

On Wednesday 17th October 2018 we left home to join up with the New Horizon group in Phoenix, Arizona for a tour of the National Parks of SW USA.

Just getting to the start was quite a saga ; -car, bus, hotel, check-in, drop bags, queue, security, queue, long flight, queue, immigration, wait, collect bags, drop bags, queue, security, wait, short flight, wait, collect bags, call shuttle, wait, board shuttle, arrive at wrong hotel, negotiate shuttle return to airport, catch correct shuttle, check-in correct hotel, shower and hit the street tired, stressed and looking for a sit down meal.

Our Tempe hotel seemed to be situated in a culinary and cultural desert from which we are rescued by a local couple who, when asked for direction to a dining spot with a bit of class in a glass, respond by driving us to their suggested venue. Their friendly generosity was greatly appreciated after the long saga getting from home to Phoenix.

When exploring Phoenix we discover the Heard museum where we buy the first souvenir of the tour. The following day we walked Scottsdale streets, through the largest mall in the SW and from one art premises to the next. Attempts to get to and to see, the botanical gardens, the Frank Lloyd Wright Scottsdale spire and his home at Taliesin failed due to our failure to early enough get a grip on the local system.. A good day rounded off by our first dinner with our travelling companions.

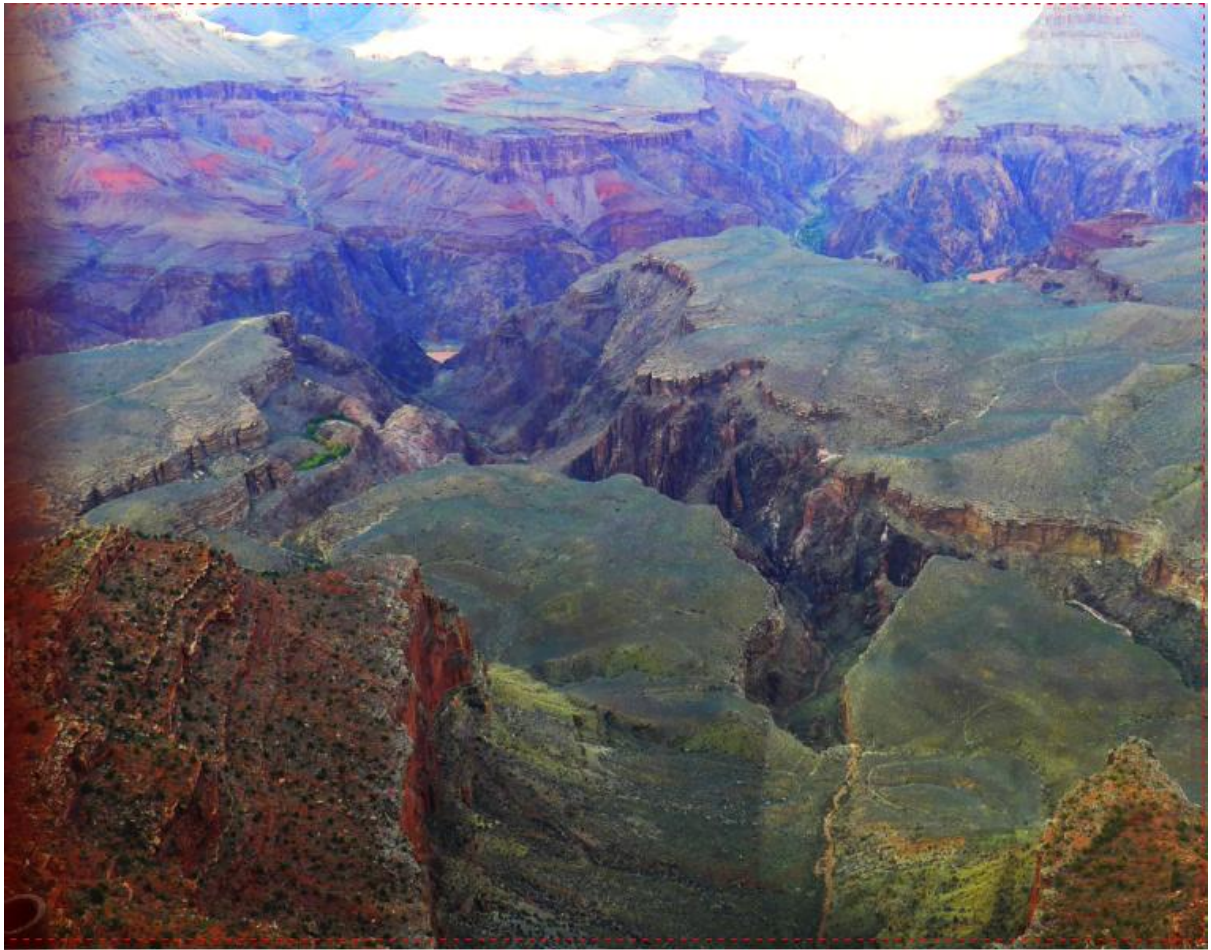




First day on the road takes us to Grand Canyon Railway Hotel, Williams. A journey starting in a low altitude desert through cacti to sparse low scrub and on to higher altitude pine forest and a noticeable drop in temperature. A very comfortable and well appointed hotel with a blazing fire at reception and the first of many, very many, souvenir shops. The train from Williams to the Grand Canyon slowly wound its way ever upwards for 65 miles through patchy alpine grass interspersed with clumps of scrub and the occasional Angus or Hereford cattle. Closer to the canyon we emerge into ponderosa and juniper pine forest. Did not see any wild life nor any evidence of pine bark beetle damage as we approached the canyon.











Nothing quite prepares you for the overwhelming immensity of one's first view from the canyon rim. Grand, yes; WOW!!, yes. No words nor images quite prepare you for the sheer scale of it. A very social evening in the bar, so much so that we forgot to have dinner before retiring to our very ordinary accommodation.

Hail and lightning accompany next morning's breakfast. While low cloud and low temps somewhat restrict our viewing day and the quality of our multitude of photos, at the canyon they enhance our enjoyment of a quality lunch at the very old-world-charm El Trevor hotel. Charles Whittlesey the chief architect for the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway, sought to construct the hotel as a cross between a Swiss chalet and a Norwegian Villa overlooking the rim of the canyon. It has been hosting tourists to the canyon since 1905.



We took the train back to Williams for an overnight in rooms that made us really appreciate the quality of accommodation on our first night there.

