



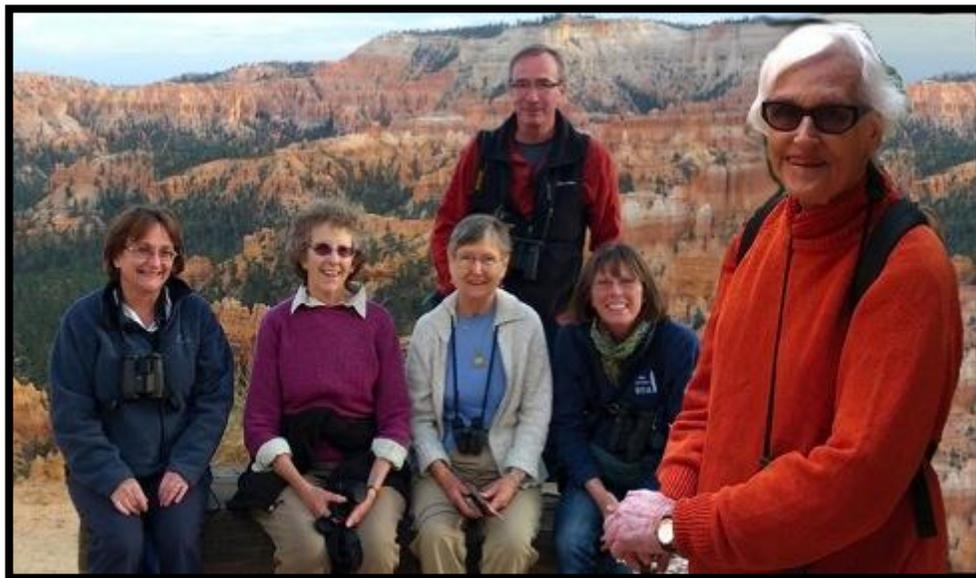
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Arizona & Utah Trip Report

01 - 09 October, 2012 – Daily Journal

09 – 14 October, 2012 – Navajo & Hopi Extension

Greg Smith, Guide, with 8 Participants: Steve, Anthy, Carlyn, John, Janet K., Janet M., Karen, and Susan



Mon., Oct. 1

Arrival in Phoenix/on to the Grand Canyon

After gathering everyone, we headed north to the Grand Canyon. The weather was warm and the skies had a few clouds as we peeked over the edge of this ten-mile wide wonder. We made our way to Yavapai Point and we each found our own rock and watched the colors dance over this amazing seam in the earth's surface.

Tues., Oct. 2

Grand Canyon National Park

After a hearty breakfast we drove to the new Visitor's Center and started our morning hike along the rim. For three miles we watched as the canyon shared view after view. Our hike dipped and rolled with the erratic rim as we watched the different layers change hues as the sun rose higher in the sky.



We had Juniper Titmouse and White-breasted Nuthatch coming right up to us along the rim, while in the background we could hear that nasal “yank” of the Red-breasted Nuthatch. We walked the Million Mile trail, checking out rocks found in the various layers of the exposed cliffs.

After lunch in the Arizona Room of Bright Angel Lodge, everyone took the shuttle up to Hermit’s Rest. One of the stops along the way found a California Condor

soaring overhead. Great looks, but even better looks when it decided to land on the canyon wall below. Pictures and the attending Common Raven made for a first look at North America’s largest vulture.

We finished the day with our welcome dinner at the El Tovar. Seems like duck was the top choice with desserts coming in a close second; nice meal...



Wed., Oct. 3

Zion National Park

After breakfast, we headed east to drive from the south side of the canyon to the north side. We stopped at the Desert View watchtower and wandered from level to level taking in the native design of this tower structure created by Mary Colter. We spent more time than planned, but the building and its interior had us intrigued.

