

Off to the Keys

Subject: San Diego

Date: Tue, 11 Jan 2000 09:55:58

Dana Point was a great place to spend a couple of days. We walked up the beach and saw the Pilgrim, an old square rigger from Boston. They had a school group divided into four different stations around the boat. It was interesting to watch them teaching the young kids about life at sea in the late 1800s.

We dropped down to South Carlsbad State Beach. The park is atop a bluff overlooking the Pacific. We found a spot and parked, then walked back to check in with the park attendant. Before we made it we saw a big spout of a gray whale and ran over to the fence to watch it. The Park Attendant was beside us about two seconds later. She was just bouncing she was so excited. She had been seeing at least one a day for the last while. This one was in much closer than most she has seen before. We ended up staying in South Carlsbad until Saturday when we went to the airport to pick up our friends.

We spent many hours watching the ocean for whales. Dolphins were plentiful and we often got to see them playing in the surf. Once we were watching this pod of dolphins playing in the surf, a big wave came and they rode it in. We could see 7 dolphins in the face of the wave, they stayed right in the curl of the wave until the wave broke, simply amazing. We did get to see gray whales several times, unfortunately pretty far away. They would stay along the surface and spout three or four times and then deep dive with the tail coming up into the air and then be gone from view for quite a while. They have no dorsal fin, which Bonnie thought was unusual but we loved seeing that tail coming up.



Mecca to a lot of sailors

We arrived at the airport in mid morning and we walked around the airport, people watching and looking around. One of the things I thought was neat was that the cost per seat per mile on a 747 is about two and a half cents. We walked by the flight information booth and the screen had just changed for one of the flights to "Landed". Norman and Sarah's flight would be arriving in a few minutes so we waited by the booth to see when it landed. We turned around and looked up and there they were waving at us from the security area. We checked again, they must have been excited to be here, they were already in the airport and their plane has not even "Landed" yet.

We picked up their stuff and sat out in the RV for lunch and talked about what we wanted to do. I had picked up one of my sailing magazines at a grocery store the day before and noticed that the San Diego Boat Show was on. We couldn't believe our luck. We spent the afternoon at the boat show and we all had a great time looking around the Tartans, Swans, Hunters, Island Packets, and "C+C"s. What a great time.

We worked our way over to the Silver Strand State Park and spent the night with our nose on the beach

of the Pacific Ocean. The park is on a peninsula forming the west side of the San Diego Bay. We could easily see water on both sides of us. The next day we spent a long time visiting and were late leaving the park but we did get directions to the San Diego Yacht Club when we were at the boat show.

When we were arrived at the yacht club we talked with the security guard for a while and when we showed him our yacht club cards he told us to head in, the buffet was still on and the bar is open. We wanted to look at the boats. A lot of them were real YACHTS, others were like some we would find in our club. One was definitely unique. As soon as Norman saw the colour of the hull he was off like a shot. Stars and Stripes is a unique vessel. The America's Cup winner is impressive for sailors. You don't often get to see a racing boat where money is no object. We were all really impressed. We walked around the finger docks and looked at the boats. Some were AMAZING yachts the bright work was immaculate and they were professionally maintained.



After walking the docks we went into the clubhouse. They have a lot of nice silver and crystal trophies. They also have a memorabilia from the America's Cup win. A letter from the President of the US giving congratulations and the US customs clearance documents for the cup, no duty, the value is priceless.

We sat and had refreshments in the bar and when we ordered the drinks the bartender said she would place the order but we had to take our Fredericton Yacht Club card to the desk and get a guest card. They were willing to give us a 10 day membership but we only took a one day membership. By the time we got out of the club it was too late to go to the Zoo.

Sarah had heard that La Jolla was really pretty so we drove up along Mission Bay and through La Jolla and up the coast back to South Carlsbad. Unfortunately we didn't see any whales.

We were up and off to the San Diego Zoo arriving just before lunch, partly because we wanted to let the traffic pass, more because we have had too much fun visiting. Nice having company.



San Diego Zoo ranks as nearly indescribable. Simply amazing. The zoo was founded after the expo after the opening of the Panama Canal. After the expo a number of animals were abandoned in the area, a person rescued the animals and founded the zoo.

Bonnie, the 35 year old polar bear played in the pool. She loved pushing off the rocks and scooting across the pool on her back, then she started playing with her ball in the water. It was like watching a five year old playing in the pool. She would get on top of the ball and try to push it down

in the water when it popped out it would fly way up in the air. When it popped out the side it was ok, but she didn't like it much when it would pop out the front and bop her on the nose on the way by. We must have watched her over a half hour.

We did the bus tour and the tramway. We saw gorillas from the tram but couldn't find them when we were on the ground. On the bus the giraffes were all heading into the sleeping quarters. One of them was giving birth, the bus driver saw the legs of the fetus before she was out of sight. We didn't see much by the time our end of the bus was there all of the giraffes wanted to head into the sleeping area, birth seemed to be a group activity.

The Zoo closed at 5 pm which meant we hit the highway at rush hour. The traffic was flowing smoothly and it was dark when 163 turned into the I-15 nothing quite like two merging 4 lane highways into an 8 lane highway (ALL FULL). All of the white and red lights were pretty. We were headed to a county park near the Wildlife Park where we are planning to go today.

Subject: San Diego Wild Animal Park

Date: Wed, 12 Jan 2000 06:55:28

We arrived at the county park after dark and the road in was a canyon road, we noticed a few things on the way in the headlights but nothing like on the way out in the morning. We passed through large orange, grapefruit, and lemon groves. This was quite a rural area and the girl I talked to while getting gas was really worried about the water. They have been without any serious rain for three years. A lot of people have animals and without rain they have to import feed. A bail of alfalfa is \$11.75 and that hurts. Without rain they will be on water rationing this summer. She said it happens every 5 years or so.

We arrived at the park and got our "Maple Leaf Discount". Both parks were giving a 30% discount to Canadians. Given the wacky exchange rate at the moment, we really appreciated it.

The park has 2200 acres of which 800 are developed. They have one of the highest success rates for breeding animals in captivity. We took the electric monorail train around the park. It goes about 5 miles per hour and takes about 55 minutes to make a circuit. It was amazing to see the large area wide open with many different kinds of animals roaming around. The "pen" they are in is very large, my very poor guess would be over a hundred acres. There are other pens which are smaller for individual groups like the zebras. Zebras are aggressive and bite and kick the other animals so they are segregated. There were a couple of others in a pen with a rhino. They figured the Zebras would leave Boris alone, they do.

The southern white rhino are nearly extinct. We saw 10% of the worlds population of southern white rhinos, two. They have three but we didn't see the male. The official estimate is 26, but the word is that the number is more like 19.

On the way in we saw gorillas and Sarah started bouncing. We had lunch at the restaurant and headed over to watch the gorillas. Winston is the alpha male, ONE BIG silverback. These are the western lowland gorillas, about 35000 to 45000 live worldwide. We watched as one of the bigger males



was starting to show signs of challenging for dominance. Winston didn't put up with the interloper long before he was hiding in the corner. It was fun to watch. Sarah was in seventh heaven.

We went to the elephant show and had a great time looking around the petting zoo and the butterfly gardens. They had a colony of ants that were cutting up a plant and hauling it back to their hive. It was amazing to watch. Norman traced the path of ants back to their hive and it stretched an awful long way. We had a great time looking around the zoo.

We worked our way back to Carlsbad for a last night on the Pacific Ocean before we head inland.

We are heading to Barstow to pick up our mail and see a mining "Ghost town". And then on to Las Vegas.

Subject: Calico Ghost Town, Las Vegas, Hoover Dam, Valley of Fire, and Zion
Date: Mon, 17 Jan 2000 10:12:11

Sorry for the long delay in email, we are having way too much fun visiting with our guests, Norman and Sarah Raine. For those who don't know Norman and Sarah, they have a mooring next to us in Douglas Harbour. Norman has helped me (and practically every other member of the boat club) on the boat and we have sailed in a couple of races with them. Great people.

We left the Wild Animal Park and headed toward one of the county parks but we didn't find the exit and ended up back at South Carlsbad which was only a short distance away. We spent our last night on the Pacific and were up early to head toward Barstow where our mail was waiting.

The traffic through LA was light and the Santa Anna winds that had closed our route a few days earlier had abated and other than not being able to show Norman and Sarah the mountains around LA it was a good trip. The smog made visibility pretty poor. We stopped in Barstow and picked up our mail and was off to the Calico Ghost Town. At the peak of the boom there were over 1200 people, now there are 9.

We took our private train around the little area and learned some of the history of the town. It was real quiet, when we asked when the train was going out it was "whenever you get on". We not only had our own private car but the whole train was ours. We did a little tour of the hard rock mine and they have a number of exhibits that date back to the mining days. The area can be cold in the winter and VERY hot in the summer but the mines are a constant 65F year round, as a result a pair of brothers lived and worked in the mine for 20 years before finally giving up. A nine year old playing in the mine later found a silver deposit that yielded \$65,000 (estimated \$650,000 today's dollars) 3 feet from the wall where the brothers toiled for 20 years.



The claims were 600 feet by 1500 feet with stakes at each corner. Each post had to contain identifying paperwork, the container of choice for the paperwork was a tobacco can. Sir Walter Raleigh seemed to be a favourite brand. There had to be lots of claims because there seemed to be little holes into the hills everywhere. At one particular site the pile of tailings at the mouth of the cave has an estimated value of \$6 million dollars. It would only cost \$9 million to extract it.

