

On Tuesday, April 4, we left Camp Verde and headed to **Williams**, Arizona. Williams is one of the gateways to the Grand Canyon and a very quaint little town full of interesting bars and steakhouses. There is also an historic railroad, complete with a train robbery, that goes from Williams to the Grand Canyon. We were really looking forward to spending the night in Williams, but there was a problem. Williams is about 7,000 feet in elevation and a storm was coming. A storm in Williams means snow. We sure didn't want to get stuck there in a snowstorm so we headed downhill on Interstate 40 toward **Kingman**, Arizona. We stopped in **Seligman** for coffee and pie. This is kind of an interesting town as it is part of the original Route 66 and the town is milking that history for all it is worth. It would be fun to come back and see more of Route 66. We would have spent the night, but the best place to park (for free) was 10 feet from the railroad tracks. Passing trains would rock our world.



Some of the craziness in Seligman.

So out of Seligman and back on the road toward Kingman. We made it to the Petro Truck Stop just before Kingman and went in for a rib dinner. \$10 each and we had enough ribs for four meals. We went to bed tired and full and woke up to the rain storm that had been chasing us all the way from Williams.

We rolled on to **Laughlin**, Nevada, but Laughlin was such a short drive that we pressed on to **Las Vegas**. Because of our careful planning, we managed to roll into downtown Las Vegas during rush hour traffic. Oh goodness, was that a mistake. Traffic in Vegas

is terrible and the drivers are super aggressive. After three near misses, we said to heck with this, and wanted to get out of town as fast as possible. So we headed up Highway 160 and went over the hump to **Pahrump**. We pulled into Terrible's Town Casino, set up a dry camp in the parking lot, and went inside for beer and a cheap buffet. After dinner, we headed back to the motorhome and the darn rainstorm caught up with us again. We got drenched walking half a block. Oh well, went to bed full and tired. Yes, we know you've heard that before.

The next morning it was a short drive to our Western Horizons RV park in Pahrump. This is really an upscale park with all the usual amenities plus a winery and a 5 star restaurant. The restaurant and winery actually has a helipad, and by golly, the rich folk fly in from Las Vegas for dinner.



**Charleston Peak RV Resort & Winery
Pahrump, NV**



Looking out the coach front window across the desert with Charleston Peak in the background.

Pahrump is a fun and interesting little town. Vegas calls itself "Sin City." Wrong! The real upscale sin is in Pahrump. Every Monday morning the Western Horizons Resorts all put out an activities sheet for the week. You know, the usual stuff, such as coffee and donuts on Tuesday morning, water aerobics with Betty Lou, ice cream social at 1:00 p.m., etc. Our resort had all of that plus an activity that caught our eye, "**Lunch and Tour of Sheri's - \$10.**" So what the heck is Sheri's, we ask. The old ladies at the desk said, "It's a very nice brothel." By golly, they weren't kidding. We signed up immediately since we had been assured that the food was quite good. And so, on the appointed day, many carloads of geriatric RVers were escorted to a buffet lunch in the bar of Sheri's brothel. Hey, the food was good and so was the scenery. While we were eating, scantily clad young beauties in very high heels were scurrying back and forth between the rooms and the bar. Not only is prostitution legal in Pahrump, but the town seems quite proud of the quality of their bordellos and ladies. Sure enough, after lunch the Madam gave us a complete tour of the whole facility, quoted prices, and answered all questions. Chuck asked if they had senior discounts. Everyone seemed to think that was funny except the Madam, who said, "No," and reiterated that the ladies are all independent contractors who set their own prices.



Sheri's Ranch brothel in Pahrump, Nevada.

If you're thinking about a little romp at Sheri's, you'd better have a high limit credit card. The house sets a minimum that the ladies can charge in each and every room. For example, 30 minutes in a hot tub room and then off to the girl's room is \$500. That's the minimum and these hotties charge a lot more. \$1,000 to \$1,500 would be closer to reality. Maybe you'd like to have a truly beautiful, 900 square foot, themed bungalow out by the pool for 4 hours and unlimited sexual activity. The minimum is \$3,000, but most of the girls get \$4,000 or more. A top girl working two weeks out of every month can easily make \$500,000 a year.

Right next door is the **Chicken Ranch** brothel. Upscale, but not as pricey as Sheri's. Okay, try this next mind blowing piece of news. Once a year the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce throws their annual BBQ. Where do they hold it? By the pool at the Chicken Ranch. Does that warp your sense of values? It rattled our cage. We have friends in Las Vegas, **Paul and Melanie**, who drove up to Pahrump to have dinner with us. Where did we take them? Yep, Sheri's. It was a darn good dinner at a very reasonable price. We bet that Paul and Melanie are still talking about it.