At the Lee’s Ferry (Lee’s Ferry is actually six miles upstream) bridges in Marble Canyon we had quite the surprise. Perched on a rock ledge below were two California Condors, an adult and a recently released immature. And it seems that the new bird was discovering that there was a pecking order involved with the older bird. A number of times we saw either the younger or the older (primarily the older) physically attack the other bird. They would fly from ledge to ledge and repeat the attacks. By the time we left, it appeared that the older bird had the upper wing.

We made it to the entrance gate at Zion under clear skies that made for excellent viewing of the sculpted Navajo sandstone. But it wasn't the sandstone that caught our attention in the park.

Zion has a population of about 100 desert bighorn sheep. We pulled around a curve and were fortunate enough to see a group of lambs and ewes foraging right alongside the road. As we looked up the side of the slope here were a few ewes! What a treat to see such a rare mammal at such close range!

As we drove off we discussed just how rare it is to see this large desert-adapted mammal. Finally we drove through the big tunnel and headed to our lodging for the next two nights – the Desert Pearl Inn. Nice!!!

Thurs., Oct. 4

Zion National Park

We started the day with a shuttle ride up to the top of the canyon. It was a little breezy in the canyon, making birding opportunities a challenge. We did have some luck, however, as a family group of three American Dippers worked the stream down near the entrance to the Riverside Walk.

Making several stops along the way, we finally made it to the top as we hiked the paved walkway that paralleled the Virgin River, which flows through the canyon. The seeps had swamp monkeyflower and a blazing red lobelia in bloom, along with some looking like maidenhair ferns. October is still not too late to get a little bit of look at what the desert when you have a water.



After we all had headed out in the explore the lower Kolob, where we looks at the arrived Gambell's crowned Sparrow resident Spotted

The scenery was stunning in the afternoon light as the rocks and grass just seemed to glow. Perfect timing!

lobelia in with some looking October is to get a blooms in Southwest little bit of

lunch, we van to part of got great newly White- and Towhee.

Next up was Grafton, a ghost town on the banks of the Virgin River that had been abandoned because of repeated flooding. Lots of old orchards and fence line. Best birds were Ladder-backed and Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Now it was time to head over to the Bit N' Spur for a tasty meal...

Thurs., Oct. 5

Bryce Canyon National Park

We took a run up Kolob Terrace Road where we would intersect with Utah 14. It was wonderful scenery as we climbed higher toward Kolob Reservoir. Beyond the reservoir we started to see lots of maple and aspen in fall color. Most everything was in color at this elevation and they just lit up the hillsides.



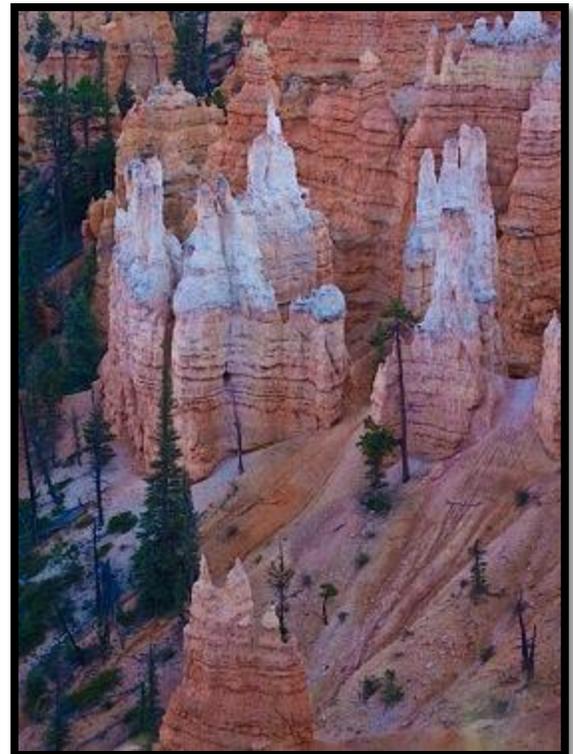
Just before we got to Kolob reservoir we ran into a loose flock of Lewis' Woodpeckers, five actually. We got to watch them fly catch for a while against a backdrop of glowing aspen. The iridescence off of their backs contrasting with that pomegranate pink on their breast was stunning in the morning light.

