

Wednesday September 13

Today was our day in Zion National Park so we drove the 20 miles to Springdale (inside the park) and had breakfast at The Spotted Dog. We then parked the car and took the town shuttle to the Visitor Center and then the Canyon Shuttle in to the park proper. Zion is a north-south canyon approximately 7 miles long (at least for easy access) and the shuttle bus makes a total of nine stops along the route. Walking trails run from each of the stops, some for several miles, others much shorter and many between the stops. Difficulty varies but is clearly marked in the park brochure.

Zion National Park is located in the Southwestern United States, near Springdale, Utah. A prominent feature of the 229-square-mile park is Zion Canyon, which is 15 miles long and up to half a mile deep, cut through the reddish and tan-colored Navajo Sandstone by the North Fork of the Virgin River. The lowest elevation is 3,666 ft and the highest elevation is 8,726 ft. Located at the junction of the Colorado Plateau, Great Basin, and Mojave Desert regions, the park's unique geography and variety of life zones allow for unusual plant and animal diversity. Numerous plant species as well as 289 species of birds, 75 mammals (including 19 species of bat), and 32 reptiles inhabit the park's four life zones: desert, riparian, woodland, and coniferous forest. Zion National Park includes mountains, canyons, buttes, mesas, monoliths, rivers, slot canyons, and natural arches.

1909 the President of the United States, William Howard Taft, named the area a National Monument to protect the canyon, under the name of Mukuntuweap National Monument. In 1918, however, the acting director of the newly created National Park Service changed the park's name to Zion, the name used by the Mormons. According to historian Hal Rothman: "The name change played to a prevalent bias of the time. Many believed that Spanish and Indian names would deter visitors who, if they could not pronounce the name of a place, might not bother to visit it. The new name, Zion, had greater appeal to an ethnocentric audience. The United States Congress established the monument as a National Park on November 19, 1919.

The geology of the Zion and Kolob canyons area includes nine formations that together represent 150 million years of mostly Mesozoic-aged sedimentation. At various periods in that time warm, shallow seas, streams, ponds and lakes, vast deserts, and dry near-shore environments covered the area. Uplift associated with the creation of the Colorado Plateaus lifted the region 10,000 feet starting 13 million years ago.

The main tourist traffic in Zion is along the canyon floor with great views up the steep walls.

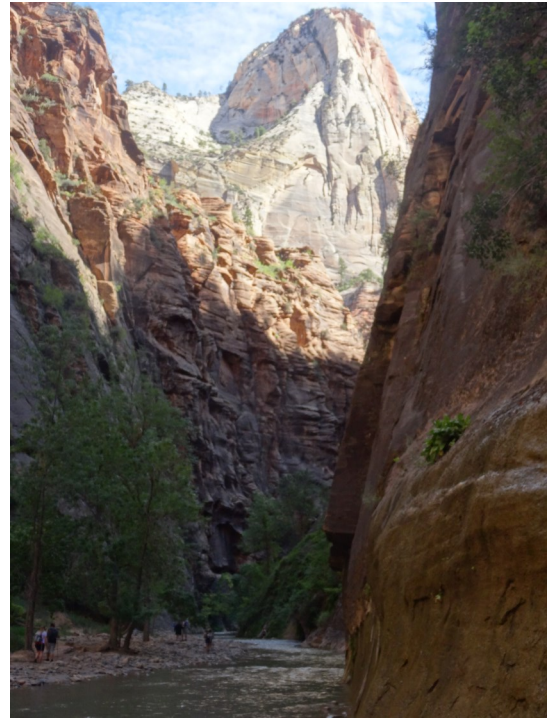


We took the shuttle to the north end where the road ends but a paved trail continues for another mile alongside the Virgin River into the narrowest part of the canyon. I recall on a previous visit being able to walk quite a distance in the river bed be-

yond the trail but today the water was flowing quite rapidly and continuing would have meant wading. We opted against that and retraced our steps along the trail.



*The North
end
of the Trail
for most of us*

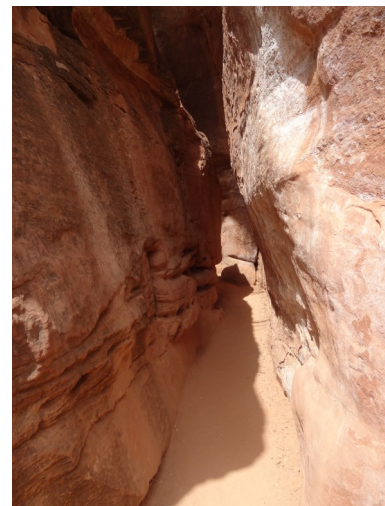


We all made our way down the canyon over the next 4 hours or so, each setting our own pace and route. As it happened, we all kept meeting up briefly and spent a few minutes together on the bus between stops. We all did some or part of the Weeping Rock Trail, a short but steep walk to a cliff face from which water splashed (today just a few drips, sometimes presumably a waterfall) and provided a small but lush area in this desert scene.

Keith, Zena and I also took the 1 ½ mile Kayenta Trail which followed a narrow **ridge** to another overhanging cliff from which fell two waterfalls.



