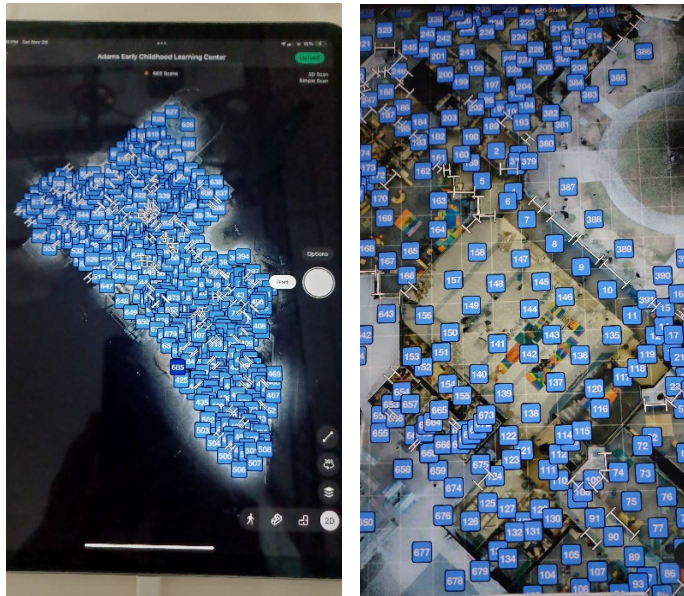


## Christmas Letter - 2025

It's that time of year again when I have another opportunity to write my annual Christmas letter to share with all my friends and family. I look forward to this every year, and this year is no exception. Although these days I don't travel nearly as much as years ago, especially internationally, I did have a few trips that were very interesting and enjoyable. So, I hope you'll enjoy reading this letter.

To back up a bit, last year we enjoyed a lovely Christmas holiday. Leslie and I exchanged gifts under the Christmas tree as our cats enjoyed playing among the wrapping paper and ribbons – so much fun to watch them! Then I fixed a very traditional Christmas dinner of roasted turkey breast with all the trimmings – I always love fixing Christmas dinner. We were joined by our dear friend, Tina, and had a great time sharing our stories. At the end of December, I had an assignment to do a “virtual tour” of the Adams Early Childhood Learning Center in La Quinta. It was a very large facility that required two full days of 3D scanning with a special camera to generate a complete 3D computer model of all the school buildings in preparation for a renovation project. While it was a challenging assignment, I gained some valuable skills, as well as a hefty paycheck!



3D Scans of the Buildings and Campus

The school was a very large campus of several buildings covering over 50,000 sq ft! By the end of the first day, I had barely finished scanning the interior of the main building, and in the process, I had to use two batteries for the Matterport camera and a portable battery charger for the iPad! Since the sun was setting, it wasn't possible to do any outside scans on the campus, so I drove to the Comfort Inn and Suites Hotel near the I-10 freeway and checked in for the night. The keycard to my room didn't work, so I took it back to the front desk. And to my frustration, the second keycard didn't work either! Finally, Jorge, the maintenance man resolved the problem, and I was able to enter the room. My first task was to charge up the Matterport camera and iPad. Then I walked across the street to the “Legends and Icons Bar & Grill” for dinner. But being that it was a Friday evening, the place was very crowded, not even an empty seat at the bar, so I was seated at a booth in the dining room next to a large family celebrating a birthday. I ordered the chicken parmesan, really delicious, but far too much for me to finish – took half of it back to my room. After dinner, I walked next door to “TJ's Steakhouse” for another local “Even Par IPA” from the La Quinta Brewery.

- With three pool tables in the middle of the dining room, I don't think it qualified as a real “steakhouse”

- As I drank my beer, I watched a young Hispanic couple playing pool. Her companion let her shoot all the solid color balls before he took his first shot! Neither of them was very good at pool, but they were certainly enjoying the game, and it was a lot of fun to watch them!

From TJ's, I walked back to Legends and Icons for one more beer and found the bar much less crowded and a lot quieter. As I enjoyed my beer, everyone at the bar was watching a college bowl game being sponsored by "SRS Distribution Las Vegas Bowl"! There are too many college bowl games these days – it's like every major company feels they need to be a sponsor! I went back to my hotel room for a quiet night's rest after a long and exhausting day!

The next morning, I was up early and enjoyed a complimentary hot breakfast in the hotel. (meanwhile, a homeless person was sleeping outside on the sidewalk in the corner of a building across the parking lot from the hotel) After breakfast, I called "Desert Sands Security Patrol" to have them unlock and disarm the doors to the school so I could continue scanning, mainly the interior of four outdoor buildings and all the exterior campus area. It took almost the entire day! When I finally finished, I was totally exhausted. I packed up my gear, shut off all the lights, closed all the doors, and locked up the school. I ended the day at 3pm, having taken 700 scans – the largest project I've had so far! Then it was time for a cold pint of Even Par IPA at Legends and Icons Bar before I headed home. The traffic on I-10 west moved quickly at 75mph most of the way, except for passing a semi-trailer on fire near the Whitewater Rest Area. It had been a long and exhausting two days, but the \$1500 paycheck made it worth it!

