

CHRISTMAS

2017



Dear Family and Friends,

Once again it's that time of year when I have the opportunity to write my annual Christmas Letter. This past year has been an eventful one and I look forward to telling you about some of my travels. I also look forward to hearing some of your stories as well. The lights are up, the tree is decorated, and the shopping has begun!

My sister Lynn joined us again for the Christmas holiday, and I had planned a trip for the three of us before Christmas. This time it was a trip to the Central Coast wine country of Paso Robles. We began by riding the Metrolink train from Riverside to Union Station in downtown Los Angeles. As we arrived in LA there was light rain falling, which would follow us all the way to Ventura. We spent some time in the TRAXX Bar, with complimentary coffee and pastries courtesy of Amtrak prior to boarding the Coast Starlight train. As we waited in the classic, art deco bar, an old 1940's film played on the TV – "The Postman Always Rings Twice", starring Lana Turner. Once we boarded the train, we soon found our Business Class seats in the coach next to the dining car, which also gave us access to the Pacific Parlour Car, reserved for First and Business Class passengers. By the time we reached Santa Barbara, the sun was finally breaking through the clouds, affording us some gorgeous views of the ocean. On the way to Santa Maria, we had beautiful views of the beaches and lovely green hills along the remote coastline of Vandenberg Air Force base. I went to the Lounge/Café car, and as I sat there with my beer, people kept coming down the stairs, turning left (Café was on the right), and then heading back up the stairs. The Café attendant said he suspected they were looking for a restroom, of which there was none in the Lounge/Café car. So I had to ask him why a sign "No Restrooms" was not posted at the top of the stairs next to the one that read "No Exit from this Car"? He had no answer, but thought it was a good idea. A short time later, a young Hispanic boy came downstairs and started taking several photos of the Café menu posted on the wall. One photo would have probably been sufficient, since the menu hadn't changed! Then an elderly man bought a bottle of Corona beer with a lime, and began telling us how he just taken a video from the rear of the train – with a bottle of Corona slowly entering the scene from the left and exiting on the right. (I think we've all seen something just like that in a TV commercial) Just then, the Café closed for a short break, after a couple of announcements over the PA system, and the door was closed. A sign was then posted "Closed, back at 1pm", yet people kept coming down the stairs, looking at the sign, and asking me if the Café was closed! (DUH) After the Café reopened, I was joined by an elderly couple from Tucson who were travelling on a Southern Pacific RR company pass, which was still being honored by Amtrak. The husband had worked 61 years for the Southern Pacific Railroad, and they were on their way up to Oakland to spend Christmas with their daughter. Later on, I joined Leslie and Lynn for a late lunch in the dining car, and as we were seated, the conductor made an announcement – "over the next two days this train will handle more than 2000 passengers"! No wonder the train had been sold out for a couple of weeks. I had a delicious bacon cheese burger, as we shared our table with "LC", a very interesting old black man from southern Louisiana, who was travelling to San Jose for Christmas with his son. We all shared favorite Christmas stories as the train rolled northward toward the summit of the Coast Mountains. Shortly after lunch, we went to the Pacific Parlour Car for a wine tasting with the onboard sommelier named Josette. As an introduction, she told us that her favorite wine was sweet Riesling, which she also used for cooking! (not a good start to the wine tasting, but she was a very nice lady) Two of the three wines we tasted were excellent, a Kendall-Jackson Chardonnay and a superb Cabernet Sauvignon from Wente Bros, along with a tray of Oregon



Coast near Vandenburg Air Force Base

cheeses and crackers. Josette actually knew something about wines and was very entertaining with her personal stories and trivia questions. Earlier, the Amtrak staff had gathered in the dining car for a holiday party, before the dinner service

started, and Josette shared her gift of Christmas cookies with us. Meanwhile, we enjoyed a gorgeous sunset, as the train was running almost two hours late. (the southbound train was nearly four hours behind schedule, mostly due to heavy freight traffic) At last we arrived in Paso Robles, some two hours late, and in the gathering darkness, we walked to the historic Paso Robles Inn, about three blocks from the train station. It was a chilly, cloudy evening, so the roaring fire in the Steakhouse Restaurant was very welcome. Leslie and I enjoyed a

delicious dinner while Lynn headed to her room. We started with grilled artichokes served with chipotle and lemon aioli, followed by a Caesar salad for Leslie and Dungeness Crab cakes for me, served with an apple-fennel salad and remoulade sauce. Later on, I walked over to "Pappy McGregor's Irish Pub" on the town square across the street. It was pretty much a local crowd, and as I ordered a pint of Guinness, I noticed a large poster above the bar. "If you cheat, cheat death – If you fight, may it be for your brother – If you steal, steal a woman's heart – and if you drink, drink with me." Meanwhile, the DJ was spinning tunes and conducting a trivia contest, which was won by a table of drunken locals!



Paso Robles Railroad Station



Paso Robles Inn

The next morning, we awoke to a gorgeous, perfectly clear day with temperatures in the 60's – a stark contrast to the day before. (as we had left Los Angeles in the rain the day before, I had been mentally preparing myself for a cold, wet wine tasting tour) While Lynn and Leslie had breakfast at the hotel, I had a huge, delicious breakfast burrito of smoked tri-tip at "Greghor's Liquor Store and Deli", on my way to pick up the rental car at the Enterprise office. The tri-tip was being smoked on an open spit in front of the deli, and it was superb! I sat outside in the morning sunshine with my burrito, at a picnic table next to a couple of transients and their dog. We all enjoyed the beautiful sunshine and the smoked tri-tip. As I

reached the Enterprise office to pick up the car and meet Bob, our "Designated Wine Driver", I found the staff had already signed him on as the additional driver, since they knew him so well. (About a month earlier I had discovered the Designated Wine Driver online as I searched for tours of the Paso Robles wine country. Not only was Bob's company much less expensive, he offered a personal tour and access to some private wineries owned by his friends. It enabled us to taste as many wines as we liked without having to drive!) Bob started our tour by driving to the "Rangeland Winery", high in the hills west of Paso Robles. It was owned by Laird, a personal friend of Bob, and in addition to the vineyards and winery, it was a working ranch. We were invited into Laird's home and greeted by his young winemaker, Paul, who served us several wines as we sat on the veranda overlooking the Santa Lucia Mountains and the Hearst Ranch beyond. Paul



was originally from Idaho, by way of eastern Washington, and besides being very personable, he was a talented winemaker. (When we had arrived, Paul told us that Laird was out on horseback rounding up some stray cattle and would join us later) As we enjoyed the wines, Paul told us many of the details about the grapes and what to look for in each wine. Meanwhile, a dozen young rams grazed in the pasture below us, and two lovely young cats roamed around, "stalking" the birds and the sheep. We could have stayed all day,



Veranda - Rangeland Winery

but Bob had two other wineries he wanted us to experience. Before we said farewell to Paul and Laird, I bought a bottle of their Petite Syrah, which turned out to be the best wine of the day! As we drove down the lane, Bob spotted a Bald Eagle sitting in the trees alongside the road. And a few moments later, as we came around a curve, we saw four large vultures sitting on fence posts, as if they expected sooner or later dinner would pass by. Our next stop was the Halter Ranch Vineyard and Winery, with its beautiful, old



Halter Ranch Winery

early 1900's ranch house and classic barn. The tasting room was in a lovely new redwood building on the hill overlooking the vineyards. The lane leading up to it crossed over the creek on an old covered bridge. Leslie and I shared a tasting that included an excellent Syrah, of which I purchased a bottle. Then Bob brought out a fabulous basket of snacks that included superb Bleu cheese, smoked Gouda, sharp Cheddar, several kinds of crackers, Italian dry sausage, stone ground mustard, lots of fresh veggies, and a delicious homemade Ranch dressing!

Bob said his wife put it together from her frequent trips to Trader Joes. It was a lovely, relaxed time with great wine and cheese, sunny skies, gorgeous views of the vineyards and hills, and especially Bob's stories!



With Bob - Halter Ranch Winery

As we left Halter Ranch, Bob took us on a tour of the region, down Peachy Canyon through a beautiful live oak forest, and then up a steep road to the Calcerous Winery. It was located on top of the mountain, with a spectacular view encompassing half of San Luis Obispo County. As we entered the tasting room, Bob introduced us to Phillippe, a well-respected sommelier from France. Phillippe had extensive and sophisticated knowledge of wine, and afforded us an amazing and delightful tasting experience. He served us a couple of special "reserve" wines, since we were standing next to a private wine

tasting party. We soon struck up a conversation with the family from San Francisco, and had a wonderful time with them, while their young son occupied himself playing Bocci Ball outside in the garden. Phillippe told us some of the history of the winery, and the fact that the name means "limestone" in Latin. The rock in the region is primarily responsible for the unique taste and excellent quality of the wines. Upon Phillippe's recommendation, I bought a bottle of their special reserve "ZSM", which was a blend of Zinfandel, Syrah, and Merlot grapes. As we headed back to Paso Robles, we all agreed that it had been a very special day and could not have been better – thanks in large part to Bob! Back in town, we said a grateful farewell to Bob, and then met up later for dinner at "Basil Thai Restaurant" on the town square. (The day before I had checked with the restaurant manager to make sure they had some "non-spicy" dishes on the menu for Lynn) The three of us enjoyed a fantastic Thai dinner, and the manager was very responsive to our special request, in spite of the packed restaurant. My order of sweet chili scallops with garlic sauce, bell peppers, green onion, snow peas, and Thai basil was outstanding and just the right amount of heat. After dinner, as Leslie and Lynn retired for the evening, I headed to Pappy's for a pint of Guinness. The bar was very crowded, with mostly locals. A lone musician named Jack, was playing classic rock-n-roll with an interesting technique, in which he would record a few chords on his guitar before he began playing a song. Then he used the recording as accompaniment for the song. It was really effective, and if one had not seen him during his recording, it would have sounded like he had a couple of other musicians playing alongside him! During the evening, a young girl came into the bar selling beautiful red roses, and Jack bought one for a lovely girl sitting at the bar. It turned out



Vultures



Tasting Room - Halter Ranch Winery



Tasting Room - Calcerous Winery

that Scarlett was his girlfriend, and she joined me at the table to listen to his music. During our conversation, she said she was very interested in becoming a singer and to join him, because she felt he needed a good voice to accompany him. I also found out that she was a member of the local Chumash tribe. When Jack took a break, I decided to check out a place I had seen earlier – the “Pine Street Saloon”. I as entered the very crowded bar, it was clearly a true “dive bar”. When I finally found a seat at the bar, I was told there was no draft beer on tap, but bottles of Bud were only \$2.00! So a cold bottle of Bud it was. As I looked around, there was a live band playing a mix of Rock with traditional country and western. I noticed two old cowboys dancing with almost any woman who would accept their invitation. The two pool tables in the corner were always occupied, though not by anyone skilled in playing pool! After a while, as I was about to leave, the bartender, a large, tall blonde, who could have also been the bouncer, made a mistake when I “signaled” her that I wanted my check. (The noise level was so loud that conversation was all but impossible) She served me another Bud instead, but it was free! As I walked back to the Inn, clouds began to fill the night sky.

The next morning, we awoke to find cloudy skies and light rain – we were so glad that our wine tour had been under



Paso Robles Inn

beautiful, sunny skies the day before. (The God of wine must have been looking out for us) We all enjoyed a delicious breakfast in the hotel coffee shop before packing our bags and checking out. I dropped Lynn and Leslie off at the train station, where they met a couple of elderly ladies also waiting. They said they had a marvelous time in conversation with the ladies, despite the inclement weather. After turning in the rental car, I walked back to the train station. Soon the Amtrak bus arrived, and we all boarded the crowded bus for the trip to San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara, where we would transfer to the Pacific Surfliner train. During the trip on the bus, the rain continued to fall, sometimes in heavy

downpours, especially as we travelled over the mountains. When we arrived in Santa Barbara, the rain had tapered off to some degree, and thankfully, the train arrived on time. As we boarded the Business Class car, we saw a table waiting for us, with a sign “Reserved for the Henderson Group”! The trip to LA was very comfortable, but the rain followed us most of the way. However, that didn’t stop a few serious surfers from tackling the huge waves. When we arrived at Union Station, we had a fabulous dinner at the TRAXX Restaurant. I ordered a delicious roasted beef tenderloin, while Lynn had a bowl of Broccolini soup and Leslie enjoyed a classic, spicy Mexican Pesole. Our server was young and very professional as she explained our dishes. Meanwhile, a holiday concert was going on next door in the former ticketing hall of the station, with a lot of Santana songs. Soon it was time to board the Metrolink train to Riverside, and I was looking forward to preparing a full, traditional Christmas dinner, with roasted turkey and all of the trimmings! There would also be a couple of pies I had made earlier, using the pecans and persimmons from our garden. We invited our friend Mary Duke to join us for dinner, and everyone agreed that Christmas was complete!

In early January I travelled to San Antonio to attend the annual “International Imaging Conference”. My trip began early in the morning on the train to LA Union Station, where I boarded the express bus to LAX, the total cost of which was \$6.50 vs \$45.00 by taxi! The departures level at the airport was jammed with traffic, so the bus driver took us to the arrivals level instead, and got us to our terminal quickly. I had enough time to have some coffee and orange juice in the Delta Skyclub lounge before boarding the new non-stop flight to San Antonio. We had some beautiful views of the southern California mountains, covered in snow from a recent storm. Lunch was served somewhere over New Mexico, a delicious plate of BBQ chicken sliders with chips and salsa, followed by a yummy Lemon Drop cookie from the Dancing Bear Bakery. Upon arrival in San Antonio, I took Super Shuttle to the Menger Hotel downtown, a beautiful old historic property that was built in 1859 from lovely hand cut local limestone. And across the street was the Alamo in all its glory. My room was one of the original hotel rooms that had been “upgraded” in the early 1900’s to install running water and electricity, and I had a



Lobby - Menger Hotel



The Alamo

nice view overlooking the courtyard and garden. Then I went downstairs to the "Menger Bar" for a beer before going to the convention center to register for the conference. In the hallway outside the bar was a large display case with artifacts and memorabilia from the "1st Texas Cavalry" during the Border Campaign of 1916 -1917. And above the gorgeous old dark hardwood bar was a more modern display of white footballs from the annual Alamo Bowl game. Upon the recommendation of the bartender, I ordered a cold bottle of "Saint Arnold's Elissa IPA" from a Houston craft brewery, and it was pretty darn good. Then he began telling me about some of

the history of the old bar, like the fact that electricity was first introduced in 1887 and the original old lightbulbs behind the bar still worked! Meanwhile, mostly traditional country and western music played, but one song caught my ear – "Talk About Me", which I can only describe as Redneck Rap! At the same time, the NFL wild card game between the New York Giants and the Green Bay Packers was on the TV. (Green Bay won 42 – 20) Leaving the bar, I walked over to the convention center by way of the RiverCenter Mall and the Riverwalk. It was a lovely walk along the river and avoided crossing any of the busy streets above. Once I was registered, I attended a great presentation on the subject of studio lighting before heading



RiverCenter Mall - Riverwalk

to the Welcome Reception. It was held in one of the large banquet rooms overlooking the river and the room was filled with countless food stations serving delicious beef and pork BBQ, which paired very well with a cold Shiner Bock beer. During the evening I met a guy named Marty from Slidell, Louisiana who had driven 12 hours from New Orleans in an ice storm. He told me that his daughter had just graduated from USC and was now employed in the USC "Music Industry" department, where she was creating musical scores for video games, work

that used to be the exclusive domain of the film industry. After leaving the reception, I walked back to the RiverCenter Mall and discovered the Yard House Restaurant and Bar, where I had a cold pint of local "Southerleigh Darwin IPA" from San Antonio. It was excellent, being nice and smooth, yet with a crisp finish. I asked the bartender what was the most popular of the 132 beers on tap, and his answer confirmed what I had heard at virtually every other Yard House I've been to – Bud Light! I closed out the evening back at the Menger Bar with another Saint Arnold's Elissa IPA. I noticed there was a large portrait of Teddy Roosevelt hanging above the bar, so I asked the bartender about the story behind it. Turned out that Teddy frequented the bar in the early 1900's and recruited many of his "Rough Riders" in the bar as well. Apparently, they trained in San Antonio for the Spanish-American War. (The bar now sells "Honorary Rough Rider" T-Shirts)

I started the next day with a visit to the huge Expo Hall in the convention center and stopped by the HouseLens booth to meet some of the staff of the company for whom



Convention Center

I've been doing real estate photography. Now I have faces to match with names on emails. Later that morning I attended a couple of very interesting sessions about stock photography. Before lunch, I had an opportunity to spend some time with a mentor who critiqued a few of my photographs and offered some great advice. Then I decided to visit the "Tower of the Americas" in HemisFair Park next to the convention center. The 750 foot high structure was built for the 1968 World's Fair and remains one of San Antonio's signature landmarks, along with the Alamo, of course. From the observation deck at the top there were spectacular views for over 50 miles in all directions. Besides the great views, there was a fascinating exhibit detailing the history of Texas under six flags (Spanish, Mexican, Republic of Texas,



Tower of the Americas



View from the restaurant

USA, Confederacy, and USA again) and the amount of historical information, old photos and maps was amazing. After spending some time exploring the exhibit, I went down one level to the restaurant and lounge for a beer. The lounge and bar slowly rotated, providing an ever changing view of San Antonio. As I went to leave, the button for the elevator didn't light up when I pushed it, even after several attempts. A few minutes later, I asked one of the bartenders if the button was actually working, to which he replied that it was out of order, and he would radio the elevator operator to make a stop at the lounge level. So why was there no sign posted – I could have waited forever! On my way back to the hotel, I took photos of some of San Antonio's most historic old homes near the river, which were being restored to eventually become part of an historic park. At the hotel, I spent some time taking photos of the historic property, much of which was still beautifully decorated for the holidays. As evening was approaching, I asked the concierge where would be a good local place to check out. Right away he said I should go to "The Friendly Place Ice House", a short walk down Alamo Street. The route took me through one of the original neighborhoods of San Antonio, and what I found was a funky outdoor bar with lots of neighborhood



Historic home - San Antonio

families, their kids, and dogs. I got a cold beer and joined the crowd seated at picnic tables outside under huge, old live oak trees. Everyone was having fun watching the National Championship College Football game (Alabama vs Clemson) on a monster 20 foot high TV screen! After a while, it felt like we were at an old drive-in theater, but without the cars. The bar had over 40 craft beers on tap, and they rotated every six months, a fact that certainly wasn't evident to anyone just passing by on the street. While the

selection of beers was impressive, the food menu didn't extend much beyond burgers

and hot dogs, so at halftime, I headed back to the RiverWalk in search of something different. As I walked along the river past the "Riverfront Patio Bar" in the Hilton Palacio Rio, I decided to give it a try. I started with a cold pint of Texas "Perdenales IPA" from Fredricksburg, and ordered a chicken quesadilla in spicy chipotle sauce. It was fantastic, and a great pairing with the beer. By this time the second half of the game had begun, and the attention of entire bar focused on the nearest TV screen. It was a very wild game in which Clemson trailed Alabama the entire time until the last minute, when Clemson scored a touchdown on a 92 yard punt return, with only five seconds left on the clock, to win by one point! The entire Alabama crowd, both at the stadium and in the bar were stunned! It had to be one of the most amazing and exciting games I had ever seen, and a fitting end to the evening.

The next morning I walked to the historic "Market Square and Farmers Market", known locally as "El Mercado". It was located a few blocks west of the San Antonio River where the old town had been established in the early 1700's by Spanish missionaries.