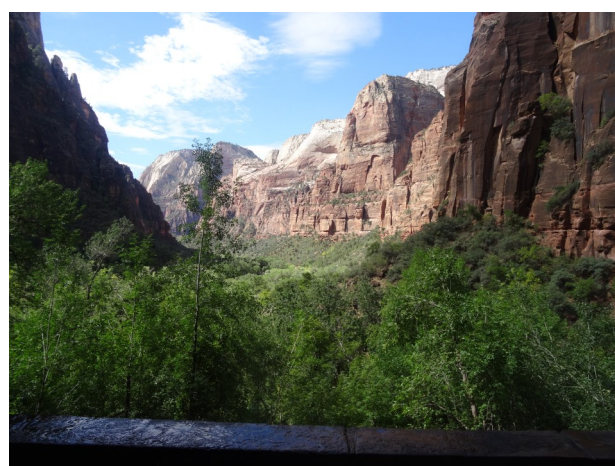
The trail was sandy and rocky, steep in places but also had a lot of shade which made for a very pleasant walk. Later, I walked the final 1 ½ miles to the Visitor Center where Molly was waiting. We had a cold drink sitting outside until Keith and Zena arrived having followed the last ¾ mile of the trail I had taken.



The trail paths were of varying width, grade and difficulty but the scenery was magnificent in all directions.



Zion National Park



We all got back on the town bus and picked up the car for the journey back to the hotel. The road rises steeply from the canyon floor in a series of switch-back curves, through a mile-long tunnel in the canyon wall and eventually emerges on to essentially level ground for the final few miles.

We arrived back at the hotel around 4:30, three of us to rest but a fourth to play a round of golf on the 9 hole course attached to the hotel. Keith was keen to see just how far he could hit the ball in the rarified atmosphere at 5200 feet. Apparently he didn't hit it as well as he thought he would as he was not inclined to share his score with us!

Tonight we drove 16 miles south to the Sego restaurant in Kanab. I had checked it online as "American" without any further details but it turned out that they provide "small and medium" dishes which essentially made it a Tapas menu. So, we shared five dishes for the table and everything was excellent; by far the best meal so far on the trip and quite reasonably priced at less than \$120 per couple.

Thursday September 14

Today was our day to visit Bryce Canyon National Park, about 60 miles north of our hotel. There had been some heavy rains overnight and the forecast was for more rain and thunderstorms for today but this was our only chance to visit Bryce, so off we went after breakfast at the hotel. It was partly cloudy as we drove north but there was no rain to speak of and we arrived at the Park around 11.

Bryce Canyon National Park is a United States National Park located in southwestern Utah. The major feature of the park is Bryce Canyon, which despite its name, is not a canyon, but a collection of giant natural amphitheaters along the eastern side of the Paunsaugunt Plateau. Bryce is distinctive due to geological structures called hoodoos, formed by frost weathering and stream erosion of the river and lake bed sedimentary rocks. The red, orange, and white colors of the rocks provide spectacular views for park visitors. Bryce sits at a much higher elevation than nearby Zion National Park. The rim at Bryce varies from 8,000 to 9,000 feet.

The Bryce Canyon area was settled by Mormon pioneers in the 1850s and was named after Ebenezer Bryce, who homesteaded in the area in 1874. The area around Bryce Canyon became a National Monument in 1923 and was designated as a National Park in 1928. The park covers 53 square miles and receives substantially fewer visitors (2.3 million in 2016) than Zion National Park (nearly 4.3 million) or Grand Canyon National Park (nearly 6 million), largely due to Bryce's more remote location. It is, however, considered the most beautiful of the three by many visitors.

Bryce has a similar arrangement to Zion in that the principal way to see many of the favorite spots is to take the shuttle bus operated by the park authorities. In addition, one can drive the length of the park (about 18 miles) but parking may be limited on the first three miles covered by the shuttle. So, we parked near the Visitor Center and took the first bus to Bryce Point – the end of the line for the buses. This spot is at an elevation of about 8000 feet and is the start of the main Rim Trail, which eventually leads back to the Visitor Center.

Unlike Zion, the trails at Bryce are mainly above the canyon (although there are many that drop down into the deep floor) and it was our intent to follow some of the rim trails back to the car park. This would have been a total of about 5 miles of essentially level paths and there were a number of intermediate spots where we could quit or stop for a break to meet those not walking the whole length (or not at all). In addition, there were a number of trails that dropped into the canyon for those inclined to not only walk down, but also to climb up again – not always an easy task at this elevation.



We all took advantage of the beautiful overlook at Bryce Point and then set out on our various tasks. Molly was going to take the bus to the next stop (1.5 walking miles



Bryce Point—and threatening clouds!

away), I was going to meet her there and decide what to do next, and Keith and Zena were going to follow the rim trail for as far as they felt capable. We were all going to meet back at the Visitor Center at a pre-determined time for the drive home.

It was at this point that the weather intervened and quickly changed all our plans. As we parted, there were several bolts of lightning across the canyon and ominous rumbles of thunder. It was pretty obvious that there were heavy rain showers headed our way but it was impossible to tell just how rapidly they would reach us – but we soon found out! After about 10 to 20 minutes on the rim trail both Keith and Zena and I (separated by several hundred yards) decided independently (and unknown to the other party) that this path running along the highest point in the park was not the best place to be as the bolts of lightning became more intense – and approached more rapidly. Although we didn't know it, both parties decided to return to the bus stop and take at least a short ride on the shuttle; Keith and Zena via the road and me by retracing my steps on the trail.