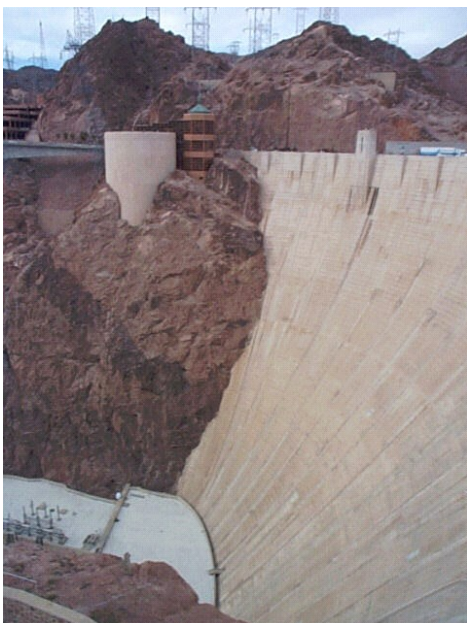
We spent the night in the campground at Calico and what a place, intensely quiet, stars just popped out of a jet black sky. Norman heard the hum of the inverter for the first time that night.

After a restful sleep we were off to the bright lights of Las Vegas. We were really impressed by the Mojave Desert. The Joshua Trees (really a type of Yucca), cactus, sage bush, and tumbleweed were in evidence everywhere. We arrived safe and sound in Las Vegas in time to avoid rush hour traffic. There was one accident we saw it was a rear end collision that involved four cars. It had traffic going quite slow in one section which was great because it was just where we needed to get off and we had lots of time to see the road signs and land in the Circusland RV Park. It is the back parking lot of the Circus Circus Casino and is located right on the strip.



Bonnie could watch the fountains for hours

We had a great time walking up and down the strip. We jumped on the trolley that travels up and down the strip to most of the hotels and we rode down one side and up the other. We got on about an hour and half before the show we were going to and figured we had plenty of time. By the time we got there the show had JUST started and there were four seats up front. The Rockettes were wonderful, the juggler landed one of the rings in the middle of our table and spilled one of Bonnie's drinks. Rip Taylor was the comedian part of the act. The Rockettes really are a great show.



The Casino's put on interesting shows to attract people. The Mirage has a volcano that erupts with smoke, fire and "lava" every 15 minutes from dark to late into the night. Bellagio has a computer choreographed fountain that has thousands of nozzles. Treasure Island has a couple of old square riggers that act as a stage for several performances a night. At the end of the performance one of the near life size ship "sinks", only to be raised and sailed backwards to its starting point for the next performance a few minutes later.

The next day we were off to the Hoover Dam, considered to be one of the seven America's modern civil engineering wonders. It was build during the 30s by Six Companies Inc. In 1999, it was named the number five construction achievement of the twentieth century. We didn't expect the dam to be busy because Las Vegas certainly wasn't, but it was PACKED. We wanted to get on the hard hat tour but had to settle for the regular tour. It is a really good place to visit.

This is a project that came in two years early, many million dollars under budget, completely paid for itself within 50 years as specified in the contract by selling a byproduct of dam. It was built for water regulation of the Colorado River, not power. Las Vegas gets almost no power from Hoover. The 1928 contract sends the majority of Hoover's power to LA. We were back in Las Vegas for another show. Norman and I went to Crazy Girls and Bonnie and Sarah went to the Pirate show at Treasure Island and circus acts at Circus Circus. Crazy Girls is a good show and the female comedian just had Norman and I in pain we were laughing so hard.

We were late leaving and ended up in the Valley of Fire State Park. We drove through the park and were amazed by the spectacular red mountains and formations in the red sandstone. We passed through the park and headed out toward Zion National Park. We didn't arrive until well after dark. We awoke in the campground surrounded by mountains. Absolutely gorgeous.

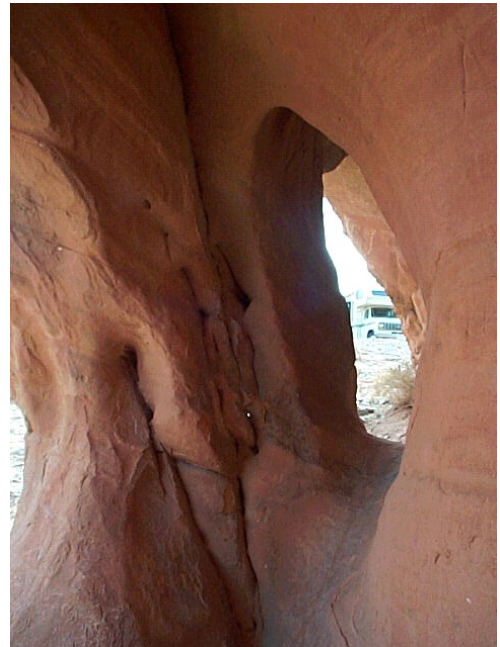
Zion National has incredible red sandstone scenery and formations. There is a tunnel 1.1 miles long with lookouts along the edge. The tunnel is a hard rock tunnel built by the CCC in the 30s. You have to have a escort go ahead of you and block traffic on the other end. We have to go down the centre of the road.

We intended to go to Bryce Canyon but we were getting rain and we were at 4000 feet. Bryce is at 8000 so we figured it would be snowing. We headed to the Grand Canyon and on the way we came to Navajo Bridge.

Navajo Bridge was the first bridge to cross the Colorado River gorge for hundreds of miles. Nearby was Lee's Ferry one of the traditional ferry routes across the gorge. The route across Lee's Ferry was known as the "Honeymoon Trail" because of all of the recently married Mormons in Arizona travelled this route to get to the Mormon Temple in St. George, Utah.



The beginning of the Grand Canyon at the Navajo Bridge



Millie through one of the arches at the Valley of Fire

The Bridge built in 1928 replaced Lees Ferry. It was an impressive bridge. It has been replaced by a new bridge in 1995. The 1928 bridge cost \$390,000. The 1995 bridge cost \$14.7 million. The bridges lay side by side and far below the peaceful emerald green Colorado River provided a great stop for a stretch and an inspiring view of the gorge and red mountains nearby. Lees Ferry is also the official start of the Grand Canyon. It extends another 277 miles to the end of the canyon.

Subject: Grand Canyon and Sedona
Date: Thu, 20 Jan 2000 10:23:27



The south rim has over 4 million visitors a year. They are in the process of a major construction effort to make people flow better. During the summer months it would be a complete madhouse. We were here and things were pretty quiet, even quieter than it was in November. It was a little cooler too, there was snow on the ground in the campsites. We got settled in the first night and just visited. It's great having friends to share the adventure with, and Norman and Sarah have been great adventurers.

We started out heading to the west rim. The west rim is restricted to shuttle buses in the summer. Traffic was so light that we were able to park in any of the viewpoints we were interested in. The visibility was better than in November.

The Grand Canyon is still no easier to describe. Seven very distinct shades of limestone with a thousand shades of colour in the borders between the layers. Colours change instantly as the sun peeks from around the nearly solid cloud cover. Colours pop brightly into vivid reds to contrast with the green of the Colorado River. White water rapids seem to look even more ominous with a bright splash of sunlight. The colours fade to muted tones as the sun passes. One mesa after another seems to be illuminated in a spotlight, the sun seeming to say "Hey look at this one!" The dark background with a single mount being flooded with bright yellows, reds, and greens. We did a good tour of the west rim before heading back toward the end of the east rim and working our way back to the campground visiting viewpoints as we went.

The next day we were up and went to the Visitor Centre. They have a number of boats on display. They were used to chart the Colorado River. It was interesting to see the different designs. One thing that was interesting was the boats had a canoe bow and a square stern. All of the pictures of people running the rapids had the square stern leading the way down the river (intentionally). They had examples of some of the minerals mined from the canyon in the old days. They mined Horseshoe Mesa for copper ore. Some of the ore was 70% pure copper, even so the cost of packing the ore up from the mesa made it unprofitable.

The canyon averages 7000 feet elevation on the south rim, the Colorado River averages 2000 feet. It looks a long way down, and it is.

We had been told that we must see Sedona, by a number of people. When Sarah showed up she said her friend had told her to drag us by force, if necessary, to Sedona. We gave in peacefully and headed to Sedona.



The road to Sedona, 89A, heading south is an experience. The speed limit is 20 mph with most corners at 15 mph. Millie came down the hill nicely in first gear with only a slight touch of the brakes into the corners. The switch backs are tight and the scenery beautiful. The red rock canyons were a brilliant red in the bright sunshine. Sedona is definitely a tourist place. They are even doing the timeshare offers. Sedona is really beautiful. We went shopping and there were really good prices on indian handicrafts. We drove around some of the back roads looking at the interesting red rock formations.



Irrigation canal at Montezuma's Well

We have been looking for things to see, we have a couple of days before the sad day comes and our guests have to leave. We found a thing in a travel guide about Montezuma's Castle, a cliff dwelling, and decided that would be neat to see. Unfortunately directions were a little more difficult. We did find Montezuma's Well, a natural oasis in the middle of the desert. We stopped and had lunch before doing the walking trail. Our thermometer showed 112F in the sun, about 72F in the shade. The Oasis drained its constant 26C water through the porous limestone cliff to reach an outlet which had been directed toward an irrigation system that led to a meadow that the indians had farmed for hundreds of years.

We did find directions to Montezuma's Castle and found a campsite nearby. We are off to see the Castle later this morning.