El Mercado - San Antonio

The Market Square was very lively and colorful – a wonderful place to stroll around in the morning sunshine. It is also the largest market of Mexican goods outside of Mexico, and I had a lot of fun taking photos of the colorful shops. A short distance from El Mercado I discovered the "Navarro Homestead State Historical Park", which happened to be located next to the Central Texas Detention Facility. (aka Jail) The site had several old buildings of adobe and hand cut limestone construction from the 1830's, and a very interesting video presentation about the history of

the area, especially the life of Jose Antonio Navarro. He was a rancher, merchant, and signatory of the Texas Declaration of Independence from Mexico, as well as being a leading advocate for Tejano rights. (In Spanish, Tejano means "Texan") The State Parks department had done a wonderful job of maintaining the



Historic home - San Antonio



El Mercado - San Antonio



Jose Antonio Navarro



Casa Navarro - San Antonio

buildings, setting up very interesting historical exhibits, and paying tribute to a true Texas patriot. As I walked back toward the RiverWalk, I took photos of the San Fernando Cathedral which dates back to 1755 as San Antonio's first church. It remains an active parish today and a focal point of the city's Main Plaza downtown. Once I reached the RiverWalk, I strolled beside the river under beautiful sunny skies and 75 degree weather, along with lots of other people and



San Fernando Cathedral - Main Plaza

their dogs, enjoying the warm afternoon. Many river boat tours passed by, their guides telling the history of the city and pointing out the historic sites along the river. Soon I came to "La Villita", meaning Little Village in Spanish, a three square block area with a fascinating collection of adobe and stone buildings dating back to 1792 and one of the original neighborhoods of San Antonio. It had been a lively

mix of residences, shops, saloons, and a church until it declined in the early 20th century and became labeled as a slum. But in the late 1930's, when the Works Progress Administration (WPA), established by President Roosevelt, rehabilitated the San Antonio River to create the RiverWalk, La Villita was saved from destruction and restored as the lovely old village it is today. A fascinating walking tour leads one along the old cobble stone streets past historic structures that are now vibrant art galleries, craft shops, restaurants, and a museum. Of



"La Villita" - San Antonio

particular interest was the "Little Church of La Villita", a small scale version of a great European Gothic Cathedral, with a gorgeous stained glass window above the alter. After spending quite a while strolling through the old village taking photos, I walked up Alamo Street to the historic "German-English School", which is now a conference center for the Marriott San Antonio Plaza Hotel next door. It was built in 1858 by German immigrants as one of the earliest efforts to establish

a comprehensive system of public education. Both German and English languages were taught as part of an extensive curriculum that included geography, writing, arithmetic, science, and music. It continued in the 20th century as the San Antonio Junior College, and later as office space for the city government, until the 1968 World's Fair when it was purchased by the Marriott hotel. The buildings have remained basically the same as when they were first constructed, with only minor renovation for modern facilities, thus preserving the beautiful architecture and history. After taking more photos, I

went next door to the Marriott Hotel and sat on the patio overlooking the lovely



"German-English School" - San Antonio

garden and pool, enjoying a cold beer. Then I noticed two beautiful Peacocks strutting through the garden as if they owned the place. As I watched them, one suddenly jumped on to a table, looking much like someone should serve him. By this time, I was thinking of dinner, so I walked back to the RiverWalk, to a place I had seen earlier in the day that attracted my attention. It was the "Little Rhein Steakhouse", located in a gorgeous old limestone building that had been built by German immigrants in the early 1800's. Since it was a lovely warm evening, I chose to sit outside on the terrace overlooking the river, and soon the lights along the river were glowing. I ordered a glass of wine and watched as the river boat tours slowly floated by, each guide pointing out the restaurant



Little Church of La Villita



Peacock - Marriott Hotel



"Little Rhein Steakhouse" - San Antonio

and the history of the building, and each story slightly different. As the sunset and the colored lights reflected in the river, I savored a fabulous filet mignon, crisp steamed asparagus, au gratin potatoes, and fresh baked dark bread. It was a most enjoyable dinner for sure. Following dinner, I made my way to the convention center, and along the way there was an incredible view of the "Tower of the Americas", brilliantly lighted against the dark night sky. I arrived just in time for the Closing Party in the

atrium overlooking HemisFair Park and the Tower. In addition to an abundance of Tex-Mex food and drink, there were several forms of entertainment, including a cowboy doing tricks with his lariat, where he casually roped young ladies as they passed by, unaware of his intentions. Everyone had a lot of fun watching him, including the ladies he roped. Another popular attraction was a "slow motion video" booth where people dressed up with crazy props and then acted wildly for a minute. After which, their video was played back in slow motion, that really created a hit with everyone watching. I spent



Tower of the Americas

some time sitting outside on the terrace in the warm evening, with a spectacular view of the Tower lighted up. While I was on the terrace, I met a nice couple from Dallas who conduct photography workshops, one of which they were preparing to do in Ireland at the end of summer. At the conclusion of the closing party, I walked over to the Yard House Bar in the RiverCenter Mall for one of my favorite beers from Germany, Wienstephan Hefeweizen. And while I was seated at the bar, I noticed a strange program on one of the big screen TVs. It was a broadcast of the International DRL competition (Drone Racing League) being held in San Jose. The objective of the race was to fly a drone through a crazy, complicated 3D course inside the atrium of a large office building without crashing. There were drone "pilots" from six countries competing, and as soon as a drone crashed, it was eliminated, along with the pilot! It was one of the strangest "sports" I've ever seen, but totally fascinating.

On my last day in San Antonio, I met up with my old friend Bob, who came down from Austin. We hadn't seen each other for a couple of years, so we had a lot to catch up on during lunch at Ruth Chris Steakhouse. After lunch, I took Bob on a short tour of the convention center to see a marvelous exhibit of life size brass statues of famous Texans, including Sam Houston, Jim Bowie, President George H Bush, President Lyndon B Johnson, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, President Dwight D Eisenhower, and Comanche Chief Quana Parker, among several other notable people. Walking among these people gave us a real sense of their personalities, as if they might suddenly turn and shake our hand or engage us in a conversation. It was quite an amazing sensation. Then Bob and I walked over to the Menger Hotel to pick up my bags for the shuttle back to the airport, but on the way I took Bob into the Menger Bar to see the historical displays and the portrait of Teddy Roosevelt. Bob decided to buy one of the Honorary Rough Rider T-Shirts, an extra, extra large size, for his young nephew who was a lineman on the high school football team. Soon it was time to bid farewell as the airport shuttle arrived. When I reached the airport I found out my flight to LA was delayed over two hours, due to a mechanical issue in LA. So I headed for the one and only bar in the terminal, as most everyone else did, making for a pretty crowded environment. But the barmaid was very efficient and I soon had a cold glass of Lone Star beer in my hand. I couldn't help but notice that she called everyone, man or woman, either "honey" or "baby", in a most friendly way. Once on board the flight, it was very smooth and comfortable, with dinner being served shortly after



Dinner on the terrace - Little Rhein Steakhouse



Hall of Statues - Convention Center

takeoff. When dinner arrived, I was surprised to see the meal was a "Charcuterie Plate", which had delicious slices of Black Forest ham, roast beef, and grilled chicken, along with Cheddar cheese, smoked gouda, pickles, pearl onions, focaccia , and a fantastic spicy brown mustard. It was the first time I had seen this dish on a domestic flight, and not that often on international flights either, but it was wonderful. Being over two hours late leaving San Antonio, I had to end up taking the last train of the night to San Bernardino. As I rode the train home, I reflected back on the wonderful experiences of the conference and the city of San Antonio, which I hope to visit again in the future.

In mid-February I drove to Anaheim for the annual PCMA Chapter event hosted by the Disney Institute. Traffic on the 91 freeway was horrible until I reached the express lanes, but even so, it took me over two hours for the 52 mile trip – such is the nature of traffic in southern California! The event was held in the Grand Californian Hotel, and the presentation by the Disney Institute focused on the topic of "Behind the Magic", where our group was lead on a tour backstage at the California Adventure Park. It was fascinating to see the extensive Costume Department where a high-tech inventory system tracked thousands of individual costume components for every single character working in the parks. There were some special characters like Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and the Fairy Princess that had their own separate and restricted location so that no one would ever



Disney Back Stage Tour

see the character "half-dressed"! Over the past several months, security in the parks had become very tight, yet in a subtle way. At the conclusion of our backstage tour, we all went to the "Wine Country Trattoria" restaurant in the California Adventure Park for lunch, also hosted by Disney. The Tuscan Salad with grilled shrimp, red grape tomatoes, cannellini beans and roasted peppers paired very well with a glass of Sonoma Coast Chardonnay, and was followed by a traditional Tiramisu for dessert. At the end of lunch, we were all presented with a "Park Hopper" pass to spend the rest of the day and the evening exploring the parks. I decided to walk over to



Disneyland

the main Disneyland Park, as it had been several years since I last visited it. There were beautiful views of "Main Street USA" and "New Orleans Square", each area authentically reproduced in exquisite detail, giving one the feeling of actually visiting the real places. At one point I stopped at an outdoor cafe for a beer and was informed that the entire Disneyland Park was "dry", as opposed to the California Adventure Park. Apparently, Walt did not want alcohol served because his father had been an alcoholic. When I returned to the California Adventure Park, I found a classic 1940's bar on Buena Vista St called "Cathay Circle Bar", where I ordered a cold pint of IPA. The couple next to me at the bar soon became loud and obnoxious, talking about rape and gay relationships. As I was about to look around for another place to sit, the young woman suddenly turned to me and said "you look like Walt Disney's brother" – Right! (She was blitzed and constantly trying to cozy up to her gay friend – he was not comfortable with it, especially as she kept hinting at staying at his place for the night!) One can't always choose who you sit with at a crowded bar, but thankfully, they left shortly after. And then another young couple took their place and soon we were talking about their experience in the park for the first time. Tristan was from Shrewsbury, England and he was so surprised when I told him I had been there several times on my trips to England. His companion, Lindsay was from Orlando and had some rather unfortunate things that had happened in her life recently, including being in a bad relationship and having three close family members that died in the past month! At that point I felt fortunate not to be burdened with such life experiences. Tristan was her best friend and brought her to Disneyland to experience a brighter, more positive side of life. We shared a delicious appetizer of "Lobster Pad Thai Rolls" and Tristan insisted upon buying my beer. I invited them to join me later in the PCMA VIP viewing



"Wine Country Trattoria"

area to watch the spectacular "World of Color" display in the evening. It was an awesome program of color videos projected on to sprays of water that "danced" to music, and at one point, we could feel the heat from the towers of fire over 300 feet away! It is definitely something not to miss on a visit to the park. After the program, I went to the bar at the Napa Rose Restaurant in the Grand Californian Hotel to sample a glass of rare "Angel's Envy" bourbon, which is the whiskey that slowly evaporates from the wooden barrel as the bourbon ages over the years. It's known in the distilling industry as "Angel's Breath", and it was truly amazing. Then I walked over to the Indigo Hotel nearby where I had booked a room for the night. It had been a short trip, but one that I really enjoyed.



Los Angeles Drum and Bagpipe band - Queen Mary

The following weekend I headed to Long Beach for the Scottish Highland Games that were held in the park next to the Queen Mary. Rather than spend two hours driving on the freeway and paying \$22 a day for parking, I took the train into downtown LA, then the Metro to Long Beach, and free shuttle bus to the Queen Mary, for a total cost of \$6.50! The day before had been one of heavy rain, almost two inches, and Saturday morning was chilly, wet, and cloudy, but that didn't stop the athletes or the spectators from showing up. On the shuttle bus was an Australian family heading for the Cruise Ship Terminal to board a three day cruise to Baja California on Carnival Cruise Lines. It was to be their first time in Mexico and they were very excited. Once I arrived at the Queen Mary I checked into a First Class stateroom and picked up my VIP tickets to the games, which included four complimentary drink tickets at the bar in the VIP tent overlooking the athletic field events – prime seats for watching the competition. I enjoyed a couple of local beers from the "Golden Road Brewery" in LA as the games started. Later, I visited the "Heritage Hall" located in the huge dome that once housed Howard Hughes "Spruce Goose", constructed of wood and the largest flying boat in the world. (It is on display in Oregon now) Inside the massive dome were a wide variety of traditional Celtic crafts, games, food, and drink that included archery, darts, Welsh bakery, whiskey tastings, and lots of Celtic heritage items and clothing, particularly clan tartans and kilts. In addition, there was a very interesting cooking demonstration of traditional Gaelic dishes by the "Celtic Caterer". I bought a copy of his latest cookbook, "The Bacon Celtic Cookbook", which he autographed for me. In the afternoon, I watched a fascinating demonstration of sheep herding by dogs that have a natural instinct to herd sheep. The lead trainer gave us an excellent narrative describing how the shepherd gives commands to the dogs through his body language and a series of whistles. He also told us that rather than rewarding the dogs with food, as is often done in dog agility competitions, the greatest reward for the herding dog is to be allowed to "guard" the sheep! As I watched the demonstration I could see the focus of the dog's eyes was intense and rarely strayed from the sheep – I had the strong feeling that the dogs loved their work. The trainer also said that training only involves bringing out the herding "instinct" that has been in certain breeds for thousands of years. A dog without this instinct could not be



Sheep herding demonstration



Watching the competition from the VIP tent

"trained". Back at the VIP tent, I met a young couple attending the games for the first time, and as we talked, they said they had decided to wait for the "right" time to start a family, so I asked "what determines the right time for you"? The young woman said that when it felt like the right time, she had promised her husband that he could have a dog. Then he said he already knew which breed he wanted, a Rhodesian Ridgeback, which she thought was a small dog, when in fact it's nearly the size of a Great Dane! I think that might have caused her to rethink her promise! Meanwhile the games were in full swing and the bagpipe bands were engaged in competition nearby, so

we all felt like we had been transported to Scotland for the day! That evening I had a fabulous dinner at "Sir Winston's", the Queen Mary's fine dining restaurant located in the Royal Salon. I ordered a fantastic seared Ahi, covered with a toasted sesame and ginger crust that was paired very well with a crisp Sauvignon Blanc from the Russian River region. After dinner I proceeded to the Observation Lounge, a gorgeous Art Deco style salon at the bow of the ship, for another glass of wine. The bar was very crowded with a lot of the competitors, but I was able to find one seat open. Then I noticed there was a group on the dance floor doing a "line dance" to Rap music – weird but fascinating. However, it wasn't long before I couldn't take any more Rap and headed for a quieter location at the bar in the Chelsea Chowder House, midship on the deck above. At



Observation Lounge - Queen Mary



Queen Mary in the evening

the end of the evening, as I walked along the sun deck on the way to my stateroom, a lone bagpiper was playing a lovely Celtic song in the darkness of the night – it was just him and me, almost magical. I spent a very restful night aboard the old lady of the seas – no rough ocean that night!

I started the next morning with a breakfast of homemade corned beef hash, eggs and toast, before doing a self-guided tour of the ship. Along the way I discovered the "Isolation Ward and Ship's Hospital", at the aft of the ship, where there was a very interesting exhibit about how the ship handled deaths on board, of which there were more than two dozen during her years at sea. Some of the crew

members who died were buried at sea, while passengers were usually placed in the temporary morgue, which happened to be a special section of one of the huge cold storage rooms. Back on deck, I toured the Captain's Quarters and the Bridge, where I saw an older man in the Radio Room showing two young Asian women how the telegraph worked. Then it was time to head to the VIP tent to watch the finals of the competition that included the caber toss, hammer throw, and "putting the stone", all of which were the origins of modern track and field events. It turned out to be a beautiful sunny day for the



Parade of the Clans

"Parade of the Clans" and the bagpipe competition. Among the participants in the parade were a number of "re-enactment" characters dressed in clothing of the Middle Ages, and they really loved playing their characters. As the games came to a close in the afternoon, I checked out of the stateroom and boarded the shuttle bus back to downtown Long Beach where I met up with Andy and Tracey at "Beachwood BBQ" for a late lunch. The spicy Catfish bites were delicious and the local "Alpha Galactic Pale Ale" went very well with

them. We had a great time catching up on all the family news and Andy's latest work on films. Soon it was time for me to board the Metro back to LA Union Station and the Metrolink train to Riverside. As the train rolled through the night, I thought about the wonderful experience of the games and the people I had met.

In early March I made a trip to Palm Springs to meet up with some of my old Esri colleagues at the annual Business Partner and Developer Summit. There were beautiful views of snow capped mountains and emerald green hills as I drove over San Gorgonio Pass. As I checked in at the Renaissance Hotel, I was pleasantly surprised to be upgraded to a junior suite on the top floor, since I was only booked on a heavily discounted employee rate. I spent most of the afternoon visiting the Palm



The Bridge - Queen Mary





Vintage 1920's Bi-Plane

Spring Air Museum, where there was an air show going on, as well as a special presentation by former F-100 fighter plane pilots. Among the highlights of the air show were flights of vintage planes, including an old 1920's bi-plane that was available for public rides, and a privately owned 1960's Russian MIG jet that was flown by its owner. The roar of the MIG's jet engine was extremely loud and the rate of climb was incredibly steep, especially in comparison to the commercial jets taking off on the adjacent runway. It was amazing to watch so many old, historic planes, that were part of WWII, and still flying. Later that evening, I walked

over to "Johannes Restaurant" near downtown for dinner, and despite being very crowded, I was able to find one seat at the small bar. I ordered the dinner special, a classic Weiner Schnitzel, along with a cold pint of Bitburger beer. The schnitzel was very authentic and delicious, just as I remembered from my days in Germany. For dessert I chose the Apple Strudel, but what arrived was the "sampler dessert plate" instead. Obviously there had been a mix up of orders, but all was resolved quickly. As I sat enjoying the strudel, I watched the chefs in the kitchen and then made a comment to the bartender, that I couldn't believe that all the chefs were Latino, yet the food was authentically German! She told me that the owner, Johannes, had trained them for many years, and it definitely showed in their mastery of German cuisine. I finished the evening back in the hotel bar with a beer and my travel notes.



1960's Russian MIG



Joshua Tree National Park

The next morning, I decided to pay a visit to Joshua Tree National Park, and as I drove north through the park, I noticed that only a few wildflowers were to be seen, but the Joshua Trees had an abundance of new blooms that were ready to burst forth to announce the coming of Spring. It was very windy, with heavy clouds rolling over the top of the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa mountains, foretelling the approach of a strong Pacific storm system. As I drove down the Geology Tour Road, there were lots of mudholes from previous storms and the road was generally wet and muddy in many places, with water still standing in some of the deep ruts. So the only way to negotiate the route was

to drive around the muddy sections. There was the beginning of wildflower blooms in Pleasant Valley as I made my up to the base of the Little San Bernardino Mountains, before I headed back to the main road. Further west, I took the road up to Keyes View and found a great view of the entire Coachella Valley and the northern shore of the Salton Sea, but the winds were ferocious from the approaching storm system. As I was exiting the park, a coyote suddenly dashed across the road in front of me, then stopped and

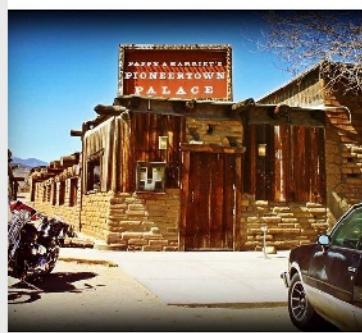


Geology Tour Road - Joshua Tree National Park

stared at me before trotting off into the brush. As I came to the town of Joshua Tree, I decided to stop at the "Joshua Tree Saloon" for a beer. The place was packed with locals enjoying the live music, but I was able to find a seat at the bar. Parked outside was a classic old 1950's school bus, painted military grey and covered with old paintings, decals, and quotes from the hippie days of American history. On my way back to Palm Springs, I took a short detour to Pioneertown to check out a place called "Pappy and Harriett's". What I found was an old bar and grill in a classic old adobe building, that was known locally for serving huge burgers



Joshua Tree Saloon



Pappy and Harriett's

and steaks, as well as an impressive selection of craft beers on tap. I stayed for a beer and absorbed as much of the unique atmosphere as possible. It's also known for great live music, and sometimes, world renowned rock bands, like the Rolling Stones and Paul McCartney have shown up unannounced. The bar is part of a complete Old West town that was constructed in 1947 by Roy Rogers and Gene

Autry, among others, as a location for filming western movies and TV shows. It

was fascinating to walk down the dusty old Main Street, past authentic replicas of stores, shops, saloons, and banks from the 1800's. But the wind was relentless and made for a very chilly time, so I got back on the road. On the way down the steep Morongo Canyon, a light rain fell, but the sun was shining brightly at the same time! (The rain was literally being blown over the tops of the mountains by the extremely strong winds – weird) As I approached Palm Springs, I saw an intense dust storm below San Gorgonio Pass and sand was beginning to drift across the road. Needless to say, the hundreds of wind turbines below the pass were spinning furiously! Back at the hotel, I met up with some of my old colleagues in the lobby bar and then joined my friend Myles for dinner at Johannes. We started with a fabulous cauliflower cream and Dungeness Crab soup, followed by classic Jaeger Schnitzel, along with a couple of great German beers. Later in the evening, I met up with Dave and a colleague from Singapore, who were engaged in an interesting conversation about "whiskey bars" in Japan, some of which were quite small but still capable of stocking hundreds of whiskeys from around the world, a few of which could cost several hundreds of dollars a bottle! Apparently, there's a new Japanese whiskey bar in the San Diego Gaslamp Quarter called "Bang, Bang", where a bottle of Japanese whiskey might cost you \$500.