Having safely reached the shuttle stop, I took the bus to the next stop where I had planned a rendezvous with Molly – she having already left on the bus. I saw her sitting at the next stop waiting for me, and we both got back on my bus and took it to the Lodge where we thought we would take shelter until the storm had passed. Little did we know!

As we drove the short distance to the lodge, not only did the Heavens open but the rain quickly turned to sleet and the large hailstones. The noise on the bus roof was horrendous and the road surface was soon covered in about an inch of white hail. When we reached our stop at the lodge, we had to walk through an inch of deposited hail with more lashing down and were lucky to get inside with relatively dry clothes.

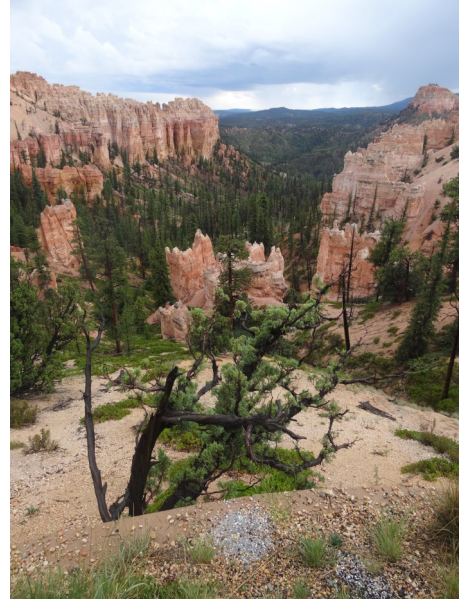
The hail continued heavily for some time and the whole area was as white as a December day so we stayed put in the lodge. Meanwhile, Zena and Keith had also left the trail, returned to the bus via the road and decided to take shelter at the Lodge! So, with a total absence of planning, but with intervention from the weather gods, we all met up again to share stories – and wait for the weather to change.



A September Day in Bryce

The weather did change – from sleet to hail to heavy rain, to heavier rain and hail and eventually (after maybe an hour?) to just a steady, cold rain. At this point we decided to cut our losses and get the shuttle back to the car. All trails had been closed to protect visitors so we were essentially left with two choices after we got back to our car: start the drive home or drive further in the park and stop at any overlooks of interest where we could do so without getting soaked immediately in the process. We opted for the latter – although more storms were clearly imminent and my phone received a flash flood alert for the area.

So, we drove to the southernmost point of the park (18 miles) and slowly worked our walk back to the exit, stopping at overlooks along the way. It is fortunate that this area of the park contains some of the most spectacular sites so we didn't feel too cheated by the inclement weather but we must admit that our stops were generally little more than photo stops as the rain kept coming and the temperature dropped to 42F. We stopped at most overlooks and actually saw some amazing views of the colorful columns within the canyon, even getting a few good photographs along the way, but it certainly wasn't what we had expected or hoped for.



Keith and Zena were good sports about it, despite it being their first and possible only visit to Bryce, and put it down to a good (unusual, unexpected, uncalled for???) experience. Obviously Molly had been here (in much more pleasant weather) on a number of occasions so our loss was not as critical but we felt badly for our friend who had traveled 5000 miles to see this magnificent part of the American Southwest.

We left the park and drove back south (and down in elevation by 4000 feet) to our hotel and the weather just got better as we drove to the point where it was 70F and sunny by the time we reached the hotel. Here we dried clothes as necessary, relaxed for a couple of hours and then spent another 2 ½ hours at dinner recapping the day and solving many of the world's problems over a very pleasant dinner (not to mention two liters of wine!)

Friday September 15

We had breakfast in the hotel and then checked out. We had a very scenic drive south and then east as far as Lake Powell and the Glen Canyon, just over the Arizona border. We stopped here to view the massive dam on the Colorado River which provides water and electricity to four states to the south and west. There was a good informative video on the statistics of Lake Powell and the dam as well as on the ecological effects and methods being used to minimize the overall impact on the environment.

We then had a short drive to the town of Page where we stopped for coffee before continuing south on US89 for another 50 miles to the small village of Cameron where we turned west on Arizona Route 64. The road climbed quite steeply to an elevation of 700 feet plus as we entered the Grand Canyon National Park. We were soon at the Desert View overlook where Keith and Zena got their first view of the Canyon and the first of many “Wow” moments that we anticipate over the next 24 hours as we spend a full day on the South Rim.



First Views of The Grand Canyon

We stopped briefly at two more overlooks and here we had the sun more to our backs so the lighting was just about perfect for photographs. We saw lots of turkey vultures and other birds of prey enjoying the late afternoon thermals gliding 5000 feet above the canyon floor.

We arrived at our hotel in Tusayan, just outside the Park on the south side about 5:30 Mountain Time (not Mountain Daylight Savings Time) so we had gained an hour at the crossing into Arizona.



Keith and Zena made a reservation in the restaurant of the hotel for 7:30. The restaurant was certainly a cut above normal hotel fare and we all thoroughly enjoyed our meals and the service – so much so that we decided on another visit for Saturday evening.

Saturday September 16

We had a very nice breakfast in the hotel and then caught the first shuttle bus (of several) outside the hotel. This took us into the Park and to the Visitor Center. From here a total of four other shuttle routes are available that allow visitors to take in most of the popular sites and trails along the South Rim.