Subject: Montezuma's Castle and Pioneer Village

Date: Sat, 22 Jan 2000 08:17:21

We arrived at Montezuma's Castle early and unfortunately they were not doing guided tours at this time of year, due to staffing. We were able to see the 800 year old five story cliff dwelling constructed in a well in the rock face, high off the ground. The 20 room dwelling housed approximately 35 people. Another dwelling which stood at the base of the cliff nearby has badly deteriorated. It would have been over 6 stories tall with 45 rooms would have housed approximately 100 people.



It was a nice sunny warm day with no breeze. Beaver Creek was clear and reflected the cliffs just like a mirror. It was a wonderful day for visiting the Castle. They are really concerned with snakes apparently they are pretty common in the area during the summer.

We left and headed toward the Pioneer Museum. After stopping at the Sunset Rest Stop for lunch we

started down into a valley. As soon as we started to drop the organ pipe cactus started to appear. It was amazing how quickly they appeared. We had not seen a single one on the plateau but as soon as we started to drop they started appearing and a short time later we seemed to be in a small forest of them. Organ pipe cactus are HUGE. Some seemed to be as big around as me and 20 or more feet tall.

The village is a 26 building historic village, with lots of neat stuff to see. They have gunfights at regular intervals but we didn't bother to go see it. Next door to the museum is a snowbird RV park and the snowbirds were there in droves. It has around 600 sites and it was mostly full.

The next day was a shopping day in Phoenix. Norman and Sarah were leaving very early in the morning the following day so we spent the night in the West Economy Lot of the airport so we didn't have to worry about getting to the airport early. While they were visiting we had a pretty wide selection of camp sites, on the beach in San Diego, on cliffs overlooking the pacific, in the high desert at a ghost town, on the strip in Las Vegas, surrounded by high red rock cliffs in Zion, the pine forest in the Grand Canyon, a snowbird village and to top it all off, a parking lot in an airport!

Subject: Picacho Peak, Tombstone, and The Kartchner Caverns

Date: Tue, 25 Jan 2000 16:46:06



Well after leaving Phoenix's Sky Harbour International Airport we headed south toward Tucson. We figured a short day was in order as no one slept particularly well. We found a little place where we could gas up, and restock the cupboards. It was here that we discovered we are in the heart of snowbird country. Lots of license plates from Canada and the northern states, and a large number of VERY LARGE campgrounds offering daily, weekly, and monthly rates, almost all seemed to be full. We headed out toward Picacho Peak State Park. It is about half way between Tucson and Phoenix.

We arrived early enough that it seemed like a bit of a waste to stop so early but after we set up and went for a walk to the overlook and what spectacular scenery it was. On the way back we did the nature trail. It was one of the better exhibits that we saw on the plants in the desert. I have always had the impression that the desert is a hot barren wasteland sparsely furnished with cactus, sand and rock. This nature trail certainly showed how wrong that impression is. The desert is full of life

and the diversity of plants and animals is surprising. We finally got the proper name for our "organ pipe" cactus. It is a Saguaro (pronounced Sah-wah'-ro). They live for up to 200 years and can reach up to 50 feet tall. They begin to form the familiar arms after about 50 years. They are often full of holes that become nesting sites for birds.

We were thinking of staying another day in Picacho Peak but continued on to get to the other side of Tucson on Sunday rather than fight through on Monday morning. We ended up staying in a little park near the Kartchner Caverns State Park. Kartchner Caverns opened in November 1999. The Caverns were discovered in 1974 by two men and kept a secret for over 14 years. The state park tours are booked solid until June. They will book 16 of the 20 places in a tour, which means that if you are there

early you might get into one of the available slots. We arrived about 9:30 on Monday morning and everything was gone. We went to Tombstone instead.

Tombstone's most famous event was the gunfight at the O.K. Corral. The wild west is still alive and well here. Tombstone was founded Ed Schieffelin, a prospector who was told that all he would find in the area was his tombstone. He found silver and struck it rich. Many others came and the town of Tombstone was born. As with every other mining boom town we have encountered, Tombstone was quickly populated by others who mined the miners. Saloons, gambling houses, and brothels were common.

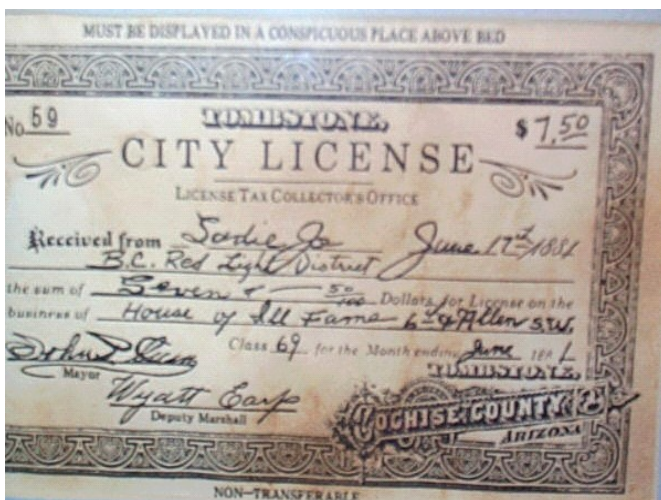


Tombstone has a number of museums that show different aspects of the life and times of Tombstone.

The strange thing to me was that the greatest problem in the mines in the desert was water, way too much water. The mines were pumped by four 200 horsepower pumps that pumped 7 million gallons of water a day from the 1000 foot level, were silenced by sea water. It was supposed to be fuel for the boilers but a tank of sea water ruined the boilers and the silver, pumps, and water are still there. The mines have been quiet since 1909.

The Golden Birdcage Theater was a theater, saloon, gambling house, and brothel. They have memorabilia from many performers that appeared at the theater. One of the most famous was a not yet 21 year old Lillian Russell who performed a song written at the bar that day "Bird in a Guilded Cage". It was a reference to the 14 cribs that ringed the second floor. The scantily clad young ladies wearing feathers and entertained their customers just above stage.

The basement had a long running poker game, 8 years 5 months and 3 days of continuous play. Each player had to place a \$1,000 deposit and place his name on a waiting list. When someone left the table he would be called. Once you were at the table you could stay as long as you wanted or until you ran out of money. Waiting time to join the game could be 3 to 4 days.



There were cribs in the basement beside the table. One of the more famous residents was Sarah Josephine Marcus of the Neuman-Marcus family, which disowned her on finding out her activities in Tombstone. She went under at least a couple of names, "Sadie Jo" and "Shady Sadie". She had many encounters there with her future husband Wyatt Earp. It was interesting to see that her license to practice was signed by none other than Wyatt Earp. She must have been a little kinky too, at the end of the bed hanging from the light was a lightweight cat of nine tails.

The Bird Cage Theater is the only historic Landmark in its original state. Most everything

else has burned at least once. During its short life, 1881 to 1889, it was a pretty rowdy spot, drinking, gambling, and prostitution as well as 16 gunfights. There are 140 bullet holes that riddle the walls. Looks like a .45 was a popular variety of Yukon Graffiti. There are several examples of them in the stage, bar, and a painting of Fatima opposite the bar. She was a popular for target practice, bearing 6 holes and a couple of knife wounds. (Mind you most of the 6 that hit the painting didn't strike "flesh". They needed more practise, 30 feet away and not hitting a 9 foot high lady in a painting.)

We left the Birdcage in time to get to the re-enactment of the gunfight at the O.K. Corral. They put on a good show and had a "Virgil Earp" that could come out with one liners sounding exactly like John Wayne.

We had dinner at nice mexican restaurant and then headed back to Kartchner Caverns. On the way home we had to go through a US Border Patrol Checkpoint. We stopped and the guy looked in the window "All people on board US citizens?" "Nope, all Canadian" we replied. The look on his face was "Oh shoot now what do I do with them" After a moments hesitation he said "cool" then handed us a fridge magnet "Support your US Border Patrol" and we were off.

Kartchner Caverns are listed as having campgrounds but they aren't open yet. So we headed back to our site near Benson. We spent another night playing in the pool, hot tub, and watching TV. The next morning we were lined up (number 24 as it turned out) at 6:45. We had breakfast waiting for the place to open and we made it into the 12:20 tour.

The Caverns are still "living" and they have done a tremendous amount of effort to control the humidity of the cave. They have two sets of air tight chambers to stop moisture from escaping, they also pipe in water and mist to replace water lost by having visitors. I hope they are successful in keeping of the cavern alive, it is a spectacular sight. They have the second longest "soda straw" formation in the world at over 21 feet. The longest is 22 feet. They don't take you to where the 21 foot "soda straw" is but do show you a 17 foot version. A soda straw looks like a straw one drop of water inside diameter, about a 1/4 inch outside diameter. They normally break after about 4 feet because of their own weight. The fact that they are so long here suggests that the area has been extremely stable for a very long time.

The Kubla Khan is the tallest and most massive column in Arizona at 58 feet tall. It is a pretty impressive work of art. I was reminded of something we saw at Mt. Saint Helens, it was talking about the recovery of a lake after the eruption but it seemed just as fitting here. "If there is a miracle on earth, it is in water."



Rock Hounds State Park

Subject: Rock Hounds State Park and White Sands National Monument
Date: Thu, 27 Jan 2000 21:40:29

After leaving the caverns it was time to start on our eastern trek. We don't have a lot that we are

planning to see as we head east. There are a few exceptions including: The White Sands National Monument, Carlsbad Caverns, and Roswell. We are basically heading east almost as quick as we can go with side trips to see a few highlights.