We headed higher onto the plateau where more aspen awaited us along with several

large flocks of Pine Siskin. A really stunning drive during the peak of fall color on the Kolob Plateau!

After having lunch in Cedar City, we drove up Utah 14 towards Cedar Breaks National Monument. Cedar Breaks is at an elevation of over 10,000 feet and the drive was coated with flaming aspens. The air was clean, but cool, and the scenery is just a taste of what lay ahead in Bryce! So we hopped back in the van and birded our way to our next national park.

We did stop in Red Rock Canyon, which was being highlighted by the late afternoon sun. Exquisite corals and reds were glowing. The Sevier River was flowing freely as flocks of Black-billed Magpie made sure we kept on our way. The pronghorn close to our night's lodging was a fitting finish to a longer than expected day.



Fri., Oct. 6

Bryce Canyon National Park

The morning was bright and clear as we headed in to an early breakfast. We were going to split the group in two, those who would go hike the Queen/Navajo loop and those of us who would go birding.

The birders found lots of Red Crossbills, Cassin's Finch and a few other species. Those who hiked were treated to



some of the outrageous landscapes found in the canyon below.

Then we hopped in the van for a drive up to the bristlecone pine forest. But first we took a quick peek at the local town, the local Utah prairie dog town.

This endangered species' distribution is limited to the Southwestern corner of Utah. From a population of 90,000, trapping and poisoning has dwindled their population to less than 3300. The park is now a safe haven for this once common

indicator species of the west.

We took our lunch up to Rainbow Point and settled into the 9000-foot elevation prior to our afternoon hike. We were off to see a small bristlecone pine forest. They were pretty cool with their age-old survival, but it was their dead brothers and sisters that stole the show. Their skeletons were positioned against the blue sky and the afternoon clouds

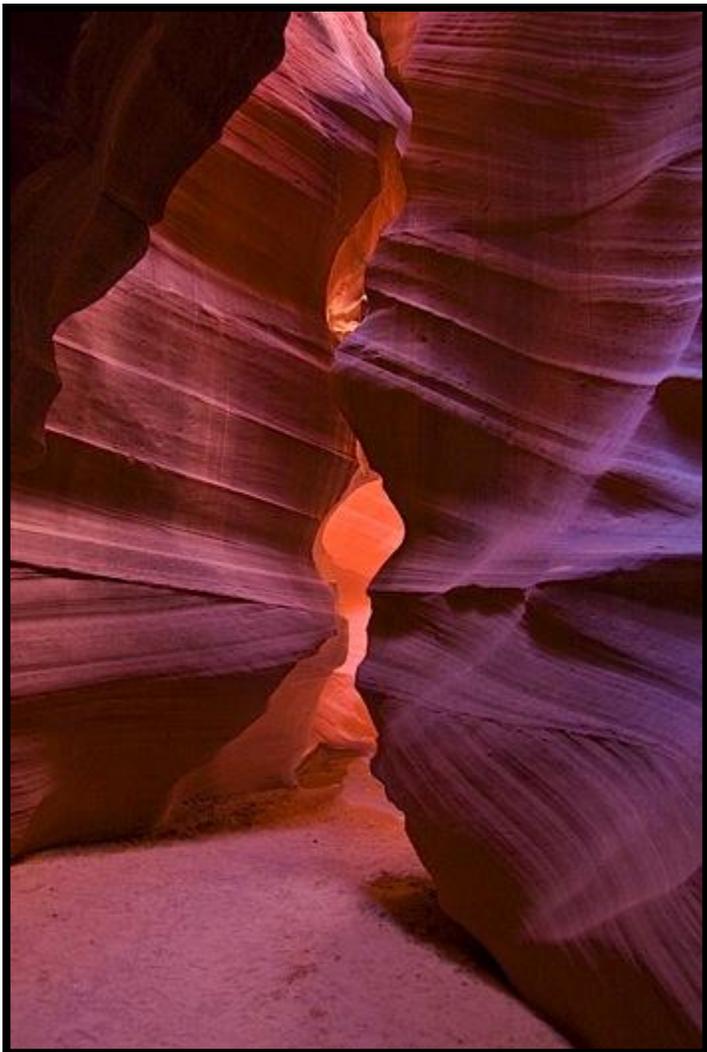
We finished the day with a delicious dinner at the Bryce Canyon Lodge and then watched the sun take another colorful swipe at the amphitheater.