The Grand Canyon is a steep-sided canyon carved by the Colorado River in Arizona, United States. The Grand Canyon is 277 miles long, up to 18 miles wide and attains a depth of over a mile (6,093 feet).

The canyon and adjacent rim are contained within Grand Canyon National Park, the Kaibab National Forest, Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument, the Hualapai Indian Reservation, the Havasupai Indian Reservation and the Navajo Nation. President Theodore Roosevelt was a major proponent of preservation of the Grand Canyon area, and visited it on numerous occasions to hunt and enjoy the scenery.

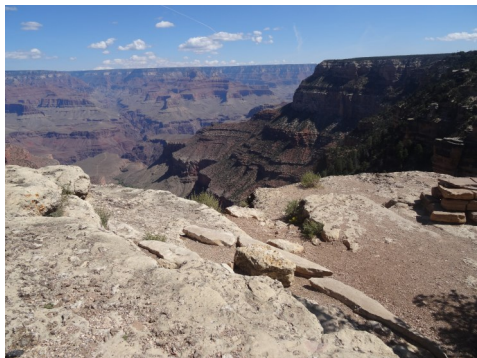
Nearly two billion years of Earth's geological history have been exposed as the Colorado River and its tributaries cut their channels through layer after layer of rock while the Colorado Plateau was uplifted. While some aspects about the history of incision of the canyon are debated by geologists, several recent studies support the hypothesis that the Colorado River established its course through the area about 5 to 6 million years ago. Since that time, the Colorado River has driven the down-cutting of the tributaries and retreat of the cliffs, simultaneously deepening and widening the canyon.

For thousands of years, the area has been continuously inhabited by Native Americans, who built settlements within the canyon and its many caves. The Pueblo people considered the Grand Canyon a holy site, and made pilgrimages to it. The first European known to have viewed the Grand Canyon was García López de Cárdenas from Spain, who arrived in 1540.

We spent the whole day in the Grand Canyon National Park. It was a warm and sunny day with clear blue skies, ideal for walks along the canyon rim. Each of us did our own thing at our own pace; Molly and I meeting up from time to time and Zena and Keith likewise.

The buses stop many times at designated points and there are trails that run between all stops. These hug the rim, giving some fantastic views of the one mile deep canyon and occasional glimpses of the Colorado River, which created this huge natural wonder. There are, of course, more difficult trails that go down into the canyon for those with more time, ambition and stamina. The rim is at approximately 7000 feet so walking uphill for any length of time can be difficult for those not used to the altitude.





Grand Canyon





So, we all spent over six hours taking in the immense scenery and trying to learn a little about the geology and environment of this mammoth hole in the ground. It's difficult to express just how awesome this National Park is, but perhaps these few pictures will give an idea of its size and shape.

Tonight we ate again at the hotel and had another nice meal followed by a nightcap in the lobby area.

Sunday September 17

We left Grand Canyon around 9:30 and set off on a four hour drive to Las Vegas; at least it would have been four or so had we simply followed the most direct route. However, once on Interstate 40 heading west we were also on US Route 66 and kept seeing signs for the old Historic Route. Needless to say, we couldn't simply pass this by so we left the Interstate and followed the much quieter, and more interesting, Route 66. There were a number of reminders of the heyday of this historic road west along the way – old gas stations, signs, a few 50's cars – but the most obvious dedication to days gone by was in the town of



Seligman. Here there were a number of stores “charm” and each had several cars (including a take us right back 60 or 70 years.



still showing their fifties pickup trucks and police car) to

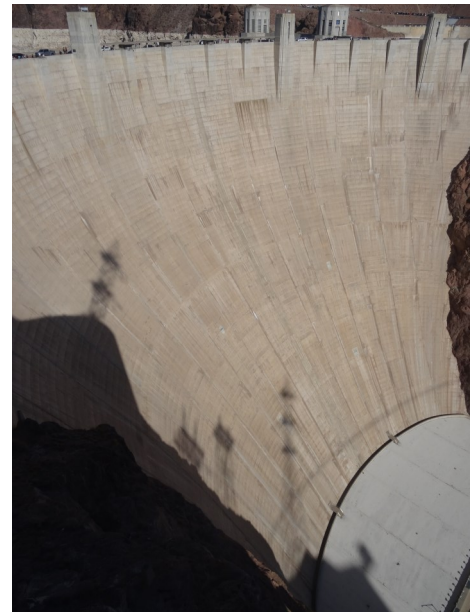
We had coffee in one of these. It was full of US66 memorabilia (signs, model cars, license plates, etc, etc) and was owned by a couple from Europe. She had emigrated from Holland, traveled extensively in the US before meeting her German husband who hired her as a travel guide in his small business. Three years ago (shortly after our last visit here) they had bought this shop, which they operate 8 months of the year – and ski in Switzerland the other four.



Along this same route we were intrigued and amused by old sequential Burma Shave advertisements which at one time were placed along many highways. We captured just one example.....



At the town of Kingman we left Route 66 and headed in a northwesterly direction on Route 93 towards the Nevada border. Our immediate destination was, of course, the 1930s engineering marvel of Hoover Dam. Since our first visit here in the 80s the whole landscape has been changed by the introduction of a new road across the canyon and by a myriad of access roads allowing visitors to get close to the dam. Much of this was precipitated by the events of 9/11 as there was real concern about security as thousands of cars passed on top of this huge dam – by the only road possible at that time.





