

CHRISTMAS 2019



Dear Friends & Family,

It's that time of year when I have the pleasure of writing my Christmas Letter. The tree is decorated, the lights are on, and the shopping has begun! I hope you'll enjoy reading my letter as much as I did writing it – **Happy Holidays!**

January

In early January, I took a brief trip to the Pala Resort and Casino north of San Diego. The route via highways 79/76/74 was constantly under repair, with lots of “road work ahead” signs posted every 15 to 20 miles, due to damage from the heavy winter rains. As I drove through the small community of Mountain Center and the Garner Valley in the San Jacinto Mountains, I saw the huge expanse of forest that had burned a few short months before. It was sad to see the charred remains of the landscape, especially with the beauty of the snow-capped peaks in the distance. For lunch, I picked up a tuna salad sandwich and chips at the Lake Hemet convenience store. I enjoyed lunch, sitting beneath the gorgeous Ponderosa Pine forest at the foot of Thomas Mountain. As I was leaving the picnic spot, three coyotes ran across the road in front of me, and a small herd of deer grazed quietly in the meadow below. Meanwhile, traffic on the highway continued to pass by, and I doubted that any of them were ever aware of the coyotes and deer! As I drove south through the Anza Valley on highway 371, I saw very little traffic. The small town of Anza was established in 1776 when Juan Batista de Anza led the first Spanish expedition into southern California and claimed all of California in the name of the Spanish King. Further south on highway 79, I stopped in the small mountain town of Julian for a cold glass of “High Tide IPA” at the Julian Brewery. Later that afternoon, I took a guided tour of the old Eagle gold mine on the ridge above the town. Also on the tour was a family from Germany, and as the tour went on, I got the feeling they didn't understand much of what the guide was saying. And to be fair, he was very tired by that time of the day. The history of gold mining in the Julian region was extensive, with more than 200 gold mines within a 25-mile radius of the town! Many of the mines operated from 1869 until 1934, when the Great Depression hit the country and the government froze gold prices. Since then, mining for gold in the region has never resumed. Later in the afternoon, I checked into a nice deluxe room at the Pala Resort and Casino on highway 76. Then I had a cold beer in the non-smoking “Bar Meets Grill”. For dinner that evening I had a huge, delicious plate of Pad Thai and steamed Pork Buns at the “Noodles Restaurant” in the casino. After dinner, I returned to Bar Meets Grill for another beer and listened to a band of two 55+ year old guys and a 20's something drummer as they played some great old 60's Rock-n-Roll! At the end of the evening, I retired to my room and watched an analysis of Trump's “wall” address to the nation on MSNBC. The consensus among all the reporters was that it was basically a “joke”! (I shall say no more)



Garner Valley - San Jacinto Mountains



The next day, I drove back home by way of Temecula, with a stop at the Orange Empire Railroad Museum in Perris and the Perris Skydiving Airport. It was a beautiful clear day for skydiving, and as I sat on the terrace with a cold glass of Goose Island IPA, I watched the skydivers slowly float down to the landing area next to the runway, just 50 yards from me. Leaving the airport, I drove back home through the Winchester Valley, and I was fortunate that day to have a spectacular view of the snow-capped San Bernardino Mountains in the distance.

Once again, I felt it had been a wonderful trip, although brief.

March

At the beginning of March, I made a trip to Palm Springs to meet up with some of my Esri International colleagues at the Esri Business Partner Conference. A steady rain enveloped Redlands as I headed over the mountains to Palm Springs. The wind in San Geronimo Pass was fierce, and some of the rain was being blown over the crest of the mountains by the ferocious winds, despite clear, sunny skies in Palm Springs! The hellacious cross winds north of Palm Springs persuaded me to abandon any idea of going to Joshua Tree

National Park. As I drove back down North Indian Canyon Drive, there were huge expanses of bright yellow wildflowers and lush green grass! I had never seen the desert so green and alive as it was this year. With the furious wind, the windmills



Palm Springs Air Museum

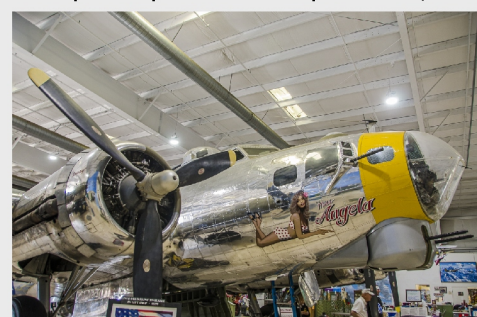
were spinning at a frantic pace! When I reached Palm Springs, I decided to visit the Air Museum again. Although the city was under beautiful sunny skies, there were massive dark clouds and light rain “spilling” over the crest of the 10,000-foot-high San Jacinto Mountains southwest of the city. As I stood outside the museum, there were lots of commercial flights arriving and departing the Palm Springs International Airport directly across the runway from the museum. (Delta, United, American, Air Canada, WestJet, Allegiant) From the museum, several vintage aircraft were offering rides, including a 1920's era Bi-Plane, Korean War era jet fighter, and a classic DC-3! Inside the museum were lots of fascinating historical

displays, exhibits, and restored aircraft spanning WWI to the Vietnam War. One exhibit especially attracted my interest, that of an historic “B-17 Flying Fortress” bomber, in the process of being restored. It was the same type of bomber as the one in which my father flew as a radio operator during WWII! His unit, the 457th Bombardment Group of the 8th Air Force, was stationed at “Glatton”, south of Peterborough, England. It was great to find the base on the large map of airbases in England. Staring at the huge old aircraft was a bit of an emotional moment for me, as I recalled the war stories told by my Dad. All in all, it was a very nice afternoon at the museum. From the museum, I decided to visit the Whitewater Nature Preserve northwest of Palm Springs. But I found the access road was closed due to flood damage from the heavy winter rains. As I returned to Palm Springs, I spotted a new brewpub next to the Hyatt Hotel downtown – the “La Quinta Brewing Company”. Their “Even Par IPA” was very respectable. Across from the brewpub was small shop with some beautiful pieces of art carved from local stone. So, I bought a little turtle carved from ivory colored Onyx for Leslie, to add to her collection of turtles! Then it was time to check in to the Marriott Courtyard Hotel near the Convention Center, site of the Esri Business Partner Conference. I was fortunate to get a nice room on the top floor. After stowing my gear in the hotel room, I walked down Tahquitz Canyon Way to the Hyatt Hotel on Palm Canyon Drive. As I enjoyed another cold pint of “Even Par IPA”, I read the latest edition of the “Coachella Valley News”. One of the stories that attracted my interest was about a new craft brewery in Virginia that was serving an IPA brewed with “Lucky Charms” cereal – it was said to have a strong taste of marshmallow (UGH!!) Other highlights in the newspaper included:

- (1) An advertisement for “**Typewriters, Buy-Sell-Fix**” They even had “ribbons available for all makes and models”. Their slogan was “We bring office machines back to life”. The name of the company was “Central Printer Resources (CPR)”!
- (2) An advertisement for a local law firm, along with their “recommendations” to secure one’s personal identity. Also included was a card that could be cut out to carry in your car. Printed on the card was the following: **GIVE THIS CARD TO THE ARRESTING OFFICER** *“Upon the advice of my attorney, Dale Gribow, I exercise my right to remain silent until you call him at (760) 837-7500 and he advises me otherwise. My attorney has advised me the voluntary field sobriety and breath*



Perris Skydiving Airport



B-17 "Flying Fortress"

tests, at the scene, are optional (unless one is on probation). Thus, I elect not to take them. I want to cooperate and am willing to take a blood test.” [who knew!!]

After reading the Coachella Valley News cover to cover in the Hyatt Hotel, I walked over to Johannes Restaurant for dinner – a truly authentic German schnitzel, Bitburger beer, and Apel Strudel. The Barmaid even remembered me from last year! On the way back to the Marriott Courtyard Hotel, I stopped at the lobby bar at “Hotel Zozos”, formerly the Hard Rock Hotel. The bartender recommended the “Big Daddy IPA” from a San Francisco brewery, and it was a very nice West Coast Style IPA. I ended the evening in the “Rocks Bar” at the Renaissance Hotel for a great conversation with Dale, an old friend from Georgia.

The next morning, I started with a delicious breakfast at the Marriott Hotel – a three egg omelet with applewood smoked bacon, cheddar cheese, and caramelized onions, along with country fried potatoes and kale salad! Later in the morning, I drove to Joshua Tree National Park and hiked the trail to the old Desert Queen Mine and the abandoned town site of “Pine City”. According to the trail marker, Pine City was supposed to be 1.1 miles, but after a couple of hours, I was sure it must have been twice that far! The only sign of a town site was a small grove of Pinyon Pines scattered among massive boulders. Along the trail, the Joshua Trees were in full bloom, as were many of the cacti. Later in the day, as I drove out the south entrance, there were scores of cars parked alongside the road, with lots of people out taking photos of the large fields of gorgeous yellow, orange, and purple wildflowers. I also pulled over, and as soon as I stepped out of the jeep, the sweet fragrance of Purple Verbena was almost overpowering – beautiful! After taking a host of photos, I headed back to Palm Springs. The wind was horrendous as I



Desert Queen Mine - Joshua Tree NP



Wildflowers - Joshua Tree National Park

approached the Coachella Valley, and I could see a massive sandstorm north of Palm Springs, with sand drifting across the road, like snow drifts! Once I was back at the Marriott Hotel, I sat in the lobby bar and processed some real estate photos I had taken earlier in the day. As evening approached, I walked down Tahquitz Canyon Way to the “Thai Smile Restaurant” for dinner. The huge plate of Kung Pao Chicken was delicious, but more than enough for a family of four! So, I boxed up half of it for another day and walked back to the Renaissance Hotel for a beer in the Rocks bar with some of my Esri colleagues. It was a lovely warm evening as we sat outside on the terrace.

The next morning was again sunny and 70 degrees. But as I drove back home, the wind through San Geronimo Pass was ferocious! On the west side of the San Bernardino Mountains, the sky had turned a dark grey, with heavy low clouds and a cold wind – definitely not Palm Springs! That afternoon I had a photo shoot at a lovely house in Rancho Cucamonga. It had a huge pool with a gorgeous Casita and a spectacular view of the San Gabriel Mountains. The interior of the house was beautifully furnished and decorated – it was a joy to photograph.

On Saint Patrick’s Day, I decided to go to Warner Springs Ranch to check out their cabins which had just recently been reopened after an extensive restoration. The route to Warner Springs took me south on highway 79, where I encountered a couple of places of one lane traffic due to damage from the recent heavy winter storms. The road restrictions caused a massive traffic jam at the junction of highway 79 and county road S22. Hundreds of vehicles returning to San Diego from Borrego



San Felipe Valley

Springs and Ocotillo Wells were stopped by a closure of the southbound lane. As I looked at the long line of vehicles headed south, I was grateful to be heading east, by way of the San Felipe Valley. Along the way, I stopped for a cold Budweiser at the old “San Felipe Saloon” – virtually the only “business” in the tiny village. The modern history of the area dates back to the late 1700’s when Spanish expeditions made their way north from Mexico. From 1857 until 1861, the village served as a major rest stop on the “Butterfield Overland Stage Route” that ran from San Antonio to San Diego and beyond. Then, during the Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, the Union Army used the stage station as a military outpost called “Camp San Felipe”. Following the end of the Civil War, the Butterfield Overland Stage resumed operations, until finally ceasing service in 1877 as the railroads reached Los Angeles and San Diego.



San Felipe Saloon

I joined a half dozen middle-aged bikers in the courtyard outside the bar. Judging from the various posters and signs around the courtyard, as well as the conversations I overheard, this was real “Trump country”. They were all very friendly folks, though I kept my own political views to myself. In addition to the bikers in their black leather, there was an old dog asleep by the door to the bar, just beneath a small sign that read “beware of the dog”! Meanwhile, as I sat in the warm sunshine with my cold Bud, listening to the conversation among the bikers, monster pickup trucks towing huge travel trailers and off-road vehicles roared past the saloon on their way west to San Diego and Los Angeles. Besides the monster trucks, RV’s and off-road vehicles, there were a lot motorcycles, many of whom pulled in for a cold beer.

Naturally, as the new bikers arrived, there was a lot of talk about their bikes.

