



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Traveling America (IX)
Painted Desert, Petrified Forest, Volcano and Wupatki National Monuments,
Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam, Blue Highways in Nevada**

Traveling America (IX) Report One: The Painted Desert

October 6 -11, 2007

Your on the Street Reporter is traveling again. *Traveling America (IX)* has us moving across Northern Arizona, up through Nevada, and into Idaho. Figure 1 provides a view of the places we visit. The red lines in the figure indicate the roads (identified with their state identification numbers) taken for this journey. As you might expect from reading recent *Traveling America* reports, we take-in places of spectacular beauty---and for this report, spectacular beauties at a Las Vegas nightclub.

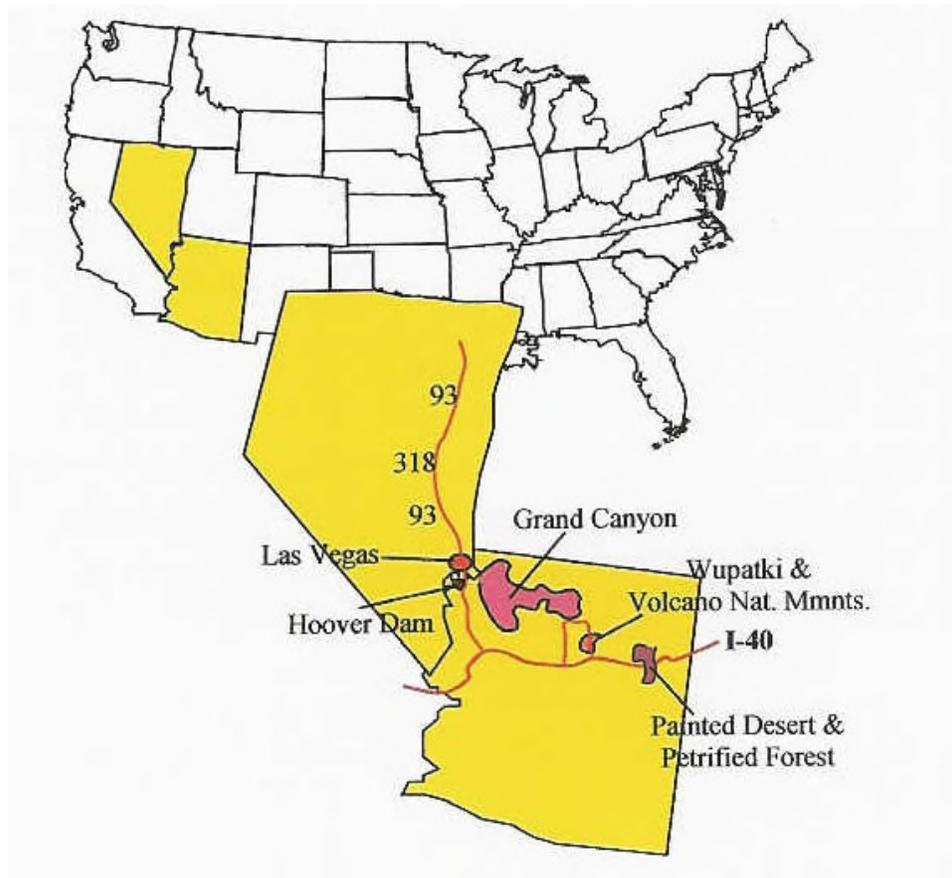


Figure 1. Route for Traveling America (IX).

For this report, we pay a call on:

- The Painted Desert
- The Petrified Forest
- Volcano National Monument
- Wupatki National Monument
- The Grand Canyon
- The Hoover Dam
- A show in Las Vegas
- A drive through central Nevada

The Painted Desert

Traveling across Interstate 40 offers an easy way to see the Painted Desert. The highway runs a mile or so south from the desert, at least the part shown on road maps. The desert itself is expansive. It extends some 200 miles across Northern Arizona to the east of the Grand Canyon, and takes in an area of 7,500 square miles. The depiction of its presence in Figure 1 is understated, reflecting the bias of road maps---designed to show roads, not deserts.

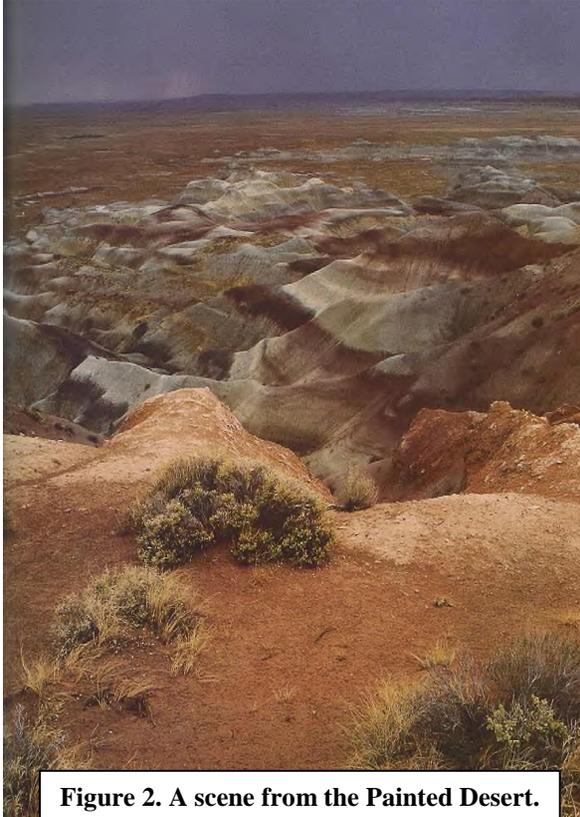


Figure 2. A scene from the Painted Desert.

I have mentioned that I do not favor treeless landscapes, but I admit the panoramas of the Painted Desert give me pause. They appear to be places out of this world; terrain one might expect to encounter in a science fiction movie about distant planets. Nonetheless, they are very much a part of us. They are just over the horizon from Interstate 40, ready for our enjoyment of their visual gifts. A picture, as seen in Figure 2, says a thousand words, but even this image cannot do justice to the startling beauty of this part of America.¹

Navajos call the Painted Desert *halchitah*, "amidst the colors." From park-provided promontories---high above the desert---we tourists can look over this vast terrain.

Fantastic images. Dreamlike views. But in spite of these wondrous vistas, we are not "amidst" the terrain's canyons. Luckily, we need not walk through its harsh, sparse, dry arroyos, searching for food and water, as did the first humans who visited this land. From a remote platform, we are far removed from being "amidst the colors."

Nonetheless, and however out of this reality, I appreciate the phrase, "amidst the colors." It has a romantic sound to it. At my late age, I like to think I still harbor a vestige of the romantic, so I appreciate the Indians' metaphor. I also appreciate that I am not walking through the Painted Desert looking for a morsel of food. We are all romantics until our stomachs growl.

Although it appears to be painted---and contrary to its name, the Painted Desert is not covered with paint. Its Neapolitan-like layered colors come from the brown, pink and white formations formed 220-225 millions of years ago.² The rock deposit I found the most interesting, and one I had not seen before in similar landscapes, was the Chinle Formation, displayed in Figure 3.

¹ Once again, my photography is not up to the task. Thus, this picture is from Rose Houk, writer; George H.H. Huey, photographer, *The Painted Desert: Land of Light and Shadow* (The Petrified Forest Museum Association: Petrified Forest National Park, Arizona, 2007), 21.

² Anne Trinkle Jones, *Stalking the Past: Prehistory of the Petrified Forest* (Petrified Forest Museum Association, Arizona, 1995), 23.

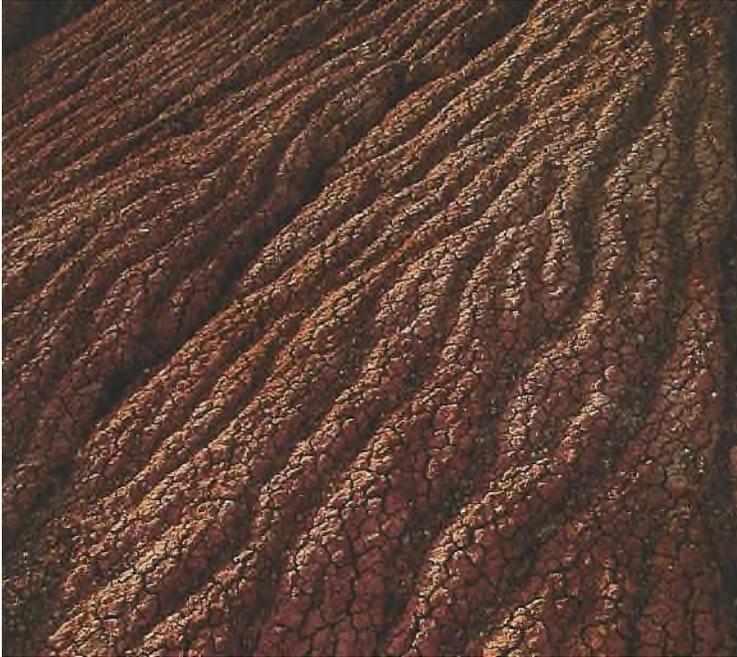


Figure 3. Chinle landscape.

I could not believe my eyes. At first glance, it appeared Chinle was a scene from a B-grade movie. I have seen Stephen King films where Chinle-like monsters engulf humans, drug stores, and the local Wal-Mart.

But not recently, so a few days ago I decided to take in a special-effects movie. It was a different way to spend an afternoon, and with today's movie theatres offering a huge collection of special-effects films, I discovered I had a lot of choices. I chose a movie based on the Stephen King book, *The Mist*.

I come from a computer software background and know a bit, so to speak, about digital technology and digital imaging. My knowledge of these techniques draws me to movie theaters to watch what the masterminds are up to. Some of the children's animation-movies special effects are fantastic in how their creators manipulate computers' software. As I watched the movie *The Mist*, I marveled at what can be created by coding 1s and 0s in silicon and software: A moving, growling, evil, flesh-eating Chinle formation. Cool! By the way, doesn't that picture in Figure 3 resemble Freddy's face?