*The new
road bridge*



Lake Mead

Now, there is a Visitor Center with a huge car park on the Nevada side and we were able to spend time watching an informative movie as well as looking down the 700 feet wall of the dam. We walked part way on the old road (cars are still allowed but must pass through a security check and traffic is now minimal) and again looked over the dam to the west and to Lake Mead (formed after the dam was created) to the east. Lake Mead is now a huge (largest man-made in the US) waterway which provides recreational facilities for thousands. Although the water level has recovered some from the droughts of recent years, it appeared to us to be at a very low point today. Walking around in the 95F heat (actually not bad for Boulder!) it is easy to feel the desert conditions that this visionary project between the Wars was designed to ameliorate and provide water and electricity to many southwestern states.

Hoover Dam is a concrete arch-gravity dam in the Black Canyon of the Colorado River, on the border between the states of Nevada and Arizona. It was constructed between 1931 and 1936 during the Great Depression and was dedicated on September 30, 1935, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Originally known as Boulder Dam from 1933, it was officially renamed Hoover Dam by a joint resolution of Congress in 1947. Its construction was the result of a massive effort involving thousands of workers, and cost over one hundred lives. The dam was named after President Herbert Hoover.

Since about 1900, the Black Canyon and nearby Boulder Canyon had been investigated for their potential to support a dam that would control floods, provide irrigation water and produce hydroelectric power. In 1928, Congress authorized the project. The winning bid to build the dam was submitted by a consortium called Six Companies, Inc., which began construction on the dam in early 1931. Such a large concrete structure had never been built before, and some of the techniques were unproven. The torrid summer weather and lack of facilities near the site also presented difficulties. Nevertheless, Six Companies turned over the dam to the federal government on March 1, 1936, more than two years ahead of schedule.

Hoover Dam impounds Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the United States by volume (when it is full). The dam is located near Boulder City, Nevada, a municipality originally constructed for workers on the construction project, about 30 mi (48 km) southeast of Las Vegas, Nevada. The dam's generators provide power for public and private utilities in Nevada, Arizona, and California. Hoover Dam is a major tourist attraction; nearly a million people tour the dam each year. The heavily traveled U.S. Route 93 (US 93) ran along the dam's crest until October 2010, when the Hoover Dam Bypass opened.

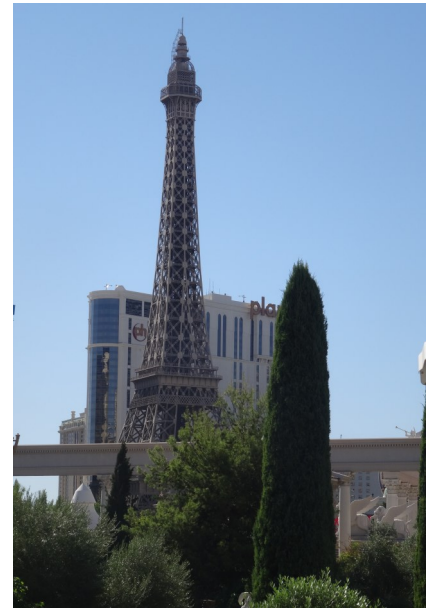
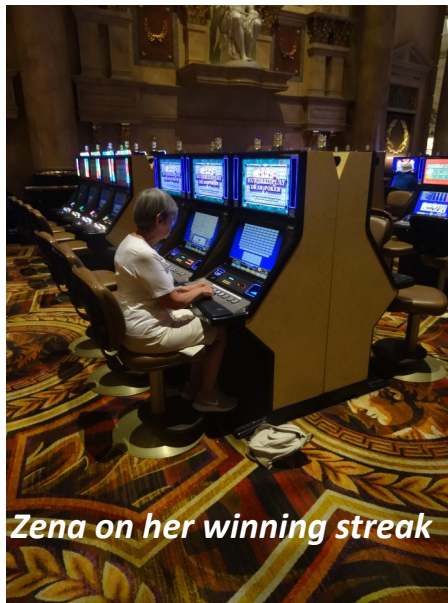
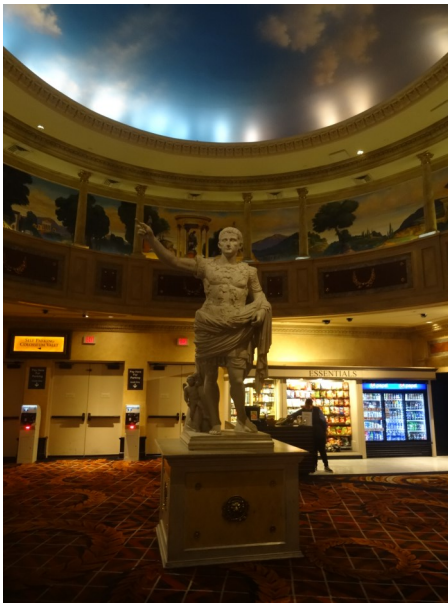
From Boulder, we drove directly to our hotel just off the Strip in Las Vegas. It was 99F by this time. We had about an hour before we left for a drive along the Strip to see the brightly lit casinos and then to dinner at the Top of the World restaurant. This revolving restaurant is 800 feet up The Stratosphere, a Space Needle type structure with casino and shops on the lower floors and all forms of entertainment on (and "off") the higher levels. After a very nice meal we went up three more floors to

the open deck where we could watch customers pay to have themselves thrown over the edge of the tower In all kinds of ways: “bungee jump”, a strange mini coaster, a swinging chair (on an arm from the tower!) and other methods designed to give you a heart attack. Just watching was almost too much.