Later in the afternoon, I continued on down the S22 to the junction with highway 78. From there, I headed west up the steep, twisting mountain highway to the summit of the Laguna Mountains and the historic old gold mining town of Julian. Besides many gold mines in the area, Julian is also famous for apple pies. Large apple and pear orchards cover the hills surrounding the old town. As I approached the town, I stopped at the “Nickel Beer Company” to try their new “Take a Hike Pale Ale”. It was nice, but rather “pale” compared to their “Vulcan Mountain IPA” – one of my favorites. I sat outside in the beer garden enjoying the beer and the gorgeous warm spring weather. As I looked around, I couldn’t help but notice an old man sitting at the next table. He was wearing a very bright, very “loud” dark green St Patrick’s Day “tuxedo” shirt! I asked if I could take his photo – but I ended up taking a stupid “selfie” by mistake – I hate phone cameras! I left Nickel Beer Company and headed to main street in downtown Julian. Suddenly, the traffic came to a halt, so I did a quick U-turn and headed back down highway 78 to take the “Wynola Road”. It bypassed the town and wound its way through a lovely landscape of forested hills and green pastures, totally avoiding the traffic “gridlock” in downtown Julian! North of the small town of Santa Ysabel, I turned on to highway 74 toward Lake Henshaw. I stopped at a viewpoint to take photos of the lake with the snow-capped San Bernardino Mountains in the distance. On my way back to highway 79, I took a short detour to the “Hide-a-Way Bar”, which was still closed for renovation, but with a new sign posted – “Opening Soon”, whenever that might be. There, laying in the middle of the road was a huge black and white Great Dane! He gave no indication of moving, so after taking his photo, I drove around him. Once I was back on highway 79 and headed north for Warner Springs, I encountered a short delay for some road work to repair damage from the winter storms. I noticed that southbound traffic was still backed up for miles! A few miles further north, I came to Warner Springs Ranch and checked into one of



Hide-a-Way Bar

their historic stone cabins. The interior of the rustic cabin had bright white-washed walls and colorful curtains. While there was no TV, there were several modern USB ports built into the nightstand, which I thought was rather odd! The cabin also had a small refrigerator and coffee maker, but no coffee! The cabin was part of a duplex, and luckily, my next-door neighbors were quiet folks.

That evening, I walked across the highway to the bar and grill for dinner. (it was the only restaurant around for 15 miles in any direction!) The place was quite busy for being St Patrick's Day. I took a seat outside on the terrace, overlooking the golf course, to enjoy a cold beer in the warm evening air. (I was disappointed to

find the bar no longer had any craft beers on draft, or any craft beers at all for that matter! Which was very surprising since



San Diego county has the largest number of craft breweries in the entire country – well over 100 now.) But the bar did offer an impressive array of local San Diego County wines! My server recommended the baby back ribs, and they were superb.

After dinner, as the sun was slowly setting over the mountains in the west, I grabbed my camera and hiked out on the golf course to take photos of the sunset. The silhouettes of the bare trees against the soft orange glow of the setting sun were spectacular. As darkness fell, I walked to a large lagoon, where the only sound was that of frogs croaking. It was a wonderful feeling of being alone, with a bright full moon, as well as the Big Dipper and North Star shining above me. I spent a couple of hours sitting next to the lagoon, absorbed in the experience of the beautiful night. Off in the distance, the lonely howling of coyotes reached my ear. The restaurant and bar had closed early, so I returned to my cabin and listened to music before falling asleep.

The next morning, I was up early at 6:30am to shower. The room was very chilly, since I had forgotten to turn on the heat the night before. Later, I discovered the restaurant was closed for the day - no chance for breakfast. So, I got some gas at the "Gas Mart", but they had nothing resembling breakfast food other than doughnuts. I passed on the pastries and grabbed a cup of fresh coffee for the road. Before leaving Warner Springs Ranch, I paid a visit to a lovely old white-washed chapel atop a small hill overlooking the meadow. It was a stunning sight in the early morning light. After taking several photos of the small chapel, I headed south on county road S22 toward Borrego Springs. Along the way were gorgeous views of the San Felipe Valley with a large herd of Holstein dairy cows grazing peacefully in the deep green meadow.

As the road descended the Laguna Mountains through Culp Valley into Anza Borrego Desert State Park, the hills were covered in a blanket of bright yellow wildflowers – though there was no sign of Big Horn sheep. (not surprising, since they rarely approach the highway) I had noticed a lot less traffic on the road than I had expected for a weekend. But upon entering Borrego Springs, I saw that State Park staff had setup traffic barriers and signs to control the crowds who had arrived to view the spring wildflower blooms. So, I drove straight into town and stopped at the Borrego coffee shop for coffee and a delicious breakfast puff pastry. (filled with egg, cheddar cheese, and black forest ham) I enjoyed my breakfast sitting with the locals outside on the terrace. Then I went next door to the State Parks office to get the latest information about the wildflower blooms. I promptly received a "detailed" report and guide map from one of the rangers. Armed with the map and my



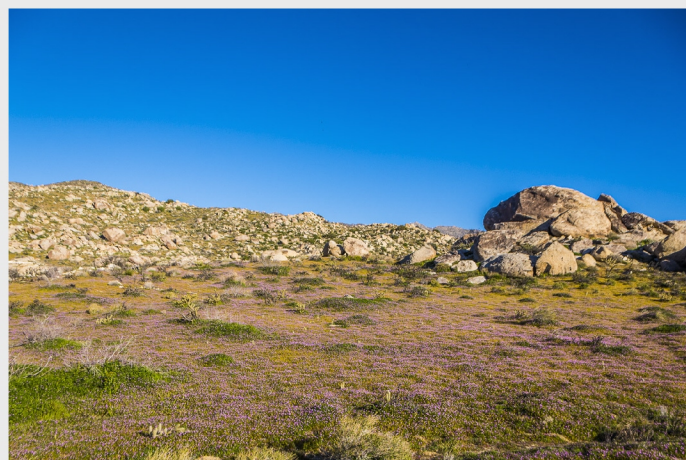
Stone Cabin - Warner Springs Ranch



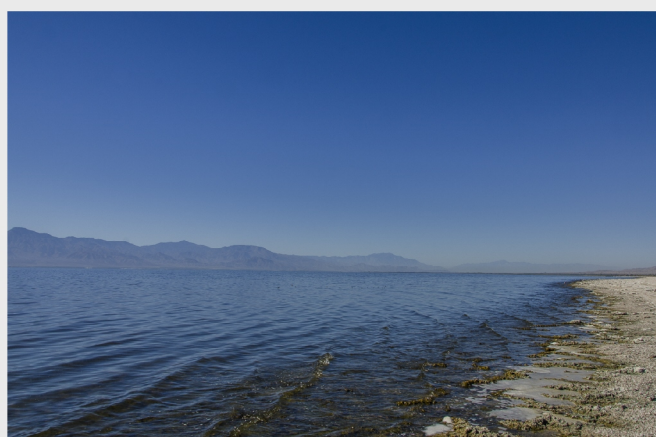
Chapel

Wildflower guidebook, I headed out to find the wildflowers. What I found was a dazzling display of brilliant red and yellow desert poppies in San Felipe Wash, just a few hundred yards off highway 78. Further west on the highway was another lovely area of wildflowers at Yaqui Well, next to the Tamarisk Grove campground. On my way back to Borrego Springs, I encountered much more traffic. I made a brief stop at "Hell Hole Canyon" to photograph a very nice display of colorful wildflowers. But soon, the large crowd got to me and I felt compelled to move on.

I escaped the crowd and headed to Henderson Canyon, typically one of the best places for extensive fields of wildflowers. But, when I got there, I was very disappointed. There were very few wildflowers in bloom, whereas the previous year had been an incredibly beautiful display. And ironically, the wildflowers within the town of Borrego Springs were much more in abundance!



Wildflowers in Culp Valley



Salton Sea

Having taken some great photos of the desert wildflowers, I drove east on county road S22 to the Salton Sea and then north on highway 86 toward Indio. I made a brief stop at the "Red Earth Casino and Travel Center" on the Torres Martinez Indian Reservation for some cheap gas. As I continued north on highway 86, I noticed a long Union Pacific freight train traveling parallel to the highway. Both of us were going at the same pace of 75 mph for almost 30 miles, before I turned off the highway at the small farming community of "Mecca". As I drove north on an old portion of the highway, I passed huge groves of date palms and large fields of all kinds of produce, from avocados to zucchini! Even though it was Sunday, the fields were filled with farm workers harvesting the produce, which would

be transported by truck to the harbors at Long Beach and Los Angeles for shipment around the country. The view of the deep green fields against the backdrop of the snow-capped peaks of the San Jacinto and San Bernardino Mountains was gorgeous!

Finally, I joined Interstate 10, along with a lot of slow-moving semis, up a steep incline to a point overlooking the entire Coachella Valley. When I came to the south entrance of Joshua Tree National Park, I left the Interstate. Just before the park entrance was an incredible expanse of wildflowers. I stopped alongside the road to take some photos. And as I opened the door and stepped out, the scent of Purple Verbena was almost overpowering! The view of the brilliantly colored wildflowers with the 11,000-foot-high snow-capped peaks of Mt Jacinto and San Geronio in the distance was breathtaking! Leaving the park entrance, I took Dillon Road, rather than the freeway, and discovered several large fields of gorgeous yellow desert poppies shining in the late afternoon sun, surrounding the huge wind turbines. Back home, as I wrote my travel notes, I felt the brief two-day trip had been another very enjoyable one!

Also in the month of March, I made my annual "pilgrimage" to Alaska to renew my spirit with the "Great Land" and to visit with Marion and Michael. My trip began on the Metrolink train from Riverside to LA Union Station, and then the "Fly-a-Way" express bus to LAX. There I boarded an Alaskan Airlines flight to Seattle and onward to Anchorage. Travelling in First Class, the service onboard was exceptional, for which Alaska Airlines is well known. Another much appreciated "perk" of travelling First Class on Alaska Airlines was the invitation to the Alaska Lounge, where there is always a relaxed atmosphere and plenty of food and drink. The flights were smooth and very enjoyable, especially the meal service, again something for which Alaska Airlines is well known. I spent a lot of time listening to my favorite music on my iPod and

catching up on reading my magazines, in particular Smithsonian and Discovery.

Upon arriving in Anchorage early that evening, I picked up my rental car and drove downtown to the Hilton Hotel. Normally I would have stayed at the Captain Cook Hotel, my favorite, but this time I couldn't turn down the special offer from the Hilton, just \$49 per night! Since parking on downtown streets was not allowed overnight, I was forced to park in a public lot across the street. But at \$5 overnight, it was far less expensive than the Hilton Hotel valet service at \$25 per day! (ironically, the hotel had no on-site parking facility, so the valet utilized the very same public lot where I was parked!)

Over the next three days, I visited many of my favorite places in Anchorage.

- **"F Street Station"** (world's best halibut and chips, along with a long list of great Alaskan craft beers on tap)
- **"Humpy's"** (named in honor of the King Salmon, it always has the best local musical talent, excellent food, and over 50 beers on tap)
- **"Glacier Brewhouse"** (superb fine dining in an informal environment, along with an impressive list of their own beers brewed on the premises)
- **"Barnes & Noble Bookstore / Starbucks"** (an enormous, well stocked bookstore that can easily occupy an entire day of browsing, along with a great Starbucks in house)

Another of my favorite places in the city is the "Anchorage Museum". I spent an entire afternoon roaming throughout the museum. The Alaskan tribal art was outstanding, as well as the extensive displays of Alaskan history. One exhibit really caught my eye – a display of common goods on grocery store shelves throughout the state, from the most accessible location (Anchorage) to the most remote (North Slope). Various items were lined up on shelves according to their destination, and below each item was the "local" price. As I looked at the exhibit, I was amazed at the huge difference in price among the locations, based mostly on the shipping cost. For example, a gallon of milk was \$4.00 in Anchorage, but when you reached the North Slope town of Barrow, that gallon of milk was over \$12! It was a fascinating and unique exhibit!



