



Welcome to Rott's Manor

Pete & Mary Clukey

National Parks 2006 Trip Report

Extended Easter weekend vacation

Four days – Three National Parks

Pete was scheduled to attend a conference in Las Vegas the week after Easter. Since we both had Good Friday off from work. We decided to take one vacation day on Thursday and fly to Vegas together. And since we've already been to Vegas twice, we decided to go do some hiking in the Grand Canyon and Bryce Canyon... then drive through Zion on our way back to Vegas.

Day 1 -

The morning of April 13th we left Atlanta, Georgia aboard a Delta flight to Las Vegas, Nevada. We were seated on the left side of the aircraft which unfortunately was not the side of the aircraft with the view of the Grand Canyon, but we were able to see the meteorite crater off in the distance. Before landing at Vegas we flew over the Hoover dam, and we did get a good view of it.

Arriving in Vegas just in time for an early lunch. Mary did some research before we left, finding that the cheap Las Vegas buffet was virtually no more. However, she did find a buffet appropriate for our final destinations... The Wild West Buffet at Arizona Charlie's (and it's pretty close to the airport). Service at the buffet was amazingly friendly. The food was adequate. The price of \$5.75 each was a really good deal.

After our fill at the buffet, it was time to start the long drive to the Grand Canyon. We took the south route over Hoover Dam. We did the Hoover Dam tour a few years ago, so we drove over the dam crossing from Nevada to Arizona. We stopped briefly for a few pictures from the scenic overlooks on the Arizona side. Then it was a long boring drive on highway 93 until the exit for Route 66. We exited onto Route 66 to satisfy Mary's need to check off the famous Route 66 on her things to do list and to check out the airport at Kingman which has a graveyard for retired airliner jets. After a construction detour that sent us back towards Vegas, adding probably 30 minutes to our drive, we were back on highway 93 passing by a whole lot of nothing for what seemed like an eternity. This drive cured us of the desire to take a road trip across the U.S. Finally we arrived a Williams, where we turned north onto Route 64. On Route 64 before the Grand Canyon National Park, there is the Planes of Fame air museum that we stopped at just 15 minutes before they closed. General Douglas MacArthur's short bodied Constellation, the 'Bataan', is on display there. It is in flyable condition, but too valuable to risk flying. After a too brief of a visit, we ventured on to find the Holiday Inn Express just outside the park, to get checked in. Then it was a race to beat the sun to a viewing point within Grand Canyon National Park. Mather Point was the popular spot, we ventured a little bit further to Yavapai Point and were rewarded with a much smaller crowd and still an impressive view. With darkness upon us it was time for dinner. Mary spotted a steak house near our hotel, the Yippee-ei-o! Steakhouse. This place could really pack in the people, first they sent us to the bar with just enough time to order a drink. We tried a local beer, the Rattlesnake. It did have a bite. Pete ordered the ribs and Mary ordered a steak. The

ribs were scorched beyond recognition. Mary's steak was very good. While there were a lot of wait staff running around, service was not the best. This is definitely a "move them in, move them out" kind of place.

Back at the hotel, we unpacked, adjusted our clocks to the local time, and set an alarm for 6:30 tomorrow morning.

Day 2 –

We were shocked at the number of people in line at 7:30 in the morning for the included continental breakfast at the hotel. The dining room was packed. Breakfast consisted of cereal, cinnamon rolls, a banana and orange juice. Mary woke up not feeling so good (jetlag?)... not a good thing since first thing this morning is a helicopter ride. So, she took some Bonine (non-drowsy... right).

We arrived at Papillion Helicopters for our 9:00 am ride a half an hour early as required. Our flight was one of the first flights of the day, so after watching the required safety video, we watched the Papillion employees prepping the helicopters for the day's flights. It seemed like a long wait, then we were called to line up for our flight. First they have you pose in front of the helicopter for the pre-flight photo that they have available for sale at the gift shop on your return. Then according to the weight & balance of the helicopter they load the passengers. Apparently Mary and the pilot balanced out the front cabin and Pete made the craft balanced by sitting in the seat that faced backwards (Eeek)! We've never experienced that before and now we know to ask for a flight with all seats facing forward. Before take-off Mary joked with the pilot, asking him if this was his first time in a helicopter. The flight itself was very smooth, one of the benefits of an early morning flight. Mary had an enjoyable time, a great view and never felt queasy. Pete was never comfortable in his rear facing seat, his headset didn't work well, and an over head panel fell on him during the flight!

