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CALIFORNIA – EASTERN SIERRA September 28 - October 5, 2013

Guides: Greg Smith and Kelly Vandenheuvel - Participants: Pat, Glenn, Ilayna, Jim, Margie, Fred, Linda, Penny, Richard, Gloria, Rosemary, Margaret & Joan



Saturday, September 28 - **Reno**

We picked up our excited travelers at the Reno airport and nearby hotels and once we had everyone situated comfortably in the two vans, we drove to Starbucks for beverages and introductions. From Reno we drove to Tahoe City to check in to our hotel across the street from Lake Tahoe. We had a couple of hours to get situated and settled in prior to our welcome dinner at Christy Hill Restaurant in Tahoe City. We sampled some great meals and had some great conversations before settling in for the night.

Sunday, September 29 **Tahoe City to Mammoth Lakes**

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Kelly took half of the group on a morning hike at Spooner Lake on east side of Lake Tahoe. It was a beautiful day for a nice hike, which put a smile on everyone's face. The hike was approximately five miles round trip, and was at the perfect temperature. Then Greg took the other half of the group and birded the summit on the north side of the lake and had great looks a some of the resident mountain species including: N. Goshawk, Cassin's Finch and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

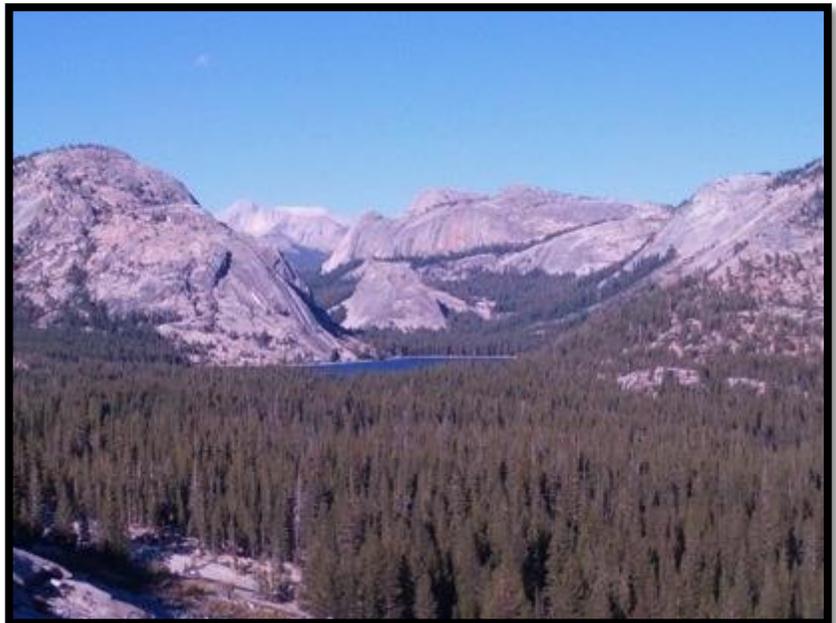


Both groups met up at the Spooner's Lake parking lot to discuss our lunch plans, and then drove to Carson City. After lunch we headed south along Highway 395 in the direction of Mammoth Lakes. We drove through the beautiful Walker River Valley, past Lee Vining and stopped at Mono Lake to get our first view of the tufa mounds and to do a little birding. After a nice walk, some great birds and good photos we drove to Mammoth Lakes to check in to our hotel. After everyone had a chance to clean up, we all walked to dinner at an Italian restaurant up the street from our hotel.

Monday, September 30 Mammoth Lakes/Tuolumne Meadows/Yosemite Valley

Today was the day we had to try and mitigate the Congressional folly of tomorrow's shutting down the government, including Yosemite National Park. Instead of spending the day on the east side of the Sierras, we made the decision to spend the day in the park, as we didn't know if it would reopen during our stay.

After a quick stop to get sandwiches for lunch, we headed in the direction of Tuolumne Meadows. We climbed to 11,000 feet elevation as we went up and over the Tioga Pass. We drove on to Olmsted Point to check out the incredible views of Clouds Rest, Half Dome and Tenaya Lake. From here



we split in to two groups - those who wanted to have a whirlwind tour of Yosemite Valley and those who wanted to hike and bird. Kelly took the hikers and birders and started out with a short trek to the top of

Olmsted Dome where the view was even more breathtaking. After soaking in the beauty and taking many photographs we hiked back down to the bottom of the dome, and piled in to the van. Kelly took her group and headed back to Tuolumne Meadows for a hike to Pothole Dome. It was a great hike around the base of the dome, and along the Tuolumne River. We stopped for lunch near the river's



edge, and then continued around and then to the top of Pothole Dome.