Grocery Exhibit - Anchorage Museum

Although there was two feet of snow on the ground when I arrived, the weather had taken a sharp turn of events and was more of a "heat wave", 40 – 45 degrees. That meant the streets and parking lots were filled with dirty, melting snow, which turned to ice at night. In Alaska it's a time known as "breakup", but it had come quite early this year. (climate change?) So, the conditions were "sloppy" during the day and "slippery" at night – not the best time to be in Alaska! One day, in the Dimond Mall parking lot, I noticed the view from the car's backup camera was very out of focus. Then, I realized the backup camera lens was covered in mud from the messy streets! (not the fault of the camera)

I took one day to drive down Turnagain Arm to Portage Glacier, and I arrived to find ferocious winds, with rain falling "sideways"! As I stepped out of the car, I encountered a very slippery slope of ice, and I was almost blown off my feet. Unfortunately, the Chugach National Forest Visitor Center was closed, due to the "inclement" weather. On my way back to Anchorage I stopped at Alyeska Lodge in Girdwood for a beer and a delicious "sourdough grilled cheese". Light snow was falling at the base of Mt Alyeska and skiers were having a great time. When I returned to the city, I headed to F Street Station for a plate of the world's best halibut and chips, along with a pint jar of Alaskan Amber. As usual, the local clientele was very interesting to watch, and the barmaids made sure everyone was well served. Then I walked over to Humpy's and enjoyed another Alaskan Amber as I listened to a band from Memphis playing traditional folk songs and blues from the South, which made for a wonderful evening.

The next day, I took a long hike on the coastal trail along the shore of Cook Inlet and enjoyed the experience of being back in



View of downtown Anchorage from the Coastal Trail

Alaska during the winter. There were several people walking or skiing on the snow-covered trail with their kids and dogs. On my last evening in Anchorage, I joined Marion and Michael for dinner at “Suite 100 Restaurant and Bar”, one of their favorite restaurants in the city. We started with “Seared Szechuan Pepper Ahi Tuna”, seared rare and served with daikon sprouts, soy vinaigrette & Korean BBQ sauce. And for the main dish we shared Alaskan Halibut, pan seared and served with chili-ginger cream, Basmati rice and fresh vegetables. Michael ordered a bottle of Kim Crawford Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, which was a perfect wine for dinner. Over the course of the evening, we shared a lot of conversation about the twins, Ben and Sam, and what they

were up to now. (Sam had recently announced his engagement to Tara, whom he met while he was in the army) As the evening went on, Marion discussed her most recent opportunity to manage a new restaurant for a close friend. But she still had a great job managing another restaurant – so what to do? Both were good choices, which made it a difficult decision. Whatever choice she would make was bound to be a good one. Later that evening, I moved to the “Lakefront Hotel” overlooking the Lake Hood Float Plane Base next to the airport, since I had an early morning flight back to LAX.

At 7:00am the next morning, I boarded the Alaska Airlines flight to Seattle. Although the majority of the route along the coast of Southeast Alaska and British Columbia was obscured by heavy cloud cover, there were a couple of spots where we had incredible views of the 19,000-foot-high St Elias – Wrangell Mountains. When we arrived in Seattle, I relaxed for a

couple of hours in the Alaska Lounge before boarding the flight to Los Angeles. Back in LA, I took the Fly-a-Way bus to Union Station. Even though it was the height of the rush hour downtown, we managed to arrive at the station just in time for me to catch the Southwest Chief train to Riverside. As I sat in the observation/lounge car, listening to beautiful music on my iPod, I reflected upon the time I had just spent in Alaska. And even though the weather was less than favorable (more like miserable), I had enjoyed being back there, if only briefly. But next year, I think I’ll plan my trip in September, the best time to visit Alaska!



Mt Saint Elias - 19,000 feet

April

In early April, I had a photo assignment in the small community of Menifee, near Temecula. It was a repossessed property where the homeowners had been evicted several weeks before, which meant it was in pretty bad condition. The house was enormous and a very weird layout. In one corner of the master bedroom, a circular stairwell led up to a “balcony” overlooking the bedroom – which I thought was pretty weird. The entire stairwell was covered in ugly green shag carpet! The property was huge, with many outbuildings, including a couple of stables, the largest of which looked more like a two-story residence. A



couple of the rooms in it were totally filled with junk and debris, including several large boxes of old issues of "Model Railroader Magazine", as well as a number of broken scale model railroad cars. Next to the room with all the model railroad junk was a very large enclosed open space with several large tables that I suspected must have been a platform for a huge model railroad display. As I roamed the property, taking photos of all the outbuildings, it became pretty clear to me that most of them had been used as "residences" – which begged the question: "how many people/families must have lived here"? The entire property was in very poor condition, and although the electricity



was still on, the water supply had been turned off. On a post note, the photo order I had been given listed the address as "2836 Tulita Lane", but all the house numbers on Tulita Lane were five digits! I finally figured out it was located at "28436 Tulita Lane". After I finished the photo shoot, I went to the "Bomb Shelter Bar and Grill" at the Perris Skydiving Airport. While I had lunch and a cold glass of Goose Island IPA, I sat on the terrace and watched the skydivers slowly descending from the sky above me to make a soft landing just 50 yards away. The Perris airport is one of the largest and most popular skydiving locations in the country. It hosts several premier national and international skydiving events each year.

As I returned to Redlands late in the afternoon, I passed a house with a rather interesting sign posted on their front yard fence – "*Forget the Dog, Beware of the Owner*"!

In mid-April I had two real estate photo shoots in Anaheim that stood out for me.

(1) A two-bedroom condo/townhouse – lots of "clutter" and moving boxes everywhere. The homeowners were two nice middle-aged ladies with their young daughters, but it looked as if they had no idea that I would be coming to take photos! However, their Japanese "Shibu Inu" dog was beautiful and very well behaved the whole time.

(2) I had been told by the real estate agent that the property was a mobile home, but it turned out to be an enormous double wide "pre-fab" house in a 55+ community. It had just been renovated and was in beautiful condition. It also had access to a very nice clubhouse, fitness center, and large outdoor pool. It was a rather surprising property.

After enduring some horrible traffic on the drive home, I stopped at my favorite bar in Redlands, "Eureka Burger", for a cold beer. As I waited for the Men's restroom, I observed two ladies enter the "single use" Women's restroom together. At that point, the other guy waiting beside me commented – "two guys would never enter a single use restroom together, unless perhaps they were gay"! Just then, the Men's restroom door opened and a father with his young daughter emerged!

A week later, I had a photo assignment in Upland, a small city west of San Bernardino. When I checked the map, I discovered that the house was located just a 20-minute walk from the MetroLink train station in Upland. So, I arranged to take the train, and after the photo shoot, I found a new craft brewery in one of the historic buildings downtown. It was named the "Rescue Brewing Company". I ordered a pint of "Resilience IPA", from a small brewery in Butte County, California. I was told that it was brewed in honor of the people who suffered disastrous losses of life and property from the horrendous wildfires in the fall of 2018. For every glass of the beer, 25% of revenue went to support the recovery of wildfire victims.

One of the most interesting features of the brewery was in the Men's restroom – the urinal was a "recycled" beer keg! I was told that "guided" tours were often arranged for women! On the big screen TV above the bar was a very humorous commercial from Duluth Trading Company about



their men's underwear with the exclusive "Bullpen Pouch – keep your boys where they belong"!

June

In mid-June, I travelled to San Diego to attend the West Coast School of Photography, my fifth year. Rather than take the freeway, I drove the back roads through the San Diego mountains. When I got to the small town of Alpine, in the mountains east of San Diego, I stopped at the Alpine Brewing Company for a cold glass of their "HFS IPA". Then I drove into San Diego to the Four Points Sheraton Hotel next to Montgomery Field airport. That evening I went to the University of San Diego (USD) campus to register for the class titled "Between Light and Shadow", being taught by Tony Corbell, a well-known and highly respected local San Diego photographer. After the orientation session, I had a delicious dinner of Middle Eastern dishes at the USD cafeteria.



Tony's Class

The next morning, I drove back to USD and joined Tony's class. He was a very good instructor and went into detail on everything he showed us about the intricate aspects of lighting a subject, using both studio lights as well as natural light. Over the course of the next five days, Tony brought several models into the classroom and showed us techniques of how best to "light them up" to achieve



Young model

amazing photographs. For me especially, it was an incredible learning experience, since I had never photographed in a studio environment before! There were only 12 people in the class, so we all had a lot of time to work with Tony. He was a master at working with models, putting them at ease as soon as they entered the classroom. And when he gave a model "direction" for the best pose, he was always very positive and encouraging. It was a joy to watch him and learn. One day, I reminded Tony that we had met a few years before at the "Nik Summit" in San Diego, and he recalled our meeting and the event quite well. Besides the studio work in the classroom, we spent some time photographing the models outdoors in natural light. Tony showed us some valuable techniques for "modifying" natural light to take advantage of its best properties. I learned a lot from those exercises!

One evening, we joined another class for a field trip to Sunset Cliffs Beach on the Pacific coast northwest of the university. Before the sun began its descent below the western horizon, we all shared dinner at the Newport Pizza and Ale House. While we sat in the restaurant, the big screen TVs were tuned to the finals of the Stanley Cup playoffs between the St Louis Blues and Boston Bruins. After dinner, we headed down to the beach to photograph a young couple as they posed for photos. Unfortunately, there was no "sunset", due to the heavy low clouds along the coast, known locally as the "June Gloom". But we learned a lot about using "available" light, whatever it happened to be.

On another evening, I joined my dear friend Lora for dinner at "True Food Kitchen" in the Fashion Valley Mall. We enjoyed a delicious dinner of "charred cauliflower" (with tahini, medjool dates, mint, dill, and pistachio), and grilled fish tacos (with tomatillo avocado salsa, pickled jicama, roasted sweet corn, and coconut lime crema). The cold glass of locally brewed "Three Weavers IPA" went very well with dinner. We had a lot to talk about as we sat around the huge fire pit. There was another evening where I went to the "Emerald Chinese Cuisine" restaurant near the hotel. The plate of Kung Pao Chicken was delicious, with lots of fresh bell peppers, but it was more than enough for a whole family! While I was in the restaurant, I noticed a large party for a Chinese youth group. They were apparently celebrating the achievements of the kids, and their parents were excited as honors were announced, all in Chinese.

Almost every day for lunch, and sometimes dinner, I went to the USD cafeteria, and the food was always exceptional and very reasonably priced. The cafeteria menu has even received an award of excellence from the Culinary Institute of America, something very unusual for a university. A couple of times I walked over to the “Torero To-Go” food truck for lunch. (the mascot of USD is the “Torero”, the Spanish name for bull) During breaks in the class, I roamed around the USD campus, one of the most beautiful in the entire country, taking personal photographs. As the week came to an end, I left San Diego with a wealth of new knowledge and another very enjoyable time spent in San Diego.

July

At the beginning of July, I attended the annual Esri International Users Conference (UC) in San Diego. As I made the travel arrangements, it suddenly occurred to me that I had been to the UC every year for the past 36 years, either as an attendee or as the conference manager! I decided to take the Metrolink train from Riverside to Fullerton to connect with the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train to San Diego. As I waited on the platform in Fullerton station, I noticed a cat sitting on top of an old dilapidated camper van parked on the adjacent street. The longer I looked at the cat, the more I realized that it never moved a muscle! After more than 15 minutes, I had to come to the conclusion that it was “stuffed”. That morning had been very cloudy and cool, typical of a weather pattern known as the “June gloom”. But by the afternoon, skies cleared and the views of the Pacific Ocean and beaches from the train were beautiful. Upon arriving in downtown San Diego, I walked three blocks from the historic Santa Fe Depot to the Hotel Republic, formerly the “W Hotel”. I was fortunate to have been given the Esri employee rate of \$189/nt, rather than the hotel’s rack rate of \$475/nt! After settling into my room, I walked around the corner to the Karl Strauss Brewpub for a cold pint. Then I headed down to the Convention Center to pick up my badge, where I ran into Barbara and Jeanne, a couple of my Esri colleagues who I hadn’t seen for a few years. It was very nice to chat with them and catch up on things that had happened in the meantime.

With my conference badge in hand, I walked over to the Hilton Bayfront Hotel and discovered to my disappointment that the Fox News Sports Bar had closed down – which was most unexpected! So, I headed up to the lobby bar for a beer and to plan my schedule of technical sessions I wanted to attend. The beer was great, but very pricey. As I sat in the bar, a couple of things caught my attention.

- A TV commercial for “airbrush makeup” – in place of using a regular makeup brush
- The US Women’s soccer team won their 4th World Cup title, defeating the Netherlands, whereas, the US Men’s team hadn’t “medaled” in any soccer competition since 1932!