A dinner that was held to be great by some of the group I found to be very ordinary;- oversized serve of watery mash and bland, stewed vegetables, followed by their "famous" pie. Many are the interpretations of "famous".





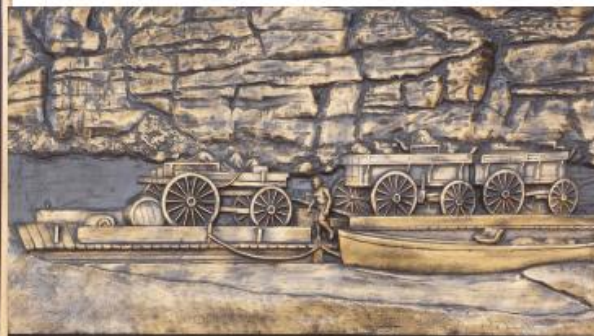


MARBLE CANYON LODGE

A tourist lodge and trading post have operated near this site since 1929. Without them, travel through this isolated region would have been far more difficult. Marble Canyon Lodge was already in operation when the historic Navajo Bridge was dedicated on June 14, 1929. The lodge was financed initially by Lorenzo Hubbell and operated by Buck Lowrey. Hubbell assumed ownership in 1937, and Kyle Bales purchased the lodge in 1949. In 1959, Jane Bales Foster inherited it. The Foster family continues to operate Marble Canyon Lodge. The original lodge building has been restored and stands 0.4 km (1/4 mile) west of this marker.

January 1997

JANE FOSTER, MARBLE CANYON LODGE



In honor of

WARREN MARSHALL JOHNSON

1838 - 1902

who, with his wives,

Permelia Jane Smith and Samantha Nelson,

were called in 1875 by

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

to operate Lees Ferry.