Main Street - Pioneertown



What remains of Salton City

The next day I drove to Borrego Springs, via old Highway 86, through small farming communities south of Indio. In addition to many date palm farms, there were huge fields of various kinds of produce, including enormous artichokes, bell peppers, and tomatoes. When I reached the Salton Sea and the small town of Salton City, I had a spectacular view of the snow capped San Bernardino Mountains to the northwest, some 75 miles away, under perfectly clear skies. Driving around the old town, there was an abundance of crumbling concrete remains of failed developments along the shore of the Salton Sea. The town was established in the early 1950's as a large resort

community with an extensive road, water, sewer, and power grid capable of

supporting 40,000 residents. But there had been very little development due to its isolation and lack of local employment opportunities. And then, beginning in the 1970's, the salinity and pollution levels of the Salton Sea greatly increased, diminishing the attraction of the area. Today only a couple thousand residents call Salton City home. Just south of Salton City, I turned on to highway S22, a very rough road to Borrego Springs. When I reached the Henderson Canyon road, I saw the wildflowers were in the early stage of blooming and the wind had died down,



Wildflowers in Henderson Canyon

so I was able to get some nice photos. After checking in to a nice suite at the Borrego Springs Resort, there was still a lot of time left to visit some other sites. So I decided to drive up the San Felipe Valley, following the old Butterfield Stage route that operated during the 1860's. The deep green landscape was gorgeous, a result of the



Borrego Springs Resort

heavy winter rains. Further west, over the summit of the Laguna Mountains, I came to the historic Warner Springs Ranch, and a large herd of Holstein cows grazing peacefully in the lush, green meadow. Continuing west I came to Lake Henshaw where I took some beautiful photos of the lake with the snow covered



Lake Henshaw

San Bernardino Mountains shining in the distance. From Lake Henshaw I drove up the steep, winding road to Mesa Grande Indian Reservation, with lovely views of ranchland and surrounding mountains.



Warner Springs Ranch

The road wound through canyons of dense live oak forests and over hills covered in thick green grass. Eventually I came to the small village of Santa Ysabel and then the historic mining town of Julian, where I stopped for a Vulcan IPA at the Nickel Beer Company. I had arrived at the same time as the birthday party for

Lindsey was in full swing outside. As I sat at a picnic table under the pine trees with my beer, I watched everyone playing a game where the objective was to throw large steel washers at a board 20 feet away that had three holes, all slightly larger than the steel washers. The three holes had point values of 1,3, or 5, depending on the distance. The goal was to get a score of 21 – exactly! There were three teams competing, and it looked like half the town of Julian had shown up to wish her a Happy Birthday. Lindsey was in an 1890's style old western dress, and she was having a ball! As the games continued, I watched as a beautiful three year old Golden Retriever named "Lincoln", sat patiently watching everyone, until someone finally offered him some dog treats. At one point, Lindsey gave Lincoln a big kiss and left a large, red smudge of lipstick on his face! Everyone noticed it, including the brewery owner Tom Nickel, but Lincoln showed no signs of embarrassment. Another of Lindsey's friends arrived with his young dog, a unique cross of Pitbull, German Shephard, and Rhodesian Ridgeback. The dogs were having as much fun as the people, under sunny, but chilly skies. As the sun was slowly making its way west across the mountains, I headed back toward Borrego Springs down the steep, twisting highway that descended almost 5000 feet from the mountains to the

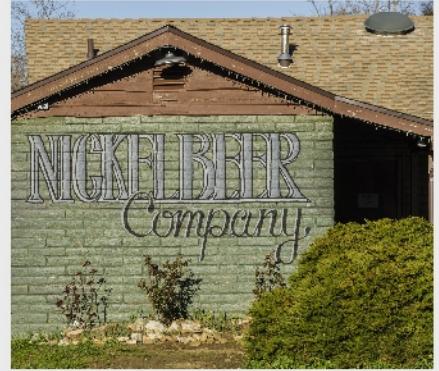


View from Arches Bar - Borrego Springs Resort

desert. When I arrived at the Borrego Springs Resort, I walked over to the Arches Bar, overlooking the golf course and the Santa Rosa Mountains beyond. I proceeded to write my travel notes as I enjoyed a cold pint of Sculpin IPA. Looking around the bar, I didn't see anyone under the age of 65. I was busy writing when all of a sudden, an older lady at the next table approached me as she and her husband were leaving. She was curious about what I was writing, so I explained I was doing my travel journal, and gave her the link to my travel blog website. (I write a lot of my travel notes during the evening in bars as I travel, and quite often someone will approach me and ask what I'm writing about.) Later that evening, I went to "Carlee's Restaurant"

downtown, one of my favorite places in southern California. As I sat down at the bar, the bartender recognized me, since he's been the same person to serve me virtually every time I've been to the restaurant. As usual, the place was packed with people, but he always seems to be able to manage it well. He highly recommended the dinner special, grilled shrimp tacos with fried rice and refried beans. It was fantastic, with just the right amount of heat and a very generous portion of shrimp. It went very well with the cold pint of Sculpin IPA. It was a great way to finish the evening, and back at the resort, I sat on the balcony enjoying a quiet night in the desert.

The following morning, after a delicious breakfast of bacon, eggs, hash browns, and toast, I checked my email and discovered that I had seven new real estate photo assignments to schedule, including one in Murrieta that was conveniently





Foreclosed property - Winchester

located on my way home. When I got to the property, I found several "eviction" notices plastered on the front door, despite being in a nice looking neighborhood! Since it was a vacant property, I had been given the code to the lock box for access to the house. As I opened the front door, I was shocked! The place was a total **disaster**, with dirty clothes, broken furniture, and all manner of junk strewn everywhere. There were even dirty dishes in the sink and half eaten food still on the kitchen stove. Every single room was littered with old books, CDs, broken electronics, and personal items. It appeared as if the occupants had "abandoned" the place in the middle of the night, with just the clothes on their back! Looking

around the living room, I spotted lots of unopened mail scattered on the floor, including several letters from the US Bankruptcy Court and the Sheriff's Office. As I walked through the house taking photos to document the damage, I almost expected to encounter someone hiding in a closet! As I left, a neighbor asked if the house was for sale, since her uncle was in business "flipping houses. This one would require a massive clean-up and repair effort. Despite the encounter with the "house of trash", the day was not a total loss, as I was able to photograph some gorgeous wildflowers along Winchester Road on my way home. (PS: The rest of the photo shoots were a world away from the place in Murrieta – thank goodness)



Foreclosed property - Winchester



Steampunk Festival

In mid-March, I went to a rather strange and unique event at the Orange Empire Railway Museum in Perris. (California that is!) It was called the "Iron Horse – Steampunk Carnivale", a weird mixture of railroading history and elements of Fantasy-Science Fiction. A lot of the people at the event came dressed in old Victorian-era costumes, that were "accented" with some weird apparatus from various sci-fi and fantasy films. The promotional description of the event went something like this. *"The pop culture genre is characterized by many fantasy and science fiction elements, intertwined with hardware-laden Victoria-era fashion mashed up with industrial revolution themes. Think old faucet handles affixed to pantaloons, brass goggles decorated with watch gears or old mismatched drawer knobs glued to the side of a top hat. A few arrive dressed like fictional characters, such as Sherlock Holmes or*

Doctor Strangelove." Besides all of the strange, weird characters, there were plenty of families enjoying rides on the old steam train and the games. I spent quite a lot of time roaming around photographing the people in costume, in addition to many of the vintage railroad cars. It was a beautiful day to be outside, and the event was a lot of fun and fascinating! In the midst of the weird world, the museum was serving a very traditional "Victorian Tea" in the Fred Harvey Annex, where there were several exhibits detailing the history of the Fred Harvey Restaurants on display. Basically, there was something for everyone!



Vintage Steam Locomotive

At the end of the month, I travelled to a couple of places I had not been to before, but which I had been curious to visit. I headed south through the San Diego mountains to the small town of Alpine, located about 30 miles east of San Diego. I had booked a room at the Ayres Hotel, one of the only hotels in town and conveniently located off Interstate 8. After checking in, I walked a couple of blocks up the main street to the Alpine Brewing Company and restaurant. They had a fantastic BBQ pulled pork sandwich, topped with fresh salsa and melted cheese that went very well with their "Hoppy Birthday IPA". The wind suddenly picked up and the air became very chilly, so I headed indoors. The bartender recommended the "HFS IPA", a special brew whose name came from a remark by the brewmaster upon tasting it for the first time. (Holy F---king Shit), and it was incredible! By this time the sun was setting and I walked back to the hotel, stopping at the local liquor store to pick up a six-pack of "Brew Free or Die Pale Ale" from the 21st Amendment Brewery in Hayward, California. Meanwhile, the clerk

was engaged in a conversation with a local customer, making jokes and imitating Joey from the Sopranos – it was a bit funny. I finished the evening with a beer on my balcony, listening to the birds in the trees. The next morning, I filled up at the local Chevron station, got cash from the Wells Fargo ATM, and picked up an egg McMuffin from McDonalds, before



Potero Regional Park

heading south toward Tecate, Mexico. The drive along highway 94 through the Japatul Valley in the Cleveland National Forest, took me into a rugged and dramatic mountainous landscape that was very green from the winter rains. I came to the Potero Regional Park, where I discovered a large grove of huge live oak trees, many over 100 years old, though some had died as a result of the five year



Potero Regional Park

drought and been cut down. I hiked along a very interesting nature trail that had many displays of historical information about the environment and the local Kumeyaay tribe. From Potero Regional Park, it was short drive to Tecate, California, a very small village on the Mexican border. Crossing the border into Tecate, Mexico was effortless, since the border guards didn't even bother to stop anyone with California license plates. Immediately upon entering the town, my first impression was that of a typical developing third world country – generally poor, and run-down, which unfortunately is often the case with "border towns". Although it looked rather dirty and shabby, I had no sense of danger or fear. Surprisingly, the traffic was pretty well behaved, and I found the people on the street to be friendly and welcoming. Although I had the address of the "Santuario Diegueno Hotel", as well as a map, it took me a while to find it. But what I found was a gorgeous five star



Santuario Diegueno Hotel - Tecate, Mexico

property on a small hill overlooking the desert and mountains of northern Mexico on one side and the border wall on the other. It also happened to be located next to the main Police headquarters! Once I entered the hotel, I saw beautiful marble and tropical wood everywhere, and as I walked through the lobby and hallways, colorful Mexican artwork was in abundance. The hotel had only 26 rooms, all of them large suites with a balcony and terrace. From my terrace I had a lovely view of the valley and mountains. The bathroom was huge, with a large walk-in shower and oversize tub



with a spa. The hotel grounds were beautifully landscaped, and the pool was secluded by an adobe wall decorated with colorful Mexican ceramic art. After touring the hotel property and taking lots of



photos, I returned to my room, sat on the terrace with a cold beer, and watched the many songbirds in the trees. From the terrace, I also had a view of the border wall, which had a very large sign painted on it that read, "I LOVE YOU ALL". The weather was lovely – sunny and warm, with a light breeze. Later in the afternoon, I drove a few blocks down to the "Museo Comunitario de Tecate" (Tecate Community Museum) where I discovered

some amazing and gorgeous outdoor

artwork by local artists. Many pieces were very colorful ceramic works depicting various animals and plants native to Baja California. Also on the museum grounds was a very interesting collection of exhibits and displays about the history of the local Kumeyaay people. I spent a couple of hours exploring the exhibits and taking photos. Then I tried to find the historic old railroad station, but there was so much construction going on in the area, and no place to park anyway. The old



Museo Comunitario de Tecate

railroad tracks were still in place, once the main line of the San Diego and Arizona Eastern Railway, but they looked as if they had been abandoned many decades ago. When I returned to the hotel, I headed to the bar for a beer. The bartender told me he had started his job just a couple of weeks before, after having worked at the Tecate Brewery for 12 years. During our conversation, I learned that he had lived in the US for several years, married an American

woman, and had two children born in the US. Today they are two teenagers who visit him two or three times a month, because it's much harder for him to travel across the border to visit them. The bar manager recommended that I try a beer from a new local craft brewery named "Finisima", which means "the top one", and it was superb! The bartender then reserved a table for me in the "Asao Restaurant", whose name means "to eat" in the Kumeyaay language. The service was very professional and the two local wines, a Chardonnay and a

Cabernet from vineyards near Ensenada, were very nice. (my first taste of Mexican wines) For dinner, I began with "grilled" iceberg lettuce salad topped with fresh peppers – unusual, but delicious. The main dish, recommended by my server, was the chef's favorite – Carne Asada and roasted peppers. It was fantastic, but also a huge portion, half of which I had to box up for another day. Then came an absolutely amazing dessert of Dolce de Leche topped with fresh berries, mint, and coconut. I finished dinner with a cup of espresso, and besides being an excellent presentation, the spoon was the appropriate size, just as in Europe but not often in the US. Throughout dinner, a group of very well dressed, middle-aged ladies were having a grand time at the table across from me. Their young, handsome waiter flirted with them throughout dinner, to their delight. I noticed that many of the ladies were using a rather unique device to hang their purses and shopping bags from the edge of the table – very practical. All in all, I found the restaurant to

be elegant and upscale, with excellent cuisine! When I returned to my room, I sat on the terrace with a glass of wine, and watched the moon rising over the desert. From where I sat, I could also see the long line of cars waiting to cross the border – sometimes the line stretched for many blocks and moved incredibly slowly. I recalled the conversation with the bartender earlier in the evening, in which he had told me how sometimes local drivers would allow a car to "cut in line", then call the police to report the car. The result of which was the offending car being pulled out of the line by the police, just a few yards from the border station. Then it was "escorted" to the end of the line! (a hard lesson) As I retired for the night, a

soft breeze cooled the room with the fragrance of the flowers outside.

The next morning, after a delicious breakfast of Heuvs Rancheros, I looked outside at the very long line of cars on their way to the border crossing. But ten minutes later, the line had all but disappeared from my view. (Earlier I had contemplated driving east to the border crossing at Mexicali, but then decided to use the Tecate border crossing) Still, I had to wait in line for more than twenty minutes, and fend off the numerous vendors hawking everything from snacks and bottled water to clothing, jewelry, and artwork. Among the street vendors were several disabled people seeking handouts from the motorists. (not a very easy way of life) When I finally reached the US border station, the agent waved me through before I had a chance to show my passport! But it was a totally different story for people of Hispanic origin or with Mexican license plates. My route home took me through the San Diego Mountains to the summit of Mt Laguna, with tall pine forest covering



Hotel Bar



Asao Restaurant



Terrace - Asao Restaurant



Santuario Diegueno Hotel - Tecate, Mexico

the upper slopes, and then down to the desert below, where I found that the wildflower bloom had peaked a week or two before. Unfortunately, the flowers had pretty much faded, but the town of Borrego Springs was still crowded with people, and the road to the State Park Visitor Center had been closed, due to the parking lots being full. So, to escape the crowd, I beat a hasty retreat out of town on highway S22 over the mountains. Along the way, I stopped at the old San Felipe Bar, the one and only business "establishment" in the tiny village. As I pulled into the parking lot, there was a group of bikers seated at the outdoor bar, and the owner was busy grilling hamburgers. There were no beers on tap, despite the fact that San Diego County has more craft breweries than anywhere else in the nation! So I went "local" and joined everyone else with a cold can of Bud. The weather was very pleasant as I sat outside, listening to the conversations of the bikers and the owner, mostly focused on very conservative political topics. Then it was time to continue on my way, through Warner Springs Ranch, Hemet valley, and finally home to Redlands, where my dear friend Tina had prepared a simple, but delicious dinner of spaghetti, fresh tomato sauce, and parmesan cheese. We all enjoyed an evening of good food, good wine, and great conversation!

Beside several extended trips, both within California and elsewhere, during the first part of the year, there were many notes that I made on other travels, of what seemed at first to be fairly ordinary events, but which revealed some very interesting details – some humorous and others rather odd! The following is a summary of them.

- "Time Out Sports Bar" – Yucaipa
A dozen big screen TVs showing a wide variety of programs at the same time.
- Westminster Dog Show
- Professional Bull Riding competition (*Cowboys now look like hockey players, with helmets, face guards, and chest protectors!*)
- Women's Ultimate Fighting Championship
- 50th Annual Grammy Awards
- Plus three different college basketball games, as well as the golf channel
(*none of the TVs had any sound!*)
- Real estate photo shoot in Hesperia
Old, run-down 1950's ranch house
- Four dogs, all barking constantly
- Unmarried couple in shorts and t-shirts (friendly folks, but heavy smokers)
- Ash trays everywhere, filled with old, stale cigarette butts
- Empty beer cans in every room
- Rooms filled with clutter and half filled packing boxes
- Huge back yard, mostly dirt, filled with junk and trash in large plastic bags
- Both front and back yard "mined" with dog shit!
- Next door neighbor had two rusting, disassembled junk cars out front!
(*note: the real estate agent called me a few days later to say there had been four offers received – based on my photos! Unbelievable!*)
- "Black Horse Tavern" – Norco
All of the flat screen TVs had large numbers pasted on them to correspond with the right remote control. Very smart idea that every bar should follow.



San Felipe Bar

- Very unusual wine on the bar menu, named “19 Crimes” Cabernet from southeast Australia. The name derives from the time in 17th century England when there were 19 criminal offenses that were punishable by banishment to Australia. Crimes included such things as (1) Ferryboat man carrying too many passengers on the Thames River, IF any drowned, (2) Impersonating an Egyptian (weird), and (3) Petty theft of property less than 1 schilling.
- “Eureka Burger” – Redlands
NCAA college hockey championship on TV in a tournament known as the “Frozen Four”. Equivalent of the NCAA basketball “Final Four” national championship
New craft beer on tap “Hell or High Watermelon”
Golf channel broadcast of the Master’s Tournament. Jordan Spieth, the number one golfer in the tournament, shot a “quadruple” bogey on the 9th hole. Worst in Master’s history!
- “Train Days” – San Bernardino County Museum
Model railroad clubs from all over California displaying extensive and elaborate setups, with everything from HO to G gauge scale. (the very small to the very large)
Some of the model railroad cars even had “graffiti” on them, just as on the real railroad cars. When purchasing a model railroad car, one can order it with customized graffiti!
- “Mousley Museum Historical Society” – Yucaipa
Stater Bros, a large grocery store chain, began in Yucaipa in the late 1800’s, and at one time, the brothers owned the little “Olive Ave Market”, just a couple of blocks from our house. When the brothers owned it, the name was “Stater Bros Complete Market”, in spite of the fact that the building is only the size of a one bedroom house! Today there are more than 150 Stater Bros stores throughout the western US. The Olive Ave Market remains a local neighborhood favorite, known for fine coffee, great homemade desserts, and unique food items.
Old photos of “Box Car Houses” (built from old wooden railroad box cars, some of the houses still exist today in Yucaipa)
Story of the “Spider Lady”, a Yucaipa woman who made a business of extracting silk from various species of local spiders. The silk was very strong and resistant to extreme temperatures. A single strand of the silk was used as the “cross-hair” in the manufacture of microscopes. The spider silk was also used during WWII when silk was scarce.
Photos of many old “lodges” and extravagant homes that no longer exist in Yucaipa.
History and photos of gold mining in the local Crafton Hills and Wildwood Canyon, formerly known as “Hog Canyon” when a number of wild hogs were released for hunting in the late 1800’s.
Maps of the proposed extension of the Southern Pacific Railroad from Redlands up to Yucaipa to support a booming lumber industry that was established in the late 1800’s by the Mormons.