Man, oh man, this traveling around the country is a broadening and educational experience.

Well, we didn't go to Pahrump for the gambling, the strip clubs, or the brothels. We went to Pahrump as a very convenient jumping off spot to visit **Death Valley**, California.

From Pahrump to Death Valley is a fun and scenic drive and only takes about an hour and a half. Friends, if you have not toured Death Valley, make plans to do it. It's an extremely beautiful place and the history is absolutely spellbinding. Oh, and if you're smart, February would be good month to visit. We were there April 19, 20, and 21. Frankly, we were lucky as it was unusually cool. While we were there, the daytime temperatures were going up about 2 degrees per day. Our last day was 97 degrees. By 2 or 3 in the morning, the temperature was down to around 84. Until you've ridden a motorcycle a couple hundred miles at 97 degrees, you don't know what "cooked and dehydrated" really is.



Chuck heading into Artist's Drive, Death Valley.

But let's back up a little. While we were in Pahrump, we met **Nullet and Sandi**, who are full time RVers and motorcycle enthusiasts. They had already been in Pahrump for a month and Nullet was out riding just about every day. Perfect. Nullet was Chuck's personal guide while Donna stayed in the motorhome cranking out taxes. Nullet loves to ride and was very gracious in showing Chuck around, including Death Valley. Chuck was so excited about his motorcycle trip to Death Valley that we changed our plans for a two day Death Valley trip to three days. Was that enough? Not nearly enough. If you're going to Death Valley, we suggest you take a 4-wheel drive vehicle and plan on spending at least a week. While there are good paved roads to all the major tourist attractions, there are many more historic sites that can be reached only via gravel roads. The history and hardship of the area is not on the pavement, hence the advantages of 4-wheel drive.

Death Valley is a land of extremes. It is one of the hottest places on the surface of the Earth. In the summer, the air temperatures can hit 130 degrees and the ground temperatures can get as high as 200 degrees. These temperatures can and have killed many people. It is also normally very dry--the driest place in North America! The average rainfall is less than 2 inches per year and yet in August of 2004, the Valley had a serious flood that did substantial damage and washed out many roads. Actually, this part of California is an area of extremes. In only 100 miles you have **Badwater** at -282 feet, the lowest point in North America, and **Mount Whitney** at 14,491 feet, the highest point in the lower 48 states. Talk about contrast!

The heat and the dryness quickly dehydrate a person. It is recommended that every person consume a minimum of one gallon of water per day. Our limited experience suggests that these numbers are right on the money. We went into Death Valley with 8 gallons of purified drinking water and in three days we consumed most of it.

We went from the Grand Canyon where we could stand on the edge at about 6,000 feet above sea level and look down into the vastness of the Canyon to the Badwater section of Death Valley where you have to look **up** 282 feet to see a sign that marks sea level. Most of Badwater Basin has no water, it's just a vast expanse of dry, crusty salt that looks like water from a distance. The survival stories of early travelers trying to cross this valley with oxen are epics of courage and hardship. Keep in mind that just the main tourist part of Death Valley is over 100 miles long. Death Valley is extremely large at 3.4 million acres. Only Alaska has a larger National Park.



Badwater Basin with the Panamint Range in the background.

Badwater is at the southern end of Death Valley. Also at the southern end is **Artist's Drive** and **Artist's Palette**. Depending on the time of day and the available light, these attractions are a must see. They are extraordinarily beautiful.



Donna at Artist's Palette.

In the center section of Death Valley is **Furnace Creek**, which is quite civilized. At **Furnace Creek Ranch**, there is an RV park, a nice steakhouse, a cafeteria, a nice bar, and a motel with a lovely swimming pool. Furnace Creek makes an ideal home base from which to begin day trips. We parked our RV at Furnace Creek Ranch which has full hookups for \$28 a day. Earlier in the season with the lower temperatures, we could have parked directly across the street in a Park Service campground without hookups for only \$6 a night with a Golden Age Passport or for \$12 without. The Golden Age Passport also gets you and everyone in your vehicle into the park for free. In late April you absolutely need the electrical hookup because you're going to run your air conditioners all day long. We have an 8,000 watt quiet diesel generator on board, but we didn't want to leave it running all day with our dog in the coach. In reality it probably is more reliable than the electrical power in the park.

www.furnacecreekresort.com



Entrance to Furnace Creek Ranch Resort.

