

24 October 1997

Hi Kids (& a few others),

This is not an official trip letter, rather it is a long E-mail message. I guess the difference is we aren't making copies for the multitudes nor making it pretty using WORD. Anyway, had a fun "long weekend." Left work about 3:30 PM on Wednesday and then left home about an hour later. Heavy traffic but pretty soon rolled across Pacheco pass and down I-5. They were picking cotton and putting it into huge bales (looked like white motorhomes across the landscape). Some fields were yet to be picked and thus white, some were picked so spotty white, and some were already plowed back and thus brown and ready for planting. Fun. Ate a quick Carl Jr Star \$1 burger and then headed East - through Bakersfield and to Mojave, where we grabbed a motel and hit the hay.

Next day we got up reasonable early, had some camp coffee cake and coffee in the room and rolled onward across the desert; which we enjoy, of course. Got to Red Rock Canyon just out side of Vegas a bit before noon; this being our first of three planned excursions, all of which were written up in the BLM Back Country By-Ways book. Very nice visitors center, beautiful scenery, fine weather. Went to an out of the way picnic area and did lunch. Then drove the loop. Stopped to see the fine red sandstone mixed with white and climbed around on the rocks a bit. Also stopped one place to do a more honest hike - to an important geological fault line called the Keystone Thrust. Nice walk, fine views, but never were convinced we saw the thrust. Guess we amateur geologists need sign posts! After getting to where we thought it was the M says why not go back via the gully and around the point, etc. So, a fairly ambitious cross-country hike resulted, but we found the car right on target. Continued on the scenic drive loop, without time to stop at one or two of the other good hike possibilities. Did stop at a canyon picnic area with great rocks and decided to BBQ a steak; since M had one in the cool chest and we had the black box along. Nice dining room! Got to town in the early dark and went to the Sahara where we had reservations. It was one of the original hotels on the Strip and has been refurnished. Cheap on Thursday and more expensive on the weekend. Cleaned up and then hit the street.

The Sahara is at the end of the strip towards town so we walked the other way, looking at the bright lights and crazy people. About the time we got to the Treasure Island hotel/casino there were a lot of people watching something so we joined in. Two big ships in real water carried out a mock battle between the Brits and Americans, with sailors running all over the ships, canyons going off, huge fireballs going skyward when a ship is "hit" and finally one ship halfway sinking. Disney Land on the Strip. Crazy. From there we took a moving sidewalk to the Mirage and lo and behold a volcano was erupting out in a waterfalls/island setting; again with fireballs going upward such that you could feel the heat from quite far away. Again, about all I can say is crazy and it is amazing what one does to "win" the tourist trade. By this time we had walked too far, and retreated back to the hotel for a well earned sleep.

Next day/Friday, we got up at a reasonable time given the lateness of the prior night. Ate a large breakfast in the hotel (corned beef hash and eggs for both of us actually) and then headed out. First stop was for gas and then rolled outward on the strip to get to New York New York casino to see about tickets for the show that night. The traffic was terrible so it took awhile. Got there, decided the tickets weren't good enough seats so said "No" and then hit the freeway northward towards our second back country byway - about 40 miles towards Utah. Twas a reasonable dirt road (for the Toy) heading off through great scenery of red and other colored sandstone, angling back towards Lake Mead. Lots of nice rocks as well as the sandstone and M collected a few items .... Drove down river bottom/gullies/washes. Eventually came out on a paved road that runs parallel to Lake Mead. Took a side trip (few miles) to Echo Bay and had a picnic lunch looking out at the lake and a variety of houseboats. Not exactly Lake Powell, but OK. Back north on the paved road and then back westward to complete the loop, going through Valley of Fire State Park. FANTASTIC red and other colored sandstone with the sun now fairly low in the west making the lighting even better. A very nice visitors center but not enough time to do it up. Drove back into the red/white rocks, took a walk and saw lots of petroglyphs, drove a bit more and walked up some stairs to see more petroglyphs, checked out a campground in a great setting (for future reference), and left the park as the sun was setting. Definitely worth a return trip and easily accessible from the main interstate.

Back to Vegas (too late for the show if we had gotten tickets ...). Cleaned up and hit the town again. This time drove down towards the far end of the strip and parked and then walked and walked. First stop was the Alladin for their \$8 steak and lobster meal - actually quite decent. Then walked towards town to see Ceasers Palace. From there headed back "out" via a combination of walking on the sidewalk and walking through hotels and/or using moving sidewalks that joined some of the hotels. Didn't go into to NY NY since we had sorta seen it that morning ==> fun mini NY neighborhoods within the building. Instead, walked by it from the front which is also quite spectacular what with the facade of old NYC along with the Statue of Liberty, and even tug boats in her waters. Oh, yes, the main hotel has various towers that look like the Chrysler building and other major landmarks. Moving sidewalk to Ex-Caliber which looks like a brightly colored, huge Disneyland castle. All sorts of King Arthur decor and old English stuff inside; like their main show is a jousting match during an old English dinner. Onward to Luxor which is Egyptian theme and amazing. All manner of huge Egyptian statues, phoenixes, etc. The hotel is build like a pyramid, the interior is amazing, and on and on. Fundamentally well done as well as huge and overwhelming. One could spend a lot of time wandering around there or any of these colossal hotel/casinos. For the most part they have spared no expenses. For example, in Ceasers the statue of David is full size, a true replica, and carved from the same Italian Carrara marble as to original. And it is just one of the things you bump into as you wonder through! Of course by now we were beat and slowly walked back to the car and then to the hotel and to bed!