The Johnson family,

including 20 sons and daughters,

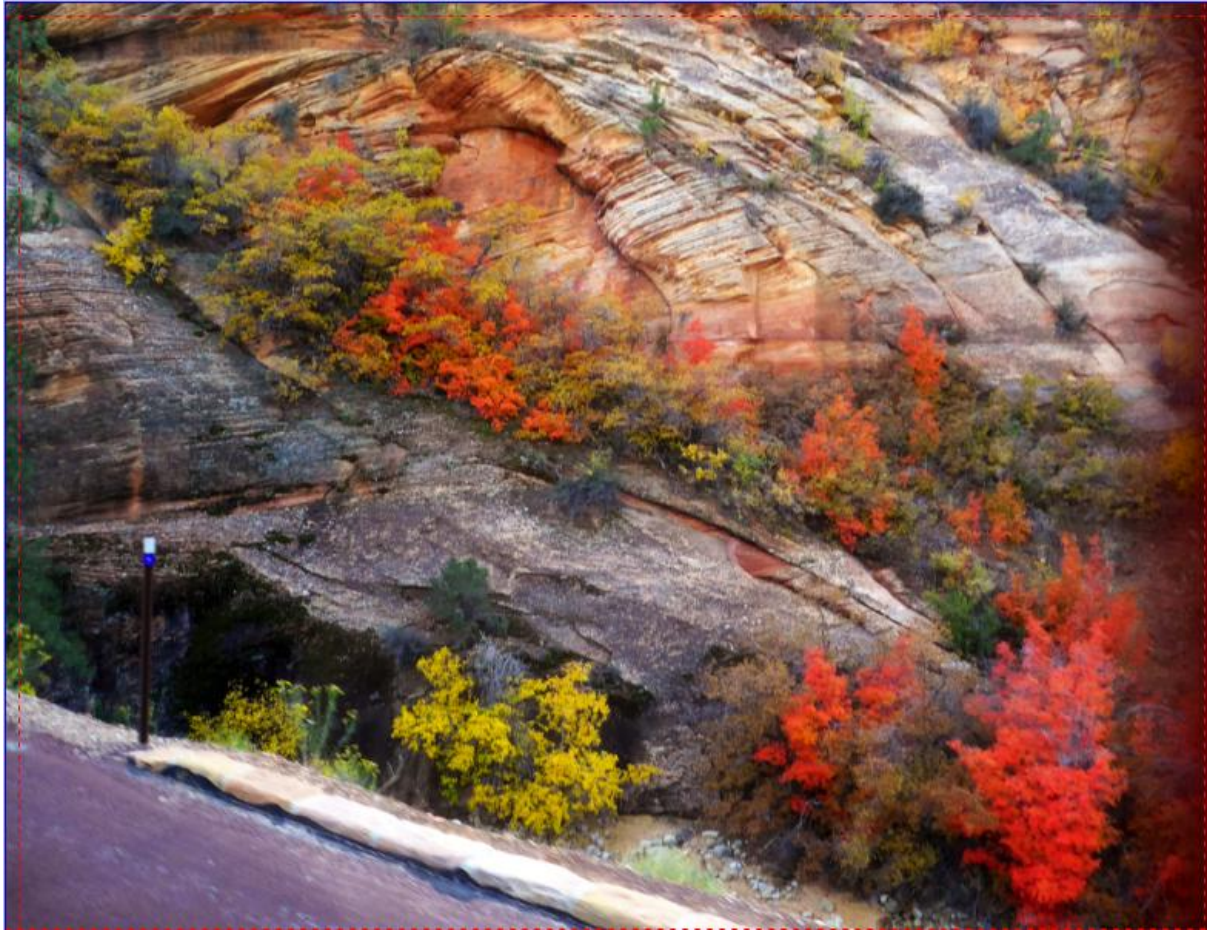


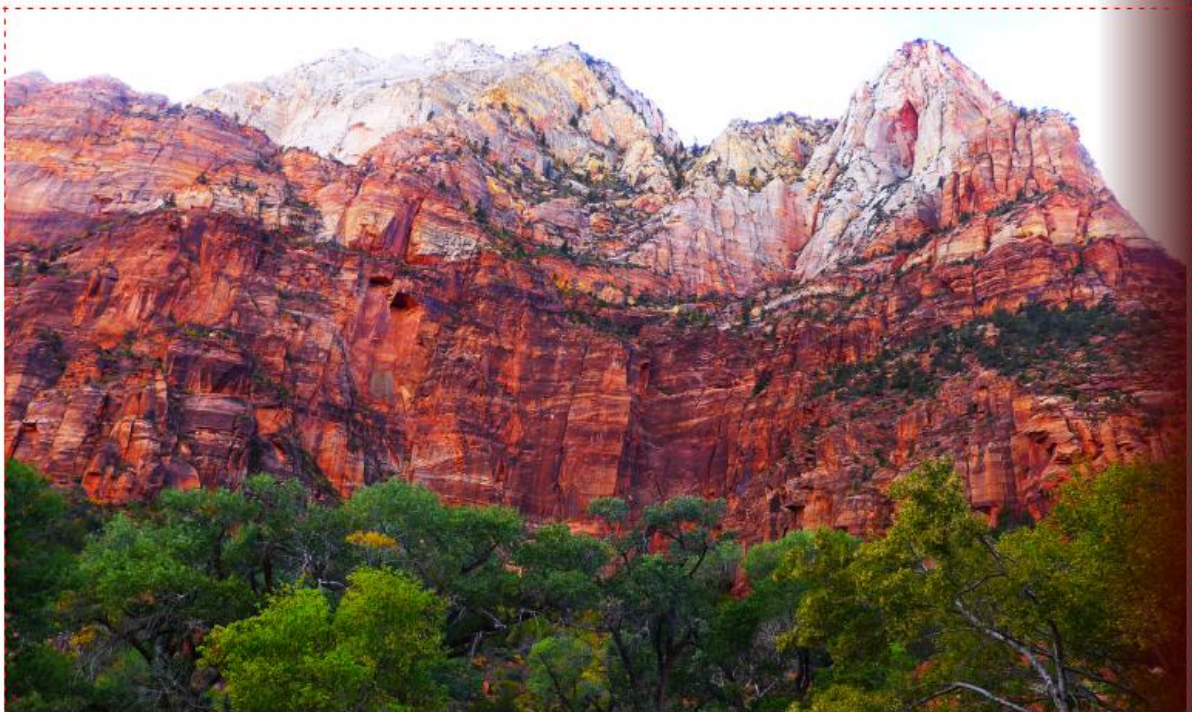
A 6.30am start for a long drive through a rather barren landscape with a sprinkling of Navajo settlements. The bus got stuck in the entrance-way to our pizza lunch stop at Kanab. The combined resources of a bus load of foremen proved not up to the bus-moving task, a challenge eventually resolved after an hour of dedicated effort by Bill & Ben the tow-truck men. Then it was on to Zion through stunningly beautiful country, well worth travelling half way round the world to experience.



