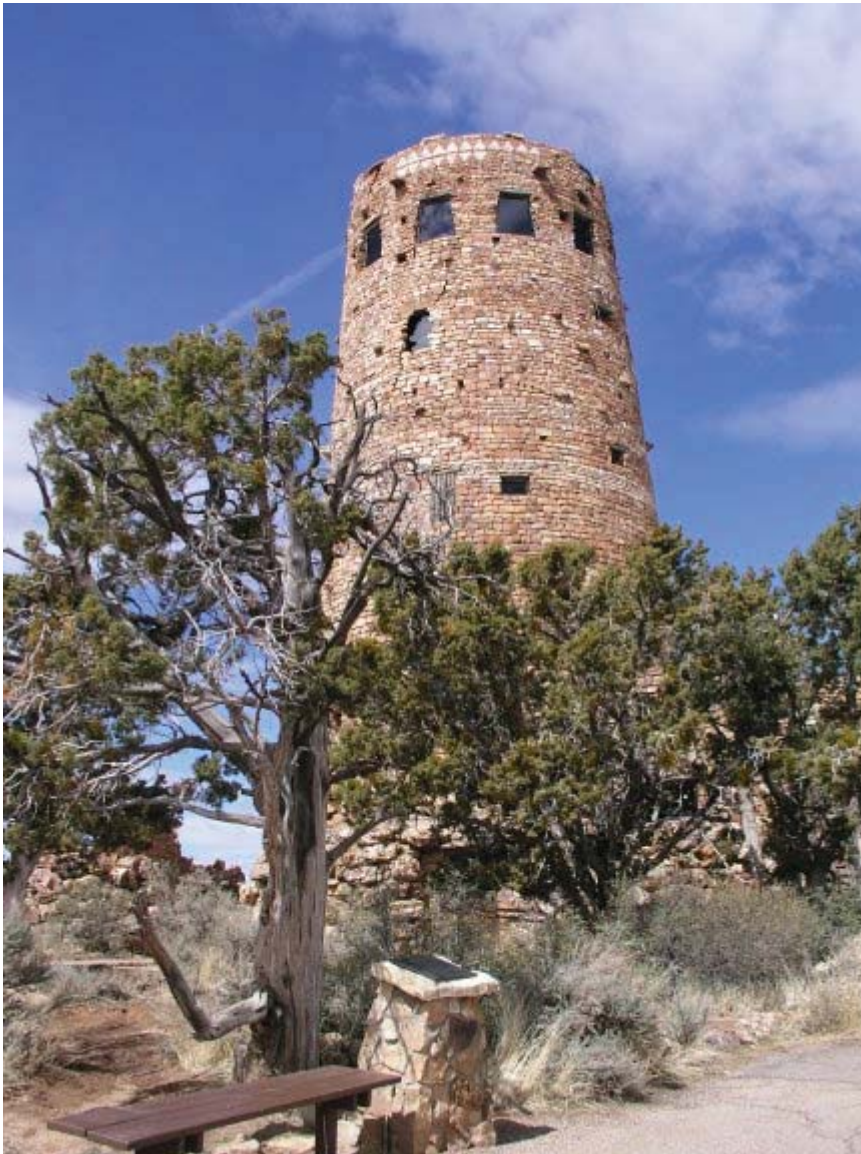


On Monday morning, April 3, our friends, Al and Bonnie, picked us up at our Camp Verde RV Resort and the four of us were off to the Grand Canyon. Yay, let the excitement begin. Most people start in Phoenix, take Highway 17 to Flagstaff and then take 180 north to 64 or they go west out of Flagstaff to Williams and then take 64 north. This puts them at the main gate of the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. There's nothing wrong with this approach, but it does miss a lot of very interesting territory.

We elected a more scenic route. We left Camp Verde heading north on I-17 to Flagstaff and then picked up scenic route 89 and then on to scenic route 64 which took us to the east gate at Desert View. From Desert View, you can travel west along the rim of the canyon all the way to the village near the main gate. This is a great way to see the Grand Canyon. Much less traffic, far more scenic and you see more of the Canyon.



**Watchtower overlooking the Grand Canyon at the East Gate**

Build a structure that provides the widest possible view of Grand Canyon yet harmonizes with its setting: this was architect Mary Colter's goal when the Fred Harvey Company hired her in 1930 to design a gift shop and rest area at Desert View. Colter's answer was the Watchtower. From a distance the building's silhouette looks like the Anasazi watchtower it was meant to mimic.



**Grand Canyon at the East Gate.**

As you drive from the East Gate to the Main Gate, there are many opportunities to pull over and see additional sections of the canyon. In the early days, there was some mining going on part way down the canyon walls. At these stops, there are historic markers that tell the story. Good grief! Can you imagine hacking a trail part way down, driving a mine shaft into the wall and hauling the ore back up again on mules?





**Just one of the many canyon views as you travel along the rim on Hwy 64.**



**View of the Colorado River cutting through the Canyon floor not far from the Bright Angel Trail.**

Once you get to the Canyon and start taking pictures, it's almost impossible to stop. Click, click, click. But it is almost futile. The reality of the Canyon is so grand that it takes your breath away and no matter how many pictures you take, you can't capture the emotional impact or the visual magnitude. We should have had a tripod and spliced many pictures together to get a panoramic view. That would have helped a little, but not enough. The Grand Canyon is an experience, not merely a destination.





**Baby mountain sheep.**

Right near the village were two mountain sheep, a mother and baby. The mom started down into the canyon on a very narrow little trail on the side of a cliff. The baby took one look and didn't like it one bit. Baby wasn't going any further and was calling for its mom to come back up. Chuck's sympathy was with the baby. He had enough looking over cliffs and was ready to have lunch at the wonderful and historic El Tovar Hotel. The El Tovar, built in 1905, is located right on the rim in the historic section of Grand Canyon Village. It is very nicely decorated and furnished. Some rooms and the bar have views of the Canyon. This hotel is a bit pricey. If you're on a budget, the Bright Angel Lodge is less costly, but it's worth it to see this wonderful old hotel even if you just go in for drinks.



**El Tovar Hotel.**

We had a couple of beers and a nice lunch and headed for the main gate. We left the main gate going south on 64 and in just a few miles came to the little town of Tusayan where there is an IMAX theater. We were just in time to view the IMAX version of the Grand Canyon. Bonnie elected not to go in as the vivid IMAX makes her a little queasy. Holy moly, if you're afraid of heights, you don't want to watch this movie. It's shot from a helicopter, flown by a suicidal pilot. Chuck's afraid of heights and the movie was worse for him than the Grand Canyon itself.

After the movie, we continued south on 64 and picked up scenic 180 back into Flagstaff. From Flagstaff, we took a detour south through Oak Creek Canyon back into Sedona and then south on 179 to I-17 and back to Camp Verde. This was one heck of a long day and one heck of a long drive, but worth every mile. The next morning, Al and Bonnie headed for Phoenix and we packed up and headed for Pahrump, Nevada. But that's another story.

In the meantime, home is where you park it.

Chuck and Donna