It is time to move-on. I know I have not expended much effort describing the Painted Desert itself, probably too much emphasis on B-grade movies. But such is the life of a roaming reporter. My venues roam. So do my paragraphs.

Anyway, the next report will keep us in the area of the Painted Desert. In this report, we will visit ancient human towns and ---once again---the wondrous outpourings of our fair earth: the Petrified Forest.

Traveling America (IX) Report Two: The Petrified Forest³

October 6 -11, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. We continue our journey through one of the most unusual parts of America, Northern Arizona. For this report, the Petrified Forest is on the agenda.

In researching for this report, I looked-up definitions of petrified. The first definition: to cause a person or animal to become immobile with terror. Obviously, the second definition is what we are after: To bring about a process by which something organic is turned to stone. Which reminds me of that rock and roll classic, "Hearts Made of Stone."

...Stay on track, Uyless, we're talking geology here.

And what wondrous geology. Figure 4 is a snapshot I took of a fallen tree and its surrounding landscape. Again, terrain seemingly from another world. And a tree, once of organic fiber, but now of inorganic stone.



Figure 4. A petrified tree.

From several on-line sources and footnote 3, we know some 220-225 million years ago, these trees died a natural death and were eventually covered by eroded sediment. During this time, silica-rich waters permeated the tree. The wood fibers were replaced by silicon which, when combined with oxygen, formed small crystals of quartz. Between these quartz structures, small fissures formed and were filled with crystals of rose quartz, smoky quartz, amethyst, and rock crystal quartz. Iron often permeated into the tree, leading to various shades of red, brown, and yellow. To add to nature's arboreal rainbow, cobalt and chromium provided green and blue hues. Carbon sometimes contributed the color black and manganese added a tint of pink.

³ For this report, I recommend a fine book about the Petrified Forest. I have cited it a number of times. Sidney Ash, author, and T. Scott Williams, photographer, *Petrified Forest: A Story in Stone* (Petrified Forest Museum Association, Park Road 1, PO Box 2277, Petrified Forest, AZ 86028). This 54-page booklet is beautifully written. Thanks to both of you. I am sending you a copy of *Traveling America (IX)*.

Gradually, the log's wood fiber was converted to mineral. In more recent times, the sediment eroded away to reveal trees made of stone.

I have taken leave with the natural look to show a polished cross section of a petrified tree trunk. (See Figure 5):⁴



Figure 5. Polished top of a dinette table. (Note: table legs are not visible.)

- Furniture salesman, "Hi there, folks! Welcome to the 'Buy Stuff You Don't Need Emporium'. I'm here to help you stuff your house with stuff."
- Husband, "Great, We've run out of electrical outlets for our TVs, stereos, and kitchen appliances. Anything else we buy has to be battery-powered. Anyway, we need a table for our meals and a place to hold our Internet-controlled: can opener, toaster, frig, stove, microwave, espresso machine, blender, waffle iron, pancake grill, bread maker, Cuisinart, sandwich grill, popcorn popper, coffee pot, deep fryer, rice maker, steamer, slow cooker, and the wireless router controlling this stuff."
- Wife, "Don't know why we buy all these things. Most of our meals are TV dinners."
- Salesman, "Have I got a deal for you! A combination appliance and dinette table. It's made of petrified wood but polished-up so it doesn't look like petrified wood. Even better, it resembles Formica! Here it is." As he shows a natural phenomenon, disguised as laminate (see Figure 5).
- Husband, "Wow! And we need a big table, but from the looks of the steel I-beam legs, this one must be pretty heavy."
- Salesman, "Sure, but you need a lot of bulk to hold all your appliances and your Weight-Watchers Chicken Fried Steak TV Dinners. Plus, look again. The application of Windex and petrified wood polish makes the wood look like plastic!"
- Husband, "Great, it fits in with our plastic cabinets. OK, we'll take it."
- Wife, "Hmm. Say, where did you get this wood? It's illegal to remove anything from the Petrified Forest."
- Salesman, "Ah! The owner of the 'Buy Stuff You Don't Need Emporium' is 1/256th Native American. He has digging and removal privileges."

The Ancient People of the Petrified Forest

I continue to be amazed as to why many of the ancient people chose to live where they actually lived. In the report about pre-historic islands of antiquity (*The Mediterranean* (2006)),

⁴ Sidney Ash, 20.

we learned that time and again, folks opted to live in inhospitable places, such as several near-barren islands in the Med. Why not the French Riviera? If you are going to paddle or sail hundreds of miles across the sea, why not journey a few more miles to reside in more accommodating surroundings? And why leave fecund Albania for sparse Rhodes Island in the first place?

The same idea pertains to the part of the world highlighted in *Traveling America (IX)*. Why on earth would someone choose to live on this part of the earth? Take a look at Figure 6⁵:

- Native American Person One, "Well, One-Who-Searches-For-Places-With-No-Vegetation, this landscape looks like the place for us."
- Native American Person Two, "Yes, indeed, One-Who-Searches-For-Places-With-No-Water...and our parents named us well."
- "Let's settle here, so we can eke out a miserable life of minimal subsistence."
- "Yeah, forget those salmon-laden streams up north that our ancestors passed-by on their way down here."

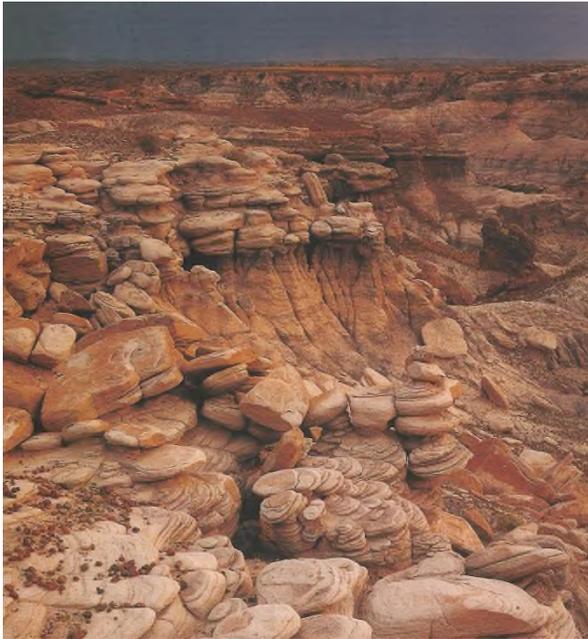


Figure 6. Looking for life in all the wrong places.

Seriously, why? Century after century, many ancient tribes remained in precarious places. Even more puzzling, they abandoned other places teeming with wild life, fertile soil, trees (firewood), and water.

We are told historians think the ancient ones moved down from the Bering Strait and away from its fridity in order to find a warmer place to live. Fine, but why did they cross the Bering Strait in the first place? Granted, Siberia was no great shakes, but it was surely more benign than crossing hundreds of miles of frozen tundra toward a great unknown.

Some historians believe these tribes moved to avoid inter-tribal conflicts, as well as to seek areas not yet denuded by humans. But to settle in such an area as the Petrified Forest? I chose the picture in Figure 6 to show the stark beauty of the terrain. However, these folks did not

⁵ Sidney Ash, 2.

actually live in this specific area, but they did live nearby in places hardly characterized as an oasis.

Because the migration of humans into North America from Asia (and some historians think Europe (across Greenland)) occurred over thousands of years, it seems reasonable to postulate these hunter-gatherers sort-of winged it. They kept looking for the elk beyond the next hill, the fish over the next wave, and thus inched along to other parts of the world. After all, they carried their belongings with them. It was not a matter of calling Acme Movers.

Or maybe it was something else. Something to do with the human spirit. Samuel Johnson said, "Curiosity is the thirst of the soul."⁶ Perhaps, like the later humans in Europe, they wanted the answer to the question of, "What's out there?"

What a noble thought. More likely, the answer to, "What's out there?" for the ancients was Fish! So, off they went. The more likely answer for the Europeans was Gold! So, off they went. Nothing more than two variations on our never ending quest of looking for booty.

Northern Arizona was once a more benign area than it is now. More water. More firewood. More game. We are told the people eventually left this area because of a prolonged drought.

Stoned in Stone Country

It is time to travel to other parts of Northern Arizona. We have done enough with petrified things until I report in later years on my stay in the Old Folks Home of Petrified People. I hope to avoid this report as long as possible. In the meantime, Figure 7 shows three of the more recent passers-by through this enchanted land.⁷ The mesas of the Painted Desert and the Petrified Forest can be seen in the background as the easy riders make their way across this part of America.

You probably recognize these men from the 1969 film *Easy Rider*: Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, and Jack Nicholson. Wait a minute! The passenger behind Fonda is not Jack. We can tell, because he's not wearing a white football helmet. I've not seen the movie lately, and I've forgotten this other character. If you know, let me know.

I doubt I will watch *Easy Rider* again. It is a downer, and I am not sure what the movie is trying to convey, other than the concept of wannabe rebels doing nothing of consequence. In my youth, I was a (couch potato) hippie, but I watched the film and said to myself, "So what?" After all, getting stoned and laid in a New Orleans cemetery is not that big a deal as cemeteries routinely deal with both topics.

de Tocqueville's Take on America

In concluding this report, I make this point: One of the goals of these essays is to present an unaristocratic view of our country. The writer, Alexis de Tocqueville presented what I would call an aristocratic perspective. I cannot muster the reflections of de Tocqueville, and will not try.

⁶ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, English Journal, March 12, 1751, 103, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 179.

⁷ Sidney Ash, 43.