## January

In the middle of January, I drove to Temecula for an overnight stay at the Carter Estates Winery and Resort while Leslie hosted her "Bunco" group at our house. I checked into a beautiful king suite bungalow overlooking the estate vineyards and the mountains surrounding Temecula. Although the Carter Estate wine tasting room and restaurant were closed, I was invited to dine at the South Coast Winery and Resort next door, along with a 25% discount certificate. The bar at the South Coast Winery hadn't opened yet, so I went next door to the "Cellar Bar" at the Ponte Vineyard Resort in the old location of their wine cellar and ordered a Tower 10 IPA during the Happy Hour. It wasn't long before the bartender convinced me to try the "Balsamic Pear Flatbread" – fresh pears, walnuts, gorgonzola cheese, arugula, and balsamic honey glaze. Truly outstanding! For a long time, I was the only patron in the bar, before another guy came in. After a couple of hours, I walked back to the South Coast Winery bar and had a glass of their award-winning Merlot. Once again, I was the only one at the bar, but it wasn't long before several other guests showed up for drinks before dinner. While I waited for the Vineyard Rose Restaurant to open, the bartender insisted upon giving me a complimentary glass of their Syrah – it was incredible!



King Suite Bungalow – Carter Wine Estate



Vineyard Rose Restaurant – South Coast Winery

Shortly after that, I was seated at a table in the restaurant and presented with an extensive menu, however, my server highly recommended the Friday night special of roasted prime rib with all the trimmings

– so how could I resist! It was one of the best prime rib dinners I’ve had, especially with a glass of Syrah – an exceptional dinner!

When I returned to my bungalow at Carter Estates Winery Resort, I made a beeline for the bedroom and enjoyed a sound night’s sleep. However, the next morning, I woke up and couldn’t find my phone! I searched everywhere without success. So, I finally had to conclude that I must have accidentally left it at the restaurant, along with my reading glasses. I went back to the restaurant, and after a long search they found both my phone and my glasses! At that moment I came face to face with the anxiety of not having a cell phone! But looking back on my life, I came to realize that throughout a majority of my life, I never had a cell phone. In fact, my family didn’t have a telephone at home until I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and then it was a “party line”. And even more recently, as I look back on the year that I spent travelling overland across Africa in 1974-75, cell phones did not exist, nor did the Internet! There were times when I travelled for weeks with no access to the outside world! And yet today, to be without one’s cell phone and access to the Internet is almost frightening and would not be tolerated! I have spent a great deal of my life without a cell phone and the Internet, and I know deep down that I would survive if today’s technology ever failed! But that being said, I was most grateful to have my cell phone and glasses back again!



South Coast Winery and Resort - Temecula

Among other things that were memorable in January were these:

- As I was leaving Darby’s Bar, I saw a young woman seated at the bar with a very interesting tattoo on her arm. When I asked her about it, and she said it was the story of “The Night Before Christmas”!
- On one of my many hikes in San Timoteo Canyon alongside the Union Pacific Railroad mainline to Yuma, Arizona and points east, I watched a very long fast freight train heading east to San Geronimo Pass, headed by five locomotives, with two more in the middle of the 3-mile-long train! While it was pretty impressive, it’s not unusual. But what suddenly caught my eye was a man riding on one of the railcars that was hauling semi-trailers! He was bundled up with a blanket in the cold wind, yet he managed to return my wave as the train roared past! (later, it reminded me of the stories my Dad used to tell us about his days riding freight trains during the Great Depression!)



San Timoteo Canyon



## **February**

The month of February was rather quiet, but there were a couple of things that captured my attention.

- Leslie gave me a delicious box of See's chocolates for Valentine's Day
- While I was seated in the bar at J Riley's Distillery with a cold pint of Hopamatic IPA from the Ritual Brewery, Jason, the owner of the bar came over to my table and invited me to taste his latest distilled whiskey, a "Single Malt" made from barley that was distilled three times. It was excellent. With an authentic taste of traditional Scottish Highland whiskey! As I tasted the whiskey, Jason and I shared our military experience. He served in the Marine Corps, while I spent my time in the Army. He offers a 15% discount every day to active military and veterans!
- On another occasion at Darby's Bar & Grill, I spotted a young woman seated at the bar order a glass of water with a slice of lemon and then pour a handful of salt into the glass! When I asked her, she said that she doesn't get enough sodium in her diet, yet she's eating highly processed foods by ordering food in the restaurant!
- Near the end of February, I received an invitation to attend the Museum of Redlands Open House. It was a lovely clear, sunny day following several days of rain. I enjoyed exploring the place in spite of the fact that most of the space was empty, awaiting exhibits that would be curated later by the Redlands Public Library. I also met up with a few of my former Esri colleagues – a very nice time and I look forward to the "official" opening soon.



Museum of Redlands

## **March**

Among the times I remember in March are these:

- Early in the month I finally installed a lovely black wrought iron railing on the front steps of my house, along with the grateful assistance of my long-time neighbor Jerry. I was very happy with the result. At the same time, our beautiful "Clivia" plant bloomed profusely!