We returned home a little before 11pm and contemplated the sights we had witnessed over the past 24 hours. From the 6 million year old natural wonder of Grand Canyon—even now largely unspoiled by human intervention—to the less than 100 year old entirely man-made glitz of Las Vegas. Both are magnificent in their own right—but we have little doubt as to which we prefer. Perhaps the amazing engineering feat of Hoover Dam, set in a river and lake of unique beauty is a pretty good compromise!

Monday September 18

After breakfast we drove to Caesar’s Palace casino and spent a couple of hours watching the punters and having a coffee (and, in the case of Keith and Zena, gambling away \$1). We then drove south on the Strip and picked up Interstate 15 at the edge of the city.



We drove without a break until we reached Calico Ghost Town, an abandoned silver mining town on a steep hillside that had mined over \$80M worth of the precious metal in the late 1800s. The town has been reconstructed and there are shops and exhibits inside most of the buildings – from town hall to saloon to fire station. It’s a fascinating place to walk and imagine the town as it was when dozens, if not hundreds, of miners and support staff lived in this tight community.

Before driving up to the mining town, we first had lunch at Peggy Sue’s diner, a fifties-style café with memorabilia from the time as well as music of the era. Again, it was just stop on the road but provided another peak at Americana for our friends.





Calico Ghost Town

*"There's got to be something
here that I need"*

*An Englishman
(and woman)
abroad!*

From there we drove to Bakersfield, an overnight stop on the way to the coast. We arrived late (after 7pm but met to go to a local restaurant for a late dinner. We chose the Hungry Hunter very close to the hotel and had a very pleasant meal.

Tuesday September 19

We had breakfast in the hotel and then set out for what was scheduled as a short drive to Atascadero, quite close to the coast. However, after perhaps 40 miles when we stopped for a coffee break we visited the Information Center in a small town called Taft and were given information and a map for the Carrizo Plains National Monument. None of us had ever heard of it but the brochure made it sound interesting, if for no other reason than the fact that its main road followed alongside the San Andreas Fault! Hence there are a number of perturbations in the terrain, not only from fault activity but as a result of water runoff from the nearby San Joaquin Mountains.

The Carrizo Plain is a large enclosed grassland plain, approximately 50 miles long and up to 15 miles across, in southeastern San Luis Obispo County, California, about 100 miles northwest of Los Angeles. It contains the Carrizo Plain National Monument, and it is the largest single native grassland remaining in California. It includes Painted Rock which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2012 it was further designated a National Historic Landmark due to its archeological value. The San Andreas Fault cuts across the plain.

The plain extends northwest from the town of Maricopa, following the San Andreas Fault. Bordering the plain to the northeast is the Temblor Range, on the other side of which is the California Central Valley. Bordering the plain to the southwest is the Caliente Range. The average elevation of the plain is about 2,200 feet. Soda Lake, a 3,000-acre alkaline lake, is in the center of the plain. As the central depression in an enclosed basin, Soda Lake receives all of the runoff from both sides of the plain. The climate type of the Carrizo Plain is semi-arid grassland. No trees grow there and the annual rainfall is around 9 inches per year.

The Carrizo Plain is an easily accessible place to see surface fractures of the San Andreas Fault; they are clearly visible along the eastern side of the plain, at the foot of the Temblor Range.

These rivers (all dry at this time of year) take a sharp turn as they reach the plain and eventually end in the Soda Lake, which once again was dry, but which has a high salinity. The lake was formed by activity along the fault that essentially cut off the streams and rivers from the north. Hence, no water now flows from the lake, making it a smaller version of the Great Basin which covers parts of several Southwestern States.



It was a 50 mile drive across the park, much of it unpaved road, but a fascinating place to spend a few hours. Apparently the area is alive with color in the springtime with plants, flowers and ground cover in many colors, so perhaps a return visit is in order.

We left the park and started the final 70 mile drive to our destination. The lake was at 2000 feet elevation and we descended steadily through pine and deciduous trees, past vineyards and farmland to our hotel in Atascadero, at an elevation of 800 feet. We arrived about 4pm but unfortunately we had a semi-flat tire on the van. A warning light had come on during our descent from the park but when I first checked, the left rear tire looked to be the culprit but didn't look to be too low. However, at the hotel it was obviously much lower pressure than the other three so I spent the next hour in Atascadero getting a replacement. Two nails had punctured the tire and both were through the sidewall so non-repairable. However, we felt fortunate to have got it fixed in short order.

Tonight we drove about 18 miles to Morro Bay for dinner at the Windows on the Water restaurant. We watched the sun set over the Pacific and had a very good meal in excellent surroundings. It was after 9:30 by the time we got back to the hotel.