In mid-April, I decided to take a short holiday to the Temecula Wine Country. I checked in to a beautiful villa suite at the South Coast Winery Resort, with a lovely view overlooking the vineyards and mountains beyond. Then I drove to Old Town Temecula to take photos of some of the historic buildings, as well as a beautiful 150 foot long mural depicting scenes of the “California Southern Railroad”. Construction of the railroad began in 1880 to link the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad (now the BNSF Railroad) at Barstow in the north with San Diego in the south. The route from Perris through Temecula to Oceanside was later abandoned in 1900 after a series of devastating wash outs in Temecula Canyon. Today the old depot is the only reminder of the railroad in Temecula, along with the mural. As I strolled through the old town I spotted the “Temecula Stage Stop Bar”, which looked interesting. I ordered a Goose Island IPA and took a seat at the bar while a small, local band set up their gear on the patio. They turned out to be pretty good, playing some classics from Santana, the Doors, and a wonderful

medley of Johnny Cash songs, as a tribute to the famous musician. The bar and the patio outside were crowded with a lot of old bikers and their “babes” enjoying the warm sunshine and the music. (the predominant beverage was Bud Light!) At one point, the Easter Bunny showed up and everyone wanted a photo with him. It was strange to see a big, burly biker in a black leather jacket standing next to the Easter Bunny! (Very funny too) Being late in the afternoon, I headed back to South Coast



South Coast Winery Resort

Winery, and on the way, I stopped to take some lovely photos of the vineyards and mountains. Since the bar and restaurant didn’t open until 6pm, because of Easter Sunday, I went next door to the Ponte Vineyard Inn and had a local “Deadpan Pils” in the Cellar Bar. As I sat in the bar, a young man played some old favorites from “The Boss” on his guitar. It was a very relaxing time, listening to the music. When he took a short break, a couple of young ladies asked him about the music, and it was obvious they were not familiar with Bruce Springsteen. By this time I headed back to the Wild Rose Restaurant and Bar at South Coast and ordered a glass of their “Wild Horse Peak Merlot”. And as the bartender was pouring it into my glass I could smell

the fragrance of the wine, which was superb. Then it was time for dinner in the restaurant, where my server Mike provided me with exceptional service throughout the evening. I started with a cup of California Clam Chowder, which had an abundance of clams, along with lobster, bell peppers, and sweet corn – delicious! The hot, fresh sourdough rolls and tarragon butter went very well with the chowder. For the main dish, Mike suggested Cumin Seared Scallops that were perfectly cooked and served with light, crispy fried arugula and a marvelous, creamy sweet corn sauce. Then came dessert, a spicy cheesecake, along with a cup of espresso. I also had ordered a bottle of the Wild Horse Peak Merlot, which Mike gave me for the price in the tasting room, rather than the higher restaurant price. Dinner was one of the best I’ve had anywhere – definitely Michelin 5 stars! After dinner I walked back to my villa and sat outside on the patio under the stars of the Orion Constellation, enjoying another glass of the Merlot. A beautiful, quiet night in the wine country.



Wild Rose Restaurant - South Coast Winery Resort



Hot-air Balloons - South Coast Winery Resort

I awoke early the next morning and heard the sound of a hot air balloon overhead. I ran outside in my stocking feet with my camera, and as I looked up, there was a balloon about 100 feet directly above me! Looking around I could see four other balloons floating over the vineyards, highlighted in the early morning sunshine. I took many photos of them as they slowly drifted west toward the mountains. After a shower, I sat outside on the patio savoring breakfast – scrambled eggs, potatoes, and apple-wood smoked bacon. Meanwhile, the sounds of the birds in the trees were beautiful and peaceful, as I watched several hummingbirds darting from one flower to another. Though it was just a short overnight trip, it was a very enjoyable and relaxing time. I look forward to another holiday in the wine country.

On the last Saturday in April, I travelled to Long Beach to meet my good friend Andy, for a tour of the USS Iowa battleship docked in San Pedro harbor. I took the train in to LA Union Station and then the Metro to Long Beach, where Andy picked me up. We drove south to San Pedro, across a massive new bridge under construction over LA harbor. The weather was very pleasant, with warm breezes and sunny skies. As we stepped aboard the huge ship, a staff member was announcing the name of every military veteran, as they came aboard, along with their rank, branch of service, and dates of service. And for those who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan,



Celebrating 75 years of the
BATTLESHIP IOWA



USS Iowa - San Pedro

they also received a hearty "Welcome Home". It was a very nice gesture of respect! (I forgot to inform the staff that I had served in the Army during the Vietnam War era, but I'll do so next time) The self-guided tour of the ship included several videos and impromptu talks by sailors who had served aboard the battleship. They gave us a real sense of what life was like on the ship, especially during wartime. At one point, a former gunner told us that the massive 16 inch guns could fire a 2,000 pound shell accurately over 24 miles. And then he turned and pointed out Catalina Island, 20 miles

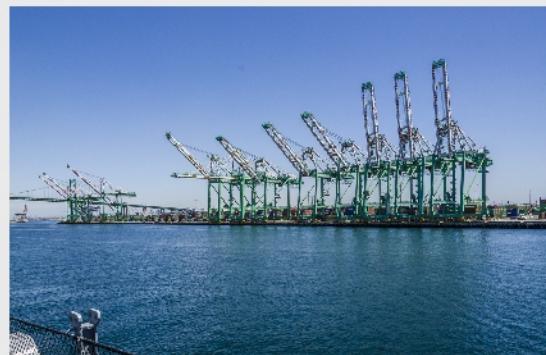
off the coast – to us it was barely visible! In addition to the amazing history of the ship, the views of the enormous LA-Long Beach port facilities were spectacular. There were three huge new 150 foot high cranes that had been manufactured in Asia and transported in fully upright position, completely assembled, across more than seven thousand miles of the Pacific Ocean to Los Angeles. (an incredible engineering and transportation challenge) As we explored the interior decks of the ship, we came upon the Captain's Quarters, which had accommodated President Franklin Roosevelt on several occasions during WWII. Of



special interest was the bathtub that had been installed just for him. There were also many old photos of FDR with members of the crew. The USS Iowa was launched in August of 1942 as the lead ship in her class of "fast" battleships. She saw action in WWII, the Korean War, and continued her service as part of the Pacific Fleet until she was decommissioned in October of 1990. Her four massive engines generated a total of 150,000 horsepower, giving her a top speed of 33 knots (38 mph). In the 1980's, most of her anti-aircraft guns were replaced with Tomahawk and Harpoon missiles as an upgraded defense. She spent just over 20 years in the Navy's "mothball

fleet", before arriving at her current home in Los Angeles in April of 2012. Since then she has been a floating museum and popular tourist attraction. We spent a few hours exploring the ship and learning about her history, but I felt there was still a lot more to see. Hopefully Andy and I will return for another visit. After leaving the USS Iowa in the late afternoon, we stopped at the "22nd Street Landing Restaurant" on the beach in San Pedro, overlooking Cabrillo Marina. As we sat on the deck, Andy pointed out what a beautiful day it was for sailing, but he also noted that there were very few sailboats on the water! We had a great time, enjoying the ocean views and catching up on things in our lives.

Unfortunately, it came time for me to take the Metro back to LA Union Station and bid farewell to Andy. As I rode the Metro Blue Line, there were several vendors on board trying to sell cold drinks and snacks, despite the frequent PA announcements advising passengers NOT to buy from vendors on board! The announcements had no effect on the vendors, including the guy trying to sell expensive headphones. I never saw anyone buying anything, but I'm sure these guys try every day to sell. When I arrived at Union Station, I had about an hour before the departure of the train to San Bernardino, so I went to the TRAAX Bar and ordered a burger and fries, along with a cold pint of Stone IPA. It was a delicious burger, but way too many fries for me to finish. An old black man in a motorized wheelchair noticed my burger and asked me if he should order one – definitely, I said! Meanwhile, a large party was going on in the courtyard outside, and it turned out to be a High School Prom, which became pretty obvious as the elegantly dressed young couples began arriving for the dinner and dance. It was fun to watch them, as some were "strutting their



Port of Los Angeles - Long Beach

stuff", while others appeared less assured of themselves. But they all looked like they were enjoying the evening. Leaving the bar, I picked up a Starbucks coffee and then boarded the train. During the ride home, I listened to beautiful music on my iPod as the train rolled into the night! It had been a short but very enjoyable day.



Southern Pacific #3751

The first weekend in May I attended the annual "Railroad Days" in Fullerton, and naturally, I took the train to get there. The weather was very cloudy and cool, with a heavy drizzle during the morning, but in the afternoon the rain ended, and the sun peaked through the clouds. There were a lot of people, especially families with young kids, who were fascinated by the model railroad setups, some of which were enormous and extravagant. Almost every scale was represented, from the smallest C to the largest G. There was also a tour of a brand new GE Evolution BNSF diesel locomotive, which had two state of the art computer displays in the cab, one for the engineer and the other for the conductor. While I was in the cab, a photographer from the Orange County Register invited a young boy to sit in the engineer's seat and pose for a photo to be published in the newspaper! (his 15 minutes of fame)



Model Railroad displays

Later I toured one of the Amtrak Coast Starlight "Parlour Cars" and took photos to show Leslie and Lynn, since unfortunately they had not been able to see it when we travelled on the train. Next to the new diesel locomotive was the old Southern



Coast Starlight "Parlour Car"

Pacific steam locomotive number 3751, and it was very popular with the youngsters. Meanwhile, monster BNSF freight trains rolled through the station, and each one received a "salute" from the 3751 steam whistle! I took a break in the afternoon to have a cold beer at the Santa Fe Café trackside and sat outside on the station platform to



BNSF Freight Trains rolling through Fullerton

watch the trains. A few minutes later, a large black man rode by several times on a bicycle with two more attached behind, like a semi-trailer truck! As he passed by, he played the sound of a locomotive horn, as if he was a train! Weird, but he did get the attention of everyone

on the station platform. Later in the afternoon, I walked over to the Old Spaghetti Factory, which now occupies the historic old Union Pacific Railway Station, and thankfully, the restaurant has faithfully restored the grandeur of the early 1900's. As I enjoyed a glass of wine at the bar, the bartender told me about the history of the old depot and how it had been moved over 500 feet from its original location. Before leaving Fullerton, I walked around the downtown area, stopped at the Hopscotch Tavern, and sat on the deck as the sun slowly set in the west. As I looked

around, I spotted a sign posted on the patio, "The Patio is Open – and so is your fly!" How embarrassing, if it happens to you. Soon it was time to board the train back to Riverside, having spent a very enjoyable day immersed in everything to do with trains!

Also in early May, I attended the Palm Springs Photo Festival, which began with a Welcome Reception Sunday evening. And so, with time to spare, I decided to spend the afternoon visiting a couple of places on the way to Palm Springs. I drove to the Whitewater Nature Reserve at the base of the



Southern Pacific #3751



Old Union Pacific Railroad Station



Whitewater River

San Bernardino Mountains, and as I came to the bridge crossing the Whitewater River, the flow of water in the river was very strong. Seeing the white water cascading over the huge boulders made the name of the river pretty obvious. Further up the canyon was a large park and reservoir, with many families enjoying picnics under the tall live oak trees.

Then I drove north up highway 62 to the small settlement of

Pioneertown, which is most well-known for Pappi and

Harriet's Bar. It was very crowded, with a lot of people having Sunday brunch, but I managed to find one open stool at the bar. As I looked around, I saw a large carved wooden bust of Pappi sitting

high up on a shelf overlooking the bar. Later I walked around the

old town taking photos of the many authentic replicas of buildings that were once used as sets for Western movies and TV programs. A couple of shops were open, and the wool shop had five young goats in a pen out front, which was very popular with the youngsters.



Pioneertown

The young goats (kids) were very cute and playful. From Pioneertown I headed south to Palm Springs and checked into the Hyatt Hotel, where I had a nice suite overlooking the oldest golf course in town and the mountains behind. As I went back down to the lobby, I was invited to the Sunset Reception, where the hotel provided complimentary beer, wine, and snacks for guests every afternoon. Soon afterwards, the festival's "Welcome Reception" was in full swing in the hotel ballroom. (the reception had been moved from the nearby "Korakai Penzione" courtyard due to the risk of rain from the heavy clouds spilling over the crest of the mountains) The next morning I attended a fascinating seminar on color management in Photoshop, presented by one of the nation's most knowledgeable experts on the subject. That afternoon I drove back home to prepare the Birthday Party for Leslie, where we all gathered for Champagne and Chocolates!

A day later I returned to Palm Springs for another day of photography seminars, and once again I

had a beautiful suite at the Hyatt Hotel. Then for dinner, I decided to try the "Thai Smile" restaurant a couple of blocks away, and it was a delightful place to sit outside to enjoy delicious Thai dishes. The pot stickers were excellent to start, and the main dish of Kung Pao Chicken was awesome, but such a huge portion that I had to take half of it with me. After dinner, I walked over to the Annenberg Theater to watch presentations of the four finalists in the slide show competition. The entry from China, titled "Homecoming", was outstanding, but the other three were only mediocre. A special presentation followed of "film noir", which focused on black and white images of fashion models – definitely not my style! I finally left during the Q&A session with the artist, since it was of absolutely no interest to me. On the way back to the hotel, I spotted the "Hair of the Dog – English Pub", and decided to check it out. The bar was filled with mostly locals celebrating the birthday of "Jewels", the bartender. Later, as I left, I wished her a Happy Birthday



Palm Springs Art Museum

too. Then I walked over to the Art Museum to join the Gala Party, which didn't start until 11pm – pretty late for all of the folks from the East Coast! During the party I met a couple from New York who were stuffing themselves with food and drink, in a desperate attempt to stay awake! And so ended the 2017 Palm Springs Photo Festival.

In mid-May, I visited the "Gilman Historic Ranch and Wagon Museum" in nearby Banning, where I learned a lot about the history of the area, as well as some unusual facts. There was a small "Wild West Art Show" set up in the barn, among



Whitewater Canyon Nature Preserve



View from Hyatt Hotel - Palm Springs



Parlour - Gilman Historic Ranch

the historic old wagons, and tours of the old ranch house were going on as well. I was fortunate to be the only person on one of the tours lead by a very knowledgeable local volunteer. Herb told me all of the history of the Gilman family and the ranch that they had established in the late 1800's. Much of the beautiful antique furniture and memorabilia were original to the house, and Herb described the history of many pieces in great detail. And from the front porch, there was a spectacular view of the valley and Mt San Jacinto beyond.

Several vendors and food stands were set up outside in the pasture, along with a western re-enactment group called the "Border Renegades". The group gave a performance of two skits, dressed in costumes of the 1880's, which must have been a bit uncomfortable in the 95 degree heat. The skit about "Big John" coming to town was very funny, and the group managed to involve a few members of the audience as well. There was also a very interesting demonstration of the dangers of shooting 45 caliber blanks, as well as a demo showing the effect of a shotgun blank shell at close range, which totally destroyed a plastic gallon jug! After the performance I joined some members of the group for a cold beer at the "Knights of Columbus" (Caballeros de Colon) beer garden. I found out that many of the group were from Arizona and were planning to participate in "Wyatt Earp Days" in Tombstone the following week. Later in the afternoon, as I sat in the shade of the beer garden, a cute little girl came by with a small plastic cup filled with pebbles that she was collecting from the dust and dirt in the driveway. As she approached my table, she offered me



View of Mt San Jacinto



"Border Renegades"

one of her rocks – they weren't anything special to look at, but to her they were priceless! Then Herb came by, joined me for a beer, and told me a bit more of the area history. It seems that in a 1912 cross country air race, one of the first in America, both the eastbound and westbound planes broke down and had to land on a ranch

in Banning. Then in 1922 the Banning airport was established, and in 1941, it was used several times by General George Patton on his way to the desert training centers in the Mojave. One of the most interesting facts from Herb, was the one about the old Banning Hotel, which was used by General Patton as his communications headquarters in 1941. Apparently, 44 young women from Los Angeles were trained as radio telephone operators and restricted to the hotel in order to secure secrecy – fascinating! Soon it was time to leave the ranch and on my way back home I stopped at the historic "Old Firehouse Pub" in downtown Banning. And while I sat outside on the patio, the

sweet smell of tri-tip wafted from the smoker. It was then that I noticed a sign on the patio, "No Smoking in this area at any time – Smoking is only allowed after 9 pm in Designated Areas". Seemed like a contradiction of rules!

When June rolled around, I attended the "West Coast School of Photography" (WCS) in San Diego – a week long series of intensive hands-on classes and field trips. Rather than drive, I took the train, a trip that began on the MetroLink from Riverside to LA Union Station. The MetroLink train was very crowded with LA Dodger fans going to the Sunday afternoon game. Upon arriving at Union Station, I spent a half hour in the Amtrak Metropolitan Lounge before boarding the "Pacific Surfliner" bound for San Diego Old Town station. Along the way there were incredible views of the ocean and beaches, where lots of surfers and families were enjoying the beautiful warm weather. When the Business Class Car attendant came



Gilman Historic Ranch House



Knights of Columbus Beer Garden



University of San Diego (USD)

by with complimentary wine and snacks, I was pleasantly surprised to find that Amtrak had switched to a new snack pack that included pita chips and hummus! Upon arriving in Old Town, I walked over to the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, and although it was located in a light industrial neighborhood, it was a very nice hotel. My room was on the top floor and at the end of the hallway, which I thought would be quiet. (But later that night, the TV in the next room was very loud, even ear plugs didn't help! And the next morning at 5:30am, the heavy equipment company across the parking lot began work! Luckily, I was able to switch rooms to one across the hall, facing the courtyard and with a balcony.) Then it was time to

take the city bus to the University of San Diego (USD) campus, where the school would be held, for the orientation session. Afterwards, most of us went to the USD cafeteria for dinner, and my order of grilled chicken kabob, rice, yogurt-dill sauce, hummus, feta cheese, and warm pita bread was not only delicious, it was only \$7.95! After dinner, I walked back down the hill to my hotel and headed for the bar. Unfortunately, there were two young guys engaged in a loud argument about whether or not, "IF" a straight man became seduced by a gay man, would he now be gay, even though he had initially said "no?". The argument was so loud, obnoxious, and absolutely pointless, that I took my beer outside to the patio by the pool!

The next morning, I rode bus #35 to the USD campus and joined the first day of class. I had registered for Advanced Photoshop, and when the instructor introduced herself, it became quite apparent that she was very knowledgeable and a very talented Photoshop artist. But as the day progressed, I became increasingly frustrated with her teaching style, which I could only describe as basically "all over the map" – no structure or learning path, just "this is cool" and "I love this stuff"! That evening, we all went to the 60th Anniversary Awards Party, which was a lot of fun. But the instructor totally ignored me – never even saying hello when she saw me standing less than ten feet away. And when no one in the class invited me to join them in the class photo, I decided to change classes the next morning! After the party, I took the bus back to Old Town, and walked over to the "Modern Times Brewery", a couple of blocks from my hotel. I had just enough time to have a pint of their signature IPA before they closed for the evening. Then I enjoyed a quiet time sitting on my balcony in the clear, cool evening air.