New Porch Railing



Clivia plant blooming



- On St Patrick's Day I made reservations at J Riley's Bar & Restaurant for Leslie, Kathleen, and me to share a very traditional Irish meal of Corned Beef and Cabbage. As we enjoyed our dinner, I told them the story of why St Patrick's Day was such a very special day in the life of my family. My mother and I arrived in America from England on St Patrick's Day in 1946 to meet up with my father who had returned from being stationed with the US Air Force in England during WWII. From that day forward, my mom and dad celebrated it every year! So, I have kept up the tradition and wanted to share the history of it with Leslie and Kathleen. (meanwhile, I noticed a couple sitting at the bar dressed in green for the holiday!)



J Riley's Bar – St Patrick's Day

- One day the high temperature was 92 degrees under sunny skies and the very next day it was 58 degrees under heavy clouds and drizzle – a huge change overnight!
- One afternoon I went to Darby's Bar and Grill for a beer and one of the TVs in the bar had a live broadcast from the "Eagle Cam" at Big Bear Lake where two young chicks (eaglets) sat in the nest flapping their wings and about to take their first flight! They were the object of most people's attention, more popular than the hockey game on the other TVs.
- One day at J Riley's Bar, a young woman in the All-Gender restroom had forgotten to lock the door – **big** surprise when I opened the door to see her sitting on the toilet!!
- On a sad note, for some unexplained reason, I felt the need to search online for some information about an old colleague from my days in Africa during 1974-75. It wasn't long before I discovered an obituary about him. Liam J. Humphreys died on March 25<sup>th</sup> of this year at his home in Bethesda, Maryland. The last time that I saw him was in 1978 when I suddenly ran into him on the street in Washington, DC! He and I shared many experiences in Africa, including climbing Mt Kilimanjaro, fishing on the island of Lamu in Kenya, and exploring national parks in Kenya and Tanzania. Reading the obituary, I felt sad, but I also fondly remembered our times together – Rest in Peace Liam!

## **April**

In early April, I received a call from Laurie Kagan asking if I was available to shoot some more photos of her B&B in Big Bear Lake City? She said she had just finished remodeling most of the rooms and needed new photos to update the property brochure. A couple of days later I drove up to Big Bear Lake and spent the day taking photos of "Apple's B&B". The rooms were absolutely beautiful, a reflection of Laurie's amazing artistic talent – it was a pleasure to photograph them. Laurie provided me with a complimentary room that night and breakfast the next day. Later that evening, Laurie and her husband Spencer invited me to share dinner with them at their favorite restaurant in Big Bear, "The Peppercorn Grill" located in "The Village", a lovely collection of shops, restaurants, and bars, including the Big Bear Lake Brewing Company. After a couple of delicious appetizers and a glass of wine, I ordered the "Chef's Special", a perfectly

sauteed filet of fresh Alaskan salmon with a parmesan crust, along with steamed fresh vegetables – it was outstanding! The three of us enjoyed another glass of wine and a luscious dessert as we shared stories of our world travels – such a wonderful evening with such interesting people!



Apples B&B – Big Bear Lake City

After a lovely breakfast the next morning, Spencer gave me a tour of the construction site where he's building a convention center and wedding hall, all from local stone and lumber. As we walked around the building, I was very impressed by the many artistic details and craftsmanship that were incorporated into the design. It seemed to fit perfectly with the surrounding forest and mountains! Spencer was really looking forward to treating me to lunch and a visit to one of the many art galleries in Big Bear Lake City, but unfortunately, I had to decline his invitation due to a photoshoot I had scheduled in Forest Falls that afternoon. We agreed to postpone the lunch invitation until I returned to Big Bear to photograph the convention center and wedding hall upon its completion. The photo shoot in Forest Falls was very unusual, being a large three-story cabin that had been turned into some kind of religious retreat, as evidenced by the altar and pews I saw downstairs on the first floor. I had to wonder who could possibly be interested in buying the place as a personal residence? But that wasn't for me to worry about, I was just there to take photos!

In mid-April, I drove to Perris to attend the annual "BBQ, Boots & Brew" festival at the Orange Empire Railway Museum. The weather was clear and very warm with very little shade available, especially in the Beer Garden – made even more uncomfortable by the lack of places to sit! Shortly after I ordered a "Wagon Wheel IPA", a very nice traditional West Coast style IPA from the Broken Timbers Brewery, I noticed a couple of Riverside Fire Department EMT's assisting an elderly man who had apparently suffered heat stroke or perhaps a heart attack! Later in the afternoon, I met up with my dear friend Robert Green, and we shared stories of things that had happened since our last meeting at "Heroes Bar" in Riverside. Then Robert had to leave to finalize the BBQ judging results as I was finishing my beer. Meanwhile, the rock band was extremely loud and not that great, so I prepared to leave. (the C&W band last year was much better)



BBQ, Boots, & Brew Festival



Luxury RV with Smoker!