Furnace Creek also has a marvelous ranger station and museum. If you want an upscale experience, you want to stay at the **Furnace Creek Inn**. www.furnacecreekresort.com



Furnace Creek Inn, Death Valley.

At the north end of Death Valley there are also many interesting attractions. There are sand dunes on the way to **Stovepipe Wells**. There is **Ubehebe Crater** and the famous **Scotty's Castle**. Scotty's Castle and its history are incredibly interesting. There are two tours of the castle and we recommend both. There is an underground tour which takes you through miles of concrete tunnels that contain all of the castle's utilities including power, water, and air conditioning--truly amazing engineering. Then there is the tour of the castle itself that shows you the unbelievable luxury of this palace of a summer home in the middle of nowhere.



Scotty's Castle.

We don't have the time or space to begin to tell you the story of Scotty's Castle, but maybe we can give you a brief overview. First of all, it is a water powered oasis in **Grapevine Canyon**. About a mile up the canyon from the house is a spring that feeds the canyon. When the castle was built, the spring provided 200 gallons a minute with enough fall to power many Pelton water wheels. The Pelton wheels provided mechanical energy to drive devices like washing machines as well as providing about 7500 watts of electrical power. Most of the electrical needs of the house are supplied by an 18 inch Pelton water wheel driving a DC generator. The power is stored in a bank of over 100 very large storage batteries. Construction of the castle started in 1922.

The human drama of the castle is absolutely fascinating. It is a story of two radically different men who for some strange reason became friends. **Scotty (Walter Scott)** was a rogue and a con man. **Albert Johnson** was a shy, quiet engineer, and very religious man, who became rich in Chicago in

the insurance business.

Born in 1872, Scotty came to the desert by himself at the age of 11 and became very self sufficient. He carried water to the borax miners and their livestock for several years and also became a very skilled horseman. At age 16, he was spotted by **William Cody (Buffalo Bill)** who brought him into his traveling Wild West show as a trick rider. Scotty traveled all over the United States and Europe for a dozen years. But in the summers, he went to Death Valley hoping to discover gold. Every year the Wild West show season started with a parade in New York City. Scotty got back from the desert late one year and Bill Cody tried to fine him two weeks pay. Scotty quit and then started searching for rich backers to help him start up his secret Death Valley gold mine. He was a very persuasive fellow and enticed a great deal of money from the rich and successful. Yep, one of his marks was Albert Johnson. Over the years Albert gave Scotty over \$22,000, but never saw any gold. Scotty had been taking money from many rich people and spending it in very flamboyant ways, always claiming it was from his secret gold mine. Scotty literally became famous as Death Valley Scotty, the miner who had struck it rich. Scotty was a big time promoter and storyteller. For example, he hired a locomotive and three luxury cars to take him from Los Angeles to Chicago and set a new speed record of around 44 hours. This, of course, got him all sorts of publicity and elevated his status as a very rich miner even further.

Well, finally Albert became suspicious and wanted to come to Death Valley and see the mine. Scotty agreed and told Albert that the best time to come was July. Albert was not a well man and Scotty expected that a few days on horseback in Death Valley in July would exhaust Albert and he would go home and never come back. Well just the opposite happened. Albert's health improved in the desert and he loved playing cowboy with Scotty. By this time, Albert knew he was being conned and didn't care. He was having too much fun and began making regular trips to the desert to ride with the very charming Scotty. Scotty's home base was in Grapevine Canyon which, at 3,000 feet, is much cooler than Furnace Creek.

Soon Albert started bringing his wife, **Bessie**, to the desert to share his adventures with Scotty. Scotty was so charming that Bessie also became close friends with him, calling herself "a little desert mouse between two desert rats." But Bessie was getting a little tired of roughing it and asked her husband to build her a vacation home. Albert began the design himself and yes, that vacation home became Scotty's Castle. Scotty was there during the entire construction and began telling everybody that it was his house and it was being built from the riches of his gold mine. The press and the public believed it. Death Valley Scotty was now even more famous than before. Well, let's cut this short. Albert and Bessie moved from Chicago to Hollywood and used the "castle" as a vacation home, ultimately spending about 2.2 million dollars on its construction. Scotty also found his fortune in the desert. No, he never found gold, he found Albert who supported him for 41 years.

If we have piqued your interest, we urge you to visit Death Valley and Scotty's Castle and learn the rest of the story.

Until next time, home is where you park it.

Chuck and Donna