

Sedona and the Grand Canyon-October 2008

We were supposed to do a train trip through the Canadian Rockies, but we got a phone call from the travel agency that the trip was cancelled due to lack of bookings. We looked through their catalog, and found a trip that goes to Sedona and the Grand Canyon, including 2 train trips.

Kathy had never been to the Grand Canyon, and I was there briefly many years ago.

Kathy's father-in-law lives near Sedona and it will give her a chance to see him again and for me to meet him.

Sunday Kathy drove down to my condo, which was the pickup point, and we were picked up and taken to Burbank Airport. After checking our bags, we sat outside in a sheltered area rather than getting involved in the hubbub in the terminal.

I had ordered the AAA tourguide for Arizona, and was looking for things to do on our free day in Sedona. Some time ago, Kathy said she would love to take a hot air balloon ride, and there was an ad in the tourguide for the Northern Lights Balloon Company. I got on the cell phone, and we were very lucky, as we got the last 2 open spots on that day.

Our flight to Phoenix was very short, and we were taken to our hotel in Scottsdale to meet the others on our tour.

It turned out we were the only Californians on the tour, with the others coming from all over the US.

We discovered that the Old Town in Scottsdale was about a block away, so we headed there to do some sightseeing, shopping, and have lunch.

We are not into the standard turquoise and silver, so there was not much else to look at, other than some fantastic sculptures.

MONTEZUMA'S CASTLE

On the way to Sedona we stopped at a National Monument called Montezuma's Castle. It was called that by the Spanish explorers, but had nothing to do with Montezuma. It was built by the Sinagua Indians in about the 15th Century. It contains about 40 rooms on 4 stories under the sheltering ledge.



They accessed the site with a series of ladders they could pull to protect themselves from problems. There was a year around stream that ran nearby to supply them with fresh water. A loop trail ran about a half mile past the site and down to the creek then back to the visitor center. It was nice and shady and a very pleasant walk.

SEDONA

We got back into the bus and headed for Sedona. On the way we stopped by a rock formation called the "bell", because it was shaped like one. This is supposed to be one of the sites where there is a vortex. These vortices are supposed to be concentrations of energy, but nobody on the bus said they felt anything.

We arrived in Sedona and checked into our hotel. We had a room with a balcony that looked out over the red rock formations, including one called "Snoopy". After freshening up a bit we were taken on a private trolley tour of Sedona and to a chapel built on the hill. The view was spectacular, and the houses were designed to blend in with the colors of the hills and vegetation.



Bell Rock

There were interesting rock formations all around, one looked like pillars and another looked like a gargoyle



The pictures below are of some other formations that we could see from the chapel



Sedona is a very artsy town, and there were sculptures all over the place. On the hotel patio, there was a sculpture of an eagle and a fountain with a mountain lion drinking from it.



GRAND CANYON

I had been to the Grand Canyon once more years ago than I will admit, and Kathy has no recollection of it, as she was a small child. The neatest way to get there was to take the Grand Canyon Railroad



Unfortunately, we would not be pulled but the steam engine, but by a diesel. I wanted to get a picture in the cab, but I was given a BS story about it taking 2 weeks to get approval.

When we arrived we visited a Hopi building then had lunch at El Tovar, with a view of the canyon from our table.



The next sets of pictures cannot do justice to the immensity of the Grand Canyon, but can give a flavor of it.



After we left the main area, we were taken to a viewing tower to get a different look at the Grand Canyon. Of course, I had to climb to the top to get some better shots.



After leaving the Grand Canyon, we were taken to “Black Bart’s Steakhouse and Saloon” in Flagstaff. It was a complete waste of time. It took us almost 2 hours to get our dinner served, such as it was.

SEDONA-HOT AIR BALOONING

We were fortunate to get the last 2 spots on the only free day we had on this trip. We were picked up at 5:30 in the morning (shudder) and were taken to the launch site in the desert. They start inflating the balloons with a gas powered blower first, then us the hot air from the burners to get them upright.



We were the first balloon off, and looking down, we could see the others getting ready to launch. It was so quiet as we drifted along, punctuated occasionally by the burners lighting off. We first climbed up and saw the sunrise over the red hills



We first climbed up to get a view of the surrounding area, then dropped down so we were just skimming the trees. We could look down and see animal tracks near water holes and did see rabbits and deer.