After leaving the event, I decided to stop by the “Bomb Shelter Bar” at the Perris Skydive Airport, probably my favorite bar in Perris. I enjoyed a cold pint of Elysian Space Dust IPA while I watched skydivers descending from the clear blue sky! Then I returned to my room at the “Studio 6 Suites Hotel” in Perris before going out for dinner. The “El Mariscos Restaurant” had changed ownership and as I entered, the sound of the band was very loud. But what really convinced me not to stay was when the bar staff couldn’t understand me as I asked for a Tecate beer! I got up and walked out, probably never to return! I ended up walking next door to “Casa Jimenez Mexican and Seafood Restaurant”. I began dinner with a cold bottle of Lagunitas IPA and the usual helping of chips and salsa that was very tasty. The bartender was great – very responsive and friendly. When I asked him for a recommendation of seafood for dinner, he immediately said I should order the “Camarones a la Jiménez”. When it arrived, it was an enormous plate of huge grilled shrimp cooked in a very spicy tomato sauce and served with chilled slices of cucumber and tomato – it was absolutely fantastic! However, the shrimp were still in their shell with heads and tails on, so I had to spend time “deconstructing” them which took some effort. The process of eating dinner became rather “messy” and my shirt sleeve ended up drenched in tomato sauce! (I didn’t notice it until I was leaving the restaurant) The dish was far too much for me to finish, so I asked the bartender for a box to take the leftovers home. When he brought the box, he pointed out that at least a half dozen shrimp were still hiding in the sauce! (I think there must have been over to a dozen shrimp on the plate – I left him a good tip!



Camarones a la Jiménez

After dinner, I stopped at the Chevron Food Mart next to the hotel to pick up a couple of chocolate bars before I returned to my room for a quiet night. Suddenly, at 4am I was struck by the urge to visit the toilet for an episode of “traveler’s misfortunate”, known as common diarrhea, so typical after a spicy Mexican meal – unfortunately! While I really enjoyed the taste of the shrimp dinner, I did not enjoy the “morning after”. The next morning, since the hotel did not have any breakfast available, I picked up a “Breakfast Jack” sandwich and headed home. Some notes about the Studio 6 Suites Hotel:

- It used to be a “Red Lion Inn” several years ago and now I think it must be an “upgraded” Motel 6 Property
- Half of my room had no furniture, and the bathroom had no amenities (shampoo, tissues, skin lotion, etc.)
- No table lamps in the room, but there was a small frig and microwave
- No breakfast, complimentary or otherwise
- Probably won’t stay there again!

A few other notes about things that I observed during the month of April:

- *Darby’s Bar & Grill*
- Why do so many elderly men with grey hair choose to wear beards?



- One afternoon, every TV in the bar was tuned to the NFL Draft, with tens of thousands of fans gathered in the Green Bay stadium
- I noticed a man wearing a bright white, blue, gold Hawaiian shirt with large photos of a man on it. When I said “great shirt”, he said the photos were of his brother! I had no response at that point.
- On another afternoon, I was sitting near a table of three middle-aged/elderly couples celebrating a birthday. I couldn’t help but notice that all the women were seated on one side of the table, opposite to their husbands. But there didn’t seem to be much conversation across the table!
- *J Riley’s Bar*
- My favorite bartender had a beer waiting for me as soon as I entered the door! Later, he suddenly showed up with another glass of beer just as my first glass was almost empty – amazing customer service!

## May

At the beginning of May I drove to Perris for the annual “Antique Truck Show” which always brings together a unique collection of old trucks from all over the Southwest. They spanned many decades from the early 1900’s up to the 1970’s, and all of them were in perfect running condition, having been lovingly restored. I walked around the grounds of the Orange Empire Railway Museum photographing the antique trucks to share with Wes and Dan, Lynn’s stepsons, who are big rig drivers and in love with trucks! One truck in particular was really “tricked out” to celebrate Halloween! It was a fun day, and I look forward to the event again next year.



Antique Truck Show - Perris

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, we celebrated Leslie’s birthday with Kathleen and Mike. (the 9<sup>th</sup> of May) also happened to be the birthday of my father, who would have been 119 years old! And by a strange coincidence, the birthday of Leslie’s father happens to be the same day as my birthday, September 6<sup>th</sup>!)

One day I was in San Timoteo Canyon to watch the heavy freight trains when I came upon a very long freight train that was “stalled” at the busy crossing of San Timoteo Canyon Road. (It closed the road for more than an hour! Being that it was a Friday afternoon, a lot of people were most likely pissed off!) Then I spotted a white Dodge van off on the frontage road with a flat tire that was almost off the rim! I asked the driver, a middle-aged guy named Gilbert, if he needed help, but he initially declined until I told him that if he continued to drive the van the tire would fall off! So, I got the jack from my Jeep, jacked up the front end of his van, and removed the flat tire. Meanwhile, Gilbert was under the van trying to get the spare tire removed, without much luck. Unfortunately, my spare tire wouldn’t fit on his van, so I offered to take him and the flat tire to be fixed and then bring him back. But he insisted on staying with his van. I did what I could to help Gilbert, but all I could do at that point was to leave my jack with him. I gave him one of my business cards so he could contact me to return the jack. Meanwhile, it was 106 degrees in the shade – but we had no shade! As I left Gilbert, as he continued to struggle with the spare tire under the van, I gave him one of my cold beers! (note: a few months later, I saw the white Dodge van again, and as I drove up to it,

Gilbert suddenly ran up and handed me the jack I had given him. By that time, I had already bought another jack so I told Gilbert to keep it and that I hoped he wouldn't need it anytime soon!

