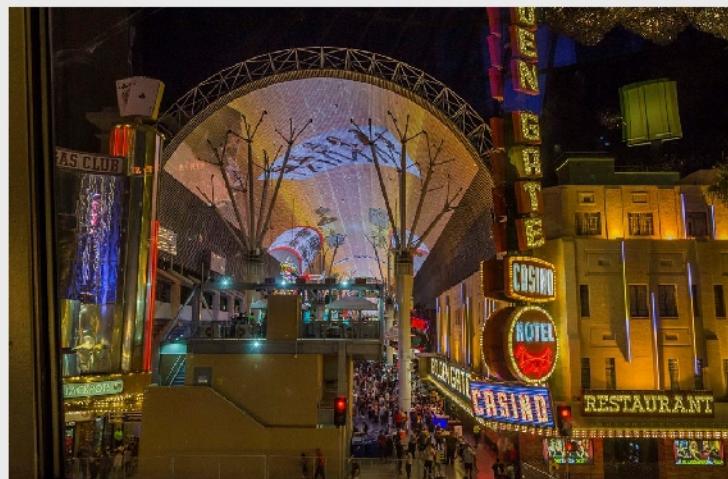
Thousand Palms Preserve - Coachella Valley



100 inch Telescope - Mt Wilson



Aboard the Inspiration Hornblower Cruise - San Diego



Fremont Street in Downtown Las Vegas



Vintage Pullman Railcars at Main Street Station - Las Vegas



Ponte Vineyards - Temecula Valley



Ponte Vineyard Inn - Temecula Valley



Covered Bridge - Yosemite National Park



"Pine Tree Limited" passing Vineyards in Western New York State



Passing through the Old Station - Toledo, Ohio



Transport of John Deere Tractors in Northern Illinois



Historic Erie Railroad Depot - Binghamton, NY



Old Russian Orthodox Church - Syracuse, NY



Sumac Tree in Brilliant Fall Color



Historic Old Town - Rockland, Maine



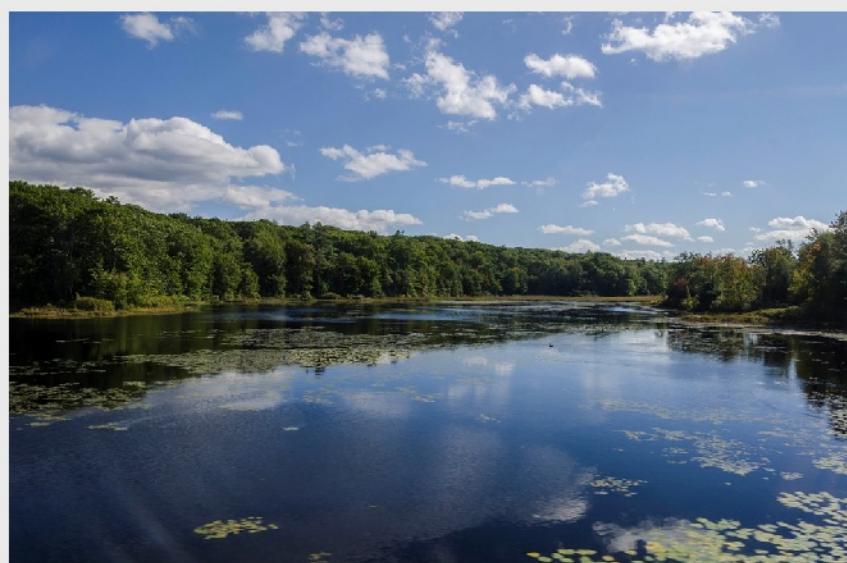
Maine Eastern Railroad Depot - Rockland



"Tricked Out" Powerchair - Rockland Depot



Mainline of the Maine Eastern Railroad



Periobscot Bay - Camden, Maine



Sumac Leaf in Fall Color



Detail of Old Trolley Control Tower



New England Fall Colors



Historic District - Portland, Maine



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow - Portland, Maine



Brilliant Fall Foliage - New Hampshire



"Pine Tree Limited" in Southern New Hampshire enroute to Boston



Connecticut River Bridge - Springfield, Massachusetts



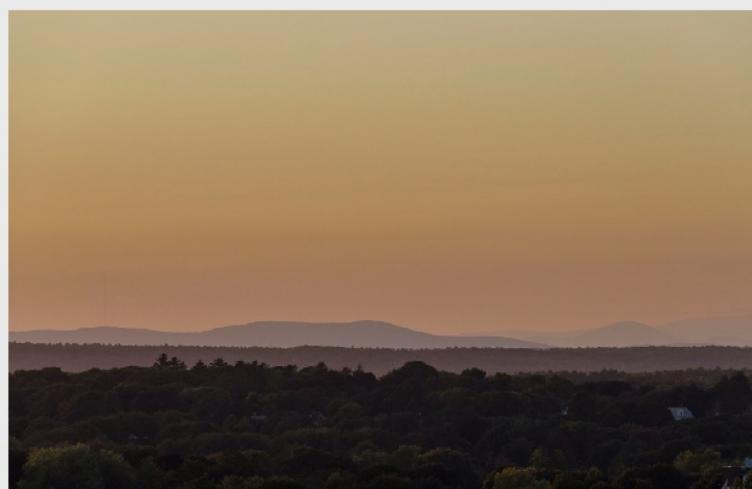
Replica of 1895 Duryea Electric Automobile - Springfield



Old First Church (circa 1819) - Springfield, MA



Unusual Graffiti - Springfield, Massachusetts



View of the White Mountains in New Hampshire at Sunset from Portland, Maine



HAPPY HOLIDAYS