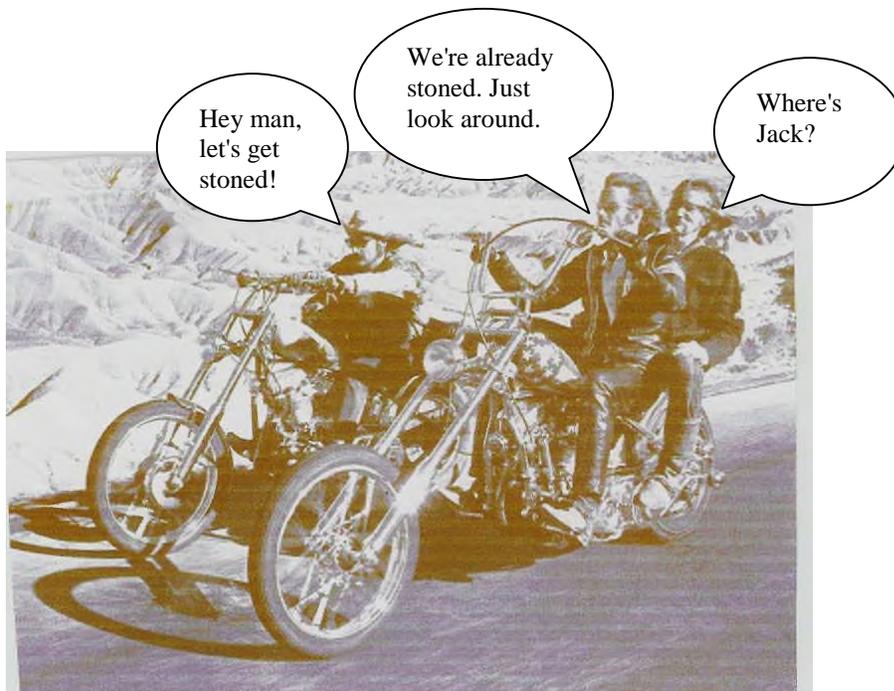


Figure 7. Stoned in stone country.

On the other hand, Alexis did not deal in parody or the common folks of America. He was one serious dude. I cannot imagine him sitting at a bar in a West Virginia mining town, buying the local populace drinks with his wife's social security check. Yet he did capture some of the spirit of our country. One of his ideas I find particularly interesting is his statement that America's public opinion tended toward tyranny and that majority rule could be as oppressive as the rule of a despot.⁸

Food for thought. Would the rule of the minority be less oppressive? Would the absence of public opinion lead to a democratic Nirvana? Consider the State of California's approach to passing laws: A two-thirds majority is required. Result? The minority holds sway. It blocks most everything. Nothing gets done. On the other hand, try California's participatory democracy where propositions are brought up almost happenstance and voted by the populace. This last example is Alexis' take on the tyranny of majority rule.

Checks and balances. Separation of church and state. Three branches of governments. Congress trying to channel citizens' zeal into practical legislation. The genius of our founding fathers becomes more evident with each passing day.

America's Past and Future

Most of us admit that America got off on the wrong foot with the Indian near-genocides and the Black slavery trade. Our forebears were doing nothing more than emulating their forebears. For an authoritative reference, see human history. The next report tells the story of a near-genocide in New Mexico.

⁸ "Alexis de Tocqueville," Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005, 1993-2004 Microsoft Corporation.

Nonetheless, unlike some other nations, we are trying to redress the grievances of the past. Sometimes, we go overboard and have to step back. Still, during my lifetime, it seems that for every step backwards, America has made two steps forward.

In my hippy days, I wore two pins on my shirt. They read, “Black Power!” and “Black is Beautiful!” They conveyed two meanings: one was for me, and the other was for the black race. I do not wear them anymore as regards myself.

I have little power, and I am far from beautiful (I never was.) But those slogans are still germane for the black race in America. It is only a matter of time before a black (or a Latino or an American Indian) sits in the Oval Office. It will be a great event for this country. It will demonstrate the long-term vitality of America.

I recorded this thought (not mine) in my notes some thirty years ago, “Democracy is like a raft. You never sink, but damn it, your feet are always wet.” We Americans suffer from wet feet, but we keep paddling.

Traveling America (IX) **Report Three: The Volcano and Wupatki National Monuments**

October 6 -11, 2007

We continue our journey through one of the most fascinating parts of the Southwest: Northern Arizona.

When the Spanish began their exploration of Northern Arizona in the 1540s, they discovered the area was no longer inhabited by American Indians. Thus, the Spaniards' forays into this part of North America were a bit more pleasant than the flying arrows and spears they encountered in other locations.

Notwithstanding this absence, by the examination of spear points, archeologists have determined humans lived in this part of America as long as 11,000 years ago. Perhaps they moved away because of drought. Whatever the motivation for leaving this land, more recently, artifacts from Zuni, Hopi, and Navajo people confirm the presence of natives living here after the Spanish began their explorations.

Get 'along Little Indian

Until the 1860s, Navajos were the only residents of the Wupatki area. Then, in 1863, Kit Carson, under the aegis of the Department of War and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (a fine partnership), began a campaign to move the indigenous population to the Bosque Redondo Reservation at Fort Sumner, New Mexico (See the *Billy the Kid* essays in the *Customs and Cultures in America* series).

Naturally enough, some of the Navajos were not keen on being forced to leave their homes.⁹ Those who resisted were able to maintain their residence on their land. But as it turned out, they were not so lucky, because their residence became a near-grave---courtesy of Uncle Sam. To encourage the migration of the Navajos, Kit and his men burned the Indians crops and killed their livestock:

At the point of starvation, the Navajos surrendered. Of the 8,354 people who made the Long Walk of five hundred miles from the Grand Canyon area to Bosque Redondo by December 1864, more than 2,000 died.¹⁰

Mr. Carson was not directly responsible for all these deaths, but he can be faulted for those who died of starvation. Starvation. Sweet Mother Mary, please give us a ray of hope for our species. Humans starved to death while under the supposed care of our noble and faultless United States of America---the bastion of everything that is good.

⁹ Put yourself in their shoes: "Hello Mr./Ms. Smith. Too bad you like your home in suburban LA. We're taking over your house and moving you to the plentiful hills of Fort Sumner, New Mexico. There, you will be consigned to live forever, without any hope whatsoever of a stock option." ... It just does not connect to our modern times. We cannot relate. But it happened. Thousands of people were dislodged from their homes, just as onerous as if you were uprooted from your life in downtown Los Angeles.

¹⁰ Courtney Reeder Jones, *Letters from Wupatki*, editor, Lisa Rappoport (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), xiv-xxv.

And true to human nature, some died at the hands of other Native Americans. Comanches, who populated segments of the land between Northern Arizona and Fort Sumner, raided this pathetic parade, and picked-off some of their Noble Savage kindred.

I am certain I have just offended some of my readers, who think I have used the term *Noble Savage* in a derogatory manner, because it was directed toward the Native American. No, I have used it to describe reality. Let's look-up anon's definition of Noble Savage:¹¹

Noble Savage: A mythical term for a very real human who, by virtue of being born on the wrong place on earth (or the wrong side of town), occupies the bottom rungs of the pecking orders of human existence.

Let's also look-up anon's law about Noble Savages:

The Noble Savage Law: The disposition of humans to attribute noble intentions to anyone who is poor.

You're welcome. Just doing my job. And...Whoa! Here's f Dylan again.¹²

Bob Offers Some Verse

- Reporter, "What say, Bob? How's the verse-borrowings coming along? I don't understand (author: parody aside, I really do not understand.) You are a gifted dude, and you are famous and rich. Why mess it up with unattributed quotes from a dead poet?"
- Bob, "I'm still brilliant. Just listen."¹³

Strum, Strum, Strum...♪♪♪

*YIPPY-TI-EI-YO, get 'along little Indian.
Don't you know the Bosque will be your new home?
YIPPY-TI-EI-YO, get 'along little Indian.
It's all your misery and none of my own.*

*I used to wish I had all of your land,
so my cows could graze without any end.
And now I find that your land is mine,
I thank you so much for being so kind!*

*YIPPY-TI-EI-YO, get 'along little Indian.
Don't you know the Bosque will be your new home?
YIPPY-TI-EI-YO, get 'along little Indian.
I'm happy my cows have a new place to roam.*

Prototype Housing

¹¹ Uyless Black, *The Deadly Trinity* (Hayden, ID: IEI Press, 9323 N. Government Way, Hayden ID, 83835, 2007), 181,

¹² For any lurking lawyers, these scenes with Mr. Dylan are non-factual parody.

¹³ Sung to the tune of, "Get Along Little Dogie."

The first people in this area---thousands of years ago--- lived in houses similar to the southwestern New Mexico home my father inhabited as a child in the early 1900s. This arrangement makes sense, as the southwest-area building materials in, say, 500 BC were the same as they were in 1905. The structures were somewhat different, but not much. For the ancients:

At first, people...lived in simple homes, little more than a pit dug into the ground, lined with rocks and roofed with sticks and mud. Later, as the population grew and farming became more extensive, they started to build more elaborate above-ground structures of stacked stones and clay.¹⁴

My father had this to say about his housing:

...Back to the homestead. This kitchen, a half dugout, (was) a roof with a three-foot wall placed over a hole in the ground to hold the roof.and being about five feet deep, making (the) walls partly dirt and partly wood. These dens usually had dirt floors.¹⁵

This house is rather extraordinary when we consider that I (and perhaps some readers of the report) am only one generation removed from a relative who lived much of his life in a semi-cave.¹⁶

Perhaps it might surprise my son if I told him the first few years of my life on dad's ranch were ones without electricity, other than unreliable power generated from a small windmill charger. On occasion, I have related these stories to my Yankee friends on the east coast. Some look at me as if I came from Mars. No, from the southwest but with similar geographical features.

Sunset Crater Volcano

The Sunset Crater Volcano is a young volcano. Scientists believe it erupted between 1040-1100. It is the most recent volcanic eruption in the six million-year old history of volcanoes in this region, generally known as the San Francisco mountain range or the San Francisco volcanic field.

Figure 8 shows two views of Sunset Crater. The top picture is an aerial view of the crater itself, which is classified as a cinder cone, because of its shape. Other volcanoes, such as Mount St. Helens and Mt. Fuji are called stratovolcanoes and have sharp peaks. The bottom picture was our view as we hiked along a one-mile trail, which is an easy walk for most anyone who is ambulatory. I have placed a red arrow in the figure to show the "black" side of the crater. According to park literature:

When the volcano coughed out its last cinders---after several months or perhaps several years---they were colored by the oxidation of iron in the magma. Similar to the way metal rusts, the magma came in contact with water-rich gasses emitted

¹⁴ Anne Trinkle Jones, 9.

¹⁵ Gill Hinshaw, *Lovington: Survivor on the High Plains* (Lovington, NM: Lea County Museum, 2007), 31.