Our first stop was at Rock Hounds State Park. Normally State and National parks are really strict about leaving stuff alone. Rock Hounds encourages you to go rock hounding and you are free to take up to 15 pounds of rocks home. We found a couple of neat rocks on our walk around the trails. We were told by one of the hounds that the "good stuff" was up next to the cliffs but we couldn't tell good stuff from bad so we stuck to the path and enjoyed the scenery. The signs showing the six to eight different kinds of snakes that lived in the park had nothing to do with it. The wording about the venom was interesting. This one was "painful but not life threatening", another "seriously toxic seek medical attention immediately", the only one that sounded worse than that was "EXTREMELY Toxic". It was kind of a "if this one gets you don't bother seeking medical attention, just sit down and enjoy the view, while you can."

We seemed to be tired and headed to bed early. We did have a good radio station which actually had news on it and it was warning of a storm hitting the east coast and causing cold weather as far south as Dallas Fort Worth. We are heading there shortly so this was bad news. We have heard about a set of storms heading up the east coast. For those in that part of the world, I wish you the best and hopefully the storms will swing out to sea.

The traffic has changed since leaving Phoenix. The roads are full of trucks and RVs, very few cars. We have arrived in snowbird country. Bonnie is spending the night pouring through the Texas, and Oklahoma info. We are trying to figure out what we are going to try to see on our bee line east.

We started across highway 70 toward White Sands National Monument on the way is White Sands Missile Range. They have the road posted that they may close the highway during missile tests. We crested the pass and there lay the Tularosa Basin. It is a spectacular view. We passed by the Missile Base entrance, the small missile range, and the high energy laser test facility, before getting stopped at another U.S. Border Patrol station. This guy was used to seeing Canadians and sent us on our way quickly. Just past the checkpoint is the White Sands National Monument.

The White Sands National Monument has a very good desert plant exhibition out in the front yard. We are still trying to get a couple of plants identified and we are still looking, sigh. We looked through the visitor centre's display on the formation of the gypsum sand dunes. According to the visitor centre they close the Monument and highway 70 on the average of twice a week for a couple of hours due to missile tests.

The Tularosa Basin is part of the Chihuahuan Desert, the largest and highest desert in North America. The basin has no rivers draining the water so the water that runs out of the mountains has only one route out of the desert, evaporation.

Water dissolves the gypsum deposits in the mountains and it settles in Lake Lucero. As the water evaporates gypsum crystals form only to be broken up by the wind. The wind then pushes the sand into



large dunes. The dunes then start their march across the basin. The 30 foot tall dunes may move as much as 10 feet per year in parts of the basin.

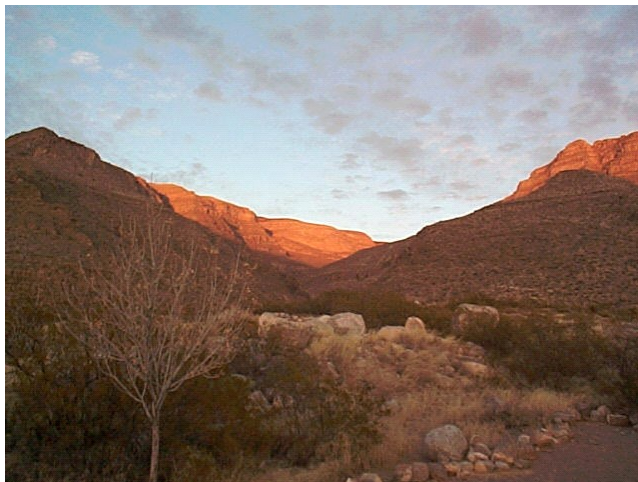
They have a lot of information about how the plants and animals have adapted to the desert. The Yucca has it half right. When the sand dunes start to move it will burst into growth and keep the leaves above the sand, that 2 foot high yucca on top of a 30 foot dune is really a 32 foot high yucca. Unfortunately when the dune moves away the yucca cannot support its own weight, collapses and dies. The cottonwood tree can actually be buried by a passing dune, as long as it is tall enough that some of its leaves are in the sun. Imagine a 35 foot high cottonwood buried to the point where only 5 feet is visible then as the wave passes it emerges unscathed and growing.

The brilliant white gypsum sand is startling. We were driving along the eight mile road into the dunes and came to a stretch that looked closer to what we expected to see in New Brunswick not New Mexico. The road was a frosty white, the gypsum packed into a hard surface that looked like ice. I even slowed down expecting it to be slippery, it isn't. There were stretches of the road that had been recently plowed the tell tail marks of a wing plow in evidence. Snow white drifts of sand three feet tall down the side of the road. Sitting in my shorts and T-shirt, I had a definite shiver, even if it was 75F in the shelter of the dunes. We climbed a dune and looked over a large area including down on Millie in the parking lot twenty feet below. We watched our private air show for a while before heading out.



No, that is not snow

Holloman Air Force Base is next door. We have been watching stealth fighters and other fighters for the last few hours. We thought they were testing at the Missile Range but on our way out of the Monument we stopped along the side of the road and watched a stealth circle, touch down on the runway, then take off again to circle again. We saw at least three in the air at once and it was interesting to see.



Oliver Lee State Park

We are camped in a state park close enough we can see the dunes in the distance. I'm sure I have seen these mountains in at least a few westerns. Dog Canyon runs through the park. Just moments before we started making supper Bonnie watched a stealth fly down the canyon and through the campground on his way back to the base.

We are planning on heading from here to Roswell NM and then to Carlsbad Caverns. We are then heading across Texas toward Oklahoma.

Subject: Roswell and the Carlsbad Caverns

Date: Sat, 29 Jan 2000 22:11:04

OK Bonnie's love for the X-Files is definitely showing. Roswell is a must stop for the X-Files fanatic. We stopped for a visit to the International UFO Museum and Research Center.

(If you are interested visit <http://www.iufomrc.com>)



The Museum has a bunch of interesting stuff related to "the Roswell incident" including a prop from the movie "Roswell", an alien on an examination table. A bunch of X-files posters and other movie promotional stuff. There is a section devoted to the timeline of the Roswell Incident. It is interesting to read through and for those who want to believe it is pretty neat stuff. I personally loved the Roswell related comics. I certainly enjoyed the exhibits and would recommend it to anyone, skeptics or believers. Both will find fodder for discussion.

It seems we have spent a lot of time on our trip looking at holes in the ground. Howe Caverns, Niagara Falls, the Grand Canyon, Mt. Saint Helens, Kartchner Caverns, and now Carlsbad Caverns. Caves are an example of water as artist. Random drops of water falling and sliding over surfaces forming odd shapes and patterns in the sediment it leaves behind. Just give it a couple hundred thousand years and it is quite amazing what it can do.

Water is a slow and talented artist

The Carlsbad Caverns were first extensively explored by Jim White a 16 year old who couldn't get anyone to go with him, for a while. Eventually he did and the caverns became a national park in the 1920s.

The Big Room is exactly that, one BIG room. It is over 600,000 square feet (14 football fields) and the trail that loops around inside the room is over 1.25 miles long. Max height in the room on one plaque is 255 feet, another beside the bottomless pit says 370. The bottomless pit is 140 feet deep but Jim's kerosene lamp couldn't see the bottom so it got the name.

We did a guided tour and the ranger was a wonderful storyteller and we were really impressed with him. We walked around took lots of pictures (some actually came out!) of the impressive formations.

They started to form over 60 million ago. Hydrogen sulfide gas from deep oil and gas deposits (lots of oil wells pumping to beat the band, good oil prices these days) and water mixed to form sulfuric acid which ate the limestone. Since then the caverns have evolved to where they are today. About 95 % of the formations are dry and inactive. This is extremely different from Kartchner Caverns where everything seemed to be moist and actively growing. They feel very different. The moisture level is very different, the temperature is different and even the colors are very different in the stone.

Kartchner Caverns is at a level where you can walk right into them, Carlsbad Caverns are 750 feet

down into the earth accessible by a one mile one hour walk or an elevator. There are even washrooms and a lunchroom at the 750 foot level.

We had a great time and visiting the Caverns and are definitely on our list for a return trip.

We were talking to Kent Ross last night and he and Michelle are interested in meeting us in Florida. We did a little calculation and figured we will be there about the middle of Feb. For those who might not know Kent and Michelle, they are sailing friends and were with us on our boat sailing from Saint John to Halifax and back a couple of summers ago. He has a mooring just a few away from us in Douglas Harbour.

We are anxious to get to a warmer climate. New Mexico is supposed to have an average temp in January high 57F and low 27F, last night was 10F. That's -12 to those more familiar with the Celsius scale. (Bloody cold on either).

Tomorrow we get to visit a new state for us, Texas. We are heading to Lubbock then Wichita Falls and then into Oklahoma.

Subject: Texas - oil wells, peanuts, cows, and camels.

Date: Tue, 01 Feb 2000 20:07:27

Well we have successfully pushed our way through Texas. Texas could take a year by itself. Some day I would love to do the arch of Texas along the Gulf of Mexico. I think that stretch is probably best seen by boat. Well maybe in a few years.

We left from Carlsbad NM and headed east toward Texas. Our first town in Texas was Seminole, number 1 in petroleum production, number 1 in peanuts, and number 1 people according to the signs. As soon as we crossed the border we went from lots of pumping oil wells into large farms. Cotton, peanuts, oil wells, and cattle are in evidence everywhere.