Chapel - University of San Diego

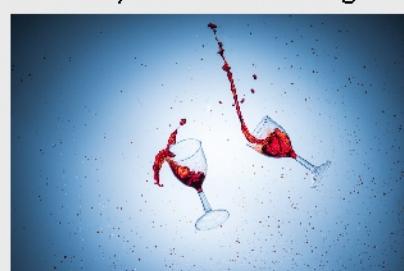


The next morning, I changed from Advanced Photoshop to Macro Photography, being taught by Frank, and immediately I was welcomed into the class. We spent the morning outside taking closeup photos of flowers on the USD campus, of which there were many different varieties. At lunchtime I went to the campus cafeteria for a hot smoked



turkey and Applewood smoked bacon sandwich with sun dried tomato dressing and swiss cheese on a French baguette – delicious! Then, the afternoon was taken up with shooting "focus stacked" images in the studio, using some of Frank's enormous stock of equipment. After class I walked down the hill and stopped at the "Ballast Point Brewery Tasting Room and Home Brew Mart" for a cold pint of Sculpin IPA. The brew mart had dozens of different recipes available for home

brewing, along with everything needed to brew your own beer. When I checked my email that evening I was pleasantly surprised to see that one of my images had been sold on the Adobe Stock website. In Frank's class the next day we were introduced to photographing "drops, splashes, and crashes", in which we had to time our exposures perfectly to capture the moment of impact of colored water drops. Some of the photographs were really amazing, capturing a very brief, but spectacular moment in time. It was



a wonderful time with Frank and my classmates – so much better than my first day in the other class. That evening I met up with my dear friend DeeAnne for dinner at “Casa Guadalajara” in Old Town. We had a great time catching up on all that had happened over the past few months, while a Mariachi band played classic Mexican songs.



The next day, Frank took us to the “Pet Kingdom”, a most unique and unusual pet store that specialized in reptiles and exotic fish. Frank had made arrangements with the owner, Matt, to allow us access to the enclosures before the store opened, in exchange for copies of our photos. Matt was very accommodating by opening the doors to many of the cages and enclosures so that we could get unobstructed views of the snakes, lizards, and other reptiles, many of which were

brightly colored. He was also very informative and really took a personal interest in all of the animals, which he gained while serving in Vietnam. We spent a couple of hours photographing before heading across the street to In-and-Out Burger for lunch, where Frank took a few photos of his “Double, Double Cheeseburger”, using his new 14mm macro lens! After lunch, we drove up a long, winding road to Jean’s home on the top of Point Loma ridge to do some more unusual closeup photography in her



large studio. Her home was a beautiful old wood framed house that had been built by the Dixon family in the late 1800’s, and the views of San Diego Bay and Coronado Island were spectacular. Frank set up some lights, strobes, and backdrops so that we could photograph “smoke sculptures” in total darkness, using burning sticks of incense. It was the first time most of us had even heard of the idea, but some of our photos revealed shapes in the smoke that one would otherwise had never seen. The class was fascinating! Later in the evening we all met for dinner at the “Third Corner Wine Bar and Bistro” in nearby Ocean Beach. My order of shrimp scampi with warm crusty sourdough bread was classic, and the Goat’s cheese cheesecake topped with shredded orange marmalade and pistachio nut brittle was phenomenal! The wines poured during the evening were the gift of our two class assistants, John and Sharon – thanks!

The next day, our last day of class, was spent reviewing our photos from the day before, and we all had a lot of fun discussing the different shapes we could see in the smoke sculptures. Then we all went to the closing session where there was a raffle to raise money for the school. And as luck would have it, the two most expensive prizes, diamond pendants, were won by men. (we assumed their wives would ultimately receive the diamonds) Following lunch, I checked out of the hotel and made my way to the Old Town Transit Center to board the Pacific Surfliner for the trip back to LA Union Station, and eventually home again. The experience of the intense hands-on classes at West Coast School was without a doubt some of the very best training in photography available anywhere, and certainly on par with the excellent photographic workshops that I have attended in Santa Fe.

In early July, I had a photo shoot in Rancho Mirage, on my way to meet up with my dear friend Tina in Warner Springs, before we both went to the annual Esri User Conference in San Diego. From Rancho Mirage, where it was over 100 degrees, I drove up highway 74, a steep, winding road that gained over 5000 feet in elevation to reach the pass over the Santa Rosa Mountains, where it was a very pleasant 75 degrees. Further south, I stopped at the historic old stage coach station museum in Oak Grove, since there was a sign posted, announcing the museum was open. As I parked in front of the gate, I could hear old cowboy songs playing, but I found all of the doors to the old station were locked! Basically, there was no one home, so why was it “open”? Anyway, I spent the next half hour walking around the outside of the old wooden and adobe building, taking photos of the exhibits inside, as best as I could, given the dirty



Butterfield Stage Station - Oak Grove



Butterfield Stage Station - Oak Grove

windows. The rooms were filled with "dummies" dressed in old western costumes, and some of them looked more than a bit weird! On the front wall of the station, was an old, weathered poster stating the "rules", known as the "10 Commandments of the Butterfield Stage Route", for riding the stage coach, which included "Don't shoot firearms for pleasure while enroute, as it scares the horses". Later down the road,

Tina joined me at the Warner Springs Ranch Resort Bar and Grill for a beer, and as we sat on the terrace, a crash

of thunder and lightning suddenly struck overhead from a thunderstorm moving over the mountains. Soon after, a short but intense downpour of rain came, and the air became noticeably cooler. From Warner Springs we continued southeast, over the Laguna Mountains, descending more than 4000 feet to the town of Borrego Springs, where we encountered 115 degree heat in the desert. We checked into the Borrego Springs Resort and then met up in the Arches Bar and Grill where Tina struck up conversations



Borrego Springs Resort

with many of the locals in the bar. One of the ladies was the editor of the Borrego Sun newspaper and originally from England, although she had also spent some time living in Germany, which meant that she and Tina became friends right away. As evening approached, we decided to stay and have dinner in the bar, where we shared a plate of crispy calamari, as well as a delicious dish of "hand rolled" fettuccine and shrimp alfredo. Both dishes were superb! The bar closed early at 9 pm, so we headed back to our rooms for the night, and I sat on my balcony

watching a spectacular rising of the full moon. The next morning we drove to the

State Park Visitor Center and watched a fantastic film about Anza Borrego Desert

State Park titled "A Year in the Desert", which followed the park animals and plants through all four seasons. Before heading for San Diego, we visited one of Ricardo Breceda's most spectacular metal sculptures in the desert that he called "The Dragon". From Borrego Springs we drove up the mountains to the small mining town of Julian, where we stopped for lunch at a little BBQ place on the main street. From Julian, we drove south through Cuyamaca State Park and the San Diego Mountains on a very scenic, but twisting road to meet up with Interstate 8 and the final leg to downtown San Diego. Upon arriving in San Diego, I checked into a nice room on the 10th floor of the Westin Hotel, before

walking over to the convention center to register for the conference and pick up my badge. A young Esri employee checked my ID, handed me the badge, and then asked "Is this your first time to the user conference?". I hated to have to tell him that I had been to every user conference since 1983, and in fact, managed it for more than 25 years! (as it turned out, this



San Diego Convention Center

was his "first" user conference and he was very excited) As I walked through the convention center, I met several old friends and colleagues, then I headed to the "Top of the Market" restaurant, one of my favorites in San Diego, for dinner. I love sitting at the bar and watching the chefs preparing and cooking the food, each chef being in charge of a particular "station", such as the grill, seafood, or salads. My server recommended the Oregon Dungeness Crab cioppino, an incredible combination of mussels, clams, scallops, prawns, cod, and half of a Dungeness Crab, all in a savory tomato sauce served over linguine and topped with fresh grated parmesan cheese! The chilled glass of New



Warner Springs Ranch Bar and Grill



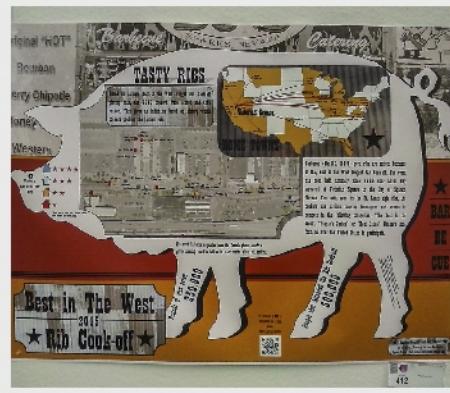
"The Dragon" by Ricardo Breceda

Zealand Sauvignon Blanc went exceptionally well with the cioppino. While the chef prepared the dish in front of me, he also served me a small appetizer of risotto with steamed bamboo shoots and chorizo in a marinara sauce, along with hot, crusty French bread and herbed butter. As always, it was superb food and excellent service!

The next day I attended the plenary session, which was one of the best I've seen, and also the most well attended, with more than 15,000 people in the huge hall. The morning presentations were primarily focused on new GIS technology and the President's award, given to UPS for the most successful implementation of GIS in business, followed by a short video showing how the entire operation of UPS was changed because of it, from top management all the way to the delivery drivers – very impressive! In the afternoon there were some more very interesting presentations, including a group of kids from a high school in Tennessee who had conducted an obesity analysis study of their own design, and a keynote address by a well respected theoretical physicist on his theory about biological laws resembling social and cultural trends. But perhaps the most

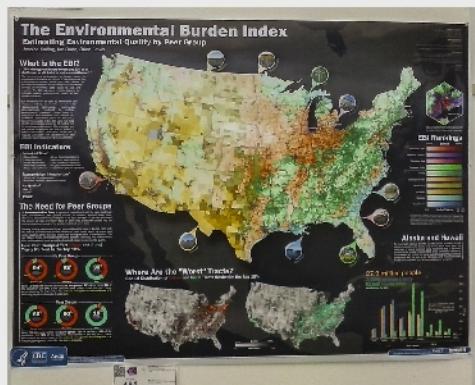


Plenary Session - Esri User Conference



Map Gallery - Esri User Conference

fascinating and unusual presentation came from one of the lead animation artists at Disney who showed how GIS technology was used to design and "build" the virtual world for the movie "Zootopia"! At the conclusion of his talk, he showed a short video clip from the film showing one of the characters, a very cute "bunny rabbit" riding a train through the four different worlds that formed the imaginary city of Zootopia, and along the journey the rabbit encountered many of the animals that called Zootopia



Map Gallery - Esri User Conference

home. It was a mind blowing experience to watch! Following the conclusion of the plenary session, everyone headed for the Map Gallery Opening Reception upstairs in the Sail Area, where hundreds of maps produced by GIS users were on display. It is one of the most popular events during the conference. I spent some time making my way through the large crowd to see the special displays from Abu Dhabi and National Geographic Society, and along the way I ran into many old friends and colleagues – a primary reason why I always like to attend the user conference each year. Later in the evening I walked over to "Kansas City BBQ" for a delicious pulled pork sandwich and a cold beer. While I sat at the bar, I made a point of looking at the multitude of signs and posters that plastered every available bit of wall space. Among the most interesting and humorous were the following:

- *"Isn't a smoking section in a restaurant like having a peeing section in a swimming pool?"*
- *"It's called tourist season, so why can't we shoot-em?"*
- *"Tell your boobs to quit staring at me"*
- *"Jesus is coming – look busy"*
- *"Asshole – just another word for a lifestyle"*
- *"If you believe you can tell me what to think, then I believe I can tell you where to go"*

While I was seated at the bar, several people came in to take photos of the old upright piano in the corner, the one Tom Cruise played while courting Kelly McGillis in the film "Top Gun". There's never a lack of "atmosphere" at Kansas City BBQ! As the evening rolled on, I decided to walk up to Patrick's Bar in the Gaslamp Quarter to see if one of my old Esri colleagues, Jack Horton, was there, since this place was almost his second home whenever he was in San Diego. Sure enough, I found him, and as expected he was out on the dance floor as a great blues band played. As we sat at the bar with our beer, he lamented the fact that there were only six women in the bar, and he had danced with all of them at least twice! Then he introduced me to his newest friend, Abel Silvas, who was a member of the local Kumeyaay tribe and a Native American

historical comedian. We had a most interesting and fascinating conversation about his life growing up in the native culture and finding a way to communicate it through comedy and storytelling. The next day I attended some excellent technical sessions on a new Esri software product called "Story Maps", which enables the user to tell stories with maps – fascinating. Later that evening I joined my good friend Lora for dinner at a small, very trendy restaurant in the Hillcrest neighborhood. The restaurant was full of old antiques, including a vintage Singer sewing machine that served as the hostess stand. Our server was a very gay, older man who loved waiting on people and helping them decide what to order. He suggested we start with a house special, baked artichoke hearts in creamy garlic and tarragon sauce, and it was delicious. Then I ordered the shrimp, bacon and arugula flatbread, which was outstanding. Meanwhile, Lora told me all about her plans to travel to the Yukon Territory in late December to view the Northern Lights, her first journey that far north. (She'll need to buy some serious cold weather gear for the trip) The following morning I checked out of the hotel and drove home to prepare for five photo shoots scheduled for the remainder of the week.

Near the end of July, I drove to Scottsdale, Arizona to attend the PCMA Chapter Board of Directors mid-year retreat. Rather than take the Interstate, I chose to go with the scenic and less travelled "blue highways" through the Mojave Desert and eastern Arizona. As I drove east from 29 Palms on highway 62 toward Parker, AZ on the Colorado River, I passed a sign on the edge of town, "next services 100 miles"! (the Chevron station nearby does a pretty good business!) I encountered practically no traffic until I got to the junction with US 95, where there was a solid line of vehicles, mostly trucks and RVs, pulling boats, and headed south, probably returning from a weekend of boating on the river. Thankfully, I was headed north, but there were a few times where there were near misses with the oncoming traffic, as some cars tried to overtake the heavy traffic and were barely able to pull into their lane in time! After crossing over the Colorado River in Parker, the drive on US 60 was a perfectly straight road for more than 50 miles, which was very pleasant with almost no traffic. As I continued east on the highway, I could see huge thunderstorms rising over the mountains to the north and east, the result of a strong flow of monsoonal moisture from Mexico. As I drove out of the small town of Hope, AZ there was a sign that

read "You are now beyond Hope"! Finally, in the late afternoon, I arrived at the Westin Kierland Resort in Scottsdale and checked into a lovely deluxe king room overlooking the golf course, lake, and mountains – complimentary, courtesy of Kevin, our board member with Starwood Corporation. (virtually the entire two days of lodging, food, and drink were complimentary as well – thanks Kevin!) I went down to the lobby bar and met up with Bob, our board president, and when I asked what local beers were on tap, the bartender recommended "Mudshark Desert Magic IPA", brewed in Lake Havasu City, AZ. It was a great copper colored beer with a nice hoppy taste and clean, crisp finish. (I always make a point of trying the local craft brew) That evening we all walked over to Tommy Bahamas for dinner, which began with a huge selection of appetizers that included jerked chicken wings, coconut shrimp, ahi tuna poke, among others. The main dish of coconut crusted crab cakes with Thai chili sauce, served with Asian slaw, was fabulous, followed by a large selection of decadent desserts. Meanwhile, as we savored the amazing dinner, dark storm clouds loomed over the area, and it wasn't long before



Thunderstorms in Arizona



View from Westin Kierland Resort - Scottsdale

we heard the sound of thunder and saw flashes of lightning. But the storms had passed by the time we left the restaurant and the walk back to the hotel was very pleasant in the cool air. I decided to stop at a place called "Mastro's Ocean Club Restaurant" for a local beer at the bar. The bartender suggested I try the "Hop Knot IPA" from a brewery in Tempe, and it was very nice, with an almost grassy taste of the hops – seven different varieties. Our board meeting began the next morning with a wonderful breakfast buffet served in our meeting room, and the egg, cheese, bacon grilled sandwiches were delicious. We listened to a fascinating and emotional presentation

about leadership by the CEO of "Make-a-Wish Foundation", which is headquartered in Phoenix. He told us that one of the questions he always asked a candidate during a job interview was "What melts your butter"! (and we all seemed to have the same response – how would we answer the question?) As the meeting progressed, a light rain continued to fall outside, which was highly unusual for the middle of summer in the desert. Then came the lunch buffet with an incredible cranberry chicken salad sandwich with green tea mousse on the side. More long discussions in the afternoon, together with a short break and "another" serving of food. After discussing a few more topics, we all headed to the Chapter Reception where local PCMA members were invited to meet the members of the board. Once again, the hotel provided a large selection of appetizers and complimentary drinks, which enabled a mingling of people and several interesting conversations. Soon it was time for us to make our way to the "Deseo Restaurant" for our board dinner, the restaurant being well known for distinctive and imaginative Latin-influenced cuisine. It was also known for the display of work throughout the restaurant from renowned Cuban artist, Nelson Garcia-Miranda. So dinner was sure to be a delight for the palate as well as the eye. Dinner started with a huge array of fabulous appetizers and a great Malbec wine from Argentina. My order of Halibut filet in a savory tomato sauce was succulent and delicious. During dinner, I had a fascinating conversation with Kevin about how I ended up in California and all the stories along the way, including my time in the Army and my overland trip across Africa. I also enjoyed hearing about Kevin's life growing up in Ireland, a country where many of my ancestors originated. The lively conversations at dinner carried over to another round of drinks in the Waltz and Weiser Saloon next door. Before calling it a night, I walked over to Mastro's for a drink, and as soon as I sat at the bar, the bartender recognized me and without asking, poured me a "Hop Knot IPA" – great service. The next morning saw another wonderful breakfast buffet before our discussions of the 2018 strategic plan began. During the mid-morning break, some of us walked outside on the terrace and watched the golfers doing their best to impress us I think. Then we noticed a large Happy Birthday balloon, that apparently had "escaped", was slowly drifting across the surface of the lake, then up to the green on the other side, aided by a gentle breeze. It was as if an invisible child was carrying it. All too soon, it was back to the meeting and some great discussion about the chapter goals for 2018, before lunch arrived, again with far too much great food. There was a wonderful Greek salad with huge chunks of Feta cheese, grilled chicken breast, thin sliced flat iron steak topped with roasted red bell peppers, a quinoa salad, and for dessert, a fresh raspberry cream mousse! The hotel did an outstanding job of feeding us throughout the two days, and really made a lasting impression upon all of us. Our meeting closed after lunch and soon I was on my way home, as the hot and humid monsoon weather had returned to Arizona. It had been a very successful and enjoyable time in Scottsdale, and I look forward to returning to the Westin Kierland Resort again someday.

Now for a few more of those other little moments to remember.