**Sat., Oct. 7
and Lake Powell**

Antelope Canyon

We left Bryce Canyon early today so we could be in Page, Arizona before our 11:30 tour of Antelope Canyon. We climbed onto the padded seats of the over-sized 4x4 pickup truck and headed out to the south (upper) end of Antelope Canyon in the Navajo Nation reservation with our guide JR.

This section of the canyon has a big sandstone



ridge that created a barrier for the passage of water down canyon. But water always finds a way, and here it worked its way through the sandstone and created a slot canyon. A narrow slot that is no more than six feet wide and 50 – 60 feet in deep is the only escape route for the water charging downstream.

The inside of the canyon is smoothed, layered sandstone created by high velocity water being forced through the narrow channel. Iron-stained rock gives a layered effect as we followed the tortuous route deeper and deeper into the slot. Here and there a shaft of sunlight tried to hit the floor, a sharp contrast with the walls. We made it to the end of the canyon before turning back to the entrance of the canyon.

Now it was time to head to our rooms at the Lake Powell Resort and get ready for tomorrow's trip to Rainbow Bridge.

Sun., Oct. 8 Rainbow Bridge

After an early breakfast we boarded our boat for the fifty-mile ride over Lake Powell to Rainbow Bridge. It took us a little over two hours as the morning light lit up the buttes and mesas that poked up from the lake's surface. Rocks took the shape of different wildlife and more. We eventually turned to starboard and entered a narrow canyon with ramparts towering over 400' in height. We motored further back into the arroyo until the floating dock we tied up to prevented us from going any further.

The hike back to Rainbow Bridge is only half a mile, but each curve of the trail exposed more of the bridge. This is the largest natural bridge in North America and spans a canyon over 200 feet in width. The softer Navajo sandstone has eroded away leaving the harder arch rock which forms the bridge standing.



Arches on solid walls are a common sight in this Navajo sandstone country. Slabs of rock peel off the vertical walls in rounded pockets as opposed to large, rectangular slabs. You won't see angled breaks in sandstone, as there isn't any structural support in this weak rock to support that kind of fracture (small grains of sand and silt get washed out between the lenses of sandstone). So arches with their inherent structural strength are all that we see.

But a bridge is all about erosion. The incessant pounding of water on a relatively weak material is how most sandstones arches are created!

It took us a little longer to return to the marina but it was a gorgeous day, so we didn't mind. We did get back in plenty of time to get ready for our farewell dinner that we celebrated that evening at the resort!

Mon., Oct. 9

Departures for some/On to Navajo National Monument



Three of our group were heading home, while the rest of us would continue on the extension to Four Corners. After getting everyone to the shuttle for the ride home, the rest of us headed to Navajo National Monument.

The monument is about twelve miles off the route to Kayenta. The road winds through juniper and pinyon pine habitat and ends at a vista overlooking one of the myriad arms of the spider web-like canyons. Here we did a

short hike to Tsegi Canyon (this name is redundant as the Dine' definition for tsegi is canyon) to view the Betatakin/Talastima cliff dwellings from the Anasazi era.