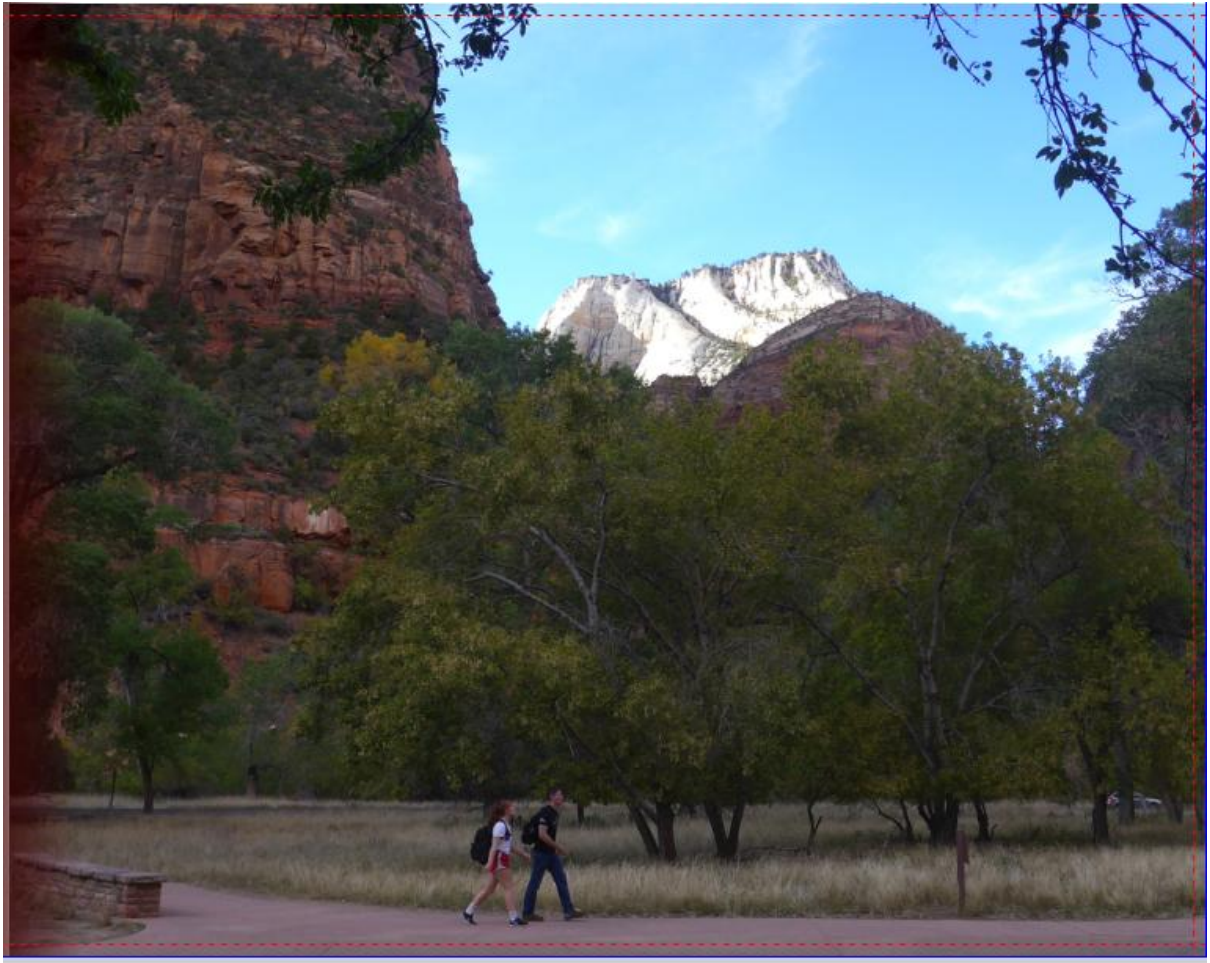


Slickrock landscape



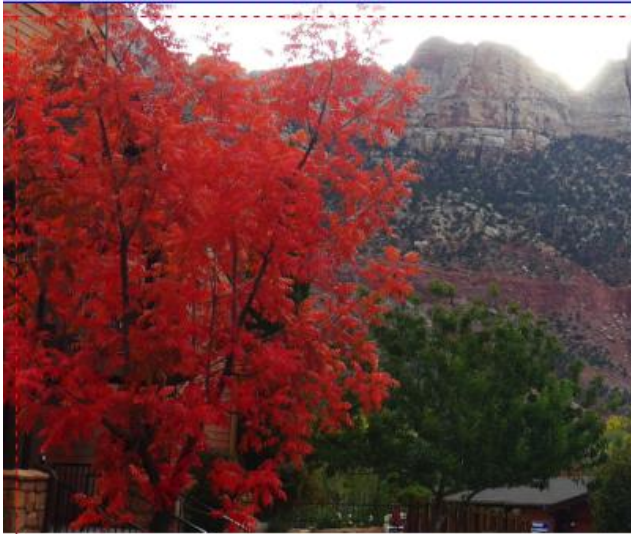


The Virgin River cut the Zion canyon down through 3000m of Navajo sandstone. Strata within the sandstone reveal a geologic history of sedimentation deposited 150 million years before 13 million years ago being uplifted 3000m when the subducting Pacific plate forced upwards the Colorado plateau and the process created a wondrous landscape for us to marvel and and enjoy.









On the road towards Bryce canyon we had the Vermillion National Monument cliffs on one side and empty plain on the other.

An impressive eroded escarpment illuminated by varied coloured bands stretched for many miles beside the road.

We rounded the day off with our first Mexican meal shared with the Nebraskan contingent, wine and stories tall and true.





Zion colours, fog ahead
and a dairy farm in a desert

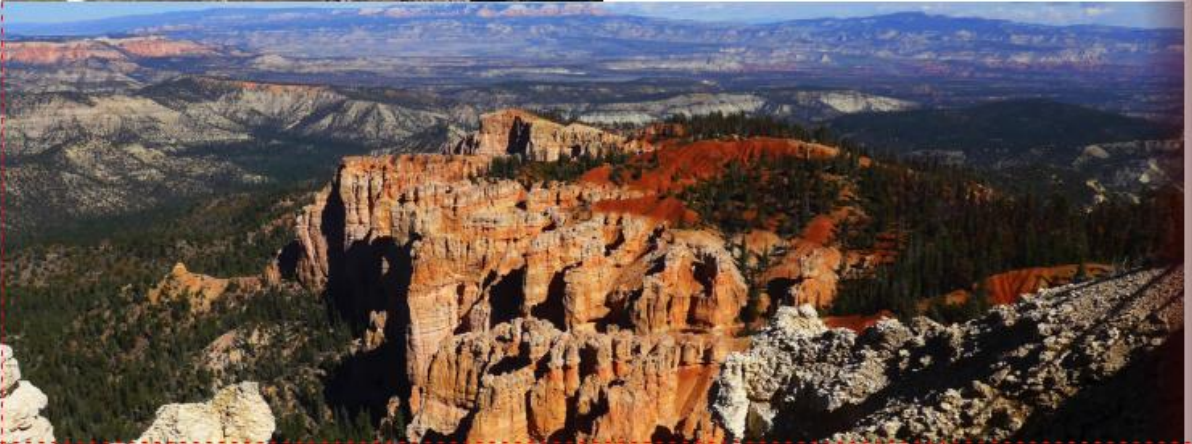




Next highlight was Bryce Canyon, a roadside Subway lunch and the pleasure of our hop on guide, April Le Fevre;- very knowledgeable, personable and entertaining.

Our first real showing of fall colours.

Bryce is not a canyon, rather a collection of giant horseshoe shaped natural amphitheatres. These eat into the edge of a vast escarpment topped by the Paunsaugunt Plateau. Vertical rock formations known as Hoodoos in spectacular colour bands in red, white and all shades in between fascinate the visitor and encourage imaginative identifications of persons and structures.