After the flight, it was back to the hotel to grab the gear for the days hiking adventures. Mary began to feel drained of energy, but off we went to the Grand Canyon. First we decided to hike down Angel Trail just a bit. Knowing it takes twice as much time to go up the trail as it does to go down the trail, we planned our ascent to coincide with lunch time. The restaurant is at the top of the canyon, this gave Mary incentive to push on up the trail. At the top, we go lodge to lodge looked at the menus. We decided on El Tovar for lunch. Since it was right at noon, we were sure that we would have to wait for a table... but no, we were seated immediately and at a table right next to the window with a great view of the Grand Canyon! Mary ordered the grilled chicken salad and Pete ordered the club sandwich on marbled bread. Service at the El Tovar was excellent. We had two wait staff members refilling our drinks. They brought bread to munch on while our order was being made. It didn't take long at all before our lunch arrived. The food was excellent too. Just when we were ready for the bill, our waiter got two big tables of guest. We had to wait, while our waiter took their orders and got their drinks. Mary's eyes began to feel very heavy.

Finally we escape the restaurant, Mary was not up to a hike at the moment. So, we hopped on the bus to the west rim of the canyon. Mary was out. Pete quickly lost interest in the bus ride. It does not offer comfortable seats or breath taking views of the canyon. In hindsight we should have gone back to the hotel for a siesta. After the endless ride, we got off the bus and began a leisurely walk on the rim trail. We got a close up view of a peregrine falcon as it flies less than 10 feet by us. Then we encountered a guy with a radio receiver antenna. We watched him searching with the antennae for his quarry, the receiver beeps and he jots down notes. Mary speculates that he is look for the California Condors that have been released in the canyon. When he is done with his work, we asked him what he was researching. He confirms that he is researching California Condors. There are twelve of them in the canyon and the roost nightly just below the rim over by the hotels. So, on our return walk we looked over towards the hotels, and soon we could see them... we counted eight. Now the clouds are getting thick and we are hit with an occasional shower. We make it back to the hotel area just in time for the clouds to open up, it was really coming down. We decided to head back towards our hotel.

Tonight we took in the Grand Canyon IMAX movie, but first dinner. Can't quite remember the name of the restaurant that we chose, something like Tusayan Café. It was a diner, like a Denny's. The food wasn't bad, not great, but adequate. We both had the seafood platter special. Then off to the movie. Mary dosed off through most of the movie, but Pete enjoyed the movie.

Our room at the Grand Canyon Holiday Inn Express had one king bed and was pretty close to the pool. We could hear kids running in the hallway until around 8:30 when the pool closed. Overall we were pretty happy with our room.

Day 3 –

Today we leave the Grand Canyon and head to Bryce Canyon. We got up a bit earlier to beat the crowd at breakfast (Ha!). Breakfast was crowded again. Soon we're off for our long drive north. We take the scenic route along the east side of the Grand Canyon and then back up around towards the North rim. Along the way we are treated to spectacular un-crowded views of the Grand Canyon. We even found a tower that we didn't know existed at the last pull out on the east side of the south rim. It's these unexpected discoveries that we enjoy a lot. So, we parked the car and climb the Grand Canyon Desert View Watch Tower. Inside the tower the walls are covered with prehistoric pictographs and petroglyphs and also murals that depict various aspects of Hopi mythology and religious ceremonies. After enjoying the views from the top floor of the tower, we were off on the road again.

We took highway 89 north then took alternate highway 89. Our next stop was at the Navajo Bridge where alternate highway 89 crosses the Colorado River. Here we had a great view of the Colorado. And we were treated to another California Condor sighting. There were about eight of them resting. Again there was a researcher with a radio receiver antenna. He told us that they just ate and were taking a siesta.