Dinner time was fast approaching, so I walked over to Joe’s Crab Shack, looking to order Halibut and chips. But unfortunately, they had no Halibut, so I went to the Tin Fish instead. There I enjoyed a huge, delicious plate of Halibut and chips. (I ended up boxing up half of it for lunch the next day) While I was at the Tin Fish, Jack Horton walked by and invited me to join him and his friend from New Zealand as they prepared their technical workshop presentation – all being completed over a couple of beers. Later that evening, I met up with Jack again at “Patrick’s Bar”, his “home away from home” in San Diego! He introduced me to a pretty young lady from Guyana who worked for the country’s National Forestry Service – so we had a lot in common. It was her first time at the UC, so she had a lot of questions for me. Meanwhile, Jack danced with almost every woman in the bar, with the exception of the barmaid!

The next morning, I made sure to get up early to attend the plenary session. The huge hall was completely packed with over 16,000 people, in addition to many people in the large overflow room upstairs. The layout and design of the massive stage, with over a dozen enormous screens, was one of the best I had ever seen. (kudos to the Esri graphics department) There were several outstanding presentations, one of the best being from the students, teachers, and Constable of Lurgan, a small town in Northern Ireland. They had done a pretty sophisticated analysis



Esri UC - Plenary Session

of how high school students from both Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods “felt” being out after 10pm in various parts of the town. There were some surprising results that showed some Catholic students felt more comfortable in a couple of the Protestant areas, and vice versa for some of the Protestant students in a couple of the Catholic areas.

Later, in the afternoon session, Jack Dangermond sat down with Dr. Edward O. Wilson and Jane Goodall on stage for an impromptu conversation. One of the most memorable moments came when Dr. Wilson mentioned the recent discovery of a previously unknown species of “eyebrow mites” – insects so tiny, they were virtually undetectable, but numerous among humans and primates! Suddenly, Jane leaned over and began “picking” through Jack’s eyebrows, in much the same manner as Chimpanzees groom each other – it brought the house down!

At the conclusion of the plenary session, everyone headed upstairs to the opening reception in the Map Gallery. Seeking to avoid the huge crowd, I headed to “Burgers, Bait, and Beer”, a small bait shop on the pier in South Embarcadero Park. I ordered a cold Sculpin IPA and sat on the pier overlooking San Diego Bay and Coronado Island. It was a very relaxing time watching all the boats and ships sailing in and out of the bay. After an hour or so, I returned to the Map Gallery reception. But it was still terribly crowded, so I only stayed for one beer and left. I walked back to the hotel and went to the Karl Strauss Brewpub for a large bowl of “beer chili”, along with a cold pint of Pilsner. Back at the hotel, as I was preparing to retire for the night, I heard the sound of a young man in the next room “practicing” with his Oboe. Fortunately, he quit after 10 minutes, but I was awakened at 2:30am by the noise of construction equipment outside on the street below! My ear plugs and a couple of pillows over my head helped a bit, but in the morning, I requested to change rooms. The hotel general manager was very accommodating, and even credited me with an extra 5000 Marriott points for the inconvenience. The next day, I attended a couple of technical workshops and demo presentations about StoryMap. Then at lunch time, I walked up to Ralph’s Market and bought two large chicken tenders from the deli counter. And not only were they very tasty, but at \$1.49 they were considerably less expensive than the \$9.00 beer in the hotels! Later, as I walked around the massive EXPO hall, I ran into my next-door neighbor Mike. He was working in the Geodatabase Product Island, behind the StoryMap Island, and he lamented the fact that the StoryMap Island was far more popular! At the conclusion of the technical workshops, I joined the “Canada Night” reception, as well as the “International Reception” afterwards, where I met up with many old friends and colleagues. At Canada Night they were giving everyone a bright red maple leaf scarf to be worn during the reception. At the check-in desk, there was a poster showing at least 10 different ways to wear the scarf, some being rather odd, but the majority of people chose to wear it draped around their neck in a very traditional style, as did I. As always, Canada Night was a lot of fun, but I found it a bit weird that the only beers being served were Budweiser and Bud Light, despite there being many excellent Canadian brews!

Later, at the International Reception, I met up with several old friends from my days of teaching software training classes around the world. It was a lot of fun to hear about things that had happened in their countries since I had travelled there. After the receptions wound down, I walked over to KC BBQ for a delicious smoked brisket sandwich and a cold pint of Sculpin IPA. And, as usual, Rick the bartender was as “entertaining” as ever harassing the locals! Among the new signs posted behind the bar was one that read: *“Some days you’re the dog and some days you’re the fire hydrant”* – philosophy doesn’t get much simpler! In fact, the bar was covered with signs and posters of great philosophical importance. Having digested both the food and the philosophy, I went back to the hotel and my new room, which turned out to be peacefully quiet!

The next morning, I met up with Christina from Guyana and introduced her to some of my Esri colleagues who could help her in her work with the Guyana National Forestry Service. And fortunately, I was able to arrange for her to meet with Jack Dangermond. (she was thrilled – like meeting with a “Hollywood” celebrity! But I doubt very much that Jack realized that) Later in the morning, I walked along the waterfront again and took photos of the historic old four masted sailing ship, “Star of India”. She was flying an enormous sail honoring the 250th anniversary of the founding of San Diego. As I looked at the sail, I suddenly realized that 2019



Star of India

was also the 50th anniversary of the founding of Esri. Although, being incredibly modest people, Jack and Laura were trying to downplay the event.

Around 1:30pm, I gathered my bags, checked out of the hotel, and walked over to the Santa Fe Depot. As I waited to board the train to LA, I had a huge hot dog from the small snack shop in the station. Then I joined a long line of people waiting to board the train. It turned out that the train was seriously overbooked, but having a Business Class ticket, I was guaranteed a reserved seat. However, as the train proceeded north, more and more people in coach class boarded the train and had to endure “standing room only”! But as I relaxed in my Business Class seat and enjoyed the lovely scenery along the pacific coast, I listened to my favorite music on my iPod. When I arrived at LA Union Station, I proceeded to the Amtrak ticket window to get a seat assignment on the Southwest Chief train to Riverside. (Car 11 Seat 1) Having made the required seat assignment, I went to the Imperial & Western Brewpub in the old Fred Harvey Restaurant for a cold pint of their “Super Chief IPA” and a huge order of fish and chips. (once again, I had to box half of it up to take home) Again the brewpub became way too crowded with Dodger fans, so when I finished my dinner, I went to the “Café Crepe” for a quiet glass of “1776 Lager” while I watched people coming and going in the immense main hall of Union Station. Unfortunately, “Traxx”, my favorite bar in the station had closed down – perhaps due to the competition from the new Imperial & Western Brewpub. Next to Café Crepe was a very interesting display of the plans for renovation/restoration of Union Station, a jewel of 1920’s Art Deco style. Eventually it was time to board the Southwest Chief for my return to Riverside. When I sat down in seat 1 of car 11, the elderly lady in the seat beside me said she was travelling to Wichita, Kansas to visit her son and his new family. She would be arriving at 2:30am in two days time. So, before I headed to the lounge car for a cold beer as the train pulled out of the station, I gave her the “snack pack” I had received earlier that day aboard the Pacific Surfliner. She was thrilled with all the different snacks! I spent the rest of the hour and half journey in the lounge car with a cold glass of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, listening to beautiful music on my iPod as the train rolled silently into the night – very relaxing!

August

In late August, I headed to Las Vegas for the annual “Photoshop World Conference”, my seventh time attending it. Often, I will take the back roads to Las Vegas, across the Mojave Desert, rather than fight the traffic on Interstate 15. A good portion of the way is on historic Route 66, through Amboy, Kelso, and Cima. The only surviving business establishment along the old highway is “Roy’s Café and Motel” in Amboy. Now days it only serves snacks and cold drinks, but during its heyday, when Route 66 was the main highway between Chicago and Los Angeles, it was a major roadside stop for travelers. From Amboy, it was about 35 miles to Kelso, once a major stop for passengers on the famous Union Pacific “Overland” train between Chicago and Los Angeles. The town also



Roy's Cafe & Motel - Amboy



Kelso Depot

once served as a primary maintenance shop and refueling station for the steam locomotives. At one time, during the 1940’s, the population of Kelso was over 10,000 people. But when the railroad phased out steam for diesel power, the maintenance shops were closed, and the population quickly declined. Today, fewer than 100 people call Kelso home, mostly National Park Service staff and a few railroad employees. The historic old depot was restored several years ago and now serves as a visitor center for Mojave National Preserve. At one time, when passenger trains stopped in Kelso, there was a Fred Harvey restaurant in the depot, which later became a café called “The Beanery”. But a couple of years ago, it

closed and is now part of the historical museum.

As I drove on to Cima, another abandoned town alongside the railroad, two vehicles suddenly passed me at high speed. And a couple of miles further down the road, as I came over a small hill, they were stopped in the middle of the road, with doors wide open! As I got closer, I could see they were sheriff's deputies in bullet-proof vests, with weapons drawn! So, I stopped a good distance from them, not knowing if bullets might soon be flying! A few minutes later, a deputy motioned me to proceed around the vehicles. As I slowly passed by, I saw they had a couple of guys handcuffed and kneeling on the pavement next to a Budget rental van. I had no chance to stop and ask what was going on, but it might have been a drug bust or illegal immigrants – we'll probably never know!

When I finally got to Las Vegas, the traffic was as horrible as ever, and the check-in line at the Mirage Hotel was creeping along at a snail's pace – not a good start! When at last I got up to the registration desk, I was informed that since I had already checked in "online", I could have used the "mobile check-in" consoles and avoided standing in line! (it would have been nice to have been told that before I got to the hotel!) After finally getting my room key, I went to the lobby bar for a cold beer. And when I was given the bill for \$10, I knew it would be my last beer in the bar! That's when I remembered that the Treasure Island Hotel next door was the home of "Gilly's Bar" and \$6 beer – even premium craft beer like Alaskan Icy Bay IPA! As I savored my cold beer in Gilly's, the music was old time country and western – NO RAP, thank goodness! It wasn't long before a group of rather overweight young ladies began riding the "mechanical bull" in the middle of the bar and doing rather poorly, I'm afraid to say! But they were having a lot of fun, taking photos of each other on the bull. The movement of the bull was controlled by an operator sitting off to the side, and he made sure they all had fun, but at the same time, he also made sure they all got "bucked off" after a few minutes! Needless to say, the mechanical bull was very popular. At one point, an elderly lady had to be lifted up onto the bull so her husband could take her photo. (the bull "behaved" himself and didn't make a move!) One of the "unique" features of Gilly's are the female servers – all young and very attractive, dressed in very skimpy black leather bikinis, black leather chaps, black boots, and black cowboy hat! Despite the intense heat outside (115 degrees), all of the interior spaces were "freezing" (60 degrees)! Meanwhile, the mechanical bull took a break and line dancing lessons began. It was fun to watch people enjoying the experience, even though many of them stumbled their way around the dance floor. There was also a noticeable absence of men on the dance floor. As the afternoon turned into evening, the place became packed, and with a lack of servers, I decided to search for dinner elsewhere, even though the smell of BBQ was very tempting. On the way out, I ran into the general manager and let him know the service was unacceptably slow. His feeble excuse was that too many servers had "bailed" on him that night. While that's understandable, he offered NO apology!

Now in search of food, I walked down Las Vegas Blvd to the "Food Court" in the Fashion Mall, where I spotted "India Masala". I ordered my very favorite Indian dish, "Chicken Tikka Masala", and it was fabulous – very authentic, with fresh baked naan bread. In addition to Indian food, the Food Court had many cuisines represented from around the world, including Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Thai and of course, Mexican. It was a nice place, inexpensive, and a great spot to watch a very diverse crowd. Upon my return to the Mirage Hotel, I decided to have one more \$10 beer in the "Heritage Steakhouse Restaurant", as I watched the chefs prepare some delicious looking dinners.

The next morning, I was up early to make sure I got to the conference registration desk before the crowd. After registering, I was invited to the Alumni VIP Breakfast – a nice perk for having attended more than five Photoshop World conferences. Being an alumni also gave us the choice seats up front in the plenary session, as well as all the technical sessions throughout the conference. The plenary session kicked off with a funny Kung Fu theme, where staff from KelbyOne put together a short movie making fun of new photography and video technology. Then, senior product managers from Adobe Systems demonstrated some of the latest new enhancements to Photoshop and Lightroom – very impressive! And over the next three days, I attended several excellent technical workshops that would prove very useful in my work later on.

During my stay on the "Las Vegas Strip", I couldn't help but observe the following:

- Walking through the hotel lobby and casino was like trying to navigate through a "herd of snails" – people aimlessly "wandering", almost as if they were "sleepwalking", while carrying a drink and smoking!