One day in the middle of May, as I was returning home from the grocery store, I saw something that concerned me. It was a "For Sale" sign in front of my next-door neighbor's house, the historic "Holt Mansion". It was a total surprise, and I wondered what had prompted Brad and Dorthee to put their house up for sale? A few days later, I met up with them, and they explained what led them to the decision to move. All their children were grown up, moved away, and had lives of their own. The house and property were far too large for just two people to manage, which I could understand. We had been friends and neighbors for 32 years, so it was hard to see them leave the neighborhood. It wasn't long before they packed up and moved to Tennessee to be near their daughter as she was expecting her first child. The historic property was listed at \$2 million and sold about a month later.



"Holt Mansion" - Redlands

I was able to meet the new owners as they were moving in, and they made it clear they would honor the beauty and history of the house as Brad and Dorthee had done, which made me happy.

On Memorial Day I walked over to Smiley Park to spend some time at the annual "Arts in the Park" event. It was a beautiful, warm sunny day and I enjoyed browsing among the numerous booths displaying gorgeous artworks – paintings, jewelry, ceramics, photography, and sculpture. I stumbled upon a display of very unusual landscape photography by a longtime Esri colleague – Charles Convis. We had a very interesting discussion about the strange "theme" of his photography. Then I headed for the Beer Garden for a cold glass of "Czech Pils" from the Ritual Brewery as I listened to the band. Later in the afternoon, I met up with a few of my former Esri colleagues – Bernie & Sandi, David and Carol, and Robin. All in all, it was a very enjoyable day in the park once again.

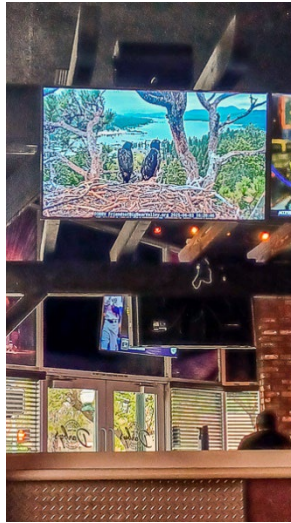




“Arts in the Park Festival”

## **June**

At the beginning of June, I was having a beer at Darby’s Bar & Grill downtown when I noticed two of the TVs were tuned to “Bear Valley Friends”, a live video of the eaglets as they took their first flight! On the adjacent screen was the broadcast of the Dodger’s game in Tokyo. I suspected that most people in the bar totally missed the “first” flight!



Live Video of the Eaglets

The next afternoon, as I was watching freight trains in San Timoteo Canyon moving slowly up to San Gorgonio Pass headed to Yuma, I suddenly found myself in the middle of a strong thunderstorm with lots of lightning and heavy rain that continued for almost an hour! The rain was very welcoming, but unusual for the month of June.

A couple of weeks later, as I was leaving the “Royal Falconer Pub” downtown and getting into my Jeep, a young lady suddenly ran out of the bar and motioned for me to lower my window. Then she complimented me on my fantastic job of parking in a very narrow space in front of the bar between a new Tesla and a large pickup truck! (for sure it was a “tight” parking space, but something I had done several times before) Her “compliment” was very surprising, totally unexpected, but appreciated! On another note, the Royal Falconer Pub is no longer the authentic British Pub that Richard built many years ago. It’s now owned and managed by the Tartan Restaurant, a long time Redlands institution. Unfortunately, my experience in the pub this time was very disappointing. The service by the bartender was lousy and the “Happy Hour” beer was \$8.50! (at Darby’s the same beer was \$5.00) So I left a nasty note on the bill.

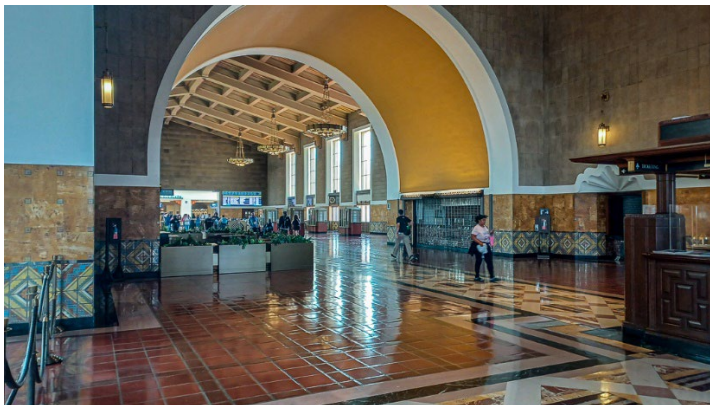
Also, in the month of June, Luci Green announced her retirement from Esri with a party held in the Esri Café. I joined many Esri people, both active and retired to wish her well. Her husband Robert assumed the role of MC, and everyone enjoyed remembering old times!