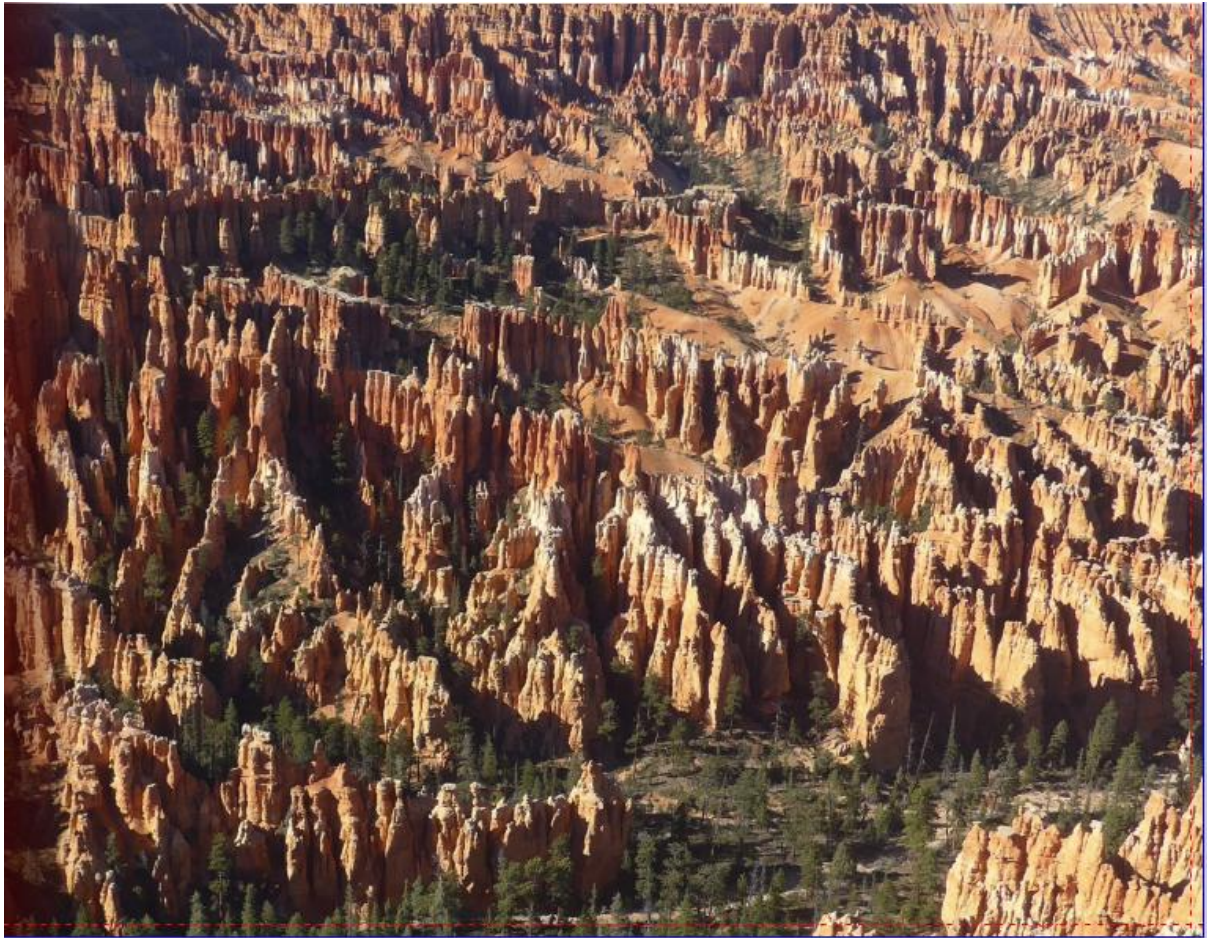


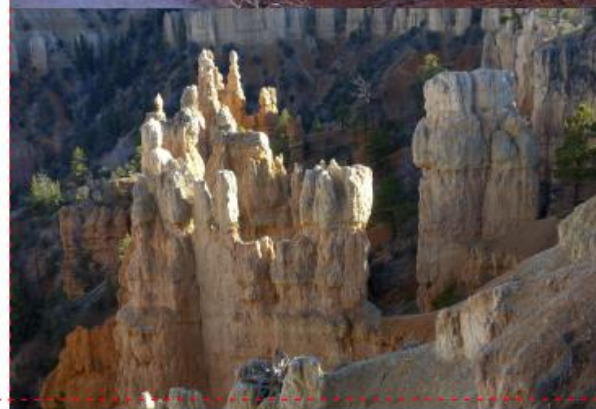
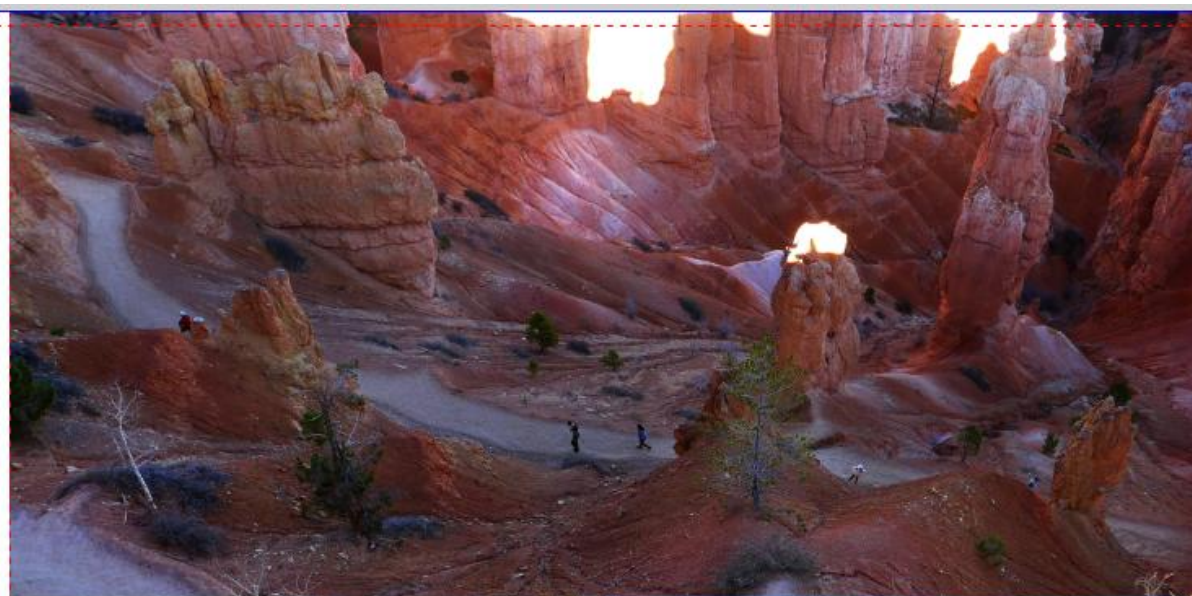


















From Bryce it is a long, long bus ride, with a box lunch aboard, to Moab along scenic route 12. Spectacular roadside scenery as we climb up through 8000 ft. On top the Aspens with small patches of snow at foot have already lost their leaves. A little lower the Ponderosa and Juniper pines appear along with the occasional perfect Christmas-tree Douglas fir. Very little sign of land use or habitation although a few open range cattle did manage to venture into the coach's right of way..





Scenic Byway 12 traverses some of the wildest country in the USA. A landscape of 100 mile vistas with few, if any, signs of human habitation.







On to Canyon lands NP with a step on guide; more stunning vistas and some cattle outside the park on open range. Roads snaking their way down into the canyons are evidence of uranium mining in the 50's. Down at river level we sight the evaporation ponds of the potassium miners. Water pumped down into the salt beds returns as a potassium rich brine that is fed into the ponds. All in all a colourful landscape eroded into countless canyons, mesas and buttes by the Colorado and Green rivers.



The Escalante Canyons are a premier hiking destination with an extensive network of slot canyons and large areas of slickrock. The latter so named by the cowboys who found the smooth sandstone surfaces very dangerous for iron shod horses. The monument is very remote with no services or water to support hikers or other adventurous types





Old roads carved into the canyonlands in the 1950s to seek and mine uranium now serve as trails for hikers and ATV adventurers. The area is still very remote and any venturing here must ensure that they are completely self sufficient for both the expected and the unexpected event.





Our journey along scenic byway 12 through the Grand Escalante Staircase national monument leads us to a Mexican dinner at Moab, gateway to both Arches NP and Canyon Lands NP. Moab is a town dedicated to the active tourist, miles of hiking trails, multiple ATV and/or bicycle hire businesses. Zip lines, rafting and balloon rides add to the available options as does a street devoted to selling souvenirs. Another night in Moab and dinner negotiated around the strange Utah licensing laws. Beer on tap is limited to 3.2 ABV while the same venue can sell bottled "craft" beer with an ABV of 9.









Arches NP is home to more than 2000 identified arches. Perhaps the most famous (most photographed) is "delicate arch". A feature that we managed to view from a distance, the time required to hike there being well outside our time budget. On an earlier visit some years ago Mel Peterson and I did hike in high summer to the delicate arch site.

Well beneath the surface is a vast layer of salt that has over the eons in places liquefied and shifted under pressure from the weight of the overlying strata. This movement coupled with repeated cycles of freezing, thawing and wind erosion have formed the arches and buttes that characterise the landscape. A beautiful and imposing place.