- Everything for sale in the Strip hotels was very expensive – beer for \$10 and appetizers starting at \$15! The Treasure Island Hotel was less expensive and a welcome exception.

I spent three nights at the Mirage Hotel, and I had to change rooms every night, for a variety of reasons.

Thursday night: (room 25010) A nice room, but with a connecting door and rather noisy neighbors. I had requested no connecting room when I had made the reservation.

Wednesday night: (room 25047) A rather shabby room where someone had unplugged the clock. I had to call maintenance at 11:30pm to reset it. That night I got very little sleep, even with earplugs and two pillows over my head! There was a continual noise from the elevator motors that were located directly above the room. (too late to change rooms) In the morning, I found the shower faucet was broken, the handle just “spun” around without releasing any water. (it took engineering quite some time to fix it – so no shower that morning) The Front Desk had no vacant “clean” rooms for me to use and refused to allow me to use a shower in a vacant “uncleaned” room, despite the fact that I said I didn’t care if the room was cleaned or not! So, I ended up washing in the bathroom sink.

Thursday night: (room 24045) Very nice, quiet room at the very end of the hallway, and no connecting room. This was the room I should have been given from the beginning! It also had a great view of the Palazzo and Venetian Hotels, as well as the Mirage Hotel’s “Volcano Event” in the evening.



View from Room 24045

After the Closing Session of the conference, I drove over to Mike’s home in Sutherland, a western suburb of Las Vegas. (Mike and I were Army buddies back in 1969–70) When I arrived, I was greeted by Mike, Lora (a mutual friend from San Diego) and the dogs (Max, Phoebe, and Buddy). After handing me a cold beer, Mike was anxious to show me the beautiful mural painted on the full length of his backyard wall. He said it had been painted in just two days by a Mexican artist named Jose. Part of the mural was a depiction of the 16th hole at Huntington Beach golf course. Another part of the wall was a scene from the Napali coast in Hawaii. Following several rounds of drinks on the patio, Mike suggested dinner at one of his favorite neighborhood restaurants, “Bob Taylor’s Ranch House”, the oldest

restaurant in Las Vegas. It was originally an old ranch north of the city and opened as a steakhouse restaurant in 1955. It was definitely “off the beaten path” and the Uber driver had great difficulty finding it on his GPS device, but eventually we got there. Inside the old stone ranch house was a large BBQ pit and grill, next to the dining room that was decorated in classic Old West motif. The mouth-watering steaks were grilled to perfection and served with a large plate of “cheesy home fried potatoes”, a house specialty. We enjoyed a lengthy evening of conversation, before heading back to Mike’s place, together with boxes of delicious leftovers! The evening continued on the patio under moonlight, with soft music in the background. Eventually, eyelids began to fall, and we all retired for the night, including the dogs.

The next morning, I took Lora to the airport for her return flight to San Diego. After I dropped her off, I noticed my fuel gauge was way past “empty”, so I stopped at the nearest gas station, a Sinclair station just outside the airport. As I reached into my pocket for my wallet, panic struck me! It wasn’t there – in fact, it wasn’t anywhere in my backpack either. At that point, I realized I must have left it at Mike’s house. Luckily, I found one of my American Express cards in my backpack, so I was able to pump some gas. If I hadn’t had that extra credit card in my backpack, my only option would have been to call Mike and ask him to have an Uber driver deliver my wallet to me! No longer running on empty, I drove back to Mike’s place and retrieved my wallet. When I showed up at the front door, I caught Mike by surprise, but the dogs still recognized me. Back on the road again, I stopped in Jean, Nevada to top up the gas tank before crossing the border into California, only to find the gas more expensive than in California!

When the month of September rolled around, I decided to celebrate my birthday in San Diego. I took the Amtrak bus from Riverside to Fullerton to connect with the Amtrak “Pacific Surfliner” train to San Diego. I was lucky to be able to sit up front, next to the bus driver for a great view of the road. It was a very smooth, comfortable ride and we arrived ahead of schedule. So, I had plenty of time to get breakfast at the “Santa Fe Café” in Fullerton station. The “Santa Fe Scramble” with bacon, country fried potatoes, and sourdough toast was very tasty, and a bargain at \$5. As I enjoyed breakfast outside in the warm morning sunshine, next to the station platform, I watched the trains passing through the station. At one point, a massive BNSF freight train roared past, led by five locomotives at the front and two locomotives on the rear. Later, it was announced that the northbound Amtrak train to Los Angeles would change tracks and arrive on the opposite platform, much to the confusion of passengers. The southbound train to San Diego was 10, then 20, and finally 30 minutes late, due to a “computer glitch”! To make matters worse, once we boarded, our departure was delayed due to another “computer glitch”. At the Irvine station, a very loud party of young ladies boarded and took seats behind me. So, I moved to the other end of the car and activated the music on my iPod, which made the trip much more enjoyable! South of San Juan Capistrano, we had spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean and beaches. Although we arrived in downtown San Diego an hour late, I had no schedule, so it didn’t matter. I walked over to the “Guild Hotel”, two blocks from the Santa Fe Depot and checked in. The hotel was now a new Marriott property – a beautiful renovation of the former YMCA. It was a lovely transformation that preserved the elegant early 1900’s design, while updating the facilities. At the time of check-in, I was given one of the “artisan” rooms. It was beautiful, but it was on the first floor facing the busy Broadway Avenue. Right away I noticed the noise from people and cars on the street. So, I changed to a smaller room on the top floor overlooking the courtyard – much quieter. The décor in the room was very trendy, which I’m sure was nothing close to what the old YMCA rooms were like. Then, I walked down to the Hilton Bayfront Hotel and ordered a coffee at Starbucks. While I sat outside on the terrace, I watched a “Waste Management” company employee empty the trash cans, both recycle and ordinary trash into the same container! When I asked him if the company separated the combined trash later, he said NO, because people toss the same stuff into both trash cans – so it was pointless to try to separate the recycled stuff. (really sad)

Later in the afternoon, as I walked along the waterfront, I passed five enormous, multi-million-dollar yachts. One of them even had a heliport and helicopter on board. I continued walking to the Embarcadero fishing pier and the “Burgers, Bait, and Beer” shop. There I ordered a cold pint of Sculpin IPA and sat outside on the pier, watching all the boats and ships sailing in and out of the bay. Sitting near me were three young Hispanic ladies from GES (Greyhound Exposition Services) with their tall Bloody Mary’s, while Spanish music blared away. They put away several rounds of drinks, and at one point, a large cargo ship passed by on its way out of the bay. As it went by the bar, all three ladies began waving their arms in an effort



to get the freighter’s Captain to blow the ship’s horn. At first, it looked like they hadn’t been seen by the ship. But as it approached the closest point to the bar, it sounded two loud shouts out from its massive horn! The ladies, as well as the rest of at the small bar, were amazed! We all clapped to honor the achievement of the young ladies. It was the first time I had seen such a thing happen, especially with the large number of ships that sail in and out of San Diego Bay every day. Later, I walked along the waterfront to “Top of the Market” for dinner, my favorite restaurant in San Diego. It’s always fun to sit at the bar and watch the chefs prepare the food. My server even recognized me and recommended the West Coast Scallops – they were fantastic, accompanied by a chilled glass of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, one of my favorites. After dinner, I walked back to the hotel and wrote my travel notes as I sat in the lobby bar.

The next morning, I took a long walk along the waterfront and picked up a coffee at the Hyatt Hotel. The day had become very warm and humid as a result of the influence from the “Arizona Monsoon”. Later in the morning, I took the ferry to Coronado Island and sat in the shade on the pier with a cold glass of iced tea, watching the boats and ships passing by.



View of downtown San Diego from Coronado Island

Meanwhile, kids on bicycles and scooters made their way along the waterfront. It was a very relaxing time, with a gorgeous view of downtown San Diego across the bay. As the afternoon went on, I took the ferry back to downtown, and as I got off the ferry, I saw an event going on in front of the Hilton Bayfront Hotel, honoring the 911 first responders. There were several food trucks, including a vintage 1940's fire truck that had been converted into a mobile pizza oven! A couple of contests were going on, one being a "stair climbing" race in which the participants had to climb several flights of stairs in the hotel in full firefighting gear! I watched the action for an hour or so before walking over to Petco stadium for the Padres baseball game against the Colorado

Rockies. My seat in the "Compass Premier Club" was a great location, 10 rows up from the field and near home plate. The "in seat dining option" was much appreciated as well. The attendance was around 30,000 and the experience of seeing people on the enormous big screen over center field between innings was very popular! The Padres won the game, much to the delight of the San Diego fans. After the game, I walked to "Kansas City BBQ" for a beer, before heading back to the hotel. The place was as fascinating as ever with a lively clientele of "locals", mixed with the occasional out of town tourist. (the BBQ is also some of the best in the city) As I sat at the bar, I noticed several new signs and posters, including:



Petco Stadium

- They call it "PMS" because "mad cow disease" was already taken
- I'm not an alcoholic, I'm a drunk – alcoholics go to meetings
- Your ridiculous little opinion has been noted and dismissed
- "Will Work for Beer"

The following morning, I had breakfast in the "Courtyard Café" at the hotel. It was a delicious plate of scrambled eggs, applewood smoked bacon, O'Brien potatoes, sourdough toast and black raspberry jam. It set me up for almost the entire day. Then, I spent a couple of hours taking photos in North Embarcadero park before returning to the hotel to pack my bags for the return trip to Los Angeles and Riverside. When I arrived at the Santa Fe Depot, I encountered a long line of people waiting to board the train. When we were finally allowed to board, we found old passenger cars and limited Café Car service. Some people complained, but the train was smooth, fast, and on time. There were gorgeous views of the ocean and beaches, with a high tide that created some huge waves for the surfers.

Once I arrived at Union Station in Los Angeles, I headed to the new "Imperial and Western Brewery" in the station's former Fred Harvey Restaurant. The brewpub was very crowded with Dodger fans just returning from a game. I managed to find one seat at the bar and ordered fish and chips, along with a cold pint of "Super Chief IPA". It was a huge portion of fish (Alaskan Plaice) and chips, but while the fish was very tasty, the breading was "soggy", and the fries were "limp"! (disappointing) Having finished the meal, I felt the crowd begin to close in on me, so I decided to seek another less crowded and quieter place to wait until it was time to board the train to Riverside. I found "Café Crepe" in the station to be the perfect place. They even had "1776 Lager" on draft. So, I sat down and watched people coming and going in the main hall of the station, as I enjoyed my cold pint of beer.

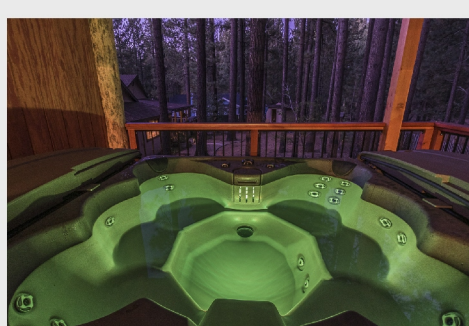
Then it was time to make my way to track 10 to board the "Southwest Chief" train. While I would only be travelling an hour

and a half to Riverside, the train would travel over 2200 miles and two and a half days to Chicago. I spent most of my time in the Observation/Lounge Car as the sun was setting over southern California. Larry, the “Café Car guy” downstairs was very friendly, and even opened early for me, as the train was still in the station. As I paid for my bottle of Stone IPA, Larry told me he had grown up in Redlands. As we carried on our conversation, he asked where I lived in Redlands, and when I told him on Alvarado Street near the Redlands Bowl, he suddenly gasped – he knew my neighborhood very well since his grandparents used to live in the big brown house on the corner! (the current owner restored the house and now operates it as an AirBnB) It was a very nice, quiet trip to Riverside, and as I sat in the Observation Car, with the train silently gliding through the night, I almost wished I was going all the way to Chicago!