## July

Early in July, while I was at Darby's, I noticed that of the 30 TV screens in the bar, virtually no one was watching any of them, prompting me to conclude that most people prefer to talk with each other, which is so characteristic of the bar atmosphere. A few days later, as I was sitting at "Septembers Bar and Restaurant", all the TVs in the bar were showing "re-runs" of hockey games several weeks after Edmonton had already won the Stanley Cup trophy! It begged the question, why would any hockey fan bother to watch the re-runs? I had to conclude that TVs in bars are useless when no one is watching, yet they remain turned on.

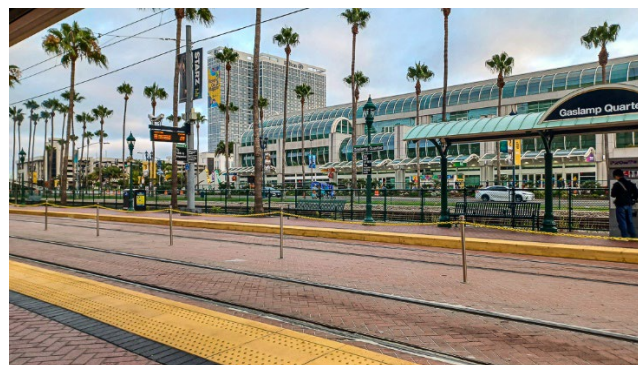
In the middle of July, I made my way to San Diego for the 44th annual Esri International User Conference – my 40th time as either the conference manager or an attendee! On Sunday morning I had planned to take the train from Redlands to LA Union Station and connect with the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner train to San Diego. However, Metrolink suddenly cancelled all the trains from Redlands, so I had to ask my neighbor Mike to take me to the San Bernardino Depot to board the train to LA Union Station. (Thanks Mike!) Once I was on board the Pacific Surfliner there were beautiful views of the ocean and beaches along the way to San Diego. When I arrived at the historic Santa Fe Depot in San Diego, I walked down to the Convention Center to register for the user conference. It was a pleasure to find there was a "Pre-registration Party" again this year. I was registered in a matter of minutes, received my badge, and a ticket for a complimentary drink. As I approached the bar, I spotted a new, interesting beer called "X-Terra Mexican Lager" brewed locally in San Diego. It was very nice with a taste in between a traditional lager and an IPA.



Union Station – Los Angeles



Pacific Surfliner Train



San Diego Convention Center

Leaving the party, I took the trolley to Old Town San Diego and checked into the Comfort Inn for the next three days. From the hotel I walked down the street to "Rockin Baja Lobster" for a beer at the bar. It wasn't long before I noticed the music kept repeating every 30 seconds – very distracting and annoying. When I brought it to the attention of the bartender, he said it must be a problem with the owner's "playlist". However, upon further investigation, he found the reason why the sound was constantly repeating. It was

coming from the TV that was still on after the Padres baseball game had ended! (nobody else in the bar was even aware of it!) Later in the evening I went next door to “Pizza Bella” where I enjoyed a fantastic seafood pizza. When it arrived at my table, it was a huge 8 inch “personal size” pizza covered with all manner of seafood – shrimp, salmon, clams, mussels, and lobster. It was outstanding, but I had to take half of it back to my hotel room!

The next morning, after a delicious complimentary breakfast at the hotel, I took the trolley to the convention center downtown, along with a lot of user conference attendees. The opening plenary session with over 18,000 attendees, was very impressive, especially the demo by a young Filipino woman who showed how she could develop a software application using her native language! Following the morning session, I made my way to “Burgers, Bait, and Beer”, a small café in Embarcadero Park overlooking San Diego Bay. The charcoal grilled turkey burger was topped with lettuce, tomato, kalamata olives, and feta cheese – it was really delicious, but it was huge! I was glad that I had arrived just before the lunch crowd. While I enjoyed my lunch, I watched sailboats and Navy ships coming and going under the clear blue skies – a great place for lunch!



“Burgers, Bait, & Beer”

The afternoon session was highlighted by an amazing presentation by the curator of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, the largest such museum in the world. His graphic displays of many different museum exhibits were incredible and gorgeous! At the conclusion of the session, all 18,000 of us headed upstairs to attend the opening of the Map Gallery and Reception, one of the most popular user conference events.