- As seen on the "ChiveTV channel" – The Royal Falconer Pub, Redlands, CA
- Jumpers in "wing suits" leaping off the top of a 10,000 foot mountain and "sailing" through the "Eye of the Needle" rock formation barely 10 feet wide at 50mph – insane!
- Sign on the back of an Empire Ice Company truck – Beaumont, CA
"I only have ICE for you"
- At the bar in Famous Dave's BBQ – Redlands, CA
A young father sitting with his young son and daughter, having them taste each of the six sauces at their table. The father chokes on the hottest sauce, but his son doesn't. That was one for the son!
- Taylor's Bar – Redlands, CA
Conversation overheard at the bar: "Google knows everything – Google is GOD"



Sunset in Scottsdale

- The Sand Trap Bar and Grill – Beaumont, CA
 - The sign on the table: “Happy Hour Specials – Budweiser Pints \$3.00, Bud Light Pints \$4.25, 6 Buds or Bud Lights in aluminum cans for \$15.00
 - The question is, which would you choose?
- Screamin Chicken Saloon – Devore, CA
 - Two very overweight (obese) young ladies tried to play on the teeter-totter outside, but they both couldn’t get on it at the same time, due their weight. After several unsuccessful attempts, I suggested that they both get on the seesaw at the middle of it and then slowly slide out to the end of the board. It worked, but they thought they had just accomplished a tough workout! It was hilarious and should have been a video on YouTube. In the end we all had a good laugh!
- Watching the National Dog Show on TV – Eureka Burger Bar, Redlands
 - The top dog in the show was a “Nova Scotia Duck Trolling Retriever” (whatever that is?)
 - As I watched the show, I never realized there were so many ugly dog breeds before, which doesn’t say much for their owners either!
- Winchester Inn and Saloon – Winchester, CA
 - Locals seated around the bar talking football and the “dangers” of drinking before going to work. It was noon on a Monday, and it was pretty obvious that none of them were planning on going to work!
- Escape Craft Brewery – Redlands
 - A young father, rather rough looking dude with lots of tatoos, walked in with his young daughter and son. The kids sat down at a table with their “Happy Meals” from McDonald’s while Dad ordered a beer. As I was standing behind him, I asked him where his Happy Meal was, and he raised his beer and said this is mine! As I watched them, he interacted with his children constantly, encouraging them to play the games around them, though they obviously had a lot to learn about some of the games. But they were having a lot of fun, as was he – so nice to see!
- Real estate photo shoot – Lake Arrowhead, CA
 - The property was difficult to find amongst the mountains, but it was a beautiful location overlooking a golf course and surrounded by tall Ponderosa Pine trees.
 - The house had four levels on the side of the mountain and six bathrooms, two of which had urinals – very unusual in a private residence.
 - Each level had a large deck, all of which were in very poor condition that bordered on dangerous.
 - In one of the rooms on the lowest level I found an enormous metal safe. How the previous owners managed to get it into the house is beyond me, and perhaps it was still there because it was impossible to move?
 - Scores of broken windows, doors nailed shut, and sliding glass doors missing
 - Master bedroom had a huge master bathroom with a sauna behind a large jacuzzi tub, but the only way to access the sauna was to “climb” over the tub! And even more strange was that one wall of the sauna was all glass and overlooked the front door and foyer – very weird!



Big Bear Lake

In mid-August, I had a photo assignment in Big Bear Lake, a small community high up in the San Bernardino Mountains. The task was to photograph three properties, one was a small B&B, and the other two were vacation estates. In exchange for the photos, I was given two complimentary nights at one of the vacation rentals, the “Whispering Pines Estate”. As I drove up highway 38 Sunday morning, I had no idea of what to expect from Whispering Pines, but I was certainly looking forward to escaping the 100+ degree heat in Redlands for the 70 degree weather in the mountains! (Big Bear Lake is almost 8,000 feet in

elevation) Having arrived early in the afternoon, I looked for a place to have a beer before checking in to Whispering Pines Estate. The Black Diamond Tavern was closed, as was Captain's Anchorage. However, the "Mountain Bar and Grill" next door was open. Apparently, it had been a Mexican restaurant in the past, and as I sat down at the bar, it became pretty clear from the conversation that everyone else was a local. I saw at least a dozen craft beer taps, so I ordered one of my favorites, Goose Island IPA, but the bartender said it was out, as were all the taps, except for Bud Light and Stella Artois – so my choice was obvious! As I sat with my glass of Stella, I couldn't help but overhear the local gossip about a guy who owned a bar in town and had recently been shut down by the state for not paying taxes. However, he apparently continued to serve alcohol, in violation of his license that had been revoked! Of more concern among the locals, he had never told his staff. Then around 3pm, a lot of the people began leaving the bar, prompting the bartender to "speculate" that there must be a new blonde barmaid in town, but who knows. However, it prompted the bartender to suddenly turn to Open sign to



Whispering Pines Estate

Closed! He also seemed anxious to leave work, and by that time, I was ready to leave as well. But then he offered me the one and only bottle of Pacifico beer that was in the cooler, being the closest thing that he had to a "craft beer"! It was a nice effort on his part anyway. I stopped at the grocery store to buy a few provisions and then headed to Whispering Pines Estate. When I got there, the front door was unlocked, and as I walked in, I found one of the most beautiful properties I had ever seen! And the entire place would be mine for the next two days. A few minutes later, the owners, Laurie and Spencer, came by to welcome

me and show me around the

huge house. Laurie told me she had done all the decorating in the house, and as I looked around, there were lots of old antiques and timeless pieces of memorabilia, such as an old bubble gum machine, a circus popcorn machine, and old children's sled, old farm implements, and many, many more fascinating objects throughout the house! That evening I had pizza for dinner and sat outside on the deck, overlooking the huge backyard, surrounded by tall pine trees. The soothing sound of a small waterfall and the soft rush of the wind were the only sounds I heard as the sun slowly set.



The "Great Room" - Whispering Pines Estate



Breakfast at Apples B&B

The following morning, Laurie invited me to join a small group of guests for breakfast at "Apple's Inn", her B&B nearby. Three ladies from San Diego and I enjoyed a fantastic breakfast that included a scrumptious quiche, Applewood smoked honey crusted bacon, yogurt with homemade granola, sliced melon with fresh blueberries, and warm, fresh muffins! After breakfast, Laurie asked if I would take a few photos of the B&B before I returned to Whispering Pines. There I spent several hours taking photos of the estate, especially the gorgeous interior – beautiful wood and natural stone everywhere, much like a grand old National Park Lodge. (I think the photos

describe the beauty of the estate much better than any words I could put to paper) Later in the afternoon, Spencer suggested that I visit the Big Bear Alpine Zoo, about 10 minutes up the road, at the base of Big Bear Mountain Ski Area. What I found was a very unique zoo that specialized in caring for wounded wild animals and those that couldn't be returned to the wild because they had become accustomed to being around humans. However, the zoo was able to release almost 80% of the animals back into the wild. As I explored the zoo, I found out it was only one of two in the country that exclusively housed animals from alpine regions of the world, including most of the species native to the mountains of Southern California. (black bears, a grizzly



Alpine Zoo - Big Bear Lake

family, bobcats, mountain lions, bald eagles, timber wolves, coyotes, and even a snow leopard from Nepal) Returning from the zoo, I stopped at "Captain's Anchorage Restaurant and Bar" for a drink in the "Andy Devine Room". When I asked the barmaid about the name, she told me that the actor Andy Devine, who was a sidekick of legendary cowboy movie star Roy Rogers, built the bar in the late 1940's. (some little known history that many people are unaware of) Later that evening, Laurie and Spencer invited me to join them for dinner at their favorite restaurant in town, a place called "The Pines", located on the lakefront. As we sat down at our table, we had a gorgeous view of the sunset reflected upon the lake. We all started with a bowl of the restaurant's signature dish, French onion soup, and it did not disappoint us. Then I ordered Maryland crab cakes, served with a delicious corn salsa. Spencer recommended that we share a bottle of Jacob's Creek Merlot from Australia, and it paired exceedingly well with dinner. During the evening we had a fascinating conversation about our travels around the world, and they told me they had recently returned from a guided trip in Rwanda for a closeup encounter with the mountain gorillas. Spencer had taken many photos of their amazing experience and shared them with me in two beautiful photo books! By this time, after hearing about the publishing company they owned, their house on the beach in San Clemente, in addition to the B&B and vacation estates in Big Bear Lake, I was pretty certain they were multi-millionaires. And they were also really genuine, humble, and unpretentious – very nice folks. We had a great time, sharing dinner and stories, and afterwards, they invited me to join them again anytime! Back at Whispering Pines, I sat outside on the deck with a glass of wine and listened to the soft sounds of the waterfall. The night was clear and a bit chilly under the stars – very relaxing.

The next morning I was up early to get some sunrise photos of the estate before breakfast. Then I accompanied Spencer down the road to their other vacation rental property, "Country Barn Estate" to take some more photos for Laurie. It was a



Waterfall in the back yard - Whispering Pines Estate



Country Barn Estate

beautiful old farmhouse they had remodeled, keeping the old farmhouse theme in a very authentic way. The old stable had been turned into a large open space for weddings, parties, and dances, while the attic space in the garage next door had been converted into a lovely, open space with bedroom/living room/kitchen and dining room. The walls were adorned with all manner of old farm tools and heritage photos of the property from the early 1900's. In addition to the original buildings, they had built a beautiful new duplex in the same vintage style as the rest of the farm. There was a

three bedroom unit downstairs and a two bedroom unit upstairs, both with lots of gorgeous wood and natural stone. Laurie had designed and decorated each of them with a very personal touch. As I took photos of the various spaces, I was very impressed with the amount of fine detail that Laurie and Spencer had put into their work. Sadly, the time came for me to return home, and to "check out" of Whispering Pines, all I had to do was turn off all the lights, leave the keys on the kitchen counter, and close the front door!



Country Barn Estate

In early September, on my birthday to be exact, I planned an overnight trip to the Temecula Valley wine country to celebrate. Along the way, I stopped at the French Valley Airport to visit the "Wings & Rotors Air Museum", a small but interesting collection of vintage helicopters and fixed wing aircraft. As I entered the small hanger, I saw a "Huey" sitting in the middle of the bay, and it still had the original machine gun mounts for the door gunner. While I was looking around the helicopter, a lady approached me and began telling me about its background. It had flown many missions during the Vietnam war and was still flying today in air shows around the country. Apparently, a few months before, a man came to



Vietnam era "Huey" - French Valley Airport

visit the museum and told her he had flown this particular helicopter in Vietnam, and showed her some places on the aircraft where it had been hit by gun fire. Then she invited me to tour their large "restoration" shop in another hanger nearby. There was a small crew rebuilding a WWII B26 "Marauder" bomber that had crashed in the Aleutian Islands in 1944, and was just discovered two years ago. It is only one of seven left in the world, so it's very special. Having sustained some significant damage to the engines and fuselage, the crew was busy "fabricating" new parts using the damaged ones as models. They hope to have it flying again in about five years. Also being restored in the shop was an F-4 Phantom fighter jet that had flown its maiden flight for President John F Kennedy. The whole time I spent at the museum was really fascinating, and as I was leaving the airport, she told me that many well-known entertainers and celebrities arrive at the airport in their private jets, on their way to the Pechanga Casino in Temecula. (the most recent arrivals being Donny and Marie Osmond)



B26 "Marauder" - French Valley Airport



Bungalow - Carter Estates Winery Resort

I arrived at the Carter Estates Winery Resort later in the afternoon, and checked in to a lovely bungalow overlooking the vineyards and mountains. It was located in the far corner of the property - very quiet and peaceful. There was a huge walk-in shower and spa built from native limestone of the region, as well as a private covered patio surrounded by rose bushes and trees. Then I walked over to the tasting room, where I sat at the bar and tasted three of their wines (2012 Syrah, 2012 Merlot, and 2010 Merlot) The 2010 Merlot was exceptional, one of the best wines I've ever tasted, so I decided to buy a bottle for later in the evening on the patio. As I sipped the wine at the bar, I perused the menu from the "Vineyard Grill" and a lobster empanada appetizer caught my eye. When I went over the restaurant, I found it was a covered patio by the pool, and the empanada was served with a delicious corn and tomato salsa, along with an avocado puree – superb! The view from the covered patio was gorgeous, with the San Jacinto Mountains in the distance. I discovered that the Carter Estate was also owned by the same family that owned South Coast



Tasting Room - Carter Estates Winery



View from my patio - Carter Estates Winery

minutes later, one of them came trotting past me in the vineyard! I arose early the next morning to photograph the sunrise as the hot-air balloons were beginning to lift off. As the sun slowly rose over the mountains and vineyards, they were beautifully illuminated, while the full moon was still just above the western horizon. I took many photos as the balloons slowly gained altitude and floated over the spectacular landscape. Later, I showered

Winery Resort, so I walked over there, through a large open field as the sun was setting. Dinner in the Vineyard Rose Restaurant was absolutely fabulous - Italian sausage pappardelle pasta with sun dried tomato sauce, topped with fresh grated parmesan. The glass of the Wild Horse Peak Merlot paired very well with the pasta, and the service was exceptional. I finished the evening back on my patio with another glass of the 2010 Merlot as the full moon illuminated the vineyards with a soft light. Suddenly, in the distance, a group of coyotes began howling at the moon, and a few



Hot-air Balloons at sunrise - Carter Estates Winery

and headed to the Vineyard Grill for breakfast, a delicious omelet with chorizo sausage, bell peppers, and cheese, along with a mountain of home fried potatoes. With the beautiful views of the vineyards and mountains, it was a very relaxing way to start the day, and the next year of my life!

A week later I drove to Santa Clarita to attend the Professional Photographers of California annual conference. Rather than take the freeways, I stuck to the less travelled state highways through the "high desert" on the northern side of the San Gabriel Mountains. As I neared Santa Clarita, I discovered a very unusual and unique geological site – Vasquez Rocks Natural Area Park. It was located in the heart of the Sierra Pelona Mountains in northern LA County. The distinctive "hogback" ridges of steeply inclined rocks graphically demonstrated the significant fault activity in the area. The dramatic scenery has been the background for many Hollywood films and TV programs since 1935, including episodes of "The Outer Limits", "Bonanza", "The Wild West", and "Star Trek". In addition, many advertising commercials have been shot there for Taco Bell, Bank of America, Nike, and Pepsi! But beyond the filming of the formations, they are a spectacular natural feature that most anyone driving on the I-5 never takes the time to visit – unfortunate! When I arrived in Santa Clarita, I checked in to the Embassy Suites Hotel, the headquarters for the conference, just a stone's throw from "Six Flags Magic Mountain". Later in the afternoon, I attended a great class about the subject of "compositing" several different images into one "composition" using Photoshop. After the class, I joined the hotel's nightly "Manager's Reception" before heading out to dinner. One of the hotel staff highly recommended the "Wolf Creek Brewery and Restaurant" in nearby Valencia. The place was very popular, but I was able to find one open seat, and quickly ordered one of their IPA's. My server suggested the Chef's favorite, "Country French Chicken" – sautéed chicken breasts in a tomato and brie sauce, served with garlic mashed potatoes and steamed broccoli – superb! After dinner, I returned to the hotel and walked over to the Marriott Courtyard next door for a beer in the Bistro – a quiet place to sit and write in my journal.

The next day, after a great complimentary cooked-to-order breakfast in the hotel, I attended several very good sessions, including a fascinating presentation about African photographic safaris by the owner of a South African tour company. He showed us some of the most incredible images of wildlife I've ever seen. After the presentation, I spent some time talking with him about my trip many years ago travelling overland across Africa and the many visits I have made to South Africa since then. We exchanged business cards and hoped to keep in touch. Later that evening, I watched the USC vs Texas college football game at the Bistro. The game was tied when USC scored a field goal, with only 45 seconds remaining. Then it went into two overtimes before USC finally won with another field goal! (I sent a text of congratulations to Andy, a USC alumnus)

The next day, after a great session on Adobe Lightroom, I joined the Sunday traffic on I-5 for a real estate photo shoot I had scheduled in Mission Viejo, 140 miles south. Earlier I had attempted to check the LA traffic report, but the website kept



Photo Shoot in Mission Viejo

confusing Santa Clarita with Santa Clara, showing me the traffic conditions in the San Francisco bay area instead! Finally, I was able to see the LA traffic report, and it didn't look good. The I-5 and I-405 freeways were closed in downtown LA, so I had to look for alternative routes around it. (as it turned out later, the closure was due to a "standoff" between an armed motorist and the Highway Patrol - the man was eventually shot dead!) Consequently, my alternative route was via the I-5/I-210/CA 57/CA 71/CA 91/CA 241 – a total of 140 miles and 90 minutes, for a 30 minute photo shoot! I finally got home at 8pm!

At the end of September, I made my annual journey to Alaska to visit Marion and Michael, as well as to reconnect with my love for "The Great Land". I took the train to LA Union Station and then the express bus to LAX, where there was the usual heavy traffic. But I still had some time to enjoy the pleasures of the new Alaska Airlines Lounge, where I had cheese and crackers, along with an "Icy Bay IPA" from the Alaska Brewing Company. It was a very nice flight to Seattle, and the lunch



Vasquez Rocks Natural Area - Santa Clarita

served onboard was delicious – Ancho chili braised beef tips served with a black bean, corn and jicama salad, along with a fabulous oatmeal, raisin, and cinnamon cookie for dessert! Most of the Pacific Northwest was socked in a heavy cloud cover, but surprisingly, the Seattle area bathed in brilliant sunshine and the summit of Mt Rainier was just poking its head above the clouds. I found a new Alaska Airlines Lounge in the North Terminal and enjoyed a bowl of clam chowder before boarding was called for the flight to Fairbanks. As the plane climbed above Puget Sound, there were views of Vancouver Island and the San Juan Islands. The flight to Fairbanks was smooth, and beyond the lights of Vancouver, there were only small, isolated settlements visible along the remote British Columbia coast. As we flew northwest toward Juneau, I could see a large cruise ship making its way along the Inside Passage. After dinner was served, I watched the new film “Alien: The Covenant” on the complimentary personal tablet, and it was a fascinating, scary sequel in the Alien series. Something new on Alaska Airlines was complimentary “chat” messaging during the flight, which was quite useful. I arrived in Fairbanks late in the evening and picked up the rental car, which happened to be a Minivan, the only vehicle they had available. As I stepped outside, the air was much colder than when I left California, and there had been a light dusting of snow the day before. I drove to the Wedgewood Resort, located near a lake, not far from downtown, and checked into a large suite in the McKinley Lodge.



Wedgewood Wildlife Sanctuary - Fairbanks

which were now a visitor center for the refuge. Creamer's Dairy was initially established at the turn of the century, following the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-99. It was one of the first dairies in Alaska and operated until 1970, when it was closed down and the land donated to the state for the designation as a wildlife refuge. The old dairy barns were still in good shape and several pieces of old farm equipment were on display. Later in the afternoon I paid a visit to “Pioneer Park”, formerly “AlaskaLand”, where

The next morning was quite chilly and overcast as I hiked around Wander Lake to the Wedgewood Wildlife Sanctuary, a 500 acre parcel of land owned by the resort. Though most of the trees were past their prime, the golden and orange leaves were still beautiful. Early in the afternoon, I hiked to the nearby “Creamer's Field Wildlife Refuge”, an old dairy farm that had been donated to the state for the preservation of habitat for migratory birds. I walked through the hay fields and pasture to the old farmhouse and dairy barns,



Creamer's Dairy Barns

many old buildings from around the state had been moved to form an exhibit of what life was like in Alaska decades ago. Also on display was a lot of old mining equipment and the historic steam-powered sternwheel riverboat “Nenana” that had operated on the Yukon and Chena Rivers until the 1950's. There were very few people in the park, as all the attractions and shops were closed for the season. But it was fascinating to walk around and see all the old stuff and imagine what life was like a hundred years ago. By now the sun was setting,

so I drove over to the historic “Chena Pump House Restaurant and Saloon” on the banks of the Chena River for dinner. The restaurant and saloon were filled with old photographs of the pump house in operation when it supplied water from the river to power high pressure hoses that scoured the hills in search of gold. I sat at the



“Nenana” - Fairbanks



Old Steam Shovel - Fairbanks



Downtown Seattle



Chena Pump House Restaurant & Saloon - Fairbanks

bar and ordered a plate of tempura-fried halibut and chips, along with a cold glass of Twisted Creek IPA from the Denali Brewery in Talkeetna. Dinner was delicious and the views of the river at sunset were outstanding. Since I had a ticket for the train early the next morning, I decided to return the Minivan in the evening and take the resort shuttle to train depot in the morning. As I stopped at a Holiday gas station and filled the tank, an Alaskan State Trooper was in the process of writing a ticket for an old pickup truck at the pump next to me! Back at the resort, I watched the latest episode of "Halloween Baking Championship", and there were some pretty "gruesome" looking creations!