Our first night in Texas was spent in a natural oasis, Buffalo Springs Lake. We were the only residents in the campground. We have headed north of the snowbird route again and the number of RVs have dropped to negligible levels. We were amazed at the number of different species of birds living in the oasis. Canada Geese by the hundred, coots, mallards, kingfishers, herons, robins, red tailed hawks, and a bunch of others we couldn't identify. It was a cold night and the electric heat has been great. If we were doing this again I would have brought along the little ceramic heater I had in my office at the house. They work a lot better than Millie's roof heater/air conditioner. I was thinking of picking up one here but they are incredibly expensive compared to home (about triple the cost).

Our last few days have been travelling across really flat and low traffic roads, we even had a bit of a tail wind! Gas mileage was the best we ever had 10.68 miles per gallon. The last three tanks pulled our month average up to the best yet at 9.32.

The next day we proceeded mostly east and landed at a large state park outside of Wichita Falls. We weren't the only one in the campground but almost, there was a campground host.

Our trip that day was notable for a large variety of wild life. Dead skunks about every five miles. They really can't seem to make it across the road here. Hawks, large Vs of geese, ostrich farms, large ranches

of horses, cattle, even a field with camels, and one lone coyote. We did a little bit of farm road travelling to avoid the big city at rush hour and ended up going through a number of places where farmers have sold the field frontage to housing developers. They make BIG houses in Texas. Right off the covers of those house plan magazines.

The campground had a working oil rig. We had seen oil rigs up close before but this one was interesting because of the little one lugger. It seemed to be operated on natural gas. There was one spark plug bright and shiny new, but that was probably the only thing new on the engine. It had no valve covers so you could see the push rods coming up to open the exhaust valves and intake valves. The putt putt of the little engine drove a large heavy flywheel which in turn drove belts that swung the weights that bobbed the pump head up and down pumping the oil into a pipeline leading off to a tank somewhere nearby. The hand crank for starting the engine was laying on the cement support for the engine. The muffler was an upside down 5 gallon metal pail. It was a lot like the old engines that we see in marine museums. Every time the spark plug fired you could hear a distinctive little PUTT. I stopped and counted 18 distinct putts in 10 seconds. It would speed up when the weight was pulled down by gravity and labour a little to lift it over the top. It putt putt putted all night.

It didn't seem to bother Bonnie or I, we slept in until 9:50 am. We weren't concerned as the weather forecast was calling for rain, sleet, and snow. We decided the night before to have a Sunday and wait out the storm. We opened the shades to see that it was 45F and sunny. The storm had moved east faster than they expected. What the heck we figured we should make tracks and since we only had a 100 mile day planned we left the park at noon and headed toward Oklahoma.

I think I found our charging problem. Every once in a while the house battery didn't seem to charge properly. When I was messing around this morning, cleaning the battery terminals and such, I noticed the positive wire connector was loose where it hooked on a diode. I cleaned up the connection and the ring terminal isn't a ring terminal anymore. Next time we pass an AutoZone or Walmart we will stop and get a new wire. It seemed to charge fine today but we'll get it fixed properly.

Subject: eMs and a little rock with a metal shine.

Date: Sat, 05 Feb 2000 18:52:09

We left Texas and headed into Oklahoma. We have been travelling on back roads for the last few days and it is amazing how much Oklahoma and Arkansas looks like New Brunswick. You could swear you were on sections of the Coles Island road. Pine Trees, a little bit of hardwood, clear cuts, and then plantations of new trees.

We landed after a short day into a quiet park where there was one other camper, a young family from Missouri. I went over to pay for the night and talked to the ranger for a while. We had been seeing these large hardwood trees completely bare of any leaves except for these pom-poms of bright green leaves stuck on a various parts of the tree. "They're an eM with a parasite on them called Mistletoe, ya know the stuff ya get at Christmas. Never known them to die of it, but they're an eM." He must of saw that dumb look on my face when I said "M?" "Ya know an eM, E, L, M, eM!" That brought a smile of understanding, yep heard of eMs before. He did seem to have a hard time getting that "L" out, seemed to stick in his throat.

The next morning we decided that we wanted to do something different for Bonnie's birthday. Diamond mining seemed to be a different way to spend the day. We spotted a State park in Arkansas that was

called Crater of Diamonds State Park. It was not on our original schedule but we figured we could probably have some fun looking around.

On our way we passed through the area that was hit by a severe winter storm. Up to 18 inches of heavy wet snow dropped on an area that usually doesn't get snow and if it does is maybe a couple of inches. They had lost over 200 chicken coops in just a couple of towns nearby. We saw several coops that had collapsed as well as a few stores, garages and porches. They lost enough chickens that the cost of chicken meat in grocery stores may rise across the whole of the United States. A week later there is still a lot of snow on the ground. To us it feels like maple syrup time. The snow in the woods is melting, cold nights and warm days. Spring days we get at home that mean winter is just about over.

The first day we arrived at the park, we just went through the visitor center where they have lots of exhibits on diamonds and examples too. They have a really impressive display on diamonds and the processes used to make them.

There are several theories on how they are created in nature however the "Crater" is actually a volcanic pipe of diamond bearing magma that flowed to the surface and slowly cooled forming a solid pipe or shaft.

Most of the diamonds at the crater are industrial grade although there have been some pretty impressive gem quality diamonds come out of the crater as well, including: Amarillo Starlight a 16.37 carat diamond in the rough that was cut down to a 7.54 carat marquise. The cutting was a 3 month process done by a New York firm. It is the biggest diamond ever found by a visitor to the park. Yes, it is finders keepers! You are allowed to keep anything you find. Others of note: the Star of Shreveport (8.82 cut weight), Star of Arkansas (15.36 rough, 8.27 cut) the largest ever was Uncle Sam, found when the area was a commercial mine 40.23 in the rough and 12.42 cut.

If you would like to make your own you can follow General Electric's recipe:

1. Take graphite and mix with a metal solvent and place between two tungsten carbide pistons.
2. apply pressure at about 1,000,000 psi.
3. heat to about 3000 F or 1648.49C
4. Maintain for a short period of time.

Results are scores of industrial grade diamonds about 1/2 millimetre in diameter. It is possible to make a gem quality diamond but not worth the cost.

If you want to go and look for diamonds here are some of the hints they give:

1. look for a small well rounded crystal around the size of the head of a match.
2. look for clean crystals, mud and dirt won't stick to the surface of a rough diamond
3. Hold onto it, experience has shown once a diamond is dropped it isn't seen again that day.
4. Diamonds may be of several colors in the park: white, yellow and brown are most common.

The next day was Bonnie's birthday so we went looking for diamonds. We arrived and it was a cool morning. We were dressed in foul weather gear and had several layers of warm cloths under it. The melting snow lay several inches deep in parts of the field. The 35 acre field is plowed to turn over the soil and since it is wet with the melting snow it is also extremely muddy. Our boat boots are not the best in slick mud and at times skiing was a quite appropriate analogy to what I was doing to try to stay

upright. We tried a couple of methods of diamond mining, walking over the surface and just looking and slowly scraping the surface off with a kitchen knife looking to see if we could find anything under the surface.

We spent most of the day on our hands and knees in some of the stickiest mud I have ever been in. We did get cold and did the prospector's walk, a 1.2 mile hike around the area just to get warmed up again. They have great signs urging you to say on the trail. "Rock outcroppings are home to many poisonous snakes." Arkansas has copperheads, water moccasins, and rattlers. The walk on the snowy trail did warm us up in time to get back to our mining for the afternoon. We headed back to the visitor center in time for them to check our stash of pretty rocks before they closed.

We washed our foul weather gear in the campsite next door and took the worst of the mud off there. We both were cold and well in the mood for a shower. While Bonnie was having her shower I made her a birthday cake and we celebrated her birthday with steaks, salad and an orange cranberry birthday cake with orange icing.

She does have a 13 point (REAL SMALL) brown diamond in the rough.

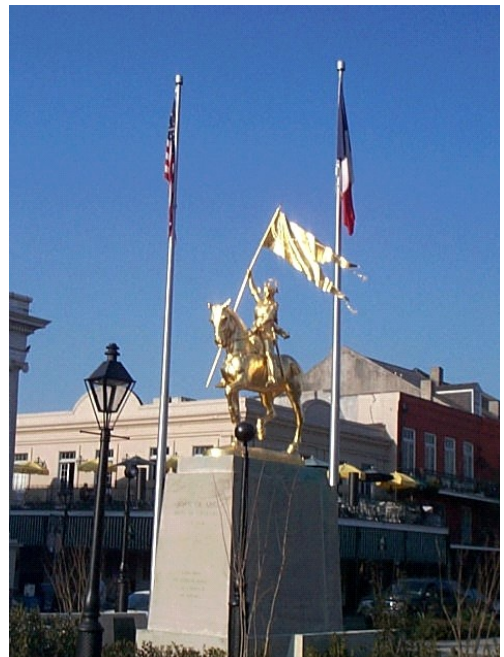
(It only hurt Mr. Visa a little.)

Subject: New Orleans
Date: Wed, 09 Feb 2000 20:16:08

We have been traveling the back woods of Arkansas and Louisiana for the past while arriving in New Orleans yesterday. We arrived early enough in the day to get settled and head into the city. We booked one of the night life tours, a combination of dinner, a jazz club, a stroll down Bourbon Street and a little of the French Quarter, ending with coffee and a donut at Cafe-du-Monde before heading back to the campground by taxi. We were under firm instructions that the bus was not a good idea even the taxi driver said things are "a little tough" in the area. We had a great visit with the taxi drivers. Very friendly and gave an interesting perspective on life in New Orleans.