Wednesday September 20

We had breakfast in the hotel and then checked out for our drive to San Francisco. We had planned (as we always do with foreign guests) to drive up California Route 1 which runs along the coast all the way to Monterey. It is a beautiful drive and compares in a number of ways to the Great Ocean Road in Southern Australia. Unfortunately, there had been a huge landslide along the route earlier in the summer and we weren't sure just how far we could get or whether the route might be open all the way. A quick check suggested that there was an area still closed (and likely to be for some time) but we guessed that there would be adequate signage to direct us to any detours or alternatives.

As it turned out, there is still a long stretch in Monterey County that is not only closed but has no viable alternative route. Consequently, we drove north to just south of Gorda where all traffic was to turn and return to Cambria – not too far north of our starting point. So, we traveled perhaps 40 miles north and had to return to take a cut across the mountains to Route 101.

We did see the elephant seal colony at one overlook and got glimpses of the Pacific from some high points as well as at sea level but, unfortunately, we couldn't drive along the most scenic stretch of the road. Once again our friends were very sanguine about the loss, much as they had been during the hailstorm in Bryce Canyon.



*An abbreviated
drive on
California Rte 1*



Once on Route 101 we were still over 200 miles from San Francisco so we agreed that any further sightseeing would get us into town very late, so we drove essentially straight to our hotel. As it turned out this was a good move as the traffic was heavy in parts and it took us until after 6:30 to reach the Courtyard at Fisherman's Wharf. The saving grace was that we all got to see (for the first time, even for Molly and I) the lush farmland of the Central Valley with its lettuce, cabbage and other vegetables and many vineyards. We always think of the Napa and Sonoma Valleys as the wine country in California but the valley south of San Francisco (all the way from Bakersfield) has hundreds of acres of vineyards and many wineries.

After arriving at the hotel, we quickly changed and went to dinner just around the corner at Lou's Crab Shack. It was noisy and a little rustic, but a very pleasant meal after a long day of driving.

Thursday September 21

Today we had a scheduled trip to Alcatraz so we met at 7:30, walked to breakfast at iHop and then to Pier 33. Here we caught the 9:30 ferry to Alcatraz Island on a beautiful sunny day. We had great views of the Bay, the city and the Golden Gate Bridge before reaching the island prison.

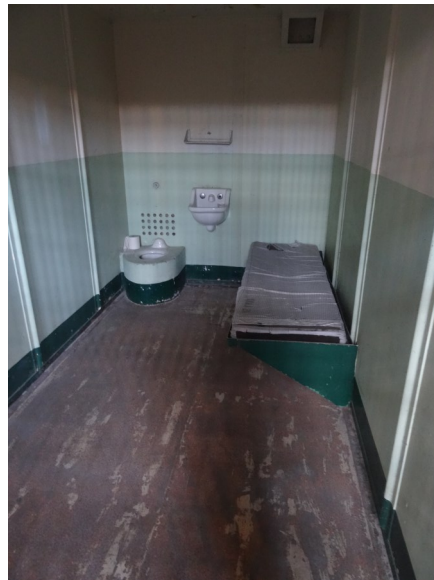
The tour included a video presentation on the history of the fort, military prison, Federal Prison (and many of its famous inmates), a 1969 occupation by Native Americans and finally to the present day National Monument. In addition, the rangers pointed out many walks, viewpoints and points of interest on the island in addition to the main prison buildings. The highlight, however, was an audio guide that was used on a walking tour of the cells, the officers' control room, the library and dining room – each brought to life by appropriate sounds and the narration of prisoners and guards. The



Model of Alcatraz Island

story of a foiled escape in which both prisoners and guards were killed and the unsolved mystery of three escapees who have not been found were covered in significant detail in both sound and pictures.

Each cell block and the isolation areas were part of the tour and the voices of officers and inmates described the life of prisoners over the 30 years that the island was a Federal Penitentiary. At least in the early days it was a pretty miserable existence for anyone unfortunate enough to spend time inside (Al Capone, the “Birdman” and many others) and even in its final years as a prison (when radios were introduced, for example) it wasn’t much better. All amenities (in addition to a bed, food and medical attention) were regarded as privileges to be earned and the brief periods of outdoor recreation were special treats.



The Prison and The Water Tower Protest



For the officers and their families, however, life on the island was presented as that of a rather idyllic small town with nice homes, gardens and great views across the water. Children went to school in San Francisco and returned to their island home daily with only rare sightings of prisoners and plenty of social activities.

The whole presentation was extremely well done and the 3 hours that Molly and I spent there were very interesting and educational. Keith and Zena followed a different schedule to us and spent more time there. The views across the bay were also spectacular.

Back at Pier 33, Molly and I had a light lunch outside and then took one of the street cars for a ride along the Embarcadero, past the Cruise Terminal (a Celebrity Ship was in port) and the Ferry Terminal to the



edge of the Mission District. Here we had to get off and take another car back to Fisherman's Wharf from where we walked back to the hotel. Meanwhile Keith and Zena had taken a ride on a cable car as far as Union Square and walked back via Chinatown to the hotel.

This evening we went to another local restaurant where we had an excellent, if a little expensive, meal.