In late September, I was invited to do a photo shoot for a wealthy couple from San Clemente. They own a publishing company and have several properties in Big Bear City. About a year before, I had photographed their “Apple’s Bed and Breakfast” in Big Bear City, as well as “Whispering Pines Estate”, another of their properties in the mountains. They had really loved the photos and contacted me to ask if I would photograph a new property in Big Bear City that they had just finished building. As part of the photo assignment, they offered me two nights complimentary accommodations at Apple’s B&B. It was an opportunity I couldn’t refuse. It was a beautiful day, clear and 75 degrees, as I drove up highway 38, and over 8200-foot-high Onyx Summit to Big Bear City. When I arrived at



The "Great Room"



the new house, it was absolutely stunning – built entirely of natural pine and local stone! The “Great Room” was an 1800 sq. ft open space that included the living room, dining room, and an enormous kitchen! The entire house occupied over 8,000 sq. ft. There were five spacious bedrooms, each with a private bathroom. The master bedroom had an incredible master bathroom of gorgeous Italian marble and a huge double shower. Even the laundry room was amazing, having counters for folding clothes and a special area for hanging things to dry. The enormous kitchen space was unique in that it included a large lighted pantry and an unusual “spice cabinet” that pulled out from the wall! Two of the most beautiful and unique features of the house were a gigantic spa on the deck at the rear of the house, and an incredible “family room” downstairs. In the family room was a pool table, wet bar, and a large “home theater” with reclining seats and a popcorn machine! Spencer, the owner, and I spent quite some time one evening getting it set up for a photo. He really wanted a shot showing one of his wildlife pictures on the big screen. After several attempts, we finally got the perfect shot! Another unique feature of the property was the statue of a bear carved out of a tree stump in front of the house.

Spencer spent a couple of hours with me as I photographed the house, but the rest of the time, I was on my own – it was truly a joy to be able to photograph such a beautiful property. One evening, Spencer invited me to have dinner with him at “The Pines Tavern on the Lake”, his favorite



Home Theater - Family Room



Heavenly Valley Road - Big Bear City

restaurant in Big Bear. As it turned out, the restaurant was celebrating “Oktoberfest” that evening. So, I ordered my favorite German dish, “Wiener Schnitzel”, while Spencer chose the traditional Bavarian roasted pork knuckle, “Schweinshaxe”. (fall of the bone meat with tantalizingly crispy skin, accompanied by roasted gold potatoes and Doppelbock based gravy) We had a very nice evening of great food and wonderful conversation, while we watched a beautiful sunset over Big Bear Lake.

On another evening, I went into “downtown” Big Bear City for dinner at “Captain’s Anchorage Restaurant” in the historic “Andy Devine Room”, named for the original owner, better known as the “sidekick” of Roy Rogers. The special that night

was Prime Rib dinner with all the trimmings, and it was one of the best I’ve had anywhere!

The next morning, I joined other guests at “Apple’s B&B” for a delicious breakfast that included a unique “Southwestern egg puff pastry” – it was fantastic. Also at the breakfast table was the office staff from the Kagan’s publishing company, as part of a company “retreat”. It was nice to share breakfast with them and to meet a couple of the staff that I had only corresponded with by email. As I drove home that afternoon, I was grateful for having had the wonderful opportunity that Spencer and Laurie had given me to photograph some of the most beautiful properties in southern California. Leaving Apple’s, Laurie mentioned that she and Spencer were looking into building another house on the shore of Big Bear Lake – I look forward to another photo opportunity!

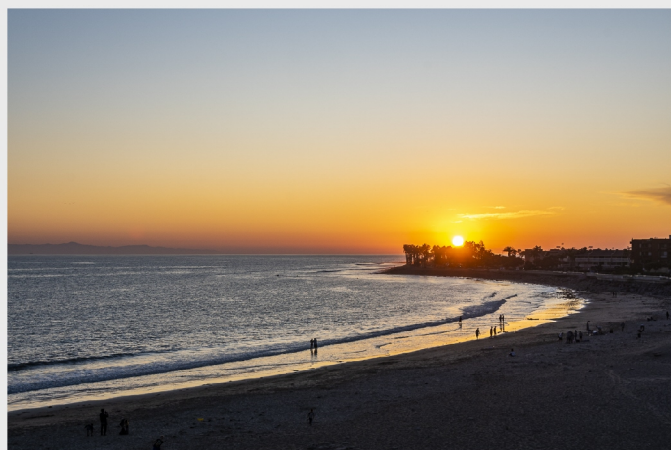
October

In mid-October, I took a trip to Ventura to attend the “Seaside Highland Games” - my third year. I boarded the Amtrak bus at the Riverside train station, and arrived in Fullerton a few minutes early, despite an accident on the 91 freeway. As I sat outside the Santa Fe Café with my coffee, a very long BNSF freight train roared through the station, with four locomotives at the front and two more at the rear. A few minutes later, I boarded the Pacific Surfliner train to Los Angeles and on to Ventura. The journey was very comfortable, and I had a jalapeno cheeseburger and Stone IPA for lunch on board the train as it wound its way through the Santa Monica Mountains. It was a beautiful day with warm temperatures and clear skies. Upon arriving in Ventura, I walked two blocks to the “Clocktower Inn” near the San Buenaventura Mission. The Inn was very rustic, with a large stone fireplace in the lobby and a covered atrium. My room was upstairs overlooking a small park next to the Ventura County Museum. After dropping off my stuff in the room, I walked over to the Ventura County Fairgrounds, the venue for the Seaside Highland games – three blocks from the Inn. (very convenient) After I entered the fairgrounds, I bought a cold glass of Harp Lager and sat down to listen to a couple of Irish bands on stage. (“Cockswain” and “Seven Nations”) Seven Nations refers to the seven places in the world that are “home” to the Celtic heritage – Scotland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany (France), and Galicia (Spain). The bands’ music was both traditional Celtic folk songs, as well as unusual “fusion” of traditional Celtic and Rock-n-Roll! I really enjoyed listening to the bands in the warm afternoon sun.

As evening approached, I walked along the beachfront to the “Beach Fish House & MadeWest Brewery Tap Room” on the Ventura Pier. As the sun was setting over the ocean, I ordered a MadeWest IPA and had a delightful conversation with the bartender. He gave me a detailed history of the brewery, an institution in Ventura for many years. Recently, at least a dozen



San Buenaventura Mission



Sunset from Ventura Pier

more craft breweries have opened in Ventura. Meanwhile, the soft glow from the gorgeous sunset filled the bar, and I walked out to the balcony overlooking the ocean to take some photos of the incredible scene. When I returned to my seat at the bar, he recommended that I try their new seasonal brew, "Oktoberfest". It was really excellent, with a familiar taste of German hops and roasted malt. As I left the bar, I bought four bottles for later. As night fell, I walked to old town Ventura, along Main Street, past many historic old buildings from the turn of the century. Back at the inn that evening, the front desk recommended "Tony's Pizzeria", a local place at "Surfer's Point", one block away. Tony's was indeed a very local place, well known for traditional brick oven

fired pizza. I ordered a large slice of pepperoni and mushroom pizza, along with a cold can of Budweiser. Then I sat outside in the beer garden under the old trees in the warm evening air. Tony's opened in 1959 and was a prime example of quintessential "laid back" Ventura! I enjoyed watching a couple of young families as their kids played together. Then I noticed an extremely obese woman at a nearby table. She was confined to a wheelchair that could barely fit her. Along with another large woman and a teenage boy, they put away two large pizzas, three orders of ice cream, and a large dessert dish!! (amazing- I could hardly believe my eyes!) My slice of pizza was very tasty, and the evening among the locals was fun. Then, I walked back to the Inn and watched an hour of TV on CNN. The program was a documentary about the Los Angeles Coroner's Office and how they handled hundreds of dead bodies every week. The morgue was filled to capacity with over 350 bodies. For the staff who worked there every day, it had become just another job! In fact, one man figured he had picked up over 12,000 bodies during his ten years in the Coroner's Office! Another fascinating aspect of the TV program was the fact that Los Angeles cremates any bodies not claimed by family members within 6 months. Those who are not claimed are buried in a special cemetery for the "unknown or unwanted". (very sad, but they were honored anyway)

After a fitful night, suffering from a serious cold/flu, I awoke early, showered, and had breakfast in the hotel atrium. Then, I went to the nearby Rite-Aid pharmacy to get some cold/flu medication to enable me to get through the day. Now that I was "medicated", I toured around old town Ventura, taking photos of the classic old buildings and storefronts. The neo-classical architecture of the historic old City hall was gorgeous. From old town, I walked over to the fairgrounds and spent a couple of hours watching the games, particularly the "Heavy Athletics Competition". As I sat in the stands, I witnessed a very impressive performance by a young 16-year-old girl in the "sheaf tossing competition". It involved



City Hall - Ventura



Heavy Athletics Competition

throwing a 20-pound bundle of hay (sheaf) up and over a bar. She easily won the competition and set a personal record at a height of 21 feet! Before leaving the fairgrounds, I stopped by the Henderson Clan tent to say hello. In all, there were at least 45 Clans represented at the games. On my way back to the Inn to pick up my bags, I stopped at the "Surfer's Point Coffee Shop" across the street from Tony's. As I sat outside on the patio with my coffee, an old grey-bearded man was playing a guitar – to no one in particular. As listened, he was a great musician, but his choice of Latin style music didn't appeal to my taste. Having said that, his rendering of the classic Doors song

"Light my Fire" was wonderful. Having finished my coffee, I picked up my bags and walked over to the train station. The train coming from Santa Barbara was almost 10 minutes late and very crowded, even in Business Class. I managed to get a seat to myself in the second Business Class car, and I enjoyed a smooth, quiet trip, at least as far as Burbank Airport. From there I had to share the seat with a guy going to Irvine. He spent the entire time watching a recording of a NASCAR race on his iPhone! Once I arrived at Union Station, I managed to get a beer at the Imperial and Western Brewery, despite the large crowd. But it wasn't a pleasant experience, so I didn't stay for a second beer. Instead, I went to the Amtrak ticket window to get a seat assignment on train #4, the Southwest Chief. (Car 11, seat 55) Having my seat assignment to Riverside, I went to Café Crepe for a scrumptious "West Coast Crepe" – smoked salmon, red onions, capers, garlic, and chives. The cold glass of Figueroa Mountain Pale Ale went with it very well. I sat at a table overlooking the main hall, watching people coming and going, in and out of Union Station. It wasn't long before I spotted lots of LA Rams football fans, so there had to be a Rams game that night. Everyone of them was sporting their Rams shirts, and one guy was even wearing "horns"! Soon it was time to board the train, and I sat in the Observation/Lounge car with a cold bottle of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, listening to beautiful music on my iPod as the train rolled silently into the night! (it was a lovely trip to Ventura, despite the cold/flu)



Garner Valley - San Jacinto Mountains

On the eve of Halloween, I decided to attend a fundraiser in Borrego Springs for the Anza Borrego Desert Foundation. After almost nine months of closure to repair winter storm damage, highway 74 was finally re-opened. As I drove up the highway toward the small town of Mountain Center, the damage from the winter mudslides was still evident, and a couple of one lane sections remained. Once I was over Keen's Camp Summit, it was a lovely drive under clear sunny skies through the Ponderosa Pine forest in Garner Valley. But the wind from the northeast was ferocious at times. When I reached the junction with highway 371, I stopped at the "Paradise Valley Café" for a huge, delicious breakfast – three eggs, hash browns, four strips of maple-cured bacon, and sourdough toast. I noticed that every time

someone came into the small café, the servers greeted them with "Welcome to Paradise"! As I read the menu, I saw it included a list of "beers for breakfast" and another list of "beers for lunch". The café was a popular spot for bikers, as well as the highway maintenance crew. After breakfast, I drove south on highway 371 through Anza Valley, which was established in 1776. Then, I took highway 79 south to the old gold mining town of Julian, where I stopped for a "Martian IPA" at the Julian Brewing Company. As I entered Julian, I couldn't help noticing much less traffic than on a typical weekend. From Julian, I drove down the mountain on highway 79 and county road S22 to Borrego Springs. There I checked into a nice King suite at the Borrego Springs Resort. As I was checking in, I noticed lots of cyclists around the resort. Obviously, there was a cycling event going on. After stowing my gear, I took a short hike to "Yaqui Well" near the Tamarisk Grove Campground. I discovered that the well (spring) had dried up several years ago, but a small grove of trees remained at the site. As I hiked up the slope above the old well, I encountered a vast expanse of Cholla cactus, shining brilliantly in the afternoon sun.