Next day, had some coffee cake in the room, checked out, and headed back up I-15 towards Utah again to our third back country byway; a bit further than the prior day. Got rolling into the backcountry about 11 AM which was sorta typical and/or a bit earlier than the prior two days. Saw some nice red rocks but not as many as the day before but more Joshua trees and sweeping views. Small hard surfaced road for awhile, then good gravel, then a spot where there is a loop with Devils throat at the top and Gold Butte at the bottom. Devil's Throat is a large sinkhole in the ground, about 100 feet across and 100 feet deep and still spreading. One way to Gold Butte is basically a 4-wheel drive road and the other is quite reasonable gravel. We headed down the 4-wheel route. Ever improving and interesting rocky scenery. Rather sandy road in spots but not too bad to navigate. Basically along a river bottom/wash. Stopped a couple times to examine especially interesting formations and also to pick up some rock souvenirs. Gradually got into a

road/wash area with cliffs on the side and found a fine spot for a lunch. Hadn't seen another car since we got on the byway, but as we were eating one came by and we waved. Got into the car and continued onward but almost immediately came upon the other car and the couple were out looking at a hard-to-pass area of the road - rocks and moisture and sand. Discussed it with them and then they went first with us offering advise. Pretty tricky. Then exchanged roles. We got hung up on a high spot and ended up getting out by use of a rope and them pulling us off the bad spot. Continued with both cars and many fairly tricky spots where we would assist one another in selecting the route.

Finally got to a spot where we couldn't continue. Turned around, which meant navigating the rough places again. Got hung up again (damnit) and ended up getting out both by a bit of help with a rope pull and also by pilling rocks into the low spot that was causing the trouble. By now the car was filthy, had many, many branch marks on the sides, and we were hoping nothing was damaged underneath. Started back the way we came but a bit beyond our lunch spot we saw where we should have made a turn in order to stay on the byway ... so our bad/impassable road wasn't part of where we were supposed to have been - score one for the BLM although they should have marked that turn better. The road from there on was a typical 4-wheel high quality road and we drove onward, eventually getting to Gold Butte. On the way we went through an excellent Joshua tree forest. Then towards "home" via the gravel road. Stopped once quickly when Dawna thought she saw a tarantula on the road way but couldn't find him/her after we got out of the car. Setting sun and nice lighting on the hills and vast panorama darkish by the time we reached the main highway. A few miles more toward Utah and we were at our previously scheduled hotel. One of those border sort of spots where hotels/casinos/resorts have developed for the ever eager gambler. We had previously arranged it via the AAA book at a bargain (especially for Saturday night) price of \$48. Long line to check in but managed to survive it with a draft beer in hand. Upon checking it turned out that since some party of 50 had just canceled and they had 100 of their 700 rooms left at this time of night so they were doing the rooms for \$24 and we got that price - crazy world when you have computers updating prices or stock trades or whatever. Of course, Dawna thought this a fine deal. Cleaned up, ate dinner there inexpensively with Dawna having prime rib an I had baby back ribs. Dawna wanted us/me to play black jack but just didn't feel like it so threw a dollar or two into the slot machines and went to bed. Getting to

bed by 10 PM rather than midnight was a bit of a treat. Certainly the excitement/frustration of getting hung up on that back road had taken its toll and we were pretty melllowsly recovered by now having had adequate wine and the large meal.

Sunday was a head to home day but (a) get started relatively early and (b) take an interesting route. So, up at 6 AM, coffee cake and coffee in the room, gas up, and hit the road. A few miles back toward Vegas on the interstate and then a cross road (Nevada 168) going westward to connect with US-93 to go northward. This is the Great Basin hiway and it has a couple nice lakes along it plus the usual rough mountains. East on the Extraterrestrial Highway, so named because so many "sightings" have been made along that very barren stretch. So barren in fact that the gas station we were counting on was closed up and we barely made it to Tonopah. Walked around there a bit and then went to a picnic area outside of town for lunch. After that it was a nice drive through the desert/mountains, going past very rugged Boundary Peak, the highest peak in Nevada, seeing the White Mountains from a bit away, Mono Lake, and then into and through Yosemite over Tioga Pass. Some absolutely gorgeous yellow (tis Fall you know) aspen trees amongst the green trees and the spectacular Yosemite granite mountains. Stopped in the Central Valley for a fast food meal (Mexican) and then home by a bit after 10 PM; 630 miles from our motel.

All in all a good outing with absolutely perfect weather. It was interesting to type the draft of this memo with the Zeos on my lap and the Toy bouncing along the hiway. Figured I'd better get this note out before we head back East on Wednesday for another 10 days ..... Also need to get out the real trip letter from our Canada outing - the draft is finished so just need to clean it up a bit and "go to press."