It was interesting, we met two people that had been here about 25 years, one said New Orleans was great to visit but not to live, the other came for 6 months and is still here after 20+ years and wouldn't live anywhere else.

New Orleans averages about -4 feet in elevation with the lowest point about 15 feet below sea level. We did another Gray Line tour Wheels and Paddle. Morning on wheels around New Orleans and afternoon on a paddle wheeler.



Joan of Arc aka Joanie on a pony



One of the major stops on all the tours is the City of the Dead. The water table is SO close to the surface that below ground burial is not really possible. The cemeteries are full of little family tombs. They were made of brick with a thin veneer of stucco on the outside. During the time that Yellow Fever was a major problem in the area there were strict rules about the opening the crypts before one year and one day. They weren't sure what was causing the yellow fever at the time but they knew that a body after spending a summer inside the crypt wouldn't. The heat of the summer and the brick oven/crypt cremated the bodies. Temperatures inside the tombs can be several hundred degrees after many days of heating in the hot New Orleans summer. Since this was a Roman Catholic city at the time and cremation was frowned upon the crypts provided for safe disposal. The family was not cremating the body, nature was. It was not until the building of the Panama Canal that they discovered that Yellow Fever was carried by the mosquitoes.

The water table being so close to the surface has created a number of problems, and almost as many solutions. They decided that they could firm up the soil by pumping out the water out and then they would have a firm structure to build on. The water was pumped out leaving voids in the soil and the existing houses tended to fill these voids, never quite evenly. As you drive up the street you can see houses that are leaning at various angles. These angles seemed to be accentuated by the fact that the houses tend to be very narrow and long (taxes are assessed by the frontage). The next idea was to drive pilings down and build a slab on these nice firm pilings. Great, but that didn't stop the soil from compacting leaving a house up in the air. They have to bring in soil every few years to pack around the house. (How many bets that the houses were built to be hanging in mid air. We will probably find that out in 20 or so years.)

The taxes being based on frontage lead to the development of "Shotgun" houses. Houses with no hallways. You had to go through the living room, to get to the bedroom, to get to the kitchen, ... Open all the doors into the back yard and you could fire a shotgun through the house and not hit any walls.

We stopped in Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville bar. Jimmy has some roots in New Orleans that are best explained in some of his books. If you are in town stop in for "Jimmy's Perfect Margarita", go down Decatur Street until you see the golden statue of Joan of Arch ("Joanie on a pony" to the locals) and Jimmy's is just down at the next corner. Bonnie found the "Perfect" a little tart. I thought it was great but it was powerful, at least I think I remember it as being just right.

New Orleans was a great place and I would love to come back and rent an apartment for a few months in the French Quarter and just suck up the atmosphere. Lots of great restaurants, museums, and of course Mardi Gras. Parades start here in a couple of weeks and then continue for another couple of weeks until Fat Tuesday. At Midnight the police roll through and empty the streets, it's over at the start of Ash Wednesday.

We found out something neat about statues in the south. If you see a statue of a general on a horse, if the left foot of the horse is in the air they won a major battle, if the right is in the air they died in battle, if both front feet are in the air he won a major battle and when on to glory. The Andrew Jackson in

Jackson square has both feet in the air. His glory was that he became the 7th President.

New Orleans dates back to the Spanish in the 1790s and has a lot of history. The French Quarter reminded us a lot of the little French islands in the Caribbean and even a little of Old Quebec City. It has a lot of influences of French, and Spanish.

We picked up a bottle of hot sauce and tried the pralines. The pralines are really good. We had a maple pea-con sample but had to rush off before trying anything else. It is definitely “pea-cons” not pecans, pecans are a little pot under the bed. There is also an accent that sounds like Brooklyn, we are told it is likely to be a native of New Orleans. The cross cultural mix with it’s variety of accents mix to form a Brooklyn accent.

It is a long history of being an easy going place. If things had a hard way or an easy way the easy way is the way to go. Local lore has it that this has extended to the police as well. An officer had to fill out a report on a dead horse on one of the streets in town, after several attempts at the report it was easier to go back to the horse drag it over another street and then come back to complete the report, the horse had died on Tchoupitoulas Street, but the report read much easier when the horse died on Fan. The steamboat trip up the river on one of the last seven steam powered paddlewheelers still working the rivers of America. The Natchez has two steam generators working with a force of 2000 horsepower. They even let you tour the engine room. The steam engines have a seven foot stroke and drive a steel and white oak paddlewheel.

They have 20 miles of wharf in the area. Some of it is in pretty hard shape. This is one of the largest ports in the world and the number of ships in the river certainly adds credibility to the claim. There were a number of ships that were waiting in the general anchoring area. Most of them were waiting to load grain. The large bulb on the keel on a one of them was actually clear of the water, a frightening sight by itself. The bulb has the effect of reducing the bow wake, creating a void that sucks the ship along reducing the wake, and increasing the speed of the vessel.

The Natchez was launched in 1975 and has a 32 note steam calliope which is played for the passengers waiting to board. We enjoyed our little trip on the paddlewheeler. They mentioned that there was a company that was still doing passenger paddlewheel trips from New Orleans to St Louis. That would be an interesting trip. We would probably do it on our own boat though. (Another list is definitely building).

We crossed the Mississippi in Minnesota where Millie spanned the entire bridge crossing the river, and you could see to the bottom all of a couple of feet deep. Here it is a slightly different story. The river is about a half mile wide and over 200 feet deep.

We will have to come back another time and spend some time. I would love to see Mardi Gras and some day I will.

Subject: Exhaust troubles.
Date: Sun, 13 Feb 2000 15:03:47

We had an exhaust problem that we spent a day trying to find a place to fix it. Not a lot of places can lift Millie, either because of height or weight. After a while we landed at a shop in Biloxi, Mississippi where the guy listened to it, looked under it (in the yard not on a hoist) and without tapping on a pipe diagnosed that the whole thing was rusted to pieces and had to be replaced cost, \$1000US.

Our next stop was an quick oil change place (needed the oil changed too) and I asked the guy underneath to see if he could find out where the noise was coming from. A while later we started the engine to check oil pressure and then shut it off. The guy on top said the guy underneath wanted me to go down below. So off I went, a pipe coming off the front of the catalytic converter had rusted off. I went hammering down the length of the exhaust with my money clip and it sounded pretty solid.

We stopped at an AutoZone and picked up a couple of packages of muffler repair tape and after an afternoon under Millie we are running as quiet as ever, for less that \$10.

We have been running slow lately. We are intending to pick up Kent and Michelle in Tampa on the 23rd and have been soaking up some time on our way. We are also back in warm weather again which makes life easier to take. We have skirted the gulf coast and are now camping in a little campground on the intracoastal waterway in Alabama.

We are almost spitting distance from Florida so will probably be there tomorrow if we find a state park we can get into (a problem in peak snowbird country) we will probably camp out for a few days and soak up some sunshine.

Time to go watch some boats in the intracoastal

Subject: Another hole in the ground.

Date: Wed, 16 Feb 2000 19:23:37

We have headed a little inland to pick up a couple of highlights. Our first is another hole in the ground. This one happens to be the Florida Caverns State Park.

We noticed a big difference in temperature as we headed inland. It has become much warmer and more humid. They are expecting thunderstorms tonight or tomorrow. We had a short day and was away relatively early for us, which put us in the park quite early in the afternoon.

The caverns are pretty small which is nice for a number of reasons, the number of people in the tour is small (ours wasn't full) and there are a lot of places where you are extremely close to the features. Sometimes you have to go single file through the features of the cave. The cave is still very much alive, water was dripping everywhere. There are lots of places where you have to crouch over to walk and be careful not to hit your head on the ceiling. They don't have the huge columns like Kartchner or Carlsbad, but you are so close you do get to see the features with all their lovely detail.



A divine picture of cave formations

They have great examples of stalactites, stalagmites, soda straws, draperies, flow stone, rim pools and columns. The colors range from brilliant white to freshly melted milk chocolate. This wasn't one of the most best guides we have had, this guy was really layed back and didn't go for a lot of explanations on how things are formed or conservation or bats but he did give a good tour and we enjoyed it.

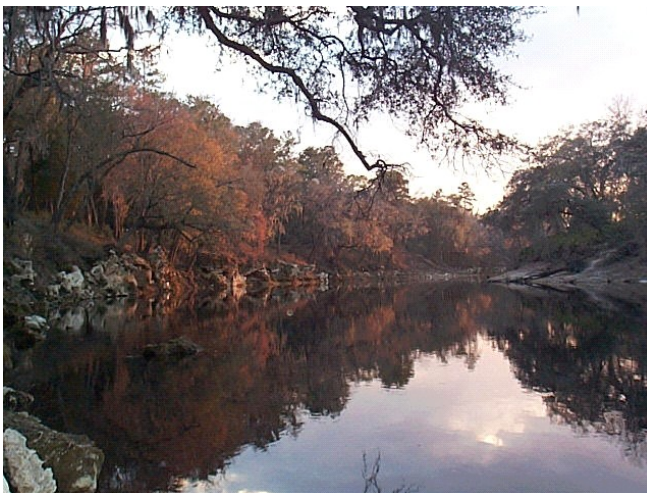
The caverns were another example of the Civilian Conservation Corp work. There are great sections of the caverns that you could see were dug out to make the walkways. It was all done with pick, shovel, wheelbarrows, and 5 gallon bucket. They also hand quarried the stone for the visitor center.