The start of the trail to the
Delicate Arch.

The much photographed
balanced rock





This is an example of a natural bridge formed by water erosion when a meander manages to double back on itself and creates a short cut.

An arch is formed by repeated freeze-thaw cycles and by wind.

The next day's early plan is to drive to Mexican Hat for lunch en route to Page. Mexican Hat is a settlement on the San Juan river between the Navajo Nation land and the Monument Valley NP, its name derived from a local balanced-rock formation.. Our planned arrival time was stymied by a U turn to recover Susan's left-behind tablet and later by a 2 hour diversion caused by a road closure on our preferred route. Those delays well reflected in the quality of the meals. Quite possibly a frybread Navajo taco is scrumptious when fresh and hot; ours wernt't.







Our route skirted the large Kayenta coal strip-mine and passed under the conveyor that delivers the coal to the rail on its journey to the power plant at Page.

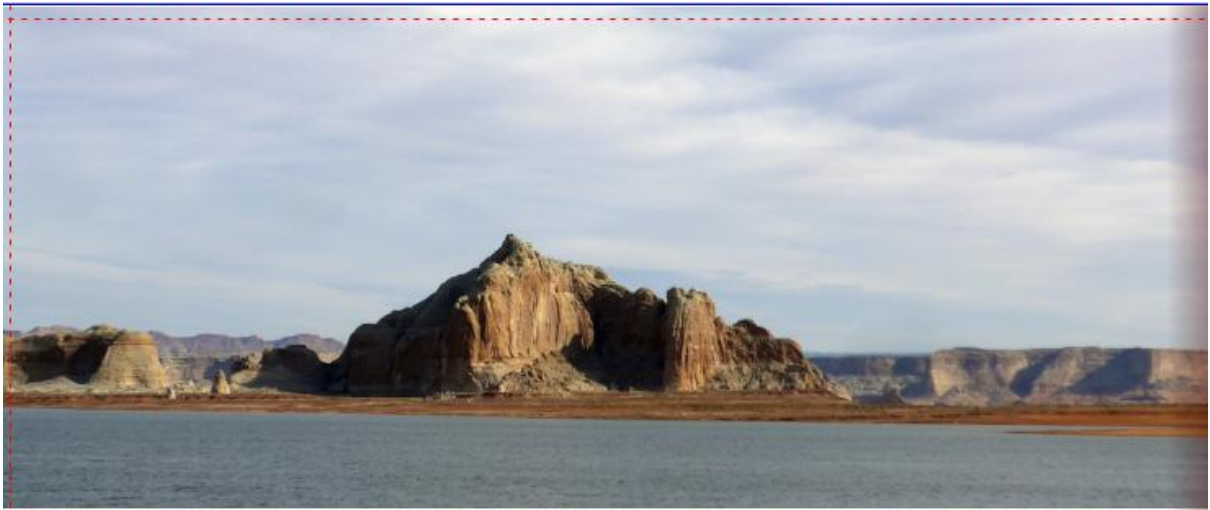
On a journey well supplied with WOW!! experiences, Monument Valley ranked high. A most imposing vista of sculptured sandstone buttes some rising over 1000 ft above the Colorado plateau. The valley is within the Navajo Nation land and excursions beyond the road reserve requires permission from the land owners who lived in a multiple of very small scattered settlements and operated many trading stalls along the way.





At Page we set sail over Lake Powell to Rainbow Bridge and learnt that arches are formed by wind and freeze-thaw cycles while bridges are formed by the eroding forces of flowing water. The lake was formed by the damming of the Colorado river at Glen Canyon. A vast reservoir that was at the time of our visit more than 100 feet below its highest water level and one that is expected to fill with silt in 700 years. The lake is a significant part of the water distribution and management system for Colorado, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, California and New Mexico.









From the boat we hike for half an hour to get a view of Rainbow Bridge the world's largest natural stone arch. It is 290 feet tall, spans 275 feet and is 42 feet thick at the top; dimensions that far surpass what we could evaluate from our rather distant viewing point and what our photos can illustrate. We really enjoyed the walk up from the boat through a shady and colourful canyon enhanced by isolated oases of green. Easy to see why the Navajo people considered the bridge a sacred site.







Dinner that evening at Big Joe's Texan BBQ complete with country and western entertainment.



Next morning a boat trip to view the dam wall and then explore the very narrow and spectacular Antelope Canyon before boarding the bus again for lunch and shopping at a Navajo trading store. A vast arrange of products on sale including some stunning rugs and jewellery. Very pleasant lunch in a well appointed, traditionally decorated restaurant.





We really enjoyed the spectacular fall colours as we dropped steeply down from the Colorado Plateau to Sedona. A very steep and convoluted ride down a 2000 foot drop across a fault line created by the Pacific plate subducting the American plate. Our guide at Sedona provided much entertainment, education and confusion as he blended the mystic with the physical. A little too much credence placed on the vortices to my taste and I formed a similar judgement of his assertion that degradation of the magnetic field was a greater and more urgent threat to civilization than is global warming. . Sedona a green oasis feed by run-off and seepage from the plateau and a refuge for many of the rich and famous who owned holiday homes there.



Our guide also identified the Colorado plateau as being the planet's second largest the Tibetan being the largest. He asserted the Colorado river did not carve its way down into the canyon but rather that it had maintained its level as the landscape rose around it as the plateau was forced upwards. From our viewing point the red colouring on the surface edging the plateau indicated that they had at some stage been submerged whereas the many limestone bands signalled a long series of flooding events. .



VISITOR CENTER

CHIRICAHUA NATIONAL MONUMENT

Welcome to the "Wonderland of Rocks"

The Chiricahua Apache called this area, "The Land of Standing-Up Rocks," and as you continue your drive up Bonita Canyon, you'll soon find out why!

The Chiricahua mountains provide habitats for numerous wildlife. You may see animals that have migrated all the way from South America like javelina and coatimundi. Over 300 bird species are found here, some of whom have migrated north from Mexico.

Chiricahua resembles an oceanic archipelago - a sea dotted with islands - only here the sea is hot desert grassland. We call these isolated mountain ranges "sky islands". The Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts, and the Rocky Mountain and Sierra Madre ranges all meet here. The convergence of these four biomes makes this area unusually rich in biodiversity.

Chiricahua National Monument was established in 1924 to protect the fantastic rock formations known as "the pinnacles." In 1934 the Civilian Conservation Corps began the job of improving the road and constructing the trails and many park structures, including the visitor center in front of you!