¹⁶ I'm told dad and his siblings usually slept outdoors, in or under wagon beds.

during the final stages of the eruption. These red cinders rim the top (and parts of the sides) of the cone.¹⁷



Figure 8. Sunset Crater. (Top photo courtesy of National Park Service.) (Yellow arrow explained later.)

Historians believe the eruption of Sunset Crater improved the lives of the residents---at least those who were not milling around the immediate vicinity of the explosion and did not experience the thrill of falling rocks, suffocating ash, poisonous gasses, and lava flows. According to scientists, a thin ash layer absorbed "...precious moisture and helped prevent evaporation, and a climate change provided more rainfall during the growing season."¹⁸

Suggestions for the Tour

As shown in Figure 1 of this report, the Sunset Crater and Wupatki are located close to each other. The best way to tour this region is to leave Route 89 and take the Park Service road through parts of the Coconino National Forest, in which these two national monuments are located. During this drive, you can see the crater, other lava flows, painted desert vistas, and for this writer, the most interesting part of the tour, the Wupatki Pueblo.

The Wupatki Pueblo

¹⁷ Sue Fischer, *Lava Flow Trail*, Western National Parks Association, 2007, 5.

¹⁸ National Park Service, brochure, GPO-2006-320-369/00482.

The remains of the Wupatki Pueblo are shown in Figure 9. Using tree rings, archeologists have determined this site was built, beginning in 1106. Tree rings also reveal local rainfall increased during 1130-1160, which allowed the natives to grow crops, including cotton. As mentioned, the Sunset Crater's eruption helped the farmers.



Figure 9. The Wupatki Pueblo.

For perhaps 130 years during this time, "streams of molten rock alternated with eruptions of ash to build the ...Sunset Crater. Yet even while the earth still crumbled and lit up the night, four or five hundred (natives) continued to tend their gardens along the (Little Colorado) river."¹⁹ The ash acted as mulch and led to more fertile soil.

A sense of the scale of this pueblo can be gained by comparing it to the people on the left side of the picture. It was constructed of stacked bricks of red Moenkopi sandstone, dark basalt, and pale Kaibab limestone. If you look carefully, you can see the builders used surrounding boulders to add strength and stability to their walls. I have placed a yellow circle around a large rock to highlight this feature.

The roofs were reinforced by heavy beams of pine and fir. Historians think the trees were felled at O'Leary Peak, some twelve miles away, and carried back to this site. Why did these people not build at O'Leary Peak? Why cart tons of wood to a hostile place to begin with? I am speaking of water, the most vital factor in determining where one lived then or lives now. During this time, permanent springs of water existed along the mesas surrounding the area.

This pueblo had more rooms added in 1137, 1160, and 1192 until about 100 rooms housed several hundred people. Thus, the seemingly hostile environment, as evidenced in Figure 10, had ample water, at least for a while.²⁰

During this time, the area's residents prospered (somewhat) with farming, hunting, and trading with other tribes in Northern Arizona and New Mexico. I say somewhat, because the electric light bulb was yet to come, not to mention the wondrous luxury: MTV.

Notice the round pit to the right of the buildings. It is a ball court. No one knows the exact game or games played at the court but due to its size and placement, ball sports must have been a big part of the culture. Some historians believe the game resembled the contest played by the Aztecs and Mayans who resided in present-day Mexico.

¹⁹ Susan Lamb, *Wupatki National Monument* (Tucson, AZ: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1999), 4.

²⁰ Susan Lamb, 7.



Figure 10. On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia.

The Spaniards recorded the speed, intensity, and skill needed to play the Aztec's game. The players could not use their hands or feet to manipulate the ball. Thus, the myth that North American Indians invented football and handball is just that, a myth.

But they did invent headball, hipball, and elbowball. Using hips, heads, and elbows the players tried to keep the ball in the air and knock it through a ring, thus ending the game. And for the Aztecs in present day Mexico, ending the lives of the losers.

Talk about motivation to win a contest! For certain, there were no need for a half-time locker room pep talk.

The so-called myth that the Aztecs invented the term *sore loser* is not a myth, because losers were destined to become very sore, if only for a short time, as they were killed. But no evidence exists that the tribes in this part of the continent murdered the losers of their ball games.

A few more pictures before we move on to other parts of Northern Arizona. Figure 11 is an artist's rendition of a multi-tiered Wupatki building.²¹ As with other structures of the southwest ancient people, entrances to the rooms were through the roof to provide security from tribal raids and to discourage visits from curious animals looking for a meal.

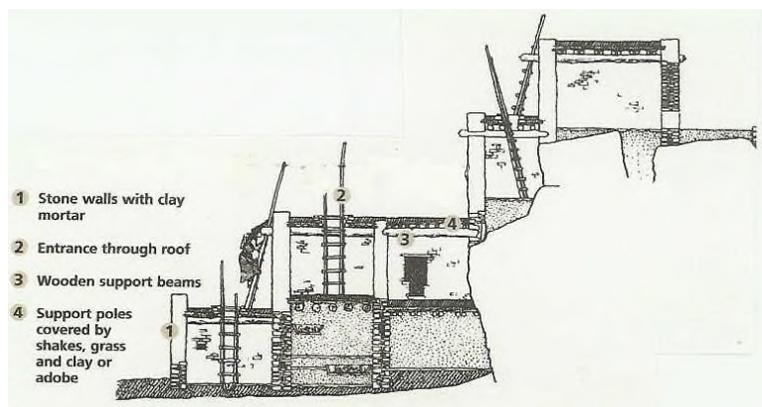


Figure 11. Side view of Wupatki Pueblo.

²¹ National Park Service, brochure, GPO-2006-320-369/00482.

Finally, Figure 12 shows photos of the Wupatki Pueblo and a couple who lived in the ruin between 1938 and 1949. Courtney and Davy Jones lived here while Mr. Jones worked for the National Park Service. They resided in two of the upstairs rooms that were reached by a ladder.

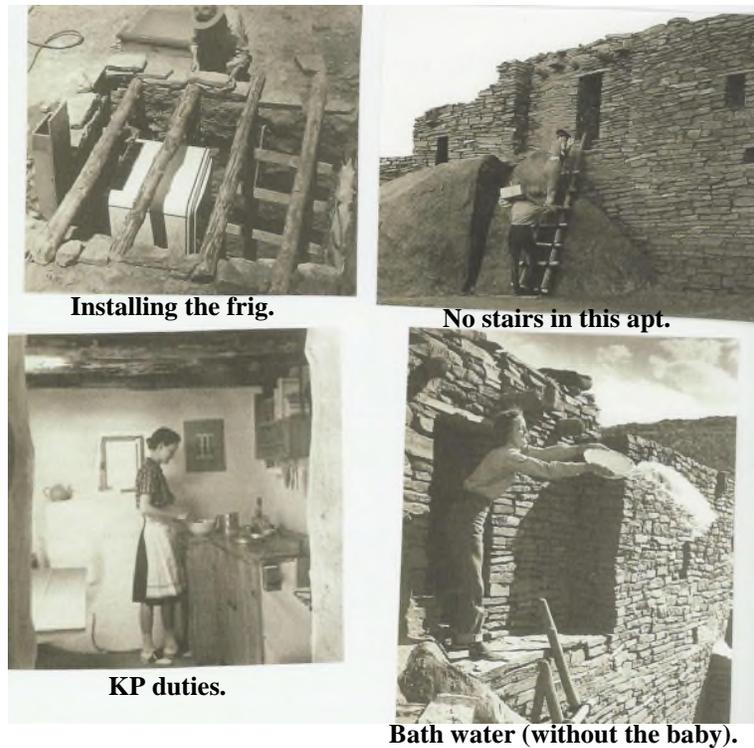


Figure 12. Last residents of Wupatki.

Living at Wupatki

Upon hearing about this couple from a park guide, I assumed they chose this Spartan life in order to emulate the life of the original occupants. I thought they wanted to be, however vicariously, Noble Savages. If not savages, then perhaps they wanted to lead lives like that of Henry David Thoreau who camped-out a few miles out of Concord, Massachusetts, in order to commune with nature. ...Nature being defined as a pond of water, some trees, bushes, and walking distance to a 1840's 7/11 store.

No, they had little choice where they lived. Mr. Jones was assigned by the National Park Service to be the "guide" for this site. At that time, nothing but the ruin populated the place. No visitor's center, no food, no restrooms, no telephone. And no place to stay, except a make-shift apartment in two rooms of the pueblo. Davy and Courtney claimed they lived in the "oldest inhabited house in the United States."²²

Davy Jones performed his Park Service duties well. Tourists were met by the couple. If needed, Mr. Jones towed cars out of ditches and cinders. Courtney Jones provided lunch from her small inventory of supplies.

²² Courtney Reeder Jones, 5. Courtney tells of her wearing a mask when she cleaned the two rooms to prevent inhaling dust.

Let's close this report by reading some passages from Courtney's letters to her friends about Wupatki.²³

That afternoon Dr. Colton and friends arrived, excavated (some) skeletons, and invited us all to go on a steak fry. So we all went off into the pinyon trees and had a big bonfire and steaks and beans.

The other day we went to inspect an eagle's nest and (Courtney's sister) hung head-down over the cliff while we held her feet so she could see the baby eagle.

...we walked around the rim of Betatakin Canyon and looked down on the (Betatakin) ruin. ...We ate lunch in the ruin, climbed all around it, and went into many of the little rooms. ...We got out of the canyon in time to move our bedrolls into a deserted Navajo hogan and fix supper before dark.

...we had to catch scorpions for a man who was studying them, and keep them alive to send to him (reporter: what does one feed a scorpion for breakfast?)²⁴

...a cloudburst hit Wupatki, and the road here was washed out... . The floor was covered with water...the trail to the john was gone...the ground on one side of the cook shack raised three feet.

That sort of life is long-gone for most Americans. "Stay on the trails!" signs are as prominent in our National Parks as the park exhibits themselves. But then, times have changed. Millions of people visit our parks each year. Until the National Park Service began to restrict how the land was used, tourists were destroying natural habitats. Take a look at Figure 8 again. The small yellow arrow points to a (barely visible) trail people made as they walked-up to the rim of Sunset Crater. The trail was once quite prominent and was closed many years ago, but its markings are still visible.

