

Trip 2 – Episode #49 – Yes, it's a Grand Canyon

Some of you may remember what I wrote at the very beginning of our first blog about starting our adventures with Charles - but I don't blame you if you don't. It was a long time and many blogs ago!

What I wrote was that when I was a kid and we did family drives, my dad was dedicated to getting to the destination and was not so interested in detours to interesting places. As an example, I used our drive from LA to Toronto, during which we passed the Grand Canyon, and stopped for twenty minutes.

I have wanted to give the Grand Canyon the attention it deserves ever since, and when Jim and I set out on this adventure, we knew not only that we had to go the Grand Canyon but that we had to spend more time there than my dad had allowed.

Boy did we make up for it!

We started in Williams Arizona, where there's a train to the Grand Canyon. Did someone say "train"? For Jim, that's like saying "walk" in front of a dog.

So, despite the temptation to go to ...



...We instead chose to board the train from Williams to the Grand Canyon's South Rim.

However, before you can board the train, you're treated to a wild west show, similar to the one we'd seen in Tombstone, although with a little more humour, and, as we were to find out later, with more consequences.



Finally we were allowed to board the train, and along the way, we had some entertainment, by a masked yodeler...



Not too many memorable views on the way, except for the moment when there was a curve so sharp we could see the front of the train.



And finally, we arrived at the place where the real views begin and never stop.



Fortunately, I had Jim to point out to me where the canyon was. (What would I do without him?)

You may notice that I have a scarf and a jacket on. It was chilly. And you'll also notice in many of the photos that there's snow.



Aside from the selfie, this is the first photo I took. The thing I kept thinking was that when you first see the canyon, it's a breathtaking sight, and we *knew* it was there. Imagine exploring this territory and suddenly coming across it.



During that day and the two following, I took, literally 400 photos. And none of them does justice to the absolute wonder of the canyon. But I kept trying, and trying.

I did notice, after scanning through all the photos that there was a real difference from one hour to the next, and one day to the next, depending on the angle of the sun or whether there were clouds. Every photo looked different.

Our first perspective was from the south rim, and we were there around midday, so there's a kind of flatness to a lot of the photos – although what we're seeing is still spectacular.

The other notable thing, from this view, is that we're not actually seeing how deep the canyon is. You can't see the bottom from this angle. The red arrow points to the lowest spot we can see, but it's still very high above the Colorado River, which carved this masterpiece.



That doesn't make it less incredible – it just makes you realize how much more there is to explore. And so we did.

We decided we'd try walking down into the canyon for a bit. Even though we didn't bring our crampons (we would've had to buy some).



We followed this trail which leads to a kind of tunnel through the rock.

Which was pretty cool.



And gave us some
different
perspectives on the
other side.





But the snow on the path was getting quite icy. And, since we were without crampons, we didn't feel at all safe. So we headed back up, warning others who were similarly unprepared that the path got treacherous ahead.



We continued walking around the south rim, which always had new views to offer.

Because we were there during March Break, there were lots of families with kids. Most of them seemed incredibly unhappy to be there. We heard a lot of crying children, and one kid who moaned to his parents, "Why did we even have to come here?" I guess it takes a certain maturity to understand how magnificent this place is.

The most memorable was a father who, as a joke, acted as though he was about to fall over the edge. His little daughter screamed, terrified. He ran to her and hugged her, but the poor kid just cried and cried. Ah, family memories.

There were also lots of people getting as close to the edge as possible and getting their photo taken. We weren't so bold (or stupid).



Along the way, we came across groups of people who were trying to take selfies, so I would often offer to take their photo (a habit I picked up from my Uncle George). Over the course of the three days, I must have taken pictures for at least a dozen groups. They often asked if they could reciprocate, which is how we got this lovely shot.



We walked to the Hopi House which was interesting for a variety of reasons. It was designed by M.J. Colter, who won the job because of the idea to model it after the 1,000 year-old pueblo dwellings of the Hopi people. It wasn't until they met the architect that they discovered that the M was for Mary.



We also went briefly into the El Tovar Hotel, which was interesting, but it's really all about the canyon.



By late afternoon, just before we had to get back on the train to Williams, the shadows created so much more definition. We were glad we had planned to stay more than one day – and much more than twenty minutes!



Our car for the train ride back had more significance to us than it did on the way out.



And the trip was made more exciting by the return of those rascally cowboys, who turned out to be train robbers!

The kid across the way did wake up when they came aboard. But I didn't get any photos of them on the train, for fear they'd steal my phone!



On Day Two, we drove from our campsite in Williams and decided we'd spend a little time exploring the rim to the east of where we'd been the day before.

On the way, we finally saw some of the wildlife all the write-ups told us we'd see.