We had a great visit with one of the tour guides while waiting for the tour to start. This guy was a real sportsman. He loved to hunt and fish. We talk a long time about salmon, deer, and wild boar. Apparently they are really a problem to the peanut fields.

Tomorrow we are going to see the Suwannee River which will also put us on the east side of the Apalachicola River and into the Eastern Time Zone for the first time since July of last year.

Subject: On the banks of the Suwannee River!
Date: Thu, 17 Feb 2000 22:06:23

We ended up having a long day on the road. We didn't leave until late and our first stop was a grocery store. We have quite a good food processing system on board and can stow an amazing amount of food pretty fast. Unfortunately our little freezer has a hard time dealing with a sudden demand to cool 15 pounds of meat. (Burger, bacon, chicken, pork, and steaks). We are getting in the habit of running the stockpile fairly low before hitting the stores. This means we are often in another state or several states away from the last major restock in this case. The last real provisioning was just outside of Phoenix. We really notice a big difference in the styles and content of the grocery stores as we have moved around the continent. The little place in Arizona had lots of Mexican food and fresh peppers. This one had the best selection of beans we had seen anywhere. At home we get white beans and red kidney beans. This place had about 12 linear feet and three shelves deep just in different kinds of beans, but it only had very small packages of rice.



Mirror black waters of the Suwannee River

By the time we got all of the food processed and stowed it was time for lunch and with the time change (we are now only 1 hour away from home) we didn't make it to Suwannee River State Park until about 4:30. We took the nature trail around the shores of the Suwannee River, arriving back just to see the sun setting against the banks of the river. With the spanish moss hanging from the trees, the white limestone banks, and the black water of the Suwannee River was just like a mirror, it was very pretty. Bonnie and I sat in one of the swings by the river to watch the sunset. As long as we were swinging fast the mosquitoes didn't bother us, too much.

The Suwannee River runs from the Okefenokee Swamp in southeast Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico and was immortalized by Steven Foster in the song "Old Folks at Home". The name Suwannee means "black water" or "dark and muddy in the sun" and it certainly is black water. The Confederate forces had a earthworks here to protect the railroad bridge across the Suwannee during the war. The Union soldiers tried to capture the bridge but were driven back.

Subject: Manatees, Gators, and NB plates.

Date: Tue, 22 Feb 2000 17:20:52

Getting into state parks this time of year seems to be a real problem at least on weekends. We ended up camping in a little private campground on Follow Your Dreams Highway. Elvis Presley spent a couple of months in the area making a movie called "Follow Your Dreams" and it has been called that ever since. I used the phone in the office to download a pile of backed up email and discovered some very bad news. A friend that Bonnie worked with for 23 years had collapsed at his desk and died at the hospital just minutes later. He was a very good friend to Bonnie and I. He was a person who you could count on for a quick quip and a wry sense of humor, but he was always friendly and helpful. He and his wife use to drive me from my step-sisters to UNB everyday until I got an apartment in town. Bonnie took his death real rough and it was really hard for her to be so far away when friends were hurting.

We spent the next day as a quiet day and didn't venture beyond the corner store but the day after we took a quick trip down to Homosassa Springs State Park. The park is something of an animal rescue area. Manatees, cats, and birds that are injured are brought here to be nursed back to health and if possible released to the wild. They have nine permanent resident manatees as well as hundreds of birds, 11 alligators that we saw, a Florida Panther, two River Otters, two Bob Cats and one hippo named Lucifer that has his own official Florida citizenship papers. When the state park bought the tourist park from private hands it ended up with a bunch of exotic animals which it wanted to get rid of by giving them to zoos. Exotic animals are not part of the mandate of the park service. When the locals found out that the park was trying to get rid of Lucifer, they caused such a howl that the governor issued Lucifer a special set of citizenship papers.



Manatee among the palms.

There is a spring that pumps water out of the ground at a constant 72 F year round. This is real important for the Manatees. They need fairly warm water to survive and the 72 F water is fine for them. Apparently when the gulf waters cool down the Manatees run for cover into the warm spring waters of the rivers. The Manatees are mammals the average adult is in the 800 to 1200 pound range and 8 to 10 feet long. Its nearest relative is the elephant. It breathes air and rises to the surface every two to four minutes when active and 15 to 20 when resting. They seemed to like to grab a head of lettuce and hold it in their flexible upper lip and chew on it under water. They eat 10% of their body weight every day. They are strict vegetarians and are usually not bothered by

alligators or sharks. Their biggest problem seems to be props on boats and a few of them bore scars from long ago encounters. The end of the park area is gated off so that boaters can't get in and the manatees can't get out. They have large fish bowl that is floated in the pool and you can go down inside and walk around and see the manatees and fish swimming around the outside of the fish bowl.

The gators are pretty much beach bunnies. They spend 95% of their life lazing on the beach in the sun. They seemed pretty docile and only one of the eleven we saw actually moved into the water and swam to the other side of the pond. It was sunny over there. They can go up to six months without eating. Many of the gators were missing parts of feet or the tip of a tail. They are cannibalistic and

opportunistic feeders, after six months I guess they even look good to each other!

The herons use the area as a rockery figuring that the gators will help take care of any predators that might be interested in the nest, things like snakes and Florida has lots of them. They seem to have been issued one version of a snake that is poisonous for every version of a snake that isn't. They have a lot of snakes on display in the park. The Eastern Indigo Snake is not poisonous and the one beside it was the Florida Cottonmouth which is. One of the differences is that the cottonmouth has a white mouth. They looked close enough to me than I have absolutely no plans on sticking around long enough to see what color the mouth is. I don't mind snakes, both Bonnie and I thought it was neat to see and touch the Indigo snake. It was dry and cool just like the ranger said it was, well to me anyway Bonnie said it felt warm to her hands. They had a huge Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake, the largest venomous snake in North America. The ranger gave the next guy in line a glare when he came out with a comment about that one making a lot of belts! Wonder why.

The next day we were off to Harrison River State Park. It is just a few miles away from Tampa where we are going to pick up Kent and Michelle. On our way a car beside us started waving and hooking it's horn we were wondering what was going on until the woman in the back seat pointed down toward the license plate, it was an NB plate. First plate from home we have seen since Ontario last July. They are getting more common though, one of the campground hosts we were talking to this morning is from Doaktown NB.

We did an email drop to tell Kent and Michelle we were ready and waiting for them and picked up the next batch of mail. This batch dropped more bad news on us. My uncle was in critical condition in hospital, call home as soon as you get the email. We called and he was in still alive but critical and not expected to live through the night. We got a call this morning saying he died early this morning.

It's hard being away from home when people need to have you around.

Subject: Busch Gardens and RULES!

Date: Sat, 26 Feb 2000 23:21:30

Kent and Michelle have arrived safe and sound and we are having a great time visiting. We spent most of a day at Busch Gardens and had a great time visiting the animals and playing on the roller coasters. We only went on a few this time including their wooden roller coaster. We didn't like it as well as Ghost Rider but it was a great trip. Michelle went with us and Kent kept the breakables safely on the ground for us, all except for the Congo River Rapids where he joined us getting soaked. We were drifting quietly down river and all of a sudden there was a shot of water landing in the middle of the raft. We just recovered from that and were hit by another, we barely recovered from that when we went flopping down the rapids with even more boarding waves. It was a little later that we discovered that the coin machines along the edge of the rapids were used for dispensing one shot of water at the unsuspecting raft below. Kent and I were disgusted at the fact someone would pay 25 cents for the privilege of firing a water canon at



an unsuspecting stranger. We got hit twice, but worse than that, we didn't have any quarters!

The lineups were few and we didn't spend much time standing around. After walking for about 8 hours around we sat down on the sky tram over the park. It was just past dark and the lights around the park were nice. The park is in the process of a major reconstruction so we couldn't see much but construction equipment. We rode back down and Michelle wanted to take a walk through the Edge of African section of the park. I kind of thought was Darkest Africa but then I had my sunglasses on and it was already night, my other glasses were in the parking lot a mile or so away. There were a few long faces but we went along, are we ever happy we did! The hippos were actively swimming in their enclosure, putting on a pretty neat show for just the four of us. The young one was running the length of the pool. It was hard to call it running since he was several feet under water and only touching every once in a while. Then mom got in the act to show him how it was done. She would scoot herself along with just her front feet touching and once or twice across the whole length of the enclosure she would touch a hind foot to aid her along. The two were incredibly graceful moving along in their easy strides. We raced from one side to the other and could just shake our heads in amazement. (No more long faces!)



We tried to get into the state parks with no success, the weekends are booked solid. We headed toward a private campground and decided we would sit tight through the weekend. The place has a pool, bar, barbecue, and billiard tables. What was funny was the number of rules. There was a survival guide(6 pages of rules), the map was footed with rules, the pool rules were posted, the billiard rooms had rules posted and ... We decided this really wasn't the kind of place we would be comfortable in for a long term, but lots of people are, they have 1600 sites, many with a permanent setup. We decide a pool day in the sun was in order. We had a great time swimming, people watching, drinking (hic) and soaking up the rays. The place has a kiosk that sells different things on different days. Today was a swimsuit day. People were actually chasing the girl across the deck while she was setting up. There were a few people there that younger than us, mostly grand kids or sons and daughters visiting for a little while. The people watching was great fun. There was one particular ittsy bittsy teeny weeny green bikini that was well, er, ahh, it could be described as, well, enjoyable. She was enjoying wearing it, her hubby thought it was great. Kent and I did enjoy it as well. This was a definite case of a December-June relationship. But every time she came out of the pool Bonnie and I got in a discussion, June was definitely late maybe April, but I think it was much closer to mid March.