Back on the road, alternate highway 89 turns west towards the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. When we passed, highway 67, the road to the North Rim, we were greeted with a sign that read "Grand Canyon – closed for winter". And yes, there was some snow still left at this elevation (7,921 feet). The road turns north, our next stop Fredonia and lunch!

We found a neat looking BBQ restaurant. Mary order a half rack of ribs and Pete ordered the mushroom swiss burger. Service was excellent, and the food was quite good.

Refreshed, we get back on the road again. Soon we cross into Utah. We arrive at Bryce Canyon around 2:00 pm. After a quick check-in at Ruby's Inn (Best Western) were off to see Bryce Canyon with plenty of daylight left for exploring (or so we thought). We pull off at each scenic overlook... each one provides an ever increasing impressive view. The final overlook is Paria View. We decided we had enough daylight left to go back to Sunset Point and hike down the Navajo Loop trail. This trail winds its way down to the canyon floor. It's not far and the view is incredible. Now we wish we had another full day to explore the many canyon floor trails, they look fabulous. With the temperature dropping and the sun setting we climb back up the way we came because the loop trail has deteriorated in places and the park service has closed the compromised section of the trail. At the top we watch the changing colors as the sun begins to set. We return to Ruby's Inn to freshen up for dinner.

Obviously everyone is ready for dinner at the same time. The restaurant/buffet at the Inn is packed and only has a table for eight. We are fortunately at the front of the line. The hostess polled the line for big party and come up empty. Mary started counting off people in line and said we have eight right here. The hostess asked if we were willing to sit together and we all agreed. So, we were sat with a couple from Canada and a couple with two children from England. We had such a great time. It really made the evening. It amazed Mary that we ran into so many visitors from outside the U.S. at both the Grand Canyon and Bryce Canyon. It seemed like 75% of the visitors were not from the U.S. We overheard

many conversations in Japanese, German, French, and quite a few languages we couldn't positively identify. We all ate the buffet and were constantly flagging down the poor waitress for drink refills. They just didn't have enough staff for all of these diners. The food was pretty good. There was salmon, beef & chicken for hot dishes. The thing that lacked the most was fresh vegetable dishes. The salad bar was good though.

Our room at Ruby's Inn (Best Western) was on the second floor of the main lodge. Our door opened up to a balcony overlooking the pool & spa. We had two queen beds and a Jacuzzi bath tub. When the room fan/heater unit was on you couldn't hear any pool noise from within the bedroom area. We were quite happy with this hotel choice.

Day 4 –

This mini-vacation is almost over, Mary has to be on a plane from Las Vegas, Nevada back to Atlanta, Georgia this afternoon. Yes, we are still in Utah. So, we get up fairly early for the journey back. But you can't start the day without breakfast. So, we go enjoy the expensive, but very convenient, buffet at Ruby's Inn.

Then we're off, taking the scenic route through Zion National Park back towards Vegas. We basically did a drive through this park. It really warrants at least a full day or two to explore it's "Narrows" and other trails. We did stop long enough to take the shuttle to the first "warm-up" hiking trail at the Temple of the Prophets. It's an easy walk up a paved walkway. Since we had time before the next bus came, we walked down by the river. Mary spotted some animal scat. It had berries clearly visible in it. Mary thought that maybe it was evidence of recent bear activity. Then she spotted some claw marks in the sand.... Then we left the river area and waited for the bus at the bus stop. Back at the visitor center, Mary showed her pictures a park ranger. He thought the claw marks looked too small to be a bear. He said that there is no resident bear population, but one was spotted traveling through about a month ago. So, who knows?

It's now just about 11:00 am and we're off on the road again in search of lunch. We decide to stop in Hurricane for lunch and find a Wendy's.

After a quick lunch stop, it's back on the road again. We arrive at the Las Vegas airport with plenty of time for Mary to catch her 4:00 pm flight.