There were a number of them, and I asked a guy there what they were. He explained that they were female elk. Apparently, the males only come around in November for rutting season, then they go off and do their thing while the females raise the kids. Nice work if you can get it.

On to Grand Canyon ...

We didn't factor in that it was March Break. The line-ups were crazy and it took us an hour to get through the gates. (This photo is from when we left the park a while later – the line ups were just as long.)



However, once we got there, we forgot all about the wait. It was a cloudier day and there was so much more drama.







We would've stayed longer But we had an appointment here ...



With a helicopter pilot!! I had always wanted to do this and since Carpe That F@\$#ing Diem is our mantra, this was the day.



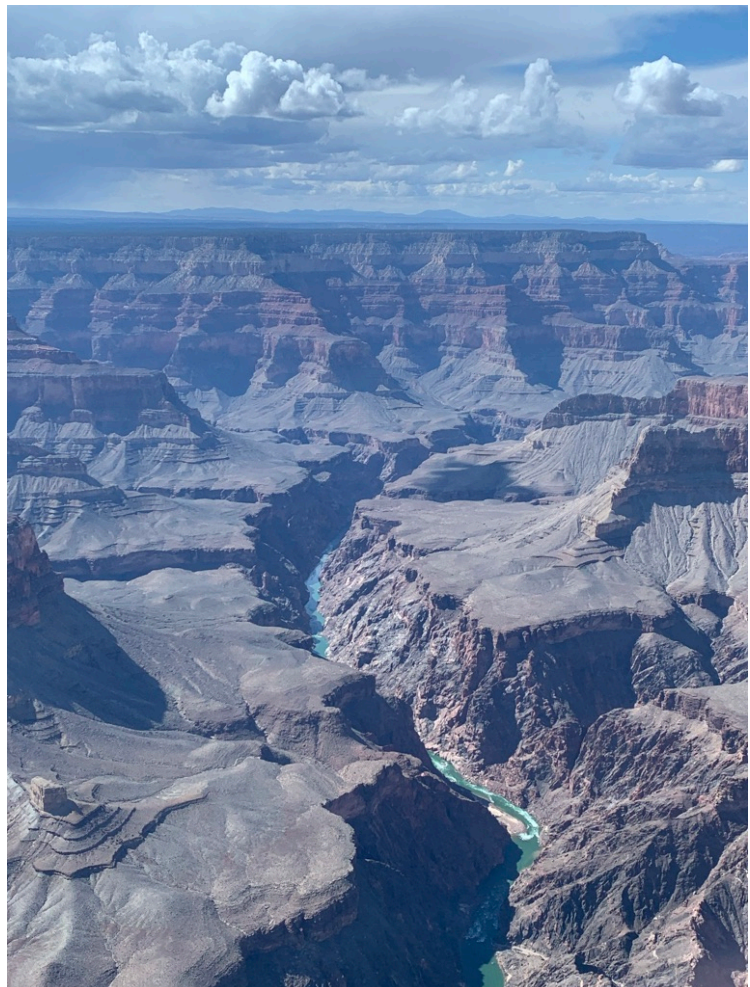
I was a little worried my insides might object, but it was not a problem, and it was truly one of the greatest experiences of my life. Through an unexpected situation I ended up in the front seat beside the pilot, so I had an exceptional view.

Jim has created a fabulous video of the flight, and you're crazy if you don't watch it. But here are a few shots that capture some of the highlights.





In this one, you see the Colorado River carving its way through the canyon so you get the sense of just how deep it is.







We weren't the only ones flying over the canyon...





It only lasted about a half hour, but it will go down as one of the best things I ever did. (Don't forget to check out Jim's video. As usual it has a few unexpected surprises in it.)

As we landed back at the airport, it was nice to see Charles waiting patiently for us.



And then what did we do? We got in Charles and went back to the Grand Canyon!

It was late afternoon and I was determined to see how the views changed as the sun got lower. We found a place to park Charles, and I kept going out periodically to take more shots until sunset.



Here's a pared down version of the dozens of shots I took.











I had an unexpected opportunity. When someone asks if you'd like to have your photo taken in front of the Grand Canyon with a Sasquatch, how can you say no?



We didn't get the dramatic sunset I was hoping for, but it was still pretty amazing.



And we still had another day (or partial day) to see the canyon from yet another perspective. From the Grand Canyon, we were heading further east in Arizona, so we drove around to the Eastern Rim and out the east gate. Sorry, but I've got more photos....









From this angle, we were able to see the Colorado River again.



Amazing that even from this height you can see the white water rapids. And you can only imagine the power of that water, which actually created this incredible canyon.



We stopped at a few different lookouts and got our last views of the canyon.





Scratch one thing off the bucket list.