Esri International User Conference – Plenary Session

In the midst of the large crowd, I ran into my old friend Myles who informed me that he and his family had just recently moved from Dubai to Vermont – such a huge contrast of environment and culture! And as

luck would have it, I also ran into Don Berry and was able to personally thank him for my free user conference pass every year. The Map Gallery Reception rapidly became extremely crowded, so after my complimentary can of “Reinvent IPA” from the Lost Coast Brewery, I bid Myles farewell and met up with my dear friend DeeAnne, the Director of Convention Center Management, for dinner at “Casa Guadalajara” in Old Town. We shared a delicious dinner outside on the patio. Our server recommended the chicken and cheese quesadilla as an “appetizer”, which was fantastic, but so large that DeeAnne had to ask for a box to take half of it home! As always, we had a wonderful evening of conversation. Unfortunately, she had just lost a family member to cancer. After dinner DeeAnne dropped me off at my hotel and we arranged to meet again for coffee tomorrow. From the hotel I walked next door to the Marriott Courtyard Hotel bar and the bartender remembered me from the night before as she brought a cold pint of Stone IPA to my table without having to ask! (great service) While I sat writing my notes of the day, I remembered seeing a sign in the convention center on one of the restroom doors that read “Inclusive”. While we all now acknowledge the meaning of “Gender Neutral”, exactly what does “Inclusive” mean? As a man, would I be allowed to use the Inclusive restroom? (very confusing)

The next day, I went to the Santa Fe Depot to change my ticket in order to take an earlier train to LA the following day to connect with the Southwest Chief train to San Bernardino and on to Redlands. Then I walked back to the convention center to tour through the Map Gallery without the crowd I had experienced the evening before. I took a lot of photos of many very interesting and unique maps, and especially the beautiful displays from the Smithsonian museum! Later in the afternoon, I walked to Seaport Village on the waterfront and stopped at the “Mike Hess Brewery” for a cold pint of their “Good to Go IPA” – a very respectable West Coast style IPA. (note: the beer at Mike Hess was \$7.50, while the Happy Hour IPA at the Marriott Hotel bar was \$15.00!) While I was sitting outside with my beer, I watched two guys as they played a game called “Jenga” that involved an attempt to increase the height of a stack of 54 small wooden blocks by pulling a lower block out of the stack and adding it to the top of the stack without causing the whole stack to collapse. As I watched, they managed to achieve a great height, and it looked like they had played this game many times. Finally, one block crashed the stack, which seemed to be the inevitable object of the game. When I asked them about it, they both claimed it was their first time playing the game – really?



Sitting at Mike Hess Brewery



Game of “Jenga”

Early in the evening, I walked back to the convention center to attend “Canada Night”, a social gathering of Canadian users. There was an abundance of food and drink outside on the veranda, and I was able to



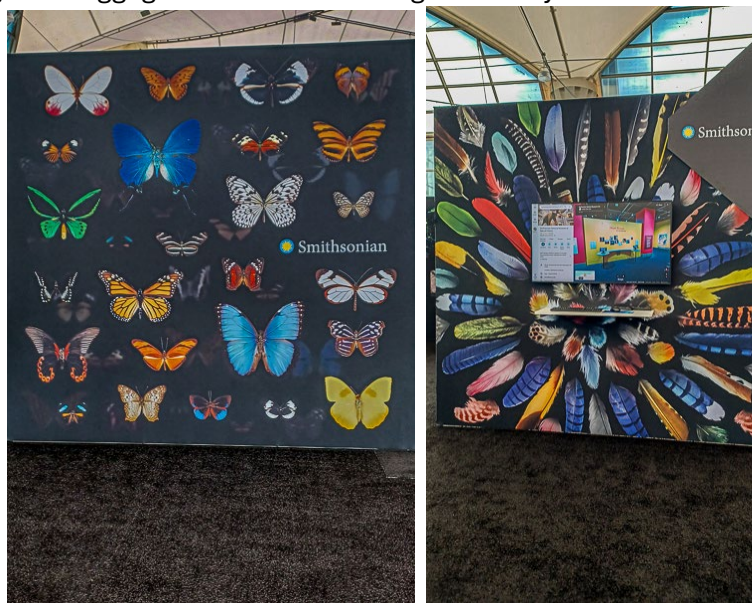
meet up with my old friend Alex Miller, president of Esri Canada. We had a great conversation about his story of how he “restored” an old family movie from the 1940’s using a software application from Google AI. It was fascinating.



“Canada Night” – Convention Center Terrace

After Canada Night wound down and the sun was setting over San Diego Bay, I took the trolley back to Old Town and stopped at the Marriott Courtyard Hotel “Bistro” for a cold pint of Stone IPA, along with an order of pepperoni flatbread – really tasty! (the bartender continued to recognize me and poured a glass of Stone IPA as soon as she saw me enter the bar!)

The following morning, after breakfast at the hotel, I packed my bag, checked out, and left a note in the frig to give any leftover food to a homeless person. (I also had to leave a can of beer that had frozen solid overnight! Perhaps a homeless person could use that too!) I took the trolley to the Santa Fe Depot with the intention of checking my bag to LA Union Station, only to discover that Amtrak wasn’t accepting checked baggage in San Diego anymore. So, I ended up checking my bag at the convention center luggage check – now a free service. Then I dropped off a note of thanks and compliments on an exceptional plenary session with Jack’s secretary Tammi. I spent the next hour and half visiting the Map Gallery and Expo one last time before picking up my bag from luggage check and boarding the trolley to the Santa Fe Depot.