Returning to Borrego Springs, I stopped to take photos of some of Ricardo Breceda's metal sculptures in the desert, which I had not seen before. One of them was an enormous eagle clutching a small sheep. As I looked at the beautiful pieces of his artwork, I recalled the time when my dear friend Tina and I first met Ricardo in his studio. (he and Tina hit it off immediately!) Back at the Borrego Springs Resort, I had a couple of beers in "Arches Bar" as I sat outside



Cholla Cactus



"Eagle" by Ricardo Breceda

on the terrace overlooking the golf course and Santa Rosa Mountains, as the sunset surrounded the resort. That evening, I went downtown to Carlee's Bar and Grill, my favorite restaurant in town. It was very busy, and the lone bartender was "slammed", as was the kitchen! So, everyone had a long wait for food. (but eventually the kitchen caught up and the evening ended well) As I sat at the bar, I saw only three people in the entire restaurant who were dressed in costume for Halloween night! One woman, dressed as a "wench", who was seated across the bar, kept staring at me and even "waved" a couple of times. Finally, she came over and introduced herself as "Annie". (while it was nice of her to do so, I had no idea of what were her intentions)

So, after I finished a fantastic dinner of scallops and wild rice, I bid goodnight and Happy Halloween to Annie, despite her insistence that I join her party.

The next morning, I picked up a coffee and savory puff pastry at Borrego Coffee Shop, before heading back home. I encountered very little traffic going west/northbound, but the traffic east/southbound was pretty heavy – mostly large pickup trucks and RVs pulling travel trailers and off-road vehicles. On my way going west on highway 79 toward Temecula, I passed at least seven police cars headed south/east – but I had no idea why. Soon after, I pulled into the old "Stagecoach Inn" for some gas, before heading north on Sage Road to Hemet and back home. It had been a short trip, but an enjoyable one – and I missed the annual "invasion" of hundreds of "Trick-or-Treaters" in our neighborhood. In addition, I had given my support to the Anza Borrego Desert Foundation.



Stagecoach Inn



Leading the Parade

November

At the beginning of November, I attended the "Amber Waves of Grain Craft Beer Festival" in Corona, an annual event organized by the "American Riders" motorcycle club to honor and support veterans. This was my third time at the event, in which there were almost 50 California craft breweries serving tastings in support of several veteran's assistance organizations. All proceeds from the event went directly to the organizations. The day was partly cloudy and a pleasant 75 degrees. The event kicked off with a parade, even larger than last year. There were many veteran's organizations and re-enactment groups representing veterans, all the way from the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War, to the current War on Terrorism. In the parade were also vintage military vehicles, as well as classic old cars honoring veterans. The parade concluded with over 30 motorcycles roaring past us! As I stood taking photos, I felt honored to be a veteran of the Vietnam War era. A special

guest speaker was then introduced, a professional "off-road racer" who had overcome a serious case of PTSD after attempting suicide. His story was remarkable as he conveyed his experience, sometimes in very emotional terms. (later, he bought \$1000 worth of raffle tickets and committed to donating any winnings to veterans!)

The emcee on the main stage was once again this year, "TMOC" (The Marine Of Comedy) from San Diego. He really kept the afternoon program moving along, as well as entertaining the crowd in between the bands. As part of the price of admission, everyone received a souvenir glass and "unlimited" beer tastings from the 50 craft breweries represented. As I walked around the event, I couldn't help but notice the majority of beers were either brewed with various fruits (mango being the most popular) or some unusual ingredient, such as nutmeg or jalapeno pepper. I found it a bit difficult to find a



"American Riders"

traditional IPA or Pale Ale. But the ones I did find were excellent! The event was well attended, with kids and dogs in abundance. As time went on, it became difficult to find a place to sit – but late in the afternoon, I was invited to sit in the “Navy League” tent and listen to the band called “K-Tel Allstars”. They played nothing but music from the 70’s, which was very popular among the mostly middle-aged crowd.

About a half hour before the end of the event, TMOC suddenly announced that the Navy League was serving free hot dogs! Then, one of the Navy guys began walking among the crowd giving away hot dogs and chips. It wasn’t long before he had quite a following! As the band ended their last set, I headed to the Stone Church Brewing Company nearby, one of the premier sponsors of the event. As I sat down at a table with a cold pint of their signature IPA, I spotted an unusual looking dog with stunning blue eyes at a nearby table. When I asked his owner, it turned out to be an Australian Shepherd. As the dinner hour approached, I walked over to TGI Friday’s and ordered the “Pot Stickers”. They were superb with traditional Hoisin sauce. It wasn’t long before I became aware of a man seated at the bar who was covered in tattoos, with the only exception being his face! When I asked him, he said it had taken over two years, and he wasn’t done yet!

Having finished dinner, I walked back to my room at the Staybridge Suites hotel. And the next morning, after a nice breakfast in the hotel, I packed my things and headed home, knowing I would return for the event next year!

In mid-November, I attended the first annual conference of “Photography for Real Estate” (PFRE) in Las Vegas. Not wanting the stress of heavy traffic on Interstate 15, I took the back roads across the Mojave Desert. As luck would have it, I received a photo assignment in Barstow the day before, which just happened to be on the way to Las Vegas. With the exception of a couple of miles on I-15, I was able to drive to Barstow on the back roads. Having completed the photo assignment, I joined the traffic on Interstate 40 going east to Ludlow, where I exited the freeway and drove old route 66 to Amboy, one of the only remaining towns in California on the original “Mother Road”. As I picked up a cup of coffee at “Roy’s Café”, an historic roadside stop when route 66 was the main highway from Chicago to Los Angeles, I watched a couple of young Japanese tourists trying to decide which route 66 souvenirs to buy. From Amboy, it was 35 miles to the junction with I-40. As I passed the junction and headed north to Kelso, I saw a new sign at the entrance to the Mojave National Preserve. The sign flashed the warning “No Fuel for 100 Miles” – I looked down at my fuel gauge and it was sitting at ¼ tank. Although I could have probably made it 100 miles, I felt the stress of the trip would not be worth it. So, not wanting to take a chance, I



2 mile long BNSF freight train

turned around and got back on I-40 east to find the next gas station. I exited the freeway a few miles down the highway at Goff’s road. There I bought \$15 worth of gas at \$5 per gallon to continue my journey north to US Highway 95. Just before reaching the junction with US 95, I had to wait for two very long BNSF freight trains to pass the railroad crossing. One of the trains had three locomotives on the head end, two in the middle and two on the rear! It took forever for it to clear the crossing. After that, it was a pleasant drive on US 95 into Las Vegas, but it wasn’t long before I encountered rush hour traffic. Eventually, I arrived at “South Point Casino and Resort”, the conference venue. It was a quick check-in to a very quiet

room at the end of the hallway on the second floor. When I entered the room, I immediately noticed that the view out the window was one of a solid wall! (clearly “no view”) But, since it rained during most of the conference, it wasn’t really much of a problem. That evening, I checked in for the conference and had a beer in the Silverado lounge. Soon, a young guy named James invited himself to sit down next to me at the bar. Over the course of the next hour, James related his “life story”! (I felt “obligated” to listen to his story, since he had insisted on buying me another beer!)

The next morning, I attended the opening session that was held in the resort’s “Showroom”. Basically, it was a “nightclub” – rather a unique and unusual



South Point Casino & Resort

room for a conference plenary session! It seemed to work out OK, despite the strange seating arrangement, in which several people had to sit in “booths”, as if they were attending a show. In the Showroom were two bars, one of which remained open and serving drinks throughout the opening session – and at times, the noise from the bartenders became very distracting. So, I moved to the opposite side of the room during the break. The presentations were very good, and I picked up a lot of valuable information that I was sure would help me in the real estate photography business. That evening, I had dinner at the “Zenshin Asian Restaurant”, one of 14 different dining options in South Point. The “Garlic Chicken” with rice was excellent, especially with a cold pint of Sapporo. While the dining options in South Point were impressive, I was disappointed by the lack of No Smoking areas in the casino. Another complaint I had was with the fact that, despite my room being on the second floor, there was no way to take the stairs to the ground floor – all the stairwells led outside the hotel! So, I had to take the elevator for just one floor every time. That evening was also the conference party in the Showroom, and this time the room was the perfect venue. Both bars were open and doing a brisk business. The program began with a local magician who did some amazing card tricks with a couple of people in the audience. Then a great band took the stage and knocked out some great classic rock-n-roll – the band was terrific and got a lot of people out on the dance floor. I sat in a booth in the rear of the Showroom, enjoying many familiar songs from the 60’s and 70’s! As the evening came to a close, I headed back to my room. Meanwhile, the rain continued to fall on the city throughout the night. The next morning, as I went to shave, I discovered that I had forgotten to pack a razor. So, it was a quick trip to the hotel gift shop to purchase one. The morning session was a very valuable source of information dedicated to working in real estate photography. I left the conference during the lunch break in order to return home that evening and prepare for another photo shoot in Anaheim the next day. For being the “first” conference for real estate photography, it was amazingly successful, in spite of a few logistical problems. And, considering the conference was organized by a real estate photographer in Fort McMurray, Alberta, I was very impressed, having managed international conferences myself for more than 25 years! For those of you who don’t know where Fort McMurray is located, it’s 600 miles north of Montana and just south of the Northwest Territories. Or as Brandon put it, just south of Santa’s home! From my experience at the first PFRE conference, I will be back again next year.

Around mid-November, I was invited to attend a “Writer’s Workshop” in Culver City, organized by the “Greater Los Angeles Writers Society” (GLAWS). On Saturday morning, I took the Amtrak bus from Riverside to Fullerton station, and then on to LA Union Station. There I connected with the Metro Expo Line to Culver City. Having checked online earlier, the Metro Trip Planner had me connecting with Culver City bus #6 at the EXPO-Sepulveda Metro Station. But when I got there, I couldn’t find the stop for bus #6. What I did find was the stop for bus #4. So, when it arrived, I asked, where was the stop for bus #6. The bus driver, a large black lady, said “bus #6 don’t run on this route”! Then, she asked where I was headed, and when I said the DoubleTree Hotel, she told me to get on board because she could get me to the mall, within a short walk to the hotel - so I hopped aboard. During the journey to the Westfield Mall, she told me that the Metro Trip Planner was totally wrong with its directions, and that I should file a formal complaint! Meanwhile, we carried on a conversation about her job driving a bus and having to support a family of five children alone. Eventually, we arrived at the “Transit Center” in the mall, with a clear view of the DoubleTree Hotel. Before I got off the bus, she gave me “detailed” directions about walking to the hotel. She was a wonderful, caring person who saved me from a night of confusion and very possibly a late arrival at the hotel! I really appreciated her concern for my safety and my need to get to the hotel. If I had been able to give her a gift that night, I certainly would have done so!

From the mall, it was only three blocks to the hotel, and I checked into a nice room on the top floor. Unfortunately, the room overlooked the busy 405 freeway. Later that evening, I walked back to the mall and had a delicious appetizer and cold glass of Peroni at the Olive Garden restaurant. Then, I ended the evening with a beer in the hotel lobby bar before retiring for the night. The next morning, I joined five other people for a workshop on the topic of how to “pitch” one’s book to a literary agent for publication and sale. The workshop was very valuable, since it was being led by a well-known literary agent from New York. She had lots of advice to share about how to pitch a book successfully, as well as the “pitfalls” to avoid in

the process. Basically, the pitch should be no more than one page to describe the book, identify the target audience, and demonstrate a compelling reason why it should be published. The workshop was both a challenging and valuable experience – an insight into the publishing industry, of which I hadn't been aware.

One of the students in the workshop talked about his book, a fascinating personal account of his experience of “coming out of the closet” and announcing he was gay. At the conclusion of the workshop, I felt it was an enlightening experience which helped to clarify some things for me as I was in the final stage of “re-writing” my book, “Travels with King Kong – Overland across Africa”. (following a couple of book reviews of my original manuscript two years earlier, I had been advised to re-write the book in the style of narrative non-fiction, so as to appeal to a wider audience – the workshop confirmed that advice) With the workshop over, I packed my bag, checked out, and walked to the Transit Center in the mall. Just as I arrived there, I saw the Culver City bus #6 standing at the bus stop, so I boarded it. As it turned out, the route of bus #6 took me to the “EXPO-Culver City” Metro Station – not the EXPO-Sepulveda Station, as the Metro Trip Planner had stated! Nonetheless, I was able to board the Metro train to Union Station. There I had plenty of time for a delicious West Coast Crepe at Café Crepe in Union Station, before boarding was called for the Southwest Chief train to Riverside. As I sat in the observation/lounge car, listening to beautiful music, with the train rolling silently through the night, I felt the Writer's Workshop had been a very worthwhile experience.