In 1976, Congress decided to further preserve the land by designating 86% of the monument as Wilderness. This precludes any development and human intervention, thus ensuring the preservation of the geological formations for future generations.

Another 6 miles along the Bonita Canyon Drive will transport you through oak, cypress and pine forests to the summit at Massai Point, where you will get a true sense of being atop a sky island.

Civilian Conservation Corps Facts

Total men enrolled: 3,463,766

Average enrollee: 18 years old, 147 pounds, 5'8" tall

Average weight gained in first 3 months: 11.5 pounds

Number of illiterate enrollees taught to read, 40,000+

Range revegetation: 814,000 acres

Fire fighting days: 6 million

Number of fish stocked: 972 million

Mosquito control: 248,000 acres

Miles of telephone lines: 89,000

Miles of roads built: 125,000

Miles of foot trail: 13,100

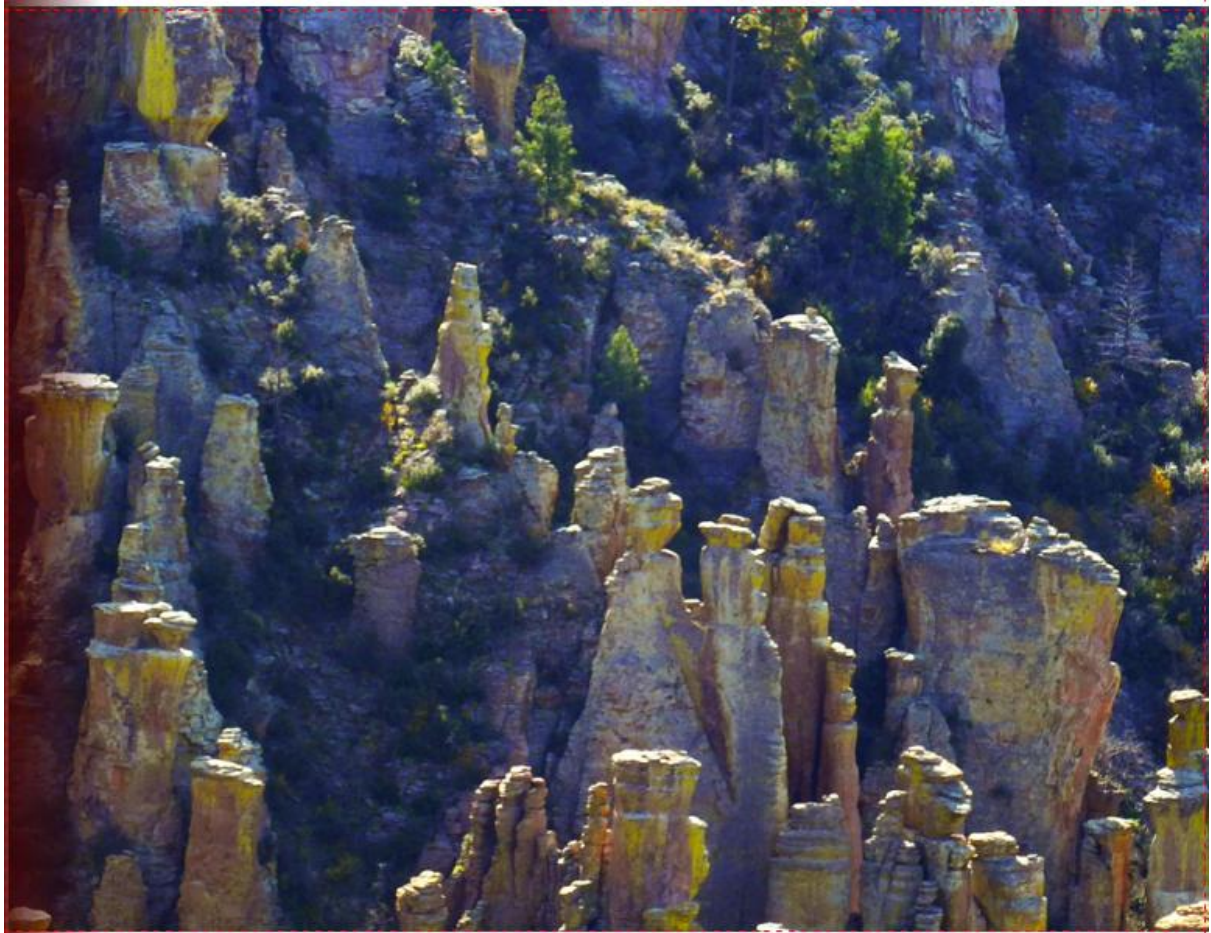
Farmland erosion control: 40 million acres

Number of people directly benefited from Enrollees' checks: 12-15 million

Value of work in 1942 dollars: 2 billion (\$21 today!)

Nicknames: Tree Army, Soil Soldiers, Colossal College of Calluses
Motto: "We Can Take It"





To the strains of Willy Nelson's "On the road again" we had a much appreciated slow start from Sedona. We settled in for the ride to Willcox entertained by John's homily from the Church of the Rolling Wheels. Willcox is a major cattle ranching and wine production support town.

Courtesy of step on guide Anne, we visit Chiricahua National Monument (a Wonderland of Rocks piled one upon another created by the erosion of compacted volcanic rock or tuft) and Far Away Ranch. Then it was on to Las Cruces National Monument in New Mexico, and a dramatic change in the rock landscape from what we had experienced earlier. Tuft rather than sedimentary. A countryside immersed in popular culture by the activities of Billy the Kid and Geromino, and much contested during the Mexican and the Apache wars. On the way a weird movie from the Cohen brs lulled the troops . Dinner that evening in an old Spanish Hacienda now the Double Eagle restaurant enthusiastically decorated for Halloween. A menu of large margaritas, beer and a massive meat loaf.







Our route to Carlsbad traverses White Sands NP. Somehow a missile test range and a National Park sit comfortably with each other. The gypsum white sands are very white and surprisingly (to me) moist. A tour of a pistachio farm turned out to be bit of a disappointment, half an hour in an over sized golf cart to learn that "this is a pistachio tree and over there is a wine grape planting". The ice cream was great, however, and partially compensated for yet another gift shop. Another long day interrupted by a pit stop featuring a petting zoo. A very sad affair!!!



- You are now in the Big Room, the largest known natural limestone chamber in the Western Hemisphere.
- Floor space in the Big Room is estimated at more than 600,000 square feet, an area comparable to 14 football fields.
- In the Big Room you can view dramatic stalactites, stalagmites, columns, and other speleothems from a variety of angles.