Alaska Railroad train to Anchorage

I was up early the next morning to catch the train to Anchorage, and when I got to the depot, I saw it was a very long train of 15 coaches and four locomotives. However, all the passengers occupied just two of the coaches. It turned out that the rest of the coaches were used only on the summer schedule and would be taken back to Anchorage for maintenance and storage. As boarding was called, I noticed a large Chinese tourist group trying to figure out which coach was car A vs car B. Eventually they all found their seats in car B. As the train departed the Fairbanks depot, we had a great commentary by the conductor about some of the sights along the route. All of the train crew were very friendly and went out of

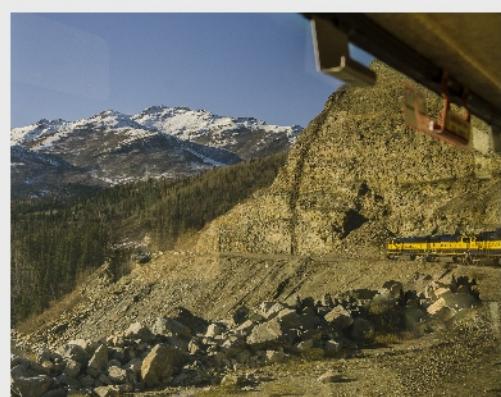
their way to answer the numerous questions posed by the passengers. Whereas Friday had been very cloudy in Fairbanks, Saturday morning dawned perfectly clear, but well below freezing. Shortly after departure, I went to the dining car for breakfast and ordered scrambled eggs, potatoes, toast, and Reindeer sausage – a specialty of the railroad. For the next three hours the route took us through huge expanses of thick boreal forest, over low hills, and always within sight of the Chena River. When we approached the town of Nenana, the train crossed over the Tanana River on the world's longest single span bridge and headed south up the Nenana River toward Denali National Park. Several miles later the train entered the spectacular Healy Canyon and the conductor pointed out a small herd of Dall Sheep high up on the steep, rocky cliffs on the other side, above the raging waters of the river. Later we arrived at Denali Park Station and the Chinese tour group departed to board buses for a tour of the park. As we left the station we got our first real view of Mt McKinley shining



Sunset on the Chena River - Fairbanks



Crossing the Tanana River - Nenana



Healy Canyon - Denali National Park

under perfectly clear skies, a view that less than 25% of visitors to the park get to see, since the mountain is most often covered in thick clouds. So this day was an exceptional one, even for the train crew. As lunchtime rolled around, I had a scrumptious bowl of Salmon chowder in the dining car, along with an Alaskan Pale Ale, as the incredible views of the mountain continued to roll past. After lunch, I went to one of the cars that had an open deck where I could take photos without having to shoot through a glass window, which is always a problem with reflections. Standing in the open air was very chilly and much of the ground was covered with light snow from a recent storm. The locomotive engineers were really great, as they always slowed down and even stopped a couple of times at



Mt McKinley from the bridge over Hurricane Gulch

points along the route were there were amazing photo opportunities. One place, in particular, was on the high bridge crossing Hurricane Gulch where virtually everyone was able to get a great photo. Often they kept a keen eye out for wildlife and would radio the conductor, who then made a PA announcement to passengers. One of the most spectacular views of Mt McKinley was just south of Talkeetna, looking north up the Big Susitna River, a view that is only possible from the train. As the train headed further south toward Anchorage, the skies became overcast and I headed to the Dining Car for dinner. The recommendation of all the crew was the chef's signature dish, pot roast. It

turned out to be fabulous, so tender that a fork was all one needed, and the garlic mashed potatoes with steamed broccoli went very well with the dish. Coming into the Matanuska Valley, one could see a lot of fresh snow on the peaks of the Chugach Range, a sure sign of



View of Mt McKinley from Talkeetna

approaching winter. The train pulled into the Anchorage Depot just 3 minutes late – truly amazing after a journey of more than

11 hours! I took a taxi to the Coast International Inn near the airport on the shore of Lake Hood, and after checking in, I headed to Piper's Restaurant and Lounge in the hotel for a cold pint of Twisted Creek IPA. It was a quiet evening in the bar as I wrote notes of the train journey in my journal.

The next morning, I rode the hotel shuttle to the airport to pick up the rental car, and once again they did not have a compact car as I had reserved. In fact they didn't have any cars available, so they gave me a big, black 4WD Nissan truck! (the rest of the day, driving around town, I felt right at home with all the Alaskans on the road) Then I went in search of a shop that might be able to repair my Nikon lens that had become loose and was missing three very small screws. A couple people recommended a small shop called "Camera Service" and the owner was able to find some screws of the right size to fit the lens. As he was at work repairing my lens, he had the radio on and as I listened to the broadcast, the horrible details of the tragic mass shooting in Las Vegas became apparent! (such a tragic and needless loss of life once again) In the afternoon, I drove down to Potter's Marsh on the edge of town and took photos of a flock of 15 – 20 Trumpeter Swans that were resting during their flight south for the winter. That evening I joined Marion, Michael, and Ben for dinner at the "Suite 100 Restaurant". I arrived early, so I sat at the bar with a glass of Alaskan Pale Ale and wrote more notes in my journal. Meanwhile, a woman next to me ordered a

"Kobe burger", medium rare, no bread, no onions, no lettuce, no



Fall foliage - Potter's Marsh

tomatoes, no pickles – probably should have just ordered the burger "naked"! Dinner started with Ben recommending that we have the Asian Tacos, which were sweet and spicy, followed by a plate of huge Portobello mushrooms stuffed with Romano cheese and topped with crusty, seasoned bread crumbs – delicious! Throughout dinner, Ben and I had a great conversation about the year he spent in



View of the Alaska Range from the dining car



Trumpeter Swans at Potter's Marsh - Anchorage

Germany as a Rhodes Scholar, as well as his continuing goal of becoming a firefighter! And as for his twin brother Sam, who got out of the Army last year to be with his new girlfriend that he met while in boot camp, he's planning to re-enlist again, but only if he's accepted into the Special Forces. The whole evening was a delight, especially to catch up on our lives over the past year. I made it an early night so as to be up in time for my 7:00am flight in the morning.

The garbage trucks arrived at 5:00am, so there was no need for the wakeup call I had scheduled the night before! There was plenty of time for coffee in the Alaska Airlines Lounge before boarding the flight to Seattle. A delicious breakfast of broccoli quiche, spicy chicken sausage, and fresh fruit was served shortly after takeoff. As the plane climbed over the massive Chugach Range, there were incredible views of endless snow-capped peaks and enormous glaciers. Later, as we flew over the Wrangell-St Elias Range, we had beautiful views of several huge tidewater glaciers, a couple of which were larger than the state of Rhode Island! As we approached Seattle, there were great views of Puget Sound, the San Juan Islands, downtown Seattle, and Mt Rainier. After an hour in the Alaska Airlines Lounge, I boarded the flight to LA, and during takeoff we had a spectacular view of snow covered Mt St Helens when the pilot flew directly over the mountain. Later, as the cloud cover returned to the Pacific Northwest, I watched the film titled "Going in Style", about three old men who suddenly became broke when their employer went bankrupt and they lost their retirement pensions. So their solution was to rob the bank where their employer had the pension accounts. In order to prepare for the robbery, they enlisted the aid of a small time crook to "teach" them the nuances of bank robbery – it was hilarious! Finally, we landed at LAX and the rush hour traffic was absolutely horrible, which meant that I missed the 6:25pm train. So I had a beer in the TRAXX bar at Union Station and caught the 7:30pm train instead. Despite the hassles with traffic at the end of the trip, it was another amazing experience in Alaska!



"Inside Passage" - Southeast Alaska



"Seaside Highland Games" - Ventura

A couple of weeks later, I boarded the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train from LA to Ventura for the "Seaside Highland Games". The site of the games was the Ventura County Fairgrounds, about 100 yards from the Ventura train station, which was very convenient. From the station, I walked along the coast to the historic Pierpont Inn, built in 1904 as a beachside playground for the elite of southern California. After WWII, it was enlarged to become a full service hotel, and is now owned by Wyndham Hotels. I checked in to a nice deluxe room with a view of the ocean, and then walked back to the fairgrounds to attend the festival and games.

There were over 40 clans represented in the festival, including the Henderson Clan. As I walked around the fairgrounds I saw a lot of people wearing kilts, including an old cowboy dressed in cowboy boots, cowboy hat, and of course, a kilt. In one

corner of the grounds was a large stage where a Scottish band called "The Angry Brian's" were playing heavy metal Celtic music, along with a woman on bagpipes! Later on they played some more traditional Celtic tunes. The highland games were taking place in an arena at the far end of the fairgrounds, and as I watched the competitors, one of them was wearing a kilt made from an American flag! Then in the late afternoon, I walked along the beach to the Ventura Pier and stopped at the "Beach House Bar & Grill" for a beer, as the sun was setting across the ocean. I ordered a local craft beer from a



Sunset from Ventura Pier



brewery in Santa Barbara, and when I didn't see any Bud Light on tap, I asked the barmaid, and she said they only served California craft beers, which makes it the only bar I've ever been in that did not serve Bud Light, either on tap or in bottles! Soon the sunset was at a peak and I took several photos from the deck outside, as did many other people as well. By then it was dinner time, so I walked back to the hotel and decided to try their restaurant called "Austen's", the name of the hotel founder's son. The bartender highly recommended the grilled pork chop served

with corn puree, and topped with sautéed onion and spinach, together with a caramelized apple Marsala sauce, boiled red potatoes and grilled asparagus. The dish was fantastic, and the cold pint of "Figueroa Mountain Hoppy Poppy IPA" was a perfect pairing! But he insisted that dinner wasn't complete without a serving of "Creole Bourbon Bread Pudding"! (and he was right on)

The next morning, I spent some time walking around a small, artistic neighborhood on the beach before heading to the festival. Two of the huge exhibit halls were filled with dozens of vendors selling everything Celtic, including clan tartans, family crests, Celtic music, and of course kilts. From one corner I heard the lovely sound of a hammered dulcimer, and discovered a young man playing the instrument as a small crowd had gathered. After listening to his music for a while, I bought one of his recordings on a USB drive. (CDs seem to be going out of style) Later in the afternoon, I watched a very interesting presentation and demo about Celtic cooking, where I learned to my surprise, that there are seven



"The Angry Brians"

countries and regions of Celtic heritage. (Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man, Cornwall, Galicia in Spain, and Normandy in France) Unfortunately, the time was passing by and I had a train to catch back home. The Amtrak train made an unusual 15 minute layover in Moorpark because it was ahead of schedule - something unheard of for Amtrak! When I reached LA Union Station I had time to get a bite to eat, so I ordered a "West Coast Crepe" (smoked salmon, herbed cream cheese, fresh spinach) from a new café in the station, and it was delicious! The trip had been short but really a lot of fun, and a chance to absorb myself in a bit of my family heritage once more.

At the end of October, I had a PPC meeting in Orange County on my schedule, but a few days before, it was cancelled. So I made a last minute decision to go somewhere else, rather than deal with the hundreds of kids that invade our neighborhood at Halloween. (it can actually be a lot of fun, but also expensive when one must buy over \$100 worth of candy just to last through the night!) Searching online I discovered a Quality Inn in Barstow that looked very interesting. It had some rather interesting history as one of "the" places to stay in town during the days when Barstow was a major stop on old Route 66. I made it a point to drive from San Bernardino on as much of the old road as possible, and with the exception of about 10 miles over Cajon Pass, I was able to stay on old Route 66! (the road does still exist) When I arrived at the hotel, I found it to be a lovely Spanish style Inn arranged around a beautiful courtyard. My room was very nice and comfortable, though one could argue that it was a bit "dated". However, it did have the latest flat screen TV, a microwave, and a frig. From the hotel, I drove over to the historic Barstow Railroad Station which at the height of rail travel in the



Drum Major competition



Quality Inn - Barstow



Historic Railroad Station - Barstow

1930's had one of the best and largest Harvey House Restaurants in the country. As I was taking photos of the classic old station, enormously long BNSF and Union Pacific freight trains rolled by, some with 5 or 6 locomotives, headed east to Chicago. When I entered the station, I found the new "Goldstone Deep Space Communications Complex Visitor Center" located on the second floor. I spent some time exploring the amazing NASA exhibit about the mission of the complex of giant dish



NASA Visitor Center - Barstow

antennas to maintain communications with scores of satellites and deep space probes, including the Voyager 1 spacecraft that has become the furthest human object from our solar system. Of special interest was a short video about how the Mars Rover was designed to land on the surface of the red planet – an extremely complicated and delicate maneuver that had to be remotely controlled from Earth. Watching the animation of the lander being deployed on the surface of Mars was mind boggling. From Barstow Station, I drove old Route 66 to the small town of Daggett, where little remains of the historic old town, save for two old abandoned buildings. At one time the town was the junction of the Death Valley Railroad and the



BNSF & Union Pacific Freight Trains - Barstow

Union Pacific where tons of Borax ore were transferred for shipment back east. Today, the town is important as the place where tracks of the Union Pacific and the BNSF diverge after crossing the Cajon Pass. The Union Pacific continues on northeast to Las Vegas and Salt Lake City, while BNSF trains head east to Kingman, AZ and Albuquerque, NM. Having exhausted the historical sights of Daggett, I drove north to "Calico Ghost Town", that once was a vibrant gold mining town in the early 1900's. Today it's a thriving tourist sight and has been able to maintain a lot of the original structures, which have been turned into shops, galleries, museums, and restaurants. I

walked through the town

taking photos and then stopped for a cold pint of local "Mojave Gold Lager" from a brewery in nearby Ridgecrest. As I sat on the deck overlooking the old town, a group of young tourists sat at a table nearby, and when I listened to them I could tell they were French Canadians from Quebec, and they were having a ball in the old ghost town! Meanwhile, an old cowboy was trying hard to lure tourists into the "Mystery Shack" attraction down the street. As I left Calico to return to the hotel, I passed by the "Desert Springs Bar & Grill" in the desert on the outskirts of Daggett. It was a very non-descript building from the outside, but I decided to check it out

anyway, despite the lack of many cars parked in front. Inside it was nothing special in terms of décor or atmosphere, but as I sat down at the bar, the barmaid, an older woman dressed up as a cat for Halloween, came up and said, "what'll you have Hon?". Fortunately, there was a good selection of craft beer and I ordered cold glass of Stone IPA. When the glass came, the outside was covered in a thick layer of ice – now that's what I would call a "cold" glass! A few minutes later a couple of old guys came in, both with very long stringy grey hair, almost bald, with long grey beards and sat down at the bar. The barmaid recognized them right away as regulars and served them drinks without the need to order. The broadcast of game 6 of the World Series was just beginning on the one and only TV in the bar, and even though the announcer and the scoreboard showed it was game 6 many times, these two guys argued whether it was game 4 or 5! (no telling where these guys had



Historic Railroad Station - Barstow

been the past several days, but it certainly hadn't been in the real world) When I asked for the check, it came to a total of \$2.50! (unbelievable, and I only wished I could have had time to stay for a few more beers) That evening, as I headed to the restaurant in the hotel, a group of Hispanic construction workers staying in the hotel were having a BBQ on one of the firepits in the courtyard. Their food on the grill smelled great, and I was almost tempted to join them! The bar in "Los Domingos Restaurant" was full of Dodger fans watching game 6 of the World Series against Houston, so I chose a table in the dining room from where I still had a view of the game in the bar. The menu of traditional Mexican dishes was extensive, but I finally decided on a combination of shredded beef enchilada, and chicken tamale in green chili sauce, both of which came with huge portions of re-fried beans, rice and fresh salsa. The meal was excellent, together with a large, cold glass of Dos XX's lager! Soon after dinner I was able to find a seat in the bar to watch the game, but then some idiot decided to play Rap music on the jukebox, and it drowned out the sound of the game! I was about to go in search of another bar in town when the bartender cut off the jukebox, for which everyone watching the game was thankful. Near the end of the game, a large group of middle-aged ladies came into the bar, and one was dressed as "Wonder Woman". However, being very much overweight, it was clear that she was not Wonder Woman's stunt double! In any case, the ladies had a great time celebrating Halloween.

The next morning, I went down to the restaurant, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that a full breakfast was included with my room, so it was a great start to the day. After taking some photos of the hotel and courtyard, including some beautiful Olive trees, I checked out and looked for a gas station. The Union 76 station near the hotel was \$4.16 a gallon, but just three blocks down the street was the Arco station at \$3.05 a gallon – so the choice was pretty obvious! (the following day the gas prices went up 12 cents a gallon due to a new state tax!) I drove east on the "National Old Trails Highway" (Route 66), past Newberry Springs and Ludlow to the

Pisgah Crater, a recent volcanic eruption with a well-defined cinder cone. Today it's the abandoned site of the "Twin Mountain Rock Company – Lavic Quarry" where the remains of the old mill site still exist. As I hiked up the steep slope of the crater I saw some unusual vegetation growing in the stark volcanic landscape. When the mine was in operation many years ago, it produced volcanic pumice for commercial use, and durable railroad ballast for the Santa Fe Railroad. Driving



Dry Lake Bed near Amboy

east from Newberry Springs to Amboy, I passed only two vehicles, both BNSF Railroad trucks. Needless to say, it's a lonely road through the desert. South of Amboy, on the way toward Joshua Tree National Park, I passed the National Chloride Company canals which were excavated in the dry lake bed to expose the shallow water table and collect the minerals suspended in the water for processing into a variety of chemical compounds. What was most interesting about the canals was the brilliant, gorgeous blue green color of the water, which had almost an iridescent glow. When I reached the small town of Joshua Tree, I stopped for a beer at one of my favorite places, the Joshua Tree Saloon. As I sat at the bar, the Weather Channel was showing on the one and only TV screen, which normally one would expect to be a sports channel. But it wasn't long before someone changed the channel to the start of game 7 of the World Series. And when the National Anthem was played, virtually everyone in the



Pisgah Crater near Amboy

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National Chloride Company canal - Amboy

bar stood up and the bar became very quiet. At the end of the anthem, everyone in the bar applauded, just as did everyone in the ballpark. As I left the saloon, I noticed an old, funky hippie era, grey school bus parked outside, with a large faded decal on its side that read "DIRT – Dreamers Institute of Research and Technology". On the drive home I faced ferocious winds through San Gorgonio Pass, a sign of an approaching Pacific storm system.

The first weekend in November I went to the "Amber Waves of Grain Craft Beer Festival" in Corona. It was organized by the "All American Riders" motorcycle club, made up of veterans from all branches of the military. The



"Amber Waves of Grain" Festival - Corona

purpose of the event was to honor and support veterans in need. Over 40 craft beer breweries from all over southern California were represented at the festival and donated all their sales to various veteran organizations. The festival began with a parade that featured many custom cars, vintage military vehicles, and several military historical re-enactment groups representing several American wars, including the Revolutionary War,

Civil War, WWI, WWII, and the Vietnam

War. The motorcycle club brought up the rear of the parade and gave a "salute" to all veterans with an ear shattering roar of their Harleys! There was also plenty of entertainment and several food trucks as well. The whole event was a lot of fun and a great way to honor and support veterans in need.