Sad news came after talking to mother after my uncle's funeral. Bill Horsman, who lived behind us all the time while I was growing up and was very good friend of the family for a very long time, died the day after my uncle. Bill was suffering from a very painful form of bone cancer. Every one of our family will carry special memories of Bill forever. He was his own man, and a man of courage, strength, and kindness.

Subject: Sanibel, 43 breeds of mosquito, and the keys.

Date: Thu, 09 Mar 2000 08:21:10

We are having a pretty good time and not doing a good job with the log. Kent and Michelle are experienced Florida travelers. We have repeated some of their routes and tried new places as well. One of their favorite places is Sanibel, an island near Fort Myers. Sanibel is a very pretty area with a nice white sand and shell beach. It is also extremely touristy with lots of shops, pricey hotels, and restaurants. The roads are also very narrow and on a hot sunny day, it was bad day for road rage. We were all packed pretty tight and when you got a chance to change lanes you did. One guy in a half ton cut in front of another guy in a half ton hauling a boat and the second guy didn't like it, he rear ended the first, not hard enough to do damage but loud enough to bother us, and then hollered out the window "Never cut me off again!" We were happy to be out of traffic that day.



Would someone tend this fishing pole?

Sanibel has a large preserve called the J. N. "Ding" Darling Refuge after a cartoonist who was Franklin D. Roosevelt's Chief of the Biological Survey (forerunner of the fish and wildlife service). On display in the visitor center is a very big shot gun called a swivel gun that was seized by wardens. The swivel gun was mounted on skiff, loaded with two to three pounds of shot and fired at raft of sitting ducks huddled together in the beam of a spotlight at night. The Canvasback and Redheaded ducks were sold by the thousands to night clubs of New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia.

Collier-Seminole State park provided a first look at what was to come in the Everglades. The park is one of the few naturally occurring Royal Palm groves in the continental U.S. All of the original palms were killed by lightning but the second growth ones are still a pretty amazing height. The monument to Barron Collier, who owned a million acres of land and preserved a portion of it for the park, is a Greek style multiple column structure of white that stands in field of green with great Royal Palms nearby, an impressive memorial.

The Tamiami trail was built in the 20s as a highway for Tampa to Miami. The fill for the trail was blasted and dredged from alongside the highway and piled up to make the roadbed. The park has one of the "Walking Dredges" used to build the canal and road. It is listed as a National Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark. Instead of wheels that would sink it had pads that it could raise and lower and by raising and lowering and pulling at the right time the Dredge could walk its way to the next spot. The canal it helped to build is also a great place for alligators. Kent was high enough to have a good view over the guard rail and saw at least a hundred individuals. Even I was able to see a few as I drove along. The road we were on passed through the northern edge of the National Park and there were quite a few campgrounds along the road, unfortunately we didn't know about them as they were not listed in our books. We stopped for the night at one of the serviced campgrounds about 10 miles inside the park. It wasn't what we were expecting for "the everglades", a stand of tall pine trees growing on coral with a small lake nearby. Michelle wanted a fire so Kent and I went looking in the woods for deadfalls, it was one of the few places where it was allowed. We were real careful as we foraged especially looking for

snakes and other things that can bite back. Kent got a couple of scrapes from a vine that looked like a 10 gauge black wire covered with small thorns.

I was up early and took a walk around the lake and spotted two small gaters. They were about four feet from tip to tip. You could see little whirlpools spin off of their tail as it propelled itself lazily (and silently) across the mirrored surface of the lake. As they get older they seem to look more like a dinosaur. Beside the amphitheater were a couple of white tailed deer that watched me as I took a seat to watch them. They were enjoying the peaceful morning as much as me.

We continued down into the Everglades to Flamingo. At certain times Flamingo would be listed on one of my never go to places. If Bonnie and I are walking anywhere there are mosquitoes, I will get eaten alive and she might get a bite or two. This area has 43 species of mosquitos thankfully only 13 that bite humans. They even have a mosquito biting index from one to five, one being none and five being "You will be driven insane", it was two the day we visited. We went to one of the ranger talks and he gave some interesting information about malaria. (No they don't have malaria here). People infected the mosquitos with malaria and when they bit another person the mosquito passed it along. When the Panama Canal was being built they would be in the field hospitals laying on beds on the ground. The ants would end up crawling over them and to stop this the legs of the bed were put in small tins of water. There is one version of the mosquito that loves to use human containers for their eggs, they also are a variety that can be infected by and pass on malaria. Sometimes you just can't win.



How stable is this canoe anyway?

We did a long canoe trip down the canal, into a lake, and up a little swampy cut to another lake, about 12 miles up and back. The canoe rentals were complete with life jackets. The ranger told us that kids are required to wear them but the adults just had to have them in the canoe and besides "if you overturn just stand up". That was comforting until his next set of descriptions as to where the alligators were, and said it was illegal to go within 15 feet of one. We didn't see anything but a few birds on the way down the canal. As soon as we got into the lake we saw three dolphins surfacing out in the lake. We paddled out to where we figured they were and doubted we would see them again. We did see all three a few times but could never really get close enough to get a good picture. The wind

started to pipe up and we headed toward the cut to the other lake. We saw one small gater but as soon as he saw us he sunk down underwater and disappeared. On the way back out we barely caught a glimpse of him again before he was gone. We did see an old one that was pretty big and just let us paddle around him. He looked at us a couple of times but didn't seem bothered at all. The gater was probably 10-12 feet long and would have the brain about the size of a walnut. Michelle read later that they evaluate everything they see as either prey or predator, maybe we should have been a little more concerned that he wasn't bothered by us. The trip up the little pass to Coot Bay Pond was spectacular. It reminded me of the old adventure films where the actors paddled through the thickets of mangroves. This is exactly what I hoped the mangrove swamps to be like. There were even very few mosquitos, and a lot of spiders.

We tried to get into one of the state parks in the keys but they were booked solid until May. We did find a spot in a campground at \$49 per night for dry camping. Electric was another \$25. We checked a few other places and they were \$60-\$90 plus \$10-\$15 each for Kent and Michelle. Sites here run \$2500 per month for a site with a boat slip, nice business. US 1 is a river of greenbacks that the locals work diligently to divert into their pockets. We really enjoyed the keys including stopping in Islamorada to pick up the mail and meet the person who does a great job handling our mail. It was a good thing we stopped by our box was getting full after six weeks of stuff.

Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville is a must stop for all parrotheads. We had a great table by the window and we spent a while watching the people in the street. Key West is a great place to people watch, and Jimmy's is great place to do it. After a Jimmy's Perfect we headed down to southernmost point of the Continental US, only 90 miles from Cuba. We strolled back down the street and wandered our way to the next must see in Key West.



Monument to Wreckers

Hemingway's house is a really neat house with lots of six toed cats still prowling the grounds. Hemingway had a number of the six toed cats and it seems to be a dominant gene as there are now LOTS and LOTS of six toed cats. The guide did talk about the cats being spayed and neutered but there always seems to be at least one new litter around. Estimates are now 62 cats. The house is one of the few houses in the area that has a deep basement. The house is on a hill (elevation 16 feet) and has a 14 foot basement. The stone from the basement was used to build the walls and are about 18 inches thick. The house was bought by Hemingway in disrepair for \$8000. His wife of the time had money of her own and spent quite a bit fixing the place up. The pool was dug during the time he was a war correspondent. It cost about \$20,000 (her money not his) and he threw a fit when he found out. The story goes that he reached into his pocket, pulled out a penny and handed it to her saying "You spent everything else you might as well have my last penny". She was proud of that little penny, he had four wives before killing himself and she was the only one that could claim that she took his last penny. It is mounted at a foot of the post, by the pool. The person that bought the house bought most of the stuff in the house as well and when they were digging in the basement they found a ceramic cat that had its legs broken. She glued them back on and had it sitting on a coffee table when Hemingway's wife showed up to visit one day and gave them the story on the cat. It had been made by Picasso and given as a gift to Hemingway during his years in Paris.

If you have ever dreamed about finding sunken treasure you should go to Mel Fisher's museum. He searched for 16 years and found the sunken treasure ship the Atocha. It is an amazing museum. The cache of gold, silver, and emeralds was amazing. They found 75,000 pounds of silver. The wedding chain was amazing, it was a double chain that often was given as a dowery to signify the joining of two families by a wedding. It was also called a money chain because the unsoldered links could be twisted off and used as money as each link weighed the same as a 8 escudo gold coin, one ounce. This chain is 12 feet long. There is a poison cup, a gold chalice ornately decorated with a place for a bezoar stone, a gallstone from a goat or llama. It is composed of hair, calcium, and a protein that binds to Arsenate, the toxic element in arsenic. Smart people in the 1620s.

They also found small gold bars called fingers and even have one on display that you can reach in and lift, it weights 74 1/2 ounces, quite noticeably heavy. They found hundreds of them. They are also finding lots of emeralds they have a 78 carat natural crystal emerald on display with a posted value of \$500,000. Lots and lots more treasure.

We walked down to the local bar and sat watching the sunset. It was the end of a great day and when we turned to head back from the keys, it marked the end of one leg of our journey and the start of another, the leg home.