We were also quite surprised to be buzzed by a man in a motorized paraglider.



Unfortunately, the flight came to an end, and we landed in an area where the other balloons had also landed. We were treated to the traditional glass of champagne along with strawberries and cream. It was quite a thing to be in the middle of the desert and drinking champagne.

We were dropped off at our hotel, and after getting freshened up a little, took the trolley to the Tlaquepaque Arts and Crafts Village. The village was built to resemble a Mexican village, and the builder insisted that none of the trees be cut down, but the building had to be built around them.

There were fantastic shops with all manner of sculptures, paintings and jewelry, most very expensive. We found a brewpub to have lunch, and then shopped a little more.

The bottom line was after looking at millions of dollars of art and jewelry, the only thing Kathy bought was a \$9 olive wood cooking spatula! Bless her heart!

When our Canadian trip was cancelled due to lack of response, We selected this trip without closely looking at the calendar. I discovered that I would be in Sedona during part of the Jewish High Holidays. The most important of these was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Traditionally the holiday starts at sundown with the Kol Nidre service. I Googled "Sedona synagogues" and located one fairly close to our hotel. I contacted the synagogue and got directions and the times of the services.

I went down to the hotel desk an hour before the start of services and asked them to arrange for a taxi to take me there. About a half hour later, I went down to the desk to catch the taxi, and they told me there was a problem contacting the regular Sedona taxi service. They said they had another service, and the man's name was Gator. I said that was fine, and went out to get in the taxi.

Well, this was not exactly what I expected. The "taxi" was a Cadillac convertible with the top down and a big pair of steer horns in front! Gator was driving with his cowboy hat on and his wife in the passenger seat, so I was in the back seat.

We got to the synagogue with time to spare and pulled up right in front! There was a lady standing there looking at the scene, but I did not care. I went inside, and sat down, and a lady behind me asked me if I had just pulled up in that convertible. I said I had, and she said, "What an entrance!" The service was very interesting, and there was a speaker who gave the history of the synagogue and how it came into being in Sedona.



VERDE CANYON RAILROAD

The next day we went to the little railway station to get on the train. After my disappointment on the Grand Canyon Railway, I was determined to get a picture of the locomotive cab. The train was parked on a curved section of track, with the station and all the personnel behind it. I walked around the front of the locomotive, and checked to see if anyone was looking. There was nobody (I thought) on that side, so I quickly climbed up the rungs to the cab and took a couple of pictures. One of the ladies in our group got a picture of me doing it, however!



The train trip was quite interesting, as we rode along the river before going higher up into the canyon.



A cow on the tracks furnished a little comic relief. The engineer had to slow down and chase the cow off down into the gulch by blowing his horn! We then passed some caves that were being excavated to study their use by Native Americans



At the end of the canyon was a large ranch, and it was also the place the engine uncoupled from the train and passed the cars on a siding to take us on the return trip.



One of the most interesting geological formations in the canyon was a thing called a monocline. It is a place where one part of the earth actually dives under the other. In the picture you can see on the right hand side the strata at a 45 degree angle diving under the horizontal strata on the left.



The rest of the ride back was very enjoyable, and we had a great idea. Kathy's father-in-law lived just 3 miles from the train station, so we called him and arranged to meet at the station. Kathy had not seen him in a while, and it was my pleasure to meet him for the first time.

On our final evening in Sedona, we were sitting on our balcony and watching the changing colors of the hills. A cloud passed in front of part of the sun, and two of the outcrops turned almost black!



The next morning we were taken to the airport for our trip home. We went through Security and headed for our gate. We walked down one area and the gates stopped short of ours! We backtracked and looked down a long corridor to where the other gates were! Fortunately help arrived in the form of an electric cart that whisked us to our gate. Our flight was mercifully short, and the plane was about half full, so we had a little room to spread out. We were picked up by that same driver, and got to my place in less than an hour. I tossed my suitcase in and we headed up for our home in Santa Paula. Our next adventure will be a trip to Chile, Argentina and Brazil in late January, just after I retire.

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