Greg took the other half of the group and drove beyond Yosemite Valley to Glacier Point where we ate lunch with a killer view. Clouds patterned the soft blue sky as we stared at this mosaic of shadows. It really is a mesmerizing view, which made it difficult to pull ourselves away, but we had the whole valley to experience in five hours, and that included our drive back to the east side of the Sierra.

Both groups made the drive back over the Tioga Pass separately on our way back to Mammoth Lakes. Both took the June Lake Loop to see the fall colors, and there was plenty to see.. It was a gorgeous drive around the lake, and the fall colors were blazing. Some stopped for ice cream at a little deli on Highway 395, and then made our way back to our hotel at Mammoth Lakes.

Tuesday, October 1

Mammoth Lakes/Bodie/Lundy Lake Canyon/South Tufas - Mono Lake

After a nice breakfast at the hotel, we loaded up both vans, and headed to Bodie State Historic Park, an authentic California gold-mining ghost town located near Bridgeport. We walked down the deserted streets of a town that once had a population of 10,000 people. Much of the town is left in a state of "arrested decay" - interiors remaining as they were left prior to 1943. We saw numerous Red-tailed Hawks , Turkey Vultures and a few of those Azure-breasted Prairie Hoverers (Mountain Bluebirds) along the long dirt road that took us east from Highway 395.





We headed to the famous Whoa Nellie Deli for lunch, where some had seared ahi, and others had lobster taquitos. Just enough so that when we drove to Lundy Canyon to see some more of the beautiful fall colors, we weren't too full to take a walk along the stream. We even made an attempt to noodle some trout....

From Lundy Canyon we drove to the southern side of Mono Lake to South Tufa where we spent some time birding and walking along the shore of the lake. We eventually worked our way back to our

hotel in Mammoth Lakes, and all went to dinner at Slocum's Bar and Grill.

Wednesday, October 2 **Mammoth Lakes to Bishop**

We split up in two groups this morning, with Kelly taking one group and doing a short two-mile hike to Emerald Lake. Highlight on the trek was an American Dipper leading the group back down the trail along the creek. Greg took the rest of the group off birding in the sagebrush flats where we got good looks at Brewer's Sparrow, Sage Thrasher and Western Tanager. Both groups met for lunch at Schat's Bakery

and Cafe in Mammoth before heading towards our new accommodations in Bishop.



Along the way we stopped and birded Crowley Lake where we looked down at American White Pelican and up at Yellow-rumped Warblers feeding along side Western Bluebirds. We got to the Creekside Inn just early enough for a few folks to head across the street to do a little more birding before calling it a day.

Thursday, October 3 **Bishop/Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest**

We ordered sandwiches to go from Schat's Bakery, and set out on our journey to the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest east of Bishop. This was not part of the itinerary, but given that the government closed Yosemite National Park, we came up with the idea of sharing some of the oldest living things on earth.

Our first stop at 11,000-feet was the Schulman Grove where we



hiked a loop trail up and around the Bristlecone Pines that overlooked the White Mountains. The oxygen was almost as scarce as the birds, but it really is a great way to put your self into perspective relative to these trees.

We drove beyond the Schulman Grove for twelve miles on a dirt road that took us to tree line and the Patriarch Grove. This grove is the home of the world's largest bristlecone pine, the Patriarch. We enjoyed lunch up in the Patriarch Grove before descending from the 12,000-foot elevation back down into Bishop. The weather had changed from our departure in the morning and had become very windy in Bishop. We made a stop the Mountain Light Gallery, which

features photographic images of the Eastern and High Sierra landscapes, as well as images from around the world by the late Galen and Barbara Rowell. After a short rest back at the hotel we all went out for an authentic Mexican dinner.

Friday, October 4

Bishop/Tuolumne/Yosemite/Oakhurst/Fresno

We started out early today as we had many miles to cover - our destination being Fresno. We drove up over Tioga Pass, through Tuolumne Meadows, down through Crane Flats, and by the outskirts of Yosemite Valley. Of course, due to the government shut down, we were unable to stop anywhere along this scenic route. The drive took a while, yet everyone seemed to enjoy the beautiful sights along the way. We eventually ended up in Oakhurst for a short break at Starbucks, and then completed our journey down the hill to Fresno. We checked into our hotel, and cleaned up before dinner. We had a delicious farewell dinner at Max's Bistro where we shared stories of our educational and fun-filled journey together.



Saturday, October 5

Departures Home or Onto the Coast

Some of our guests were continuing on for the California Coast journey, while the others had flights to catch. Everyone said their good byes over coffee and breakfast and off we went...