Were they the *good old days*? As I grow older, I admit I think about the past more than I did when I was younger. Anon advises me that this is a natural progression, as I increasingly have a longer past and thus more to dwell on. Nonetheless, I like Oliver Wendell Holmes's thought about the matter:²⁵ *There is no time like the old time when you and I were young.*

Yet, it is probably a good idea for older folks to also remember this wisdom from Horace Greeley:²⁶ *The illusion that (past) times were better than those that are, has probably pervaded all ages.*

Your on the Mesa Reporter

²³ Courtney Reeder Jones, 8, 10, 11/12, 12/13, 41, respectively for each statement.

²⁴ They discovered three new species of scorpions, two of which were named by the scientists to honor this pueblo and the Joneses: *Vejovis wupatkiensis* and *Vejovis jonesii*.

²⁵ Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., "No Time Like the Old Time," in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001, 584.

²⁶ Horace, Greeley, *The American Conflict*, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001, 584.

Curmudgeon 101: Henry David Thoreau, the Birth of the Yuppie

I am amused at the laudatory comments bestowed on Thoreau regarding his living a comfortable life for two years in a cozy hut; a house almost within shouting distance to a grocery store. I do not deny this man's intelligence or writing skills. I admire his insights and thought bites. But *Walden* has never hit the mark with me. Thoreau comes across as yuppie.

I think part of my prejudice toward *Walden* is because of my background and the background of my parents: lives not permitting self-indulgence. If nothing else, *Walden* is self-indulgent. Get a job, Henry. After which, if you remain idyllic, you can write about the idyllic.

But then, and on the other hand, much of my protest might be sour grapes. Thoreau inherited the latitude to indulge himself at his Walden setting. It was not his fault he was born into a privileged family and educated at Harvard.

Nonetheless, from my blue-collar perspective, the writings of Thoreau, and those of Alexis de Tocqueville, cited earlier, do not capture the well-spring of America. They skip around the surfaces of America's heart, but they do not delve into America's heart.

I do not mean to diminish the merit of these men's writings because they often describe---in fine prose---the personality of our country. But when I read their thoughts about Americans, I feel I am reading essays from distant observers, somehow trying to make sense of something they have never experienced. ...Maybe Studs Terkel does it better.

Let's read a few quotes from Thoreau, with my comments in parenthesis:

- Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him. (How on earth could this man have any idea of wildness? His thoughts are similar to the delusions of Rousseau in his discourses about the Noble Savage).
- I have a great deal of company in the house, especially in the morning when nobody calls. (I agree. Solitude can be a companion, at least for a while.)
- Not that the story need be long, but it will take a long while to make it short. (I agree. He lays-out a challenge for writers and story tellers.)
- Whatever sentence will bear to be read twice, we may be sure was thought twice. (Those who re-read my sentences often do so because of my misconstructions.)

Traveling America (IX) Report Four: The Grand Canyon

October 6 -11, 2007

Anon recounts the possible impressions of the European explorers when they first came upon the Grand Canyon:

The year was 1540. For weeks, the Spaniard (Captain García López de Cárdenas) and his men had been walking and riding through high desert country, now called the Colorado Plateau. They had encountered hundreds of miles of harsh---even deadly---terrain. Steep mesas, bone-dry creeks, and baked deserts offered little solace, small comfort, and no succor. Temperatures, scorching in the day but near freezing at night, had begun to take their toll.

Finding their larders nearly empty, they discovered that elusive desert critters---such as coyotes and lizards---made for fine meals. Because of his troops' never-ending search for rare water, the Spaniard understood why the barren creek beds were called "arroyos": dry gulches

The Spaniard's soldiers---an army beginning its trek from Mexico in splendor---were now a rag-tag assembly of dirty, hungry, thirsty men, supported by local Hopi guides. Their quest to find gold was yielding nothing but frustration and misery. Their general, an educated man, recalled a warning from his teacher, "There is no forgiveness in nature."²⁷

As he proceeded north on the plateau, the landscape began to change from nearly barren mesas to dense growths of piñon and juniper trees. So dense, his steed had difficulty pushing its way forward. For awhile, he and his party made their way though these verdant barriers. The closures were so tight that they tested claustrophobic thresholds. With difficulty, they looked upward through the thick tree branches to catch occasionally a glimpse of the sky.

Gradually, the land began to slope downward. As the trees widened their distances from each other, he and his men could more easily view the blue firmament above---a welcome relief from their tight arboreal maze.

Suddenly, he and his men emerged from the desert forest and found themselves in front of a world they and their European brethren had never seen. It was a gorge of such enormous width, length, and depth that it left the soldiers spellbound, in speechless awe. They had encountered the Grand Canyon.

King Lear said it well, "Nature's above art." We might add: That goes double for the Grand Canyon.

²⁷ Ugo Betti, *Goat Island*, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 539. I like this quote from an unknown source, "Nature is a hanging judge."

You must see this place to understand why:

The Grand Canyon has inspired a kind of literature of desperation. The world's great travel writers and naturalists, when confronted with this stupendous thing, have recruited their most ambitious adjectives and unleashed their most fervent raptures. One and all, they agree they were not up to the job.²⁸

Nor am I, who will not try, but will rely on quotations to help us understand the task:²⁹

One early British visitor called the canyon, "...a sort of landscape Day of Judgment."

Another, "...Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in stone and magic light."

John Muir, "...it seems a gigantic statement for even nature to make, all in one mighty stone world."

Zane Grey said that to see the canyon was, "...to be elevated in soul."

Ideas for seeing the Canyon

If you are passing through this part of America by car and Interstate 40, I suggest you take the route 89/64 loop on the southeast side of the Canyon. This road offers several pull-over points for viewing the canyon, as well as easy access to the Grand Canyon Village, the Tusayan Ruin, and the Watchtower at Desert View. Figure 13 shows a map of this loop. (Not to scale but I hope adequate for your needs)

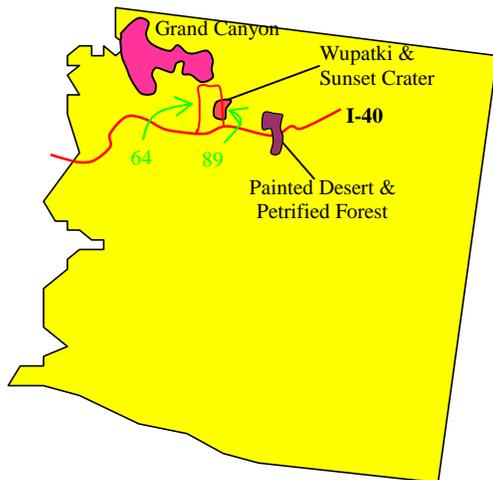


Figure 13. A suggested route for seeing part of the Grand Canyon.

I have passed by the Grand Canyon many times during my trips across America. For various reasons, I have never stopped to see it. Friends and relatives had advised me to make

²⁸ Paul Schullery, *America's National Parks* (New York: DK Publishing, 2001), 305.

²⁹ Ibid.

certain I visit the Grand Canyon before I pay a final canyon call to the Six Foot Canyon. Good point. At this time in my life, I've experienced considerably more years in my past than I will experience in my future. Anon advises, "One dwells on the past to the peril of one's future." You bet anon, and the future is now. So here we go.

Desert View

Desert View on Route 64 was our first stop-off after traveling from Wupatki. We parked the car, and made a short hike to a viewing platform to see (for me and Milli, but not Holly) the Grand Canyon for the first time. After a few moments of silent awe, not quite believing what was before my eyes, I snapped the photo shown in Figure 14.



Figure 14. First sighting (from Desert View viewing platform).

I have seen valley, canyon, and mountain formations in New Mexico, Utah, and other parts of Arizona similar to the terrain shown in Figure 14. The difference---the big difference---is

the "bigness" of the Grand Canyon. Its landscape is one thing. Its size is another. It is a mile deep, up to 18 miles wide and 277 (river miles) long.

And it is old. About 1,860 - 1,600 million years ago, as earth's surfaces were beginning to take shape, meandering tectonic plates collided and created Vishnu Basement rocks, which form the bottom of the Canyon.

Relative to the Canyon basement, the creation of the gorge is a recent event. About 4 or 5 million years ago, a river---flowing across a huge plateau that was once covered by an ocean, and later pushed up above sea level by those helpful tectonic plates--- began to carve out the Grand Canyon. As the river flowed, it cut down farther into the sides of the Canyon.

Those first events transpired almost *two billion* years ago. Consider that you and I will live to say, 80 years of age. Next, consider this simple calculation: $2,000,000,000 / 80 = 25,000,000$. The formations at the bottom of the Grand Canyon in Figure 14 are 25 million times the length of our life span. Just a thought to suggest we humans might attempt to be a bit humble about our presence on this earth.

The Watchtower

At Desert View, be sure to visit the Watchtower, one of the most unusual buildings in North America. Figure 15 shows two photos of this structure. It was built in 1932 by the Fred Harvey Company and Santa Fe Railroad to serve as an observation platform and a tourist rest stop.

The top windows of the tower provide stunning views of the eastern part of the Grand Canyon. The architect, Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter, after months of research, designed the building on the order of prehistoric towers that are scattered over the southwest. It is believed the towers were used for ceremonial purposes, food storage, and a fortress, in case of attack.



Figure 15. The Watchtower.
Top: Main floor & top of tower.
Right: Back of tower

The brevity of these reports prevents a thorough description of this fascinating building, but Figure 16 provides three views from inside. Don't miss the sand painting in the Hopi Room. Sand paintings are used in Hopi ceremonies. I have watched them being created. The artist sprinkles naturally colored sands (from a painted desert) between his/her thumb and forefinger onto a canvas, the canvas being Mother Earth. It is extraordinary art from extraordinary artists.

Sand paintings are supposed to be started at dawn and destroyed at nightfall. I have seen hundreds of supposed sand paintings in curio shops and bookstores throughout the southwest, but I suspect they are not used for Hopi rituals. Anyway, with some alterations, the Hopi tribe gave permission to keep this masterpiece in the public eye for our enjoyment.