Later in November, on Veteran's Day to be exact, I attended the wedding of the daughter of my old Army buddy Mike. Annie had arranged for the wedding to be held at a private event site near San Marcos, and all the guests to stay at the Pala Casino Resort, about 20 minutes north. The day before the wedding, I drove to Pala by way of Warner Springs, where I stopped for a beer at the Warner Springs Ranch Bar and Grill. As I sat on the terrace, alongside a small group of hikers taking a break on



Lake Henshaw

their trek north following the Pacific Crest Trail, I watched a flock of wild turkeys grazing on the golf course! From Warner Springs I continued south to Lake Henshaw, and then west down the Pauma Valley to Pala Casino Resort. As I checked in to the hotel, there were more than 1200 Marines also staying in the hotel for their annual "Marine Ball" that celebrates the birthday of the Corps. They all looked very sharp in their crisp dress blues, and the ladies accompanying them were decked out in beautiful evening gowns. I noticed one Marine officer dressed in a Scottish kilt. A bit later I went to the "Cave Bar and Lounge" for a

beer and to write notes in my journal. The bar was in the No Smoking section of

the casino – a real plus! At one point, I noticed a large Asian family celebrating dinner for a wedding the next day. When an elderly, grey-haired lady arrived in a wheelchair, everyone paid respect to her by kissing her hand. One young man had a very unique and unusual hair style that resembled that of a Samurai warrior! (*note: Later in the evening, after having dinner with Mike, I found out that the Asian family I had seen earlier in the evening was actually the family of Annie's husband to be, and the young guy with the Samurai hair style was the groom – Jeremiah!!*) Mike and I had dinner in the Oak Steakhouse, and when I asked the server why there were no beers on the list, even though San Diego County has more craft breweries than anywhere else in the country, he had no answer. (later I lodged a complaint with the restaurant manager) Mike ordered his usual Bacardi and Diet Coke, while I was able to finally get a Stone IPA. After dinner, I followed Mike around to a couple of poker tables where he came out about \$1,000 ahead, but by the time he headed for the Craps table, the noise and smoke of the casino had finally gotten to me, so I retired to my room. The next morning, I decided to explore



Joshua Tree Saloon



"Amber Waves of Grain" Festival - Corona



San Pasqual Valley

the San Pasqual Valley before the wedding that evening. I drove east on highway 78 to Ramona, and then up the Black Canyon Road, which according to the map, would take me to the Mesa Grande Indian Reservation. The first five miles of the road were paved, and then suddenly the road became a very narrow, twisting unpaved track through the mountains. There were many tight, blind one

lane curves, where signs were posted – “use horn on one lane curves”! Luckily I met only two vehicles and three bicyclists along the way. It was very slow going, often barely 10 mph. Still, the steep mountainous landscape was beautiful and remote. When I finally reached the Mesa



Old Ranch - Mesa Grande Indian Reservation

Grande Reservation, I passed many old ranches amid a landscape of rolling hills covered with groves of Live Oak forests. As I drove along the twisting mountain road, now paved, there were many motorcycle groups enjoying the warm, sunny weather. I came to the junction with highway 76 and turned west toward Pala. Along the way, just east of Pala, I discovered the “Wilderness Gardens County Preserve”, and old ranch alongside the San Luis Rey River. I decided to stop and take a hike on one of the trails that lead to the site of an old 1881 Grist Mill and water wheel. The mill

was established by the Sickler

Brothers, and farmers from all over the region brought their crops to be ground into flour. Because the grinding of wheat and corn was a slow process, farm families would often camp out on the property. The brothers constructed a long wooden flume to transport water from the headwaters of the river down to the mill site to power the large water wheel that drove the huge grind stones. Today, all that remains of the mill is the stone foundation and the water wheel. After exploring the preserve for a while, I continued on to the hotel to change clothes for the wedding. Thankfully, Annie and Jeremiah had arranged for a shuttle bus to take us from Pala to the historic “Twin Oaks Schoolhouse”, the venue for the wedding and dinner. The shuttle bus became very crowded, and I ended up standing for the entire 30 minute trip. But that wasn’t the worst of the situation – one of the young guys hooked up his iPhone to the shuttle’s sound system and proceeded to play very loud Rap music that was very inappropriate for the occasion. So after about five minutes of the crap, I tapped him on the shoulder and insisted that he change the music to anything but Rap! He was very nice about my request, and for the rest of the journey, we all listened to classic rock and ballads. (everyone on board thanked me when we



Black Canyon Road



Water Wheel from 1881 Grist Mill



Garden - "Twin Oaks Schoolhouse"

finally arrived at the wedding!) The venue for the wedding ceremony was in a gorgeous garden setting, with lovely flowers everywhere. The ceremony began at 5 pm, by which time the daylight was rapidly fading, and the minister had to ask for a flashlight in order to see what he needed to read. The vows exchanged by Annie and Jeremiah were very personal and touching - a very emotional expression of their love for each other. It was the most unique and emotionally moving wedding ceremony that I’ve attended. (Earlier I had talked with the wedding photographers just before the ceremony, and they had planned to shoot everything in natural light – I

wished them good luck!) After the ceremony, we all headed to a rustic old bar in the courtyard beside the historic schoolhouse, for the cocktail reception before dinner. Later in the evening, we all sat down to dinner under a huge tent on the lawn. Then came toasts by both families, and Mike stole the show with his toast to his daughter and new son-in-law, which was both very emotional and humorous. Dinner was great, and afterwards, it was nice to meet up with Mimi again after so many years since she and Mike had divorced. Soon after dinner, dancing began and my friend Lora dragged me on to the dance floor for a few songs, before we boarded the shuttle back to the hotel. Later that evening, we met up with Mike and Ken, the CEO of Freeman AV, in the Cave Bar and Lounge, where we all had a great time together. (we closed the bar at 2 am!) All in all, it was a very special day, and one that I would not have missed! (Annie and Jeremiah – best wishes for your future together) The next morning, as I left Pala Resort, I stopped at the "San Antonio Mission de Pala", an historic old Spanish mission founded in 1816 to serve the native American tribes in the area. The vast majority of the adobe and stone structures have been well preserved, and the church remains a vital community center for the Pala tribe. On the drive home, I passed through the lovely vineyards of the Temecula Valley – always one of my favorite drives.



"San Antonio Mission de Pala"



Monarch Beach Resort - Dana Point

In mid-December, I drove down to Dana Point, on the coast, to attend the annual PCMA Chapter Board of Directors Retreat. It was hosted by the Monarch Beach Resort, a 5 star property overlooking the ocean, and beautifully decorated for the holidays. Even though we spent some long hours in meetings to plan the year ahead, there was some time to explore the resort and enjoy its many amenities. Although it

was only a couple of days, the experience of being at the resort was wonderful, and hopefully I will be able to return someday for leisure, rather than business.

So that brings the year to a close, almost. My sister Lynn will be joining us again for Christmas, leaving behind the cold and snow of the Midwest. I have planned a few days for us to travel to San Diego to enjoy some of the sights of the city, and perhaps take a walk along the beach to dip our toes in the ocean. Until then, I hope this letter finds all of you in good health and high spirits for the holidays!



Channel Islands at sunset from Monarch Beach Resort



PHOTO GALLERY

Paso Robles



Paso Robles



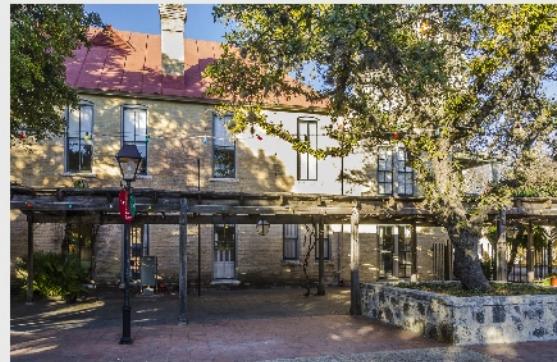
San Antonio



San Antonio



San Antonio



San Antonio



Disney California Adventure Park



Scottish Highland Games - Long Beach



Palm Springs



Joshua Tree National Park



Pioneertown



TIM EASTON AND JONNY CORNDAWG



THU, SEPT. 17TH - SAN DIEGO, CA - THE CASCADA
FRI, SEPT. 18TH - PROSPECTIVE, LA - PAPPY AND HARRET'S
FRI, SEPT. 18TH - SANTA MONICA, CA - MACALESS GUITAR SHOP
MON, SEPT. 19TH - PORTLAND, OR - MISSISSIPPI STATION
TUE, SEPT. 20TH - SEATTLE, WA - TRACTOR TAVERNS
WED, SEPT. 21TH - VASHON, WA - MUDHOLE CAFE
THU, SEPT. 22TH - BURLINGTON, WA - GREEN EGG
SAT, SEPT. 24TH - HEDWIGSBURG, PA - TIM WALKER'S HOUSE
SUN, SEPT. 25TH - SAN FRANCISCO, CA - HOTEL DIAH
MON, SEPT. 26TH - SANTA BARBARA, CA - RIDGE WATERS

More Info: TMEASTON.COM • JONNYCORNDAWG.COM



Salton Sea



Borrego Springs



Warner Springs – Mesa Grande



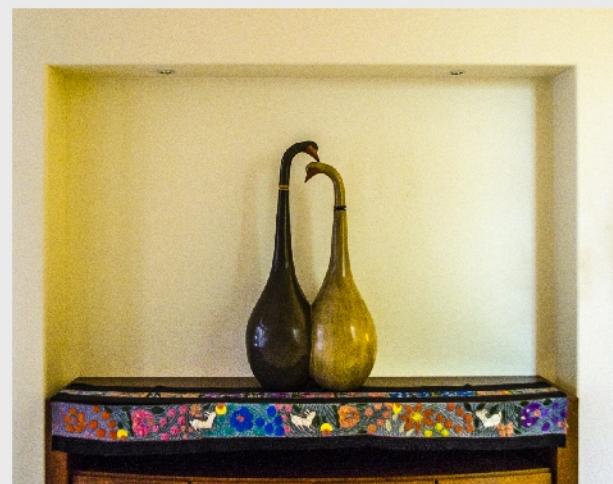
Steampunk Festival – Perris



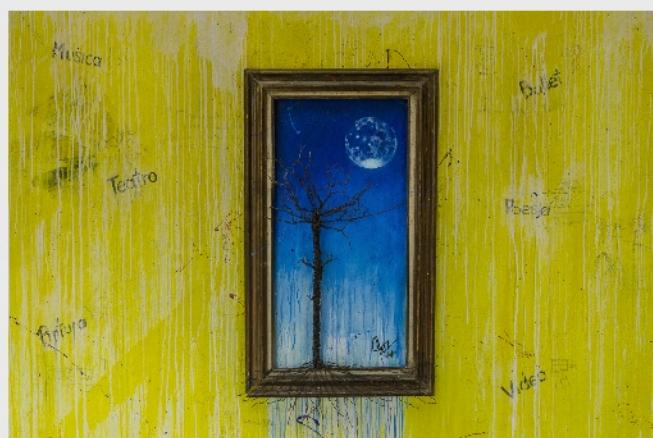
Japatul Valley - San Diego County



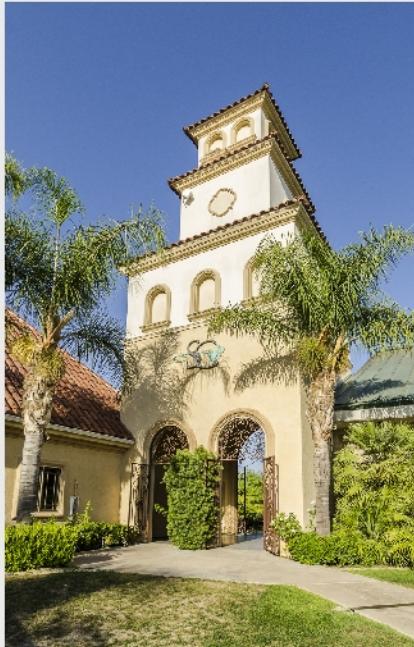
Tecate, Mexico



Tecate, Mexico



South Coast Winery – Temecula



South Coast Winery – Temecula



USS Iowa - Los Angeles



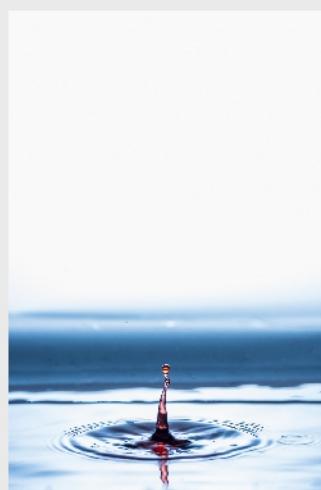
Gilman Historic Ranch - Banning



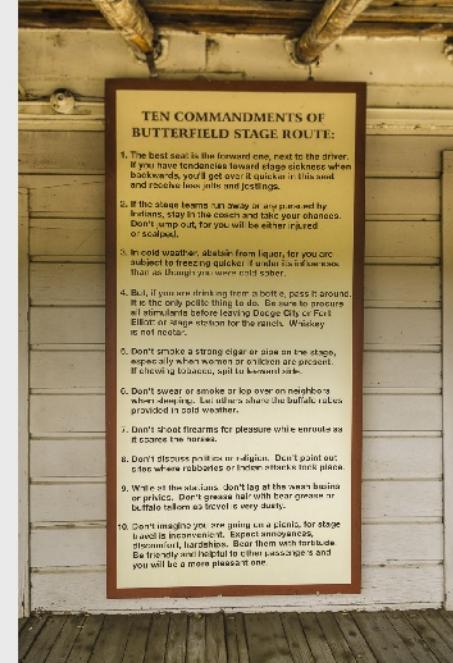
Gilman Historic Ranch – Banning



West Coast School – University of San Diego



Butterfield Stage Station – Oak Grove



Whispering Pines Estate – Big Bear Lake



Whispering Pines Estate – Big Bear Lake



Country Barn Estate – Big Bear Lake



Apples B&B – Big Bear Lake



Carter Estates Winery Resort – Temecula



Carter Estates Winery Resort – Temecula



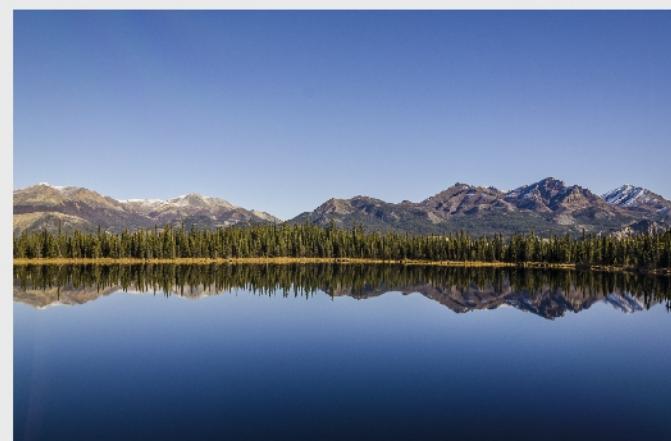
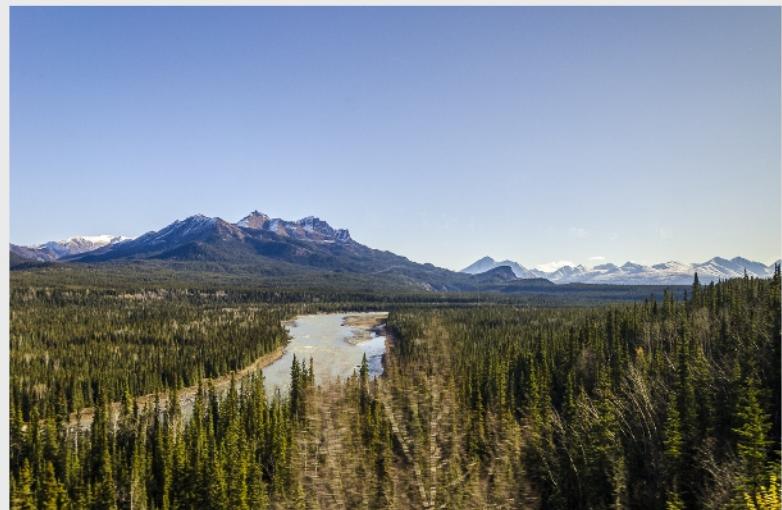
Vaquez Rocks Natural Area – Santa Clarita



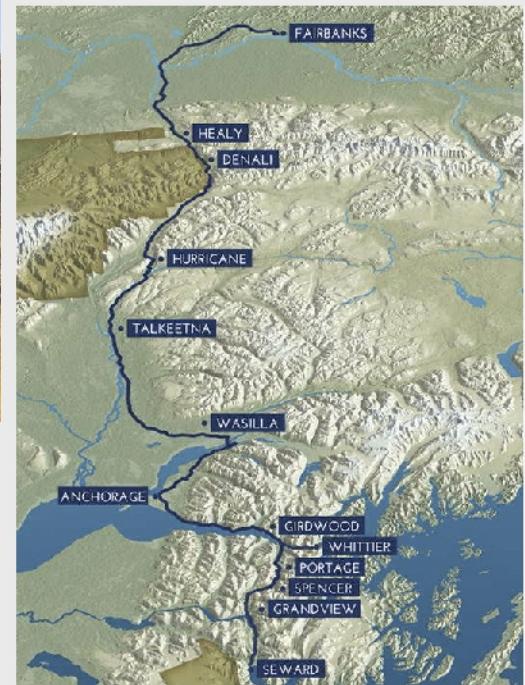
Fairbanks, Alaska



Alaska Railroad – Fairbanks to Anchorage



Alaska Railroad – Fairbanks to Anchorage



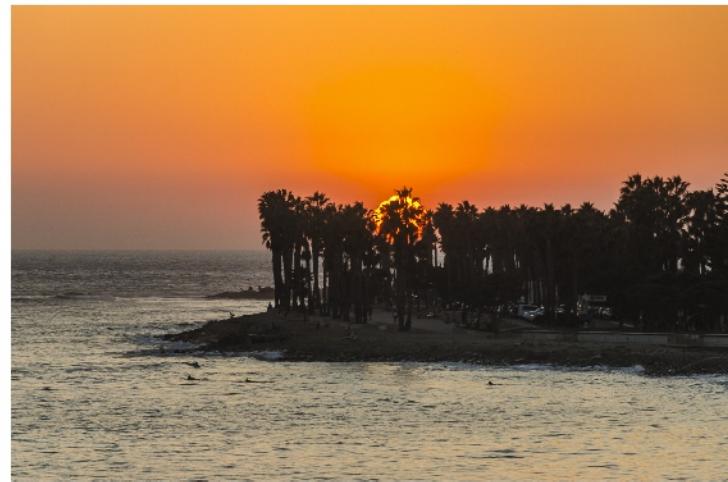
Anchorage, Alaska



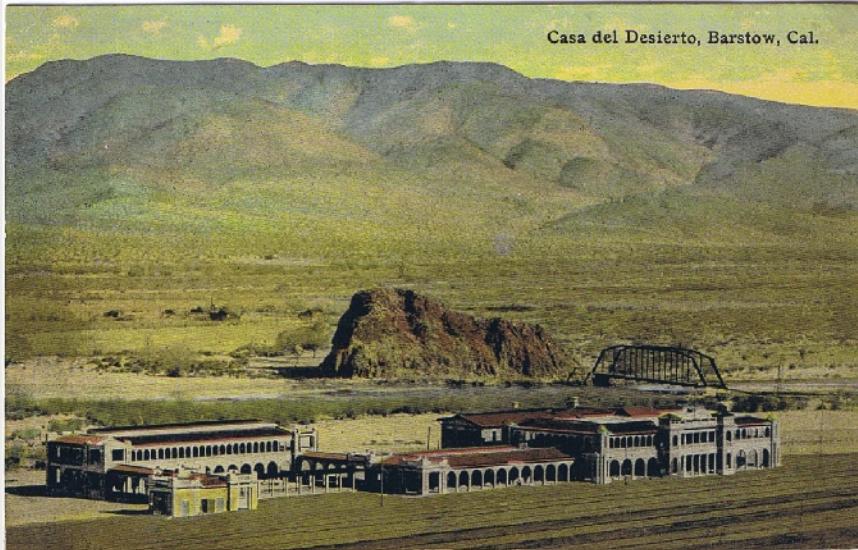
"Seaside Highland Games" - Ventura



"Seaside Highland Games" - Ventura



Barstow - Amboy



"Amber Waves of Grain" Festival - Corona



Black Canyon Road - Pala



Monarch Beach Resort - Dana Point