Then we did a late afternoon drive to our lodging in Monument Valley, where John Ford directed many of the iconic westerns of the late '30's and 40's.

Tues., Oct. 10

Monument Valley

The wind from yesterday was completely gone as the front it was ahead of came into the valley. Definitely on the cool side but it did warm up enough to make for an easy day. We hopped in the truck and off we went to explore the valley.

The sandstone outcroppings and walls were surrounded by the red sand of this arid desert. The fall lighting accentuated the buttes as we visited our first Anasazi ruin – Square House. Pottery shards littered the ground with examples that must have spanned a thousand years with earliest being

corrugated ware. Remnants of their cliff dwelling, protected under the cliff's overhang, were still in good shape, even after hundreds of years.

We drove further back into the valley and saw more ruins and wonderful examples of petroglyphs of wildlife and symbols. We saw fine examples of miniature sandstone bridges, ceiling holes in caves that let the abundant sun shine through and gnarled junipers that were hundreds of years old. This stunning landscape was our view as we ate our barbecued lunch and took it all in.



After lunch we explored Monument Valley, with all those buttes made so famous by the great director John Ford. The mittens, totem pole and the sitting hen were all made familiar by his films that John Wayne and others starred in. We drove on roads the public could not, getting photographs of views that were almost story book in their composition. Over eight hours later we made it back to the lodge and took a break before we headed into dinner.

After yesterday's wind storm, it was almost too good to believe the views, clean air and blue sky.

Wed., Oct. 11 **Mexican Hat / Goosenecks / Moki Dugway**

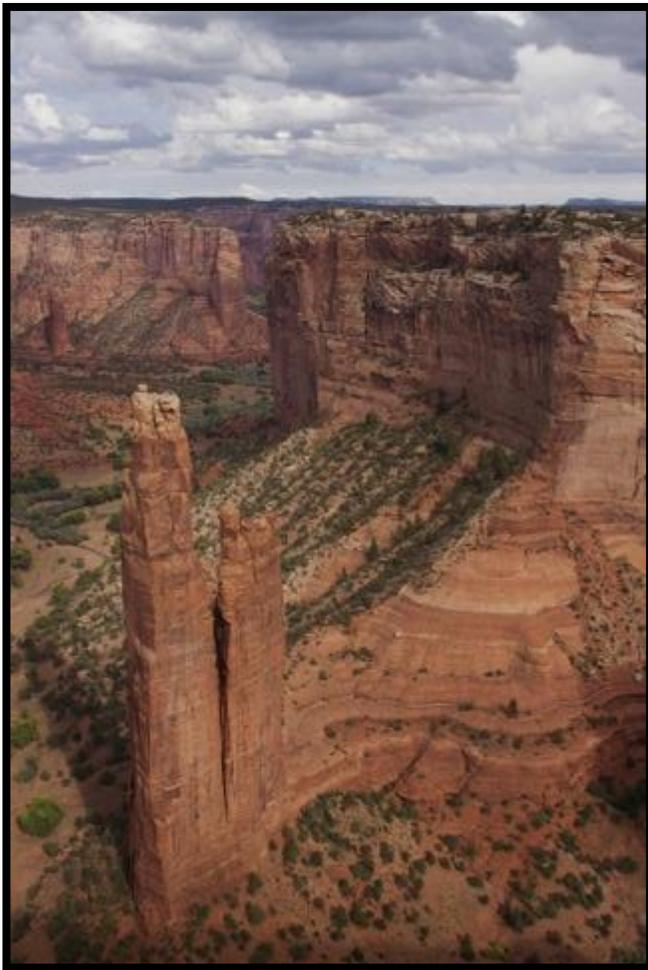
We left Monument Valley with clear, blue skies and headed north to explore some of the San Juan River watershed. Our first stop was just north of Mexican Hat to photograph the "hat" and the San Juan River. Rabbitbush was in full bloom on the desert floor as the silt-laden river milked its way through the canyon. With the "Mexican Hat" rock as the backdrop, photos of the landscape and wildflowers dominated our time.