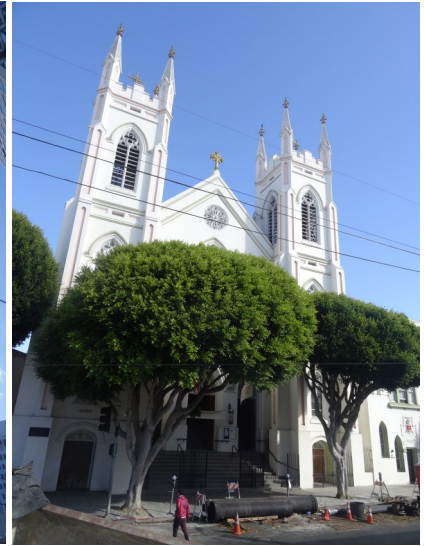


Friday September 22

We had breakfast at iHop again and then got on the Hop on/Hop off bus near the hotel. We went almost all the way round the city center, along Market Street, through the civic center, past a section of Golden Gate Park and then crossed the Golden Gate Bridge. The commentator was excellent (Irish) and he made it a very informative and amusing ride.

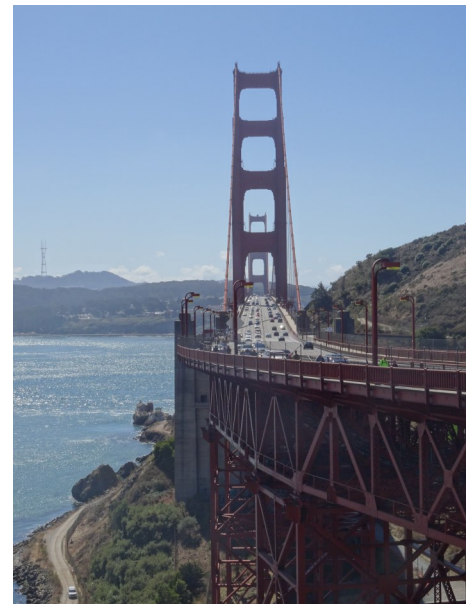
We got off the bus here and Keith, Zena and I walked across the bridge and back. It was another beautiful day and pleasantly warm even on the windiest sections of the bridge. Keith and Zena continued to the south end and had coffee before continu-

ing their trip around town while I met up again with Molly. We took the bus to Chinatown, had lunch sitting outside at a very nice French restaurant and then strolled through the shops. We left Chinatown to catch the bus back to the hotel where we arrived around 4pm.



San Francisco City Tour

And the Golden Gate Bridge





Chinatown

Tonight we ate at the Franciscan restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf.

Saturday September 23

We had breakfast at iHop, checked out and then drove to the airport. Here we said farewell to Keith and Zena before Molly and I drove to Sacramento for the rest of the weekend.

This ended our 3 week trip with Keith and Zena and they boarded their flight home. Actually, they spent another couple of days in Chicago before flying home to England as Keith, in particular, wanted to see more of Frank Lloyd Wright's work in that city. We will see them next on our winter visit to England.

The traffic was running quite well with only a couple of slow spots so we arrived at our hotel about 12:30. We contacted Christopher and we met him, Cyndi and Sammy for lunch at On the Border.

We spent the afternoon at their home watching a slide presentation of their trip to the UK in August. We saw a little over half of the trip today (as far as their arrival on Shetland) and then broke for dinner. Tonight we ate at Anthony's, a small Italian restaurant about 10 minutes from the hotel.

Sunday September 24

We had a coffee at Starbucks first thing and met the family for lunch at 11:45 at Panera. We then watched the rest of their trip to the UK. Both yesterday and today we saw some excellent photographs of all the places they had visited and heard their enthusiastic accounts of what we were looking at. They covered a lot of ground in just over two weeks and really seemed to have had a great visit.

We ate at Melting Pot tonight as a belated wedding anniversary celebration for Christopher and Cyndi. We said goodnight and farewell for this trip about 9:30.

Monday September 25

We were up by 8am, checked out and drove to iHop for breakfast. About 9:15 we left for Elko, Nevada, traveling all the way on I-80. Once out of the Sacramento urban area, the road climbed quite steeply over the Sierra Nevada and then down into Reno. It is a beautiful drive through forested hills and reaches an elevation of almost 8000 feet near Truckee. In Reno we made a short stop for coffee.

From Reno the terrain changed to desert but the many mountain ranges that cross Nevada in a north-south direction provide a beautiful backdrop – especially with a dusting of snow on the peaks as we had today. Closer to our destination, the snow cover intensified so we assume the first winter storms have already occurred. We made one more rest stop and arrived in Elko around 4:15, almost exactly seven hours after leaving Sacramento having covered 420 miles.

Tonight we ate at Luciano's, an Italian restaurant that had received good reviews and, as it turned out, one where we had eaten on this same journey about a year ago.

Tuesday September 26

We were up by eight and had breakfast at a nearby McDonalds before starting our drive to Salt Lake City. It was a cool morning (mid-thirties) but clear and sunny. Today we had only 230 miles to drive but we had a plane to catch at 5pm in SLC – and, of course, we lost an hour en route. Nevertheless, with one stop for coffee and one for gas we were at SLC airport by 2pm.

The drive took us over a couple of passes in Nevada of 7000 and 6000 feet and at one point we were almost at the level to which snow had fallen either during the night or very recently. Once in Utah, the terrain changed dramatically to flat salt flats and then along the Great Salt Lake. The temperature never exceeded 60F but it was an easy drive, on cruise control most of the way.

We had about 2 hours in the Lounge before our flight and had dinner between SLC and Cincinnati. We were home by midnight after yet another great trip with friends and a bonus visit with our California family.