As we approached Carlsbad the countryside was peppered by nodding pumpjacks pulling up the newly found oil that has put the USA back amongst the world's top oil producers.

Our hotel full of oil workers and the roads chocked with strings of tanker trucks carrying the daily 2 million barrels brought up from the Permian Basin. Take away the oil industry evidence and the Mesa and Pecos Valley present a desolate landscape.

The following day we took the elevator down 700ft into the Carlsbad Caverns where I walked the 1.3 mile loop within one of the largest known limestone cave complexes. Some energetic souls eschewed the elevator and walked down the natural entrance before walking the well formed track around the aptly named Big Room.



**BAT FLIGHT
AMPHITHEATER**



Back on the bus for a long drive to Santa Fe where we arrived after dark and had a monumental struggle to manipulate ourselves and the luggage into the hotel.

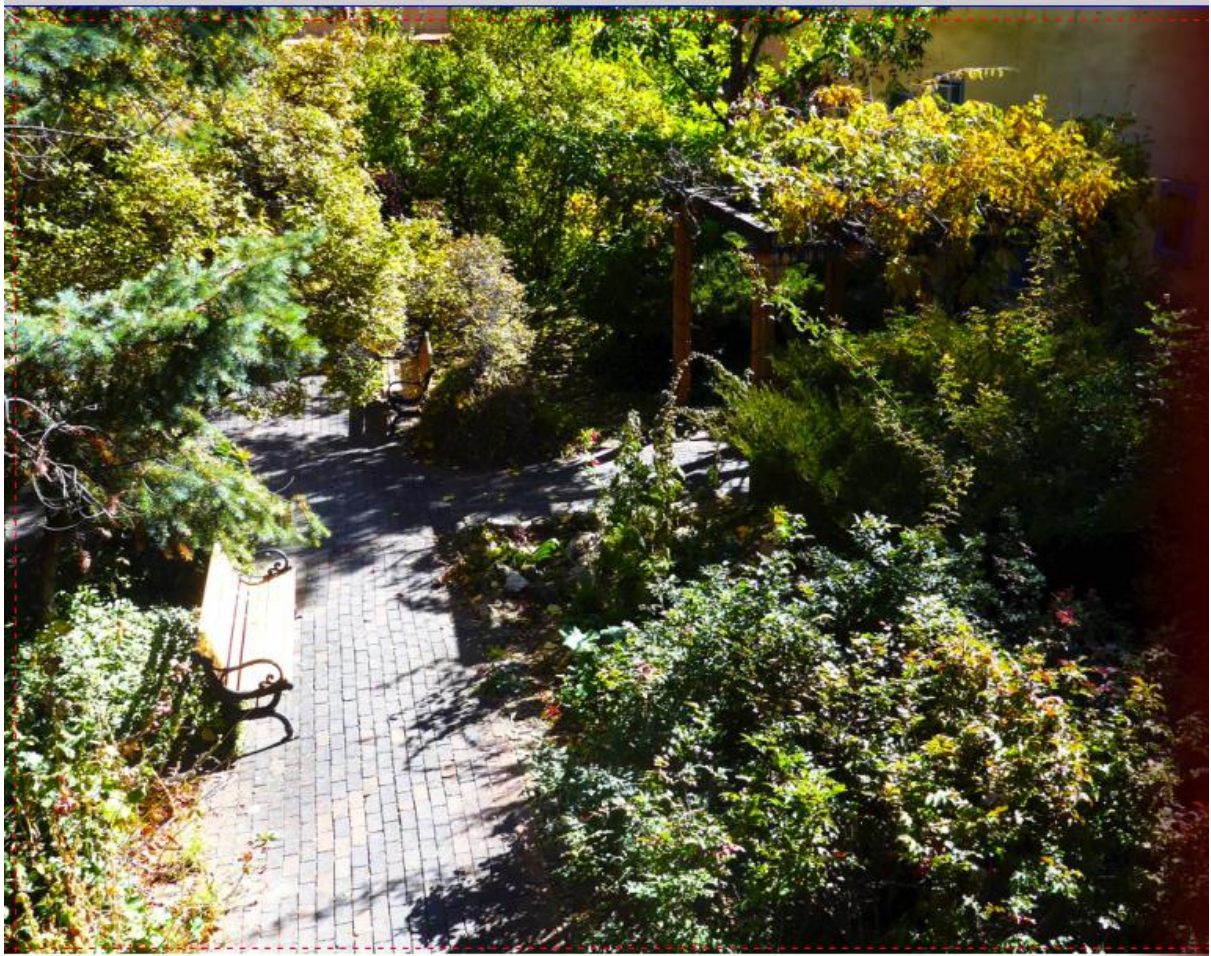
We spent an inordinate amount of time next morning awaiting the shuttle into town, time looking from the high vantage point of the hotel over a large military cemetery hosting 60,000 burials. Time to reflect on the cost and the futility of so many wars.

Down town old Santa Fe presented a most attractive vista of adobe civil and commercial buildings. The entire plaza and surrounds one giant souvenir and indigenous jewellery market. The museum and library featured substantial displays and expositions dedicated to Los Alamos and the Manhattan project. In 1943 Los Alamos suddenly burst from almost nothing to a secret town of 6000 people. Another long wait for the shuttle resulted in us seeing nought of the modern Santa Fe, its industry, commerce or entertainment.













Our final bus day;-Santa Fe to Taos to Albuquerque and our last dinner with the whole group. Taos today seemed to be primarily an art focused tourist town that celebrates its Spanish antecedents. Adjacent tourist venues Santa Fe plaza and Taos while each pedalling similar products managed to achieve a completely different feel from each other.

I greatly appreciated a side trip to Pueblo Taos, an living settlement more than 1000 years old. True adobe buildings inhabited by true local people who so generously allow streams of tourists to intrude into their spaces.





TRIBAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES

TAOS PUEBLO WELCOMES YOU

WE REQUEST THAT YOU ABIDE BY THE FOLLOWING:

- STAY WITHIN THE VILLAGE WALLS.
- OBSERVE RESTRICTED AREAS.
- DO NOT FEED DOGS
- CLIMBING ON BUILDINGS OR LADDERS IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.
- PETS MUST BE LEASHED.
- DO NOT ENTER THE RIVER.

Thank You!

Rotten Tree Rd

Pueblo Driveway

REAL 
INDIAN
WELCOME
COME IN
STUFF