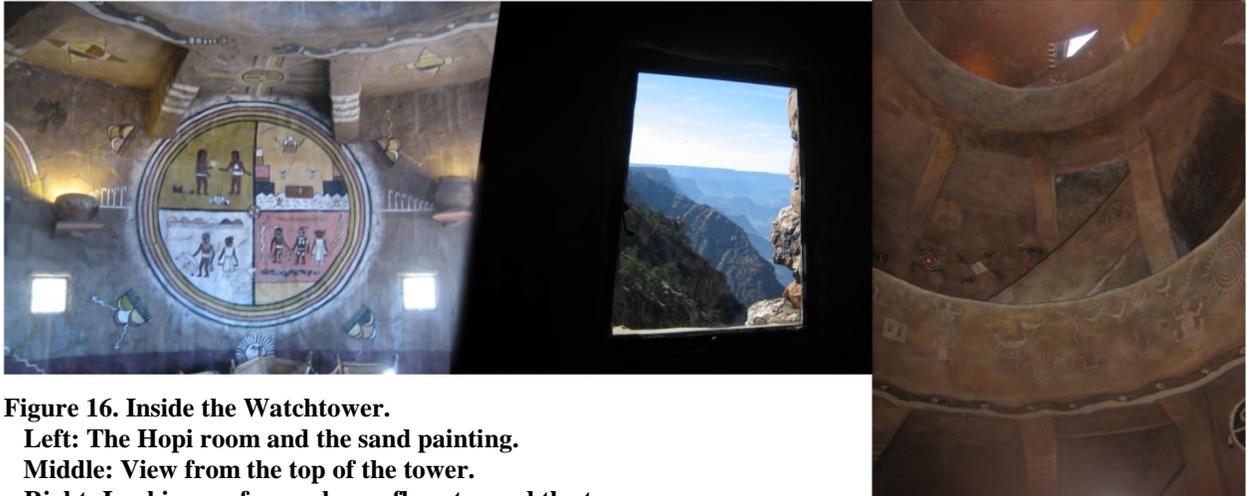


Figure 16. Inside the Watchtower.
Left: The Hopi room and the sand painting.
Middle: View from the top of the tower.
Right: Looking up from a lower floor toward the top.

An American Eagle in Grand Canyon

Reporter, Reporterette, and Milli continued our road trip over northern Route 64 and stopped-off at Grandview Point, which offered a view of the Hance Canyon and the famous Hance Rapid. This water is a one-mile stretch so dangerous that early explorers traversed this part of the canyon by walking on shore, using ropes to guide their boats downstream. Quite a few adventurers have met their fate on the waters of Grand Canyon's Colorado River:

- Boater, "Oh Lord, save me. These rapids are killers. Immerse me in your Holy Waters!"
- The Lord, "Relax. You're already in'um."

As we looked over the Canyon from Grandview Point, we noticed other tourists were becoming excited about a vista across the Canyon. Shortly, we learned they had spotted an American eagle. What could be finer than watching the avian icon of America majestically gliding over the geographic icon of America? Nothing. Well, maybe an American eagle flying over Niagara Falls. (The Falls---in their own way, are as magnificent as the Canyon---and are visited later in the *Traveling America* series.)

Because I knew the American eagle was not as prevalent on courthouse squares as the American Pigeon, I was eager to record the flight of this rare bird. Thus alerted, I pulled-out my miniature camera. ...Which by the way, makes extraordinary photos and videos considering it is the size of a deck of cards.

Anyway, I snapped the photo in Figure 17.³⁰ The bird is hard to spot. If you look at the middle of the photo, you can see the eagle, transposed in flight in front of a distant mesa. I have kept the scale of the photo the same as the original picture to convey a sense of the scope of the Grand Canyon, and I've drawn a purple arrow to point out the location of the bird. (As well as a

³⁰ You're welcome Canon. Send money. I already have a camera.

close-up of the bird in another photo---just in case my foreign readers do not know what an American eagle looks like.)



Figure 17. An American icon flies over an American icon.



Eagles: Regal. Grand. Stately. Products of a majestic Mother Nature. And of course, American-like. What could be more impressive?

For one, the African eagle. Recently, I watched a documentary film about the life of the African Black eagle, a creature as imposing as the American eagle. Its wing span is even greater than Uncle Sam's mascot.

The film narrator explained a mother eagle had laid two eggs, from which two chicks emerged. The narrator then explained one chick was destined to kill the other chick. Without exception, one chick was killed in its infancy. Sure enough, after some sibling jousting, one chick assumed the dominant role and began pecking the other chick---seemingly taking a break only to eat, take a nap, and rest its beak. After a few days, the attacked baby bird finally died. The mom, after doing a visual autopsy, snagged the dead chick in its mouth and devoured it. ...Time to switch to the Disney Channel.

Paraphrasing a thought from Pliny the Elder seems apropos to our discussion about these eagles, and for that matter (once again) nature, "It is far from easy to determine whether nature has proved a kind parent or a merciless stepmother."³¹

The female African Black eagle might appear to wear both the kind and merciless hats suggested by Pliny the Elder, but bird experts tell us laying two eggs is insurance. In the event one egg turns rotten, so to speak, the other egg survives to produce an off-spring and perpetuate the adult eagles' gene pool.

But how about mama eating her dead child? Once again, nothing more than Mother Nature at work: "Nature ...makes nothing in vain."³² And "There is no unemployed force in nature. All decomposition is recomposition."³³

Tusayan Ruin

Just off Route 64, a short distance from Grand View Point, is the Tusayan Pueblo Ruin, one of 4,300 archeological sites within the Grand Canyon National Park. Based on tree ring studies, historians believe the site was inhabited around 1185. Based on archeological digs, the experts tell us this pueblo was arranged as seen in Figure 18.³⁴

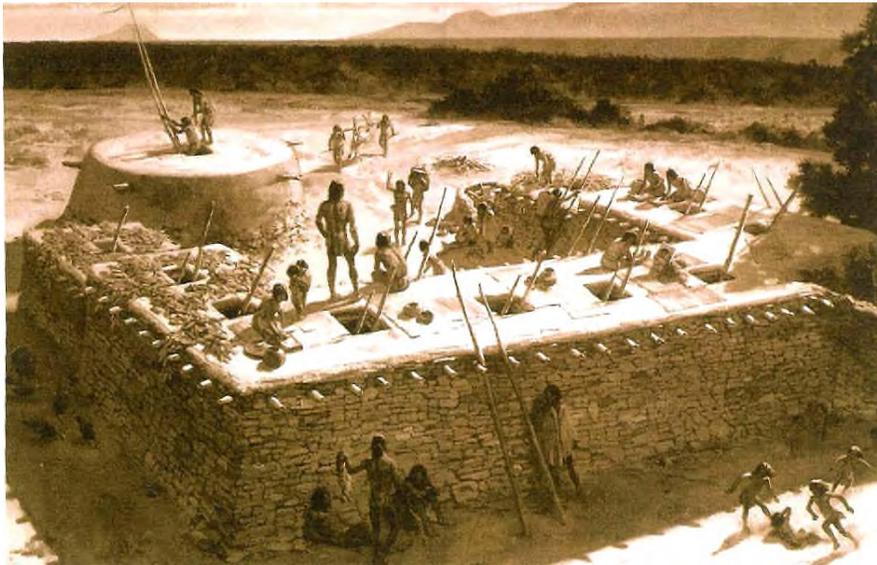


Figure 18. Tusayan town.

Notice the kiva, the circular building at the top of the picture. As described in earlier reports, the kiva was a ceremonial place. This rendition was created by artist Elizabeth McClelland and her colleagues by examining the kiva remnants. To gain an idea of the difficulty of this task, Figure 19 shows what they had to work with. Ms. McClelland would have liked a few more pieces to this puzzle, but information about this site and knowledge gained from other ruins have generated a substantial body of knowledge about Native Americans and their kivas.

³¹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VII, 1, in John Bartlett, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 17th edition (New York: Little, Brown, 2002), 108.

³² Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.2, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 539.

³³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Man of Letters," in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 539.

³⁴ Elizabeth McClelland, illustrator, *Tusayan Ruin*, National Park Service, nd.



Figure 19. Could I have a few more pieces to the puzzle?

Invention is the Mother of Survival

It is time to move on. I would like to stay a long while at the Grand Canyon, perhaps another time.

In my general explorations of the southwest ancients over the past four years, it has become evident to me the people who once inhabited this region were intelligent and resourceful. Sure, they did not have the steam engine and had not figured-out the theoretical properties of heat and cold. They were oblivious to absolute zero, but acutely aware of freezing.

Knowledge is an accumulation of information about past experiences. Knowledge builds on past knowledge. Things follow other things. I would bet my last Irish coffee and Rum Bun that an 1107 person was as intelligent as a 2007 person is. The former would fail a SAT test. The latter would fail a Colorado Plateau test. Intelligence is determined by who administers the intelligence test. For the ancients, it was Mother Nature. For us moderns, it is Stanford-Binet.

The American Noble Savages invented ways to use the piñon nut for food, construction, heating, and clothing. They devised means to brew tea out of pine needles to extract vitamin C, as well as to use the needles for bandages and fiber for waterproof baskets. They employed juniper for firewood, insulation, and padding for sandals. They ate juniper berries for nourishment, but also added them to bread for flavor. They extracted Yucca leaves to make twine and rope and used Yucca seeds for food and soap. They chipped away stones to create elegantly beautiful points, used with bows and arrows with astounding aerodynamic sophistication.

These ancients had no choice. Invention is the mother of survival. Invent they did, and survive they did.

As in Europe, what if these people had had the luxury of an accommodating climate to provide an ample larder. As in Europe, what if they then used their resultant spare time to, say, invent steel? Their climate relegated them to the role of Noble Savages. All they could do was survive. Not much time to invent. What if they had horses earlier in their lives? The Spaniards used steel and horses to subdue the Native Americans.

Who knows? If the flip of Mother Nature's coin had landed on the other side, perhaps we modern humans would be acting out our ceremonial rituals in a giant kiva in Flagstaff instead of a giant cathedral in Rome.

Anon tells us about a 19th century Navajo who asked his missionary, "Why is your religion better than mine?" The missionary answered, "Because I am richer and more powerful than you."