Mission Inn - Riverside

On Thanksgiving Day, rather than doing my usual cooking of turkey and all the trimmings, I invited Leslie and Mary Duke to join me at the Mission Inn in Riverside for the most amazing Thanksgiving Day Brunch in the entire country. The choice of food was awesome, everything from Belgian waffles and Eggs Benedict, an entire table of fresh seafood, a carving station with prime rib and leg of lamb, two buffets of traditional roast turkey, apple-sage stuffing, garlic mashed potatoes, to every dessert you could imagine, including pecan pie and southern bread pudding with bourbon sauce! Brunch began with fresh squeezed orange juice and chilled glasses of champagne to wet our appetite. We all had seconds, thirds, and sometimes fourths before we finally felt “stuffed”, yet very

happy. It was a true gastronomic experience and one that we all enjoyed to the fullest!

Meanwhile, outside the Inn, heavy rain poured down from a powerful Pacific storm that drenched the area with over three inches of rain and left more than four feet of snow in the mountains. Later in the day and that evening, the two major Interstate highways between southern California and northern California were closed down by the snow, which fell even at such a low elevation that communities in the high desert and foothills of Los Angeles were covered with several inches of snow for the first time in decades! Ironically, the ski resorts in the mountains of southern California had to close because there was too much snow, which made all the mountain roads impassable! While it's not unusual for severe winter storms to hit southern California, this one came very early. What was even more notable, was the fact that there had not been a single drop of rain for almost 6 months before this storm hit!

So, for anyone who believes the song “It never rains in southern California”, let's just say that Thanksgiving Day proved “it ain't always so”!

Miscellaneous Moments

Throughout the year, as I travel around, I'm always on the lookout for weird and interesting things. Often, it's a sign or poster, and other times it's a conversation I've overheard or a situation I've observed that's unique. Here are a few:

- **Darby's Cantina, Redlands** (A young couple is seated at a nearby table with their teenage son. He looks “totally” bored, while his parents carry on a conversation. He's got his earphones on, listening to music on his iPhone, and staring at

one of the big screen TVs! Meanwhile, a big, burley biker in a black leather jacket, emblazoned with “Infidel Motorcycle Club”, sits at the bar, with a large hunting knife strapped to his side!)

- **Circle K convenience store, San Bernardino** (Two guys are standing beside an old Ford pickup truck listening to “static” on a small portable radio. When I asked them why they were listening to the static, they said the radio was a special “static scanner”. So, then I asked them what it was used for, and their reply was “it’s for ghost hunting”! The idea was to record the static and play it back at a very slow speed in order to hear the message from a ghost. They had been “Ghost Hunting” for several months, and so far, they had received only one message, which was simply two words – “F--k You”! As I pulled out of the parking lot, they were still listening to the static!)
- **The Royal Falconer pub – Labor Day** (A sign in front of the pub read “Today’s special – buy any two drinks and pay the same for both” ??)
- **7-Eleven convenience store, Highland** (A man buys a gallon plastic jug of water, steps outside and pours the entire jug out on the ground, then crushes the plastic jug and puts it into his plastic bag of recyclables! The question is – does it pay to buy the water just to recycle the plastic jug?)
- **“Screamin Chicken Saloon”, Devore** (Three old guys walk into the bar and open up their guitar cases. Then they proceed to start “jamming” in the middle of the bar. Meanwhile, loud heavy metal music is blaring from the loudspeakers above the bar and members of the P.O.B.O.B. Motorcycle Club (*the “Pissed Off Bastards Of Berdoo”, Mother Chapter of the Hell’s Angels*) continue shooting pool. [Note: “Berdoo” is the nickname for San Bernardino] I think I was the only one in the bar paying any attention to the “impromptu” band!) As I left the bar, they gave me a “high five”, most probably the only one that afternoon!
- **The latest additions to College Bowl games** (“Famous Idaho Potato Bowl” / “New Era Pinstripe Bowl” / “Camping World Bowl”)

December

And once again this Christmas, my sister Lynn will be joining us for the holiday, which is always a time that we look forward to sharing. The lights are up, the tree is decorated, and the shopping has begun. I have planned a trip for the three of us to San Diego before we all sit down to dinner at home on Christmas Day. Hopefully we’ll be able to have some good weather as we enjoy our time in the beautiful city on the ocean! Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Photo Gallery



Southern California in Winter



Anaheim Packing House



Historic House - Anaheim



Anaheim Packing House





Along the Coastal Trail - Anchorage



Captain Cook Hotel lobby - Anchorage



Fletcher's Bar, Captain Cook Hotel - Anchorage



Captain Cook Hotel lobby - Anchorage



Alyeska Lodge lobby - Girdwood, Alaska



View of the Alaska Range from the Lakefront Hotel - Anchorage



Wildflowers - Borrego Springs



Wildflowers - San Felipe Wash, Anza Borrego Desert State Park



Wildflowers - Anza Borrego



Purple Verbena - Anza Borrego Desert State Park



Kitchen - Heavenly Valley Road, Big Bear City



Desert Wildflowers



Master Bath - Heavenly Valley Road, Big Bear City



Apple's B & B, Big Bear City



Master Bedroom - Heavenly Valley Road, Big Bear City



"Arches Bar" - Borrego Springs Resort



Yaqui Well



Cholla Cactus at Yaqui Well - Anza Borrego Desert State Park



Juniper Berries - Anza Borrego Desert State Park



"Clash of the Dinosaurs" - Ricardo Breceda



View of Mt San Jacinto from Joshua Tree National Park



Joshua Tree in bloom



Joshua Tree National Park



Vintage 1958 Chevy Impala - Amber Waves of Grain Festival parade



Pipe & Drum Band from Riverside



Presentation of the Colors!



WWI "Duce and a Half"



Yachts moored in San Diego Bay



San Diego Convention Center Terrace



San Diego Convention Center



View of San Diego Convention Center from the top of Bayfront Hilton



Esri UC - Map Gallery (the day after the reception)



Esri UC Expo



Eagle Gold Mine - Julian



Main Shaft - Eagle Gold Mine



Stamp Mill - Eagle Gold Mine



Tulita Lane, Meniffee, CA



Tulita Lane, Meniffee, CA



Tulita Lane, Menifee, CA



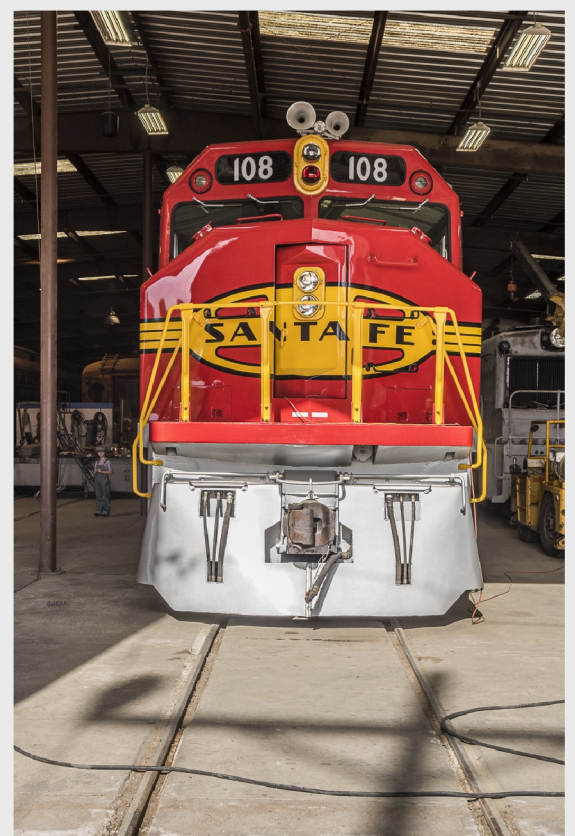
View of San Bernardino Mountains from Menifee



Orange Empire Railway Museum - Perris



Orange Empire Railway Museum - US Army Railway Kitchen Car



Orange Empire Railway Museum



Orange Empire Railway Museum - Santa Fe Business Car



Orange Empire Railway Museum - Classic early model diesel



Orange Empire Railway Museum - Santa Fe Business Car



Orange Empire Railway Museum - Steam & Diesel side by side



Orange Empire Railway Museum - Los Angeles Pacific Electric Car





Kelso Depot



"The Mother Road" - on the way to Amboy



"The Beanery" - Kelso Depot



Mt San Geronio (11,000 feet) View from Panorama Point - Redlands



Wildflowers - San Timoteo Canyon



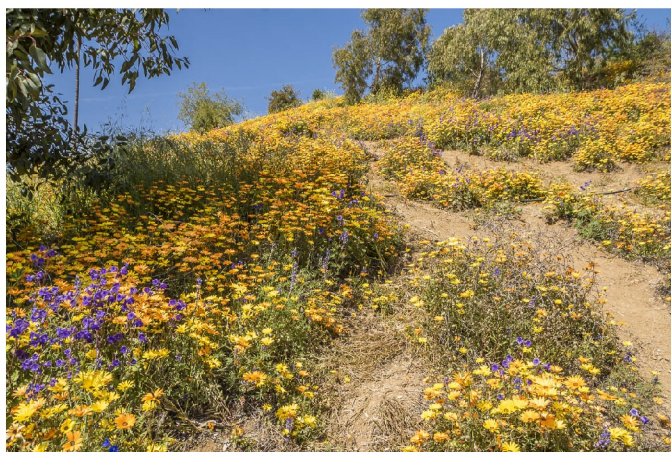
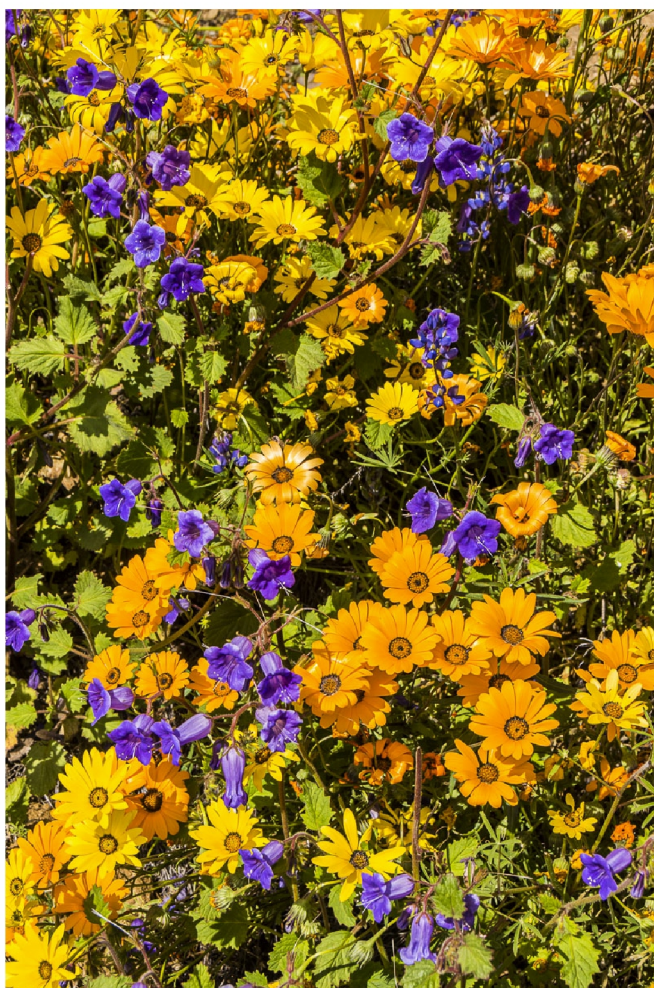
View of San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains from Panorama Point - Redlands



Springtime in San Timoteo Canyon



San Bernardino Mountains



California Poppies - Sand Canyon, Yucapia



San Timoteo Canyon



Vintage Fire Truck "refitted" as a Pizza Oven



View of downtown San Diego from Coronado Island Ferry Dock



Fundraiser Event for 911 First Responders - San Diego



Metal sculpture - Coronado Island art gallery



Sailing on San Diego Bay



Coronado Island



Seaport Village - San Diego



Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel from Embarcadero Park



Seaside Highland Games - Ventura



March of the Bands - Ventura



Lobby - Clocktower Inn , Ventura



Heavy Athletics Competition - Seaside Highland Games



"Caber Toss" - Seaside Highland Games



Ventura Pier



Downtown Upland



Metrolink Station - Upland



Historic Mural - Upland



Main Street - Upland



Cathedral - University of San Diego



Cathedral - University of San Diego



Classroom - West Coast School of Photography



University of San Diego



University of San Diego



University of San Diego



Sunset Cliffs Beach



My photo of "Harrison" (model)



Sunset Cliffs Beach - Photo Shoot



My photo of Stephanie (model)



Gladiolas - University of San Diego campus



Highland Springs Ranch