Our next stop was Goosenecks State Park, where the San Juan had incised through millions of years of layered rock to form four very tight goosenecks. It was a stunning view, and one that left us wondering how the river could create those goosenecks without forcing itself through the remaining narrowed canyon walls.





Moki Dugway is a narrow, gravel road that climbs 1100' to Cedar Mesa in just three miles using numerous switchbacks. It is a 10% grade and is not suitable for any vehicle over 28 feet. We got to the top and drove over to Muley Point. From here the edge dropped off to the valley below. The views in front of us were everything we had seen the previous two days: Goosenecks, Monument Valley, Valley of the Gods and the San Juan River.



After driving the 1100' feet to the base, we made a quick left and drove through the Valley of the Gods on our way to Bluff and the Twin Rocks Café for lunch. The road became sinuous as it maneuvered through the monuments. We were driving at the base of the monuments, which was a completely different perspective from our Monument Valley experience.

We spent the afternoon driving to Canyon de Chelly, where we settled into our rooms at the Thunderbird Lodge and got ready for our morning tour.

Thurs., Oct. 12

Canyon de Chelly

We had a tour set up for nine in the morning, so after breakfast we got together with our Navajo guide DJ. We loaded up into the open air truck and made our way into the canyon. Steep-sided and red in color, the sandstone walls were tarnished with desert varnish and other stains. Lush cottonwood forests fading from green to yellow provided views into fall camps for local families.

Numerous Anasazi ruins dotted canyon caves, ranging in size from single family to multi-family dwellings. Petroglyphs of figures and symbols were

found alongside stunning pictographs of pronghorn antelope. The canyon walls were lined with signs of human habitation spanning back 1300 years. Narrow, switchback trails dating back over a thousand years were still being used by Navajo families today to access the canyon from above. The sense of time and human use in this canyon made city streets seem so inconsequential.

After lunch we drove to various overlooks on the south side of the canyon to get a different perspective. The farmed fields, the cottonwood gallery forest, Spider Rock and sheer height of the encompassing walls left a more mentally manageable memory than that of the immensity of the Grand Canyon!

Fri., Oct. 13 Hubbell Trading Post National Monument / Hopi Nation

This morning we were heading back into Arizona's non-daylight savings time zone, which gave us an extra hour. We took that hour, plus a couple of more and spent some time at the Hubbell Trading Post.

The post was the first of many trading posts set up in the Utah, New Mexico and Arizona area to provide goods for Native Americans and others during the late 1800's. The artifact collection and the main house had an amazing collection of Indian artifacts and paintings collected over the last 140 years. It put into perspective some of the challenges associated with living in this area decades ago as well as what it meant to be Native American in a time that didn't favorably view Indians as part of the landscape.

After lunch we headed to the Hopi Nation, where we drove up onto the First Mesa, the oldest community of the Nation. Narrow streets provided a little room for vehicles as we passed small homes lining the edge of the mesa. This strategic construction was a fortified way of repelling attacks by the Spanish. It was successful then, so apparently didn't need to be changed.



A drive up to the Second Mesa put us in the middle of a little traffic jam as a Basket Ceremony was going to take place there. We eased out towards the Hopi Cultural Center where we parked and found the First Annual Hopi Arts Expo taking place. This was an unexpected treat; there was drumming and singing of ages old chants and some wonderful artists. A number of us bought carvings (carved out of cottonwood root) and jewelry, but it seems that food was the main order for everyone. Piki bread, semi-popped blue corn and fry bread seemed to find its way to everyone's mouth...

We did a quick stop on Third Mesa before heading to Flagstaff for our final night and out farewell dinner (excellent East Indian food!).

Sat., Oct. 14

Return to Phoenix / Departures

After an early breakfast, we took our last drive from Flagstaff to Phoenix. It was time to head home.