Traveling America (IX) Report Five: Hoover Dam and Las Vegas

October 6 -11, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter, reporting from the Hoover Dam, just outside of Sin City, and the water reservoir for fantastic sights in Las Vegas: the Bellagio's lake, the Venetian's canals, the Wynn's waterfalls, to cite a few. Figure 20 shows an aerial view of the dam taken several years ago.

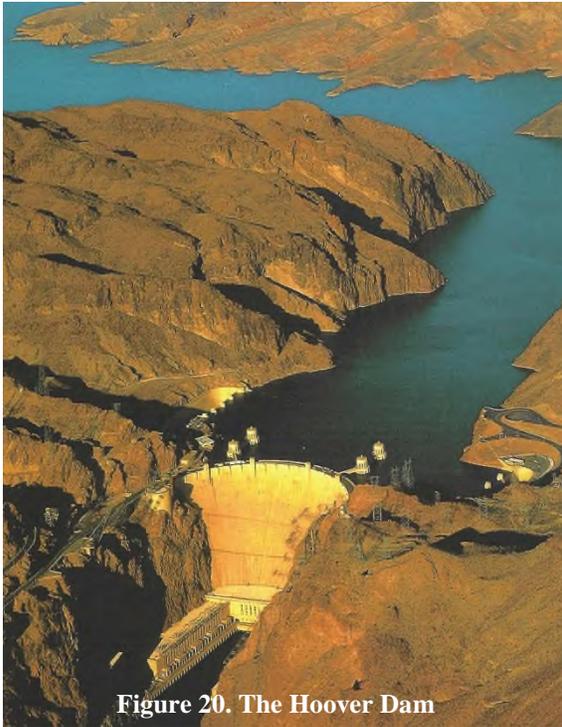


Figure 20. The Hoover Dam

The fastest growing city in America is implanting itself onto one of the driest places on earth. Fortunately, for the residents and tourists of Las Vegas and surrounding areas, the Colorado River runs into Lake Mead, the lake behind the Hoover Dam fortress. The Colorado, with water from as far away as Wyoming, drains nearly 8 % of the total land area of the contiguous United States.

Before the Hoover Dam was constructed, spring run-offs often devastated farms, homes, even communities that were in the river's path. But true to fickle Mother Nature, some years brought forth very little water, resulting in drought and its associated miseries.

The answer? Tame the Colorado. Thus, in the 1930s, the Hoover Dam was constructed, an astounding engineering feat, and one leading to many benefits for America: electricity, predictable flood plains, and water skiing.

When finished, it was considered by some to be the most colossal engineering accomplishment in the history of mankind. But others did not think so. Nor do I. The greatness of this construction and the greatness of its creators cannot be denied. But folks, these guys used motorized cranes.

My choice for the number one colossal engineering accomplishment in the history of mankind is the Pyramids. How were they created? Unlike the Hoover Dam, no motors or cranes. But with a lot of manpower. A Pyramid budget had to fund the employment of about 25,000 people. However, one Pyramid construction, unto itself, created a housing boom with an instant city of 25,000 citizens and their families.

The job of these workers was to build a castle to house the corpse of a dead despot. No payback on the investment other than the ego and spiritual fulfillment of the soon-to-be interred. It appears we humans are making some progress as we plod along through the millenniums. The Hoover Dam was funded as a loan from Uncle Sam, and this loan was paid back, with interest, over 30 years ago. Imagine a government project that paid for itself.

Pay a Visit

If you are in the area, you will find a visit to the Hoover Dam interesting and a lot of fun. Guided tours are available, and one will take you inside the dam itself. There, you will see banks of huge electric generators. Seventeen of them have a combined capacity to generate 2,080,000 kilowatts of energy.

On my way from the parking lot to the dam, I struck-up a conversation with the parking lot attendant. He had seen Milli in the car and informed us the dog had to remain in our car, attended by a human. That is, the dog had to be attended, not necessarily the car.³⁵

- Reporter, "Been doing this job long?"
- Attendant, "Just over 20 years."
- "See many changes over these years?"
- "Mainly what's going on now. They're building a highway to divert traffic from the dam. Travelers will be able to bypass the dam if they want to."
- "We saw the construction coming in. Say, the water looks low."
- "See that spillway?"
- "Yeah."
- "I haven't seen water over that spillway since 1987. Look at those intake towers (Figure 21). When I first came to work here, Mead's water level was at the crest level. Now it's about 15-20 feet down. These spillways are as useful as a two-dollar bill."
- "Sure, but lake levels vary. Rain. Snow run off..."
- "Doesn't account for this level. Can't talk right now. Those cars need parking."



Figure 21. Intake towers.

Sure enough, if you look again at Figure 20, a picture taken over ten years ago, it is obvious that 8 percent of the drainage of the total land area of the contiguous United States is not what it used to be. The most pressing environmental issue in the southwest is water. Not to mention the east coast. During the 1970s, my son and I camped-out and fished at Lake Lanier, Georgia. I read recently where this lake is drying-up from overuse and drought.

³⁵ Recorded from my hand-written notes. The conversation is paraphrased

The problem is not restricted to the southwest or Georgia. Slowly but surely, it is becoming a problem in most parts of the country. Regardless of one's opinion on the cause of global warming, it is uncontested that it is happening. I have written there will be winners and losers of this warming trend. Greenland will become a tourist heaven. Glacier National Park will have to be renamed. And so on. But the battle lines are being formed, and the battles for water are going to be nasty.

Here are possibilities for some winners and losers:³⁶

The oil-rich countries of Saudi Arabia and Iraq---mostly deserts to begin with---will eventually run out of water. In order to survive, these nations and other water-starved regions will have to import water from water-rich countries.

This program will be named the Water for Oil Plan. Countries with ample water, such as Norway, Sweden, and New Zealand will become the newly crowned Potentates for Precious Resources and barter their water for oil. They will one-up the sheiks of the Middle East for control of a liquid even more vital than oil. Gigantic channels and ducts will be constructed to pipe the water from one part of the world to another.

In addition to the Water for Oil Plan, massive plants will be constructed along the coasts of continents to desalinate ocean water. The demand will be so great the pumping of this water will have the potential to lower the level of the seas. Thanks to global warming, the North and South Poles and the Greenland glaciers will be melting, which will more than resupply the water in the oceans, resulting in the flooding of thousands of miles of coast lines.

And to lighten-up, we head to Las Vegas.

I have been to Las Vegas many times and usually stay on the strip. No longer. It has become too congested. Taking a walk on the Strip's sidewalks is similar to taking a stroll in Singapore: Pedestrians packed together in an ambulatory bundle, jointly treading their way to places in lock step. You need a hand signal to indicate you are making a turn into a casino.

Green Valley Ranch Hotel

Once you "get away" to Vegas, and want to "get away" again, try a hotel outside the strip. We stayed at the Green Valley Ranch Resort; I recommend it. We encountered only one problem:

- Reporter, "Hi. Reservation for Uyless Black."
- Clerk, "Hello, Mr. Black. Welcome. ...There we are. Two people and your dog. Milli, right?"
- "Right. A five pounder. She won't use a lot of water."
- "Ha! You do know we have a pet fee?"
- "I assumed so. Most hotels accepting pets add a fee."
- "Yes, there will be \$200 pet deposit, refundable after an inspection, and..."
- "Sure. No problem. Anyway, how much of a mess can a five-pound dog make?"

³⁶ Uyless Black, *The Deadly Trinity* (Hayden, ID: IEI Press, 2007), 44.

- "I'll bet not much at all. In addition, there will be a non-refundable pet fee of \$100."
- "Hmm. Seems a bit steep. But we're here. Say, we might decide to stay longer than one day. Do you have rooms available?"
- "Yes, but you should let us know soon, as we usually book-up by this time tomorrow."
- "Are repeat nights the same fee?"
- "Yes, including the pet."
- "You charge \$100 *per night* for a pet!?"
- "Yes...sorry."
- "I could understand if the hotel changed the sheets on her bed or if she used your soap. Services like that. But she sleeps on the floor and doesn't shower. OK. Can we get a cab to the Wynn later? We're headed for a Cirque Du Soleil show."
- "We have taxi service 24 hours a day. I've heard the Wynn show is sensational. I've never been to a Cirque performance."
- "They're great, but not cheap. (I couldn't resist.) Two tickets are about the same as three nights of Green Valley Hotel pet lodging."
- "Ha! Let us know if we can do anything to make your stay more pleasant. Shortly, we will send up a package for Milli."
- (Later, Milli received a matching food and water dish, and a matching tug toy and blanket---which, like the towels, were not to be taken with us when we left.)

Notwithstanding this semi-extortion, Green Valley is a delight. The rooms are large and comfortable, the service fine, the food outstanding, and the casino is removed from the lobby of the hotel. Imagine, a hotel lobby in Las Vegas without any CHINGS.

Cirque Du Soleil's *Le Reve*

I have reported on two other Cirque Du Soleil shows (*Las Vegas* (2007)). Reporterette was not with me for these performances. The reason for stopping again in Las Vegas was for her to see one. We chose the *La Reve* show. One scene from *La Reve* is shown in Figure 22. From this photo, it may appear the performance was a bit weird. Not at all. Sure, there were a lot of folks flying around in the air, and others on the ground that looked a bit strange. But all three Cirque shows I have seen have uplifting themes, fantastic settings, and some of the most gifted gymnasts and swimmers outside the Olympics.

As mentioned, the ticket prices for a show range from around \$150 to \$225. We tried to snare a couple tickets for better seating (with champagne and strawberries), but they were sold out.

The show is worth the ticket price. Maybe not three shows, as they are variations of the same format: Great athletes doing their stunts to music. If I were to recommend one show over the others, it would be a Beatles theme show called *Love*. However, I would gladly fork over the money to attend all of them again.

What a change from Indian ruins. But it was time to move on. The next morning, we left Las Vegas and took blue highways up through Nevada, the subject of the last report in *Traveling America (IX)*.



Figure 22. A scene from La Reve.³⁷

³⁷ Cirque Du Soleil souvenir program. All rights reserved by Cirque Du Soleil. This photo is for personal use only. Reproduction for commercial purposes requires permission from Cirque Du Soleil. See www.cirquedusoleil.com

Traveling America (IX) Report Six: Traveling Nevada

October 6 -11, 2007

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This last report will highlight some vistas in Nevada, another hotel visit, a beer tasting session, and a few more thoughts about Native Americans.

Until I began writing these essays and traveling by motorcar to make the reports, I was under the impression that most of Nevada was desert. My only experience had been to fly into Las Vegas, which is located in flat desert country. Yet, Nevada has many mountain ranges scattered throughout the state. For some reason, most of them are collectively known as the Humboldt -Toiyabe National Forest, even though they may be separated by hundreds of miles.



If you want to experience 400 miles of pleasant driving in attractive country, take route 93 out of Las Vegas. At the 93/375/318 junction, take 318 north. This highway is not traversed as much as 93, and it is a peaceful respite from busier roads. At the juncture of 318 and 6, take 6 north to catch 93 again. You will be rewarded with several hours of pleasant sight-seeing of high desert and mountains. Not spectacular, such as the San Juan National Forest in Colorado, but worth the trip. A typical scene on routes 93 and 318 is shown in Figure 23.

Figure 23. Typical scenery.

Green Valley Resort and Motel 3: Pros and Cons

Much of the fun of motor trips is the experiences taken-in during layovers in small towns. For many Americans who grew-up in rural areas, it presents an opportunity to relive old memories.

During one evening, as we journeyed up Route 93, we spent an evening at Wells, Nevada. For only \$48.50 a night, we had access to a bed and hot shower. Even better, the tab covered Milli, with no pet deposit. Our entire room tab for two people and one dog was less than one-half of what a Las Vegas hotel charged for one dog. As we discovered later, the tab also included:

- Noise from over thirty 16-wheelers, less than 200 feet from our room, reverbed up during the night to keep their engines hot and their sleeping drivers warm.
- Two large forced air fans across the hallway from our room. Spewing hot air and noise, they blended with the trucks' harmonics, all cascading into our room through walls built to lowest-bidder specs.

- To combat these aural assaults, we turned on the TV to its highest volume, only to discover the audio and video did not sync...on all channels.
- To combat the hot air of the fans putting forth oven-like air underneath our door and one of our windows, we opened another window on the other side of the room, to be confronted with yet more noise---and exhaust fumes---from the nearby highway.

What should one expect from a motel tab of 48 bucks, including a dog surcharge? After all, the Green Valley Ranch charged \$100. for the dog---for each night. No big deal. Bring along earplugs and an oxygen bottle, and you can stay at any Motel 2, 3, 9...whatever, in fine comfort.

I am joking. In truth, part of the joy of experiencing America is to motor around this country. Sometimes you will come across a Green Valley Resort with immaculate, clean, quiet, and elegant surroundings. Sometimes you will watch a Cirque show. Other times you will come across a roadside motel with thirty 16-wheelers paying their respects to your olfactory senses. Sometimes it's Hank Williams on the juke box.

We should like these combinations. A bit of this, a bit of that, not too much of one or the other. Otherwise---siding to one---we become imbalanced, biased toward one or another of America's so-called class structures.

Sure. But the truth is, a typical Motel 2 resident most likely will not choose to "expand his horizons" to sample a Cirque experience. I do not mean to come across as stuck-up. My roots are about as humble as they can be. My father lived in a dirt dug-out, and yours truly cut his teeth on okra and pinto beans. My point is that I am comfortable with my blue-collar roots, but I am not restricted by them. I take to heart anon's advice, "Do not be circumscribed by your circumstances."

I am going to enjoy a Green Valley Resort to its fullest. I am going to enjoy a Motel 2 to its fullest. But each in their own way.

And for this evening, just across the street from our inn, was the 4 in 1 Casino, Bar, Cafe, Restaurant, and Truck Stop.

Waitress, "Hi, folks. Anything to drink?" We had had enough wine and other fancy spirits. I ordered a Coors Light. Holly ordered a Bud Light. In the spirit of the evening, the two of us conducted a blind taste test of two beers many beer aficionados believe taste more like water than beer. No offence to Bud and Coors lovers; just reporting facts. I cannot tell the difference myself, which made me imminently qualified to participate in the test.

Results:

Holly: **Bud:** Paler, sharper, malty & creamy, more beer-like, which was good because she was drinking beer. **Coors:** More fizz, more carbonation, less flavor, watery but no aftertaste, which was good because water tastes better if it has no aftertaste.

Uyless: I couldn't tell the difference. I stopped drinking beer in college after I discovered Ripple. Later, I graduated to Boone's Farm Semi-Wine, then to Mateus, later to Lancers---with a side trip to Cold Bear Wine. (The instructions on the Cold Bear label advised, "Serve exceedingly chilled.")

During the test, we checked-out the menu. I was tempted order the Garbage Omelet, described on the menu as, "Everything but the kitchen sink." But I opted for the same meal I order in every truck stop/casino/bar/cafe I visit: chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes, lots of

Texas Toast with garlic butter, and hold the veggies...the latter being dangerously healthy. Oh, and one beta-blocker just before the mud pie dessert. Being the sensible sort, Holly ordered shrimp---deep fried, of course.



Figure 24. One meal exceeds my daily calorie requirement.

Shortly, after polishing off the Bud and Coors, and graduating to Pabst Blue Ribbon, our chow arrived...with veggies. As seen in Figure 24, my meal was of Texas-sized proportions. As a calorie counter, I knew intuitively how many of those Cs were on this plate: Counting the Texas Toast (not shown), the count was about 1800 calories.

Because I was on a diet, I put-aside the vegetables. The mud pie filled-out my daily calorie requirement. Trouble is, I had already eaten two meals today. Oh well, I rationalize: Tomorrow I'll not eat.

In my defense, I ate about half the stuff on this plate, including all the veggies. Anyway, the fancy fare at the Green Valley Resort Café was never like this. And vice-versa.

What say, Mr. Thoreau? Ever been to a 5 in 1 Casino, Bar, Cafe, Restaurant, and Truck Stop? How about you, Mr. de Tocqueville? Some Bud Light might relax your French Burgundy soul. OK, I'll let these guys alone, and I'll not pick on Mr. Dylan for a while.

Back to the Room. Full of beer and carbs, we turned-on the Weather Channel to make sure we were not headed into an Idaho storm. The voice and video were still out-of-sync, but all we wanted was a quick update. Instead the Weather Channel was airing a program on the "Top Ten Worst Storms of the Past." A weather channel discussing the *history* of weather? Talk about poor programming.

Some Final Thoughts

I thank you for traveling with Reporterette, Milli, and your Reporter in *Traveling America (IX)*. It's been a kick for me, and I hope for you as well. Many of our visits and conversations have been about the American Indians and their lives in the old times---about Kit Carson's Trail of Tears march of these folks to a reservation. We've talked about Mother Nature and the fickle flips of her coin that often set our fates. As well, we've shared a story about fancy places in Las Vegas which helped us balance-out a fine evening with chicken fried steaks and beer---and a bunch of 16-wheelers.

Going back a few days, we spent one night at a hotel near the Grand Canyon. The hotel operated a dinner club. During its buffet, the club provided entertainment: Native American chanters and dancers, interspersed with Country and Western singers and guitar players.

Cowboys and Indians. But unlike the past, these former enemies were pals, on the same stage sharing the limelight and the tips.

This cultural collage happens only in America. It happens in a setting that speaks to some of the unique characteristics of our country. I cannot say if these characteristics are positive or negative. In one way, I felt sorry for the Hopi dancers. They performed their once sacred ritual dance on a nightclub floor. Occasionally, diners looked-up from their fried condiments to see the Indians and their feathers glide around the stage.

Yet, the Native Americans did not seem to mind. As their performance was coming to an end, an Indian pot was placed on the dance floor. Gradually, customers walked to the floor and placed money into the pot. It was a long way from sacred sand paintings and closed ritual dances, but I suspect a lucrative way to earn a living. (See Figure 25.)

And why not? I admire Dolly Parton's attitude. She said people were going to stereotype her because of characteristics over which she had no control. She said they were going to, "...make fun of them," so she was going to make these people pay a price for their behavior. Lord knows, we've stereotyped the "red man" into parody. In previous reports, I reported on interviews with Native Americans, most of whom informed me they were indifferent to the tag of "Indian." Nonetheless, the laughing Indian logo for the Cleveland Indians is pretty stark humor.

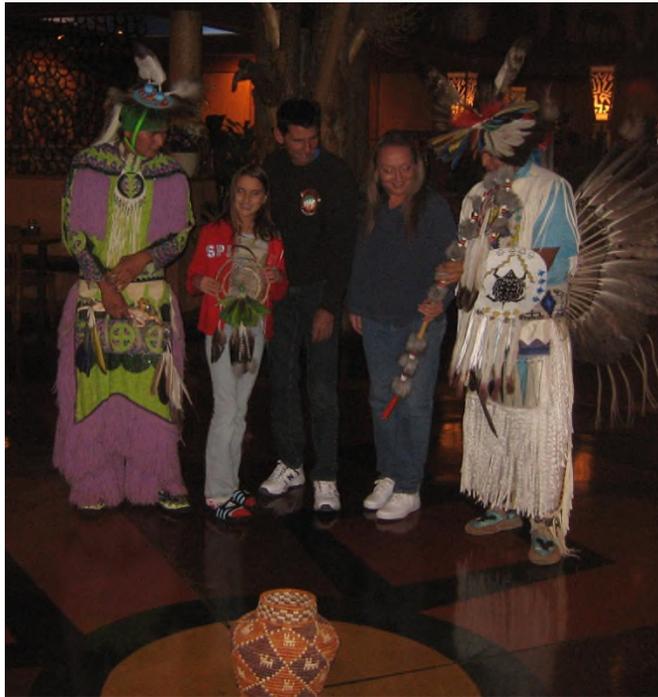


Figure 25. Dancing for dough.

One of my high school friends, after reading the third report of this essay about the sad past of Native Americans, wrote, "It's payback time." You bet Ken. Consider the Indian casinos. They are making tons of money. The Las Vegas/Atlantic City casino bosses are losing millions to the red man. Take that Kit Carson.