Smithsonian National Natural History Museum exhibits

With an hour to wait for the departure of the train, I grabbed an egg salad sandwich and chips at the “Silver Streak Café” in the depot. Once on board the train I headed to the Café Car for a cold can of

“Swami’s IPA” as we rolled along the coast with lovely views of the ocean. Upon arriving at LA Union Station, I spent some time in the Amtrak Metropolitan Lounge using some of my Amtrak Rewards points – a welcome relaxing environment away from the crowds and chaos in the station. As boarding was called for the Southwest Chief, I rode to the platform with the Red Cap service. On the platform I received my seat assignment in the coach car next to the Lounge/Snack Bar Car – very convenient.



Amtrak Metropolitan Lounge – Union Station



Lounge Car – Southwest Chief

As I sat in the Lounge Car waiting for boarding to be completed, an Amtrak policeman walked by and stopped to say, “the view gets better”! (we were still parked on the track next to a Metrolink train, so we and the passengers on the Metrolink train watched each other – they were headed to Ventura, and our train was bound for Chicago!) Just before we departed, the Café attendant walked by and invited me to come down to the Café on the lower level before he made the announcement that the Café was open so that I could avoid the crowd! (it was very thoughtful of him and much appreciated) I also took the opportunity to order an Angus cheeseburger and a bag of “Miss Vickie’s” potato chips. The burger was huge and quite tasty!

While I enjoyed the burger, it was a lovely ride through the Santa Ana River Canyon, with beautiful views of the Santa Ana Mountains at sunset. Meanwhile, there was a massive traffic jam on highway 91 on the other side of the canyon, known as “rush hour”! The 90-minute trip from La Union Station to San Bernardino Depot was very relaxing and enjoyable, as opposed to a 2 or 3-hour drive from LA. I connected with the Metrolink train to downtown Redlands, and as I walked home I happened to meet my long-time neighbors, Brad and Dorthie walking their dog. We spent some time in front of their house fondly remembering the times we had been neighbors. I expressed my sadness at seeing them leave Redlands, after having been next door neighbors for almost 32 years! I wished them well as they prepared to move to Tennessee, and I knew they would be missed.

## **August**

When August rolled around, there was nothing to mention of any significance beyond a couple of photo shoots.

## **September**

Early in September, I arranged a trip to Baker City, Oregon to visit my sister Lynn in her new home, and then on to Anchorage, Alaska to spend time with Marion and Michael, as I’ve done almost every year since I moved from Alaska to southern California in 1985. On Friday the 5<sup>th</sup>, my neighbor Mike gave me a ride to the railroad station in downtown Redlands to board the train to San Bernardino and on to Rancho Cucamonga where I would catch the express bus to Ontario Airport. (the trip cost me less than \$7.00, compared to a parking fee of \$15.00 per day if I had driven to the airport) Unfortunately, the train to Rancho Cucamonga was delayed 25 minutes by a mechanical issue, so it meant I would miss the airport bus as I had planned. Luckily, despite the delay, there was another bus waiting as I arrived at the Rancho Cucamonga station, and I got to the airport with plenty of time.





Metrolink Station - Redlands

As I checked in for the Delta Airlines flight to Salt Lake City, the agent took time to write a personal Thank You note to me, along with a small gift to acknowledge my “Three Million Miler” status – much appreciated! After passing through the TSA security zone, I discovered a new facility, the “Aspire Airport Lounge” near my departure gate. I was able to gain complimentary access to the lounge using my Diners Club credit card, and I enjoyed an hour of relaxation with a chilled Tsing Tao beer, along with some tasty snacks! Soon it was time to board the plane and my first-class seat 1A was quite comfortable, especially with the Gin and Tonic served before takeoff. As the boarding process continued, the elderly lady seated behind me was so excited to be in first class for her first time that she just had to phone her daughter and tell her all about it! After takeoff, our route took us over the 11,000-foot-high San Bernardino Mountains and the Mojave Desert as the pilots carefully steered around heavy storm clouds. The views of the massive clouds were beautiful, highlighted in the late afternoon sun. But the elderly lady behind me was obviously scared, though the flight was fairly smooth.



Thunderstorms over the Mojave Desert

When the flight attendants came by to refresh our drinks and offer snacks, I chose a package of “Grain Free Dijon Mustard Pretzels” that were excellent and went perfectly with my Gin Tonic and lime!

As we approached Salt Lake City, the view of sunset over the mountains was gorgeous. Upon landing, the lady behind me said she would be connecting with a KLM flight to Amsterdam where she was looking forward to visiting her family. I headed for the Delta Skyclub, and I was pleasantly surprised to find a huge, beautiful new club! After ordering a beer at the bar, I went to the front desk to enquire if it was possible to change to an earlier flight to Boise. The agent checked and said the best she could do was one open middle seat in economy. She even told me it was not a good seat and “suggested” that I keep my first-class seat and stay in the club. So, I ordered another local “Unita Cutthroat IPA” and filled a small plate with delicious food from the extensive buffet!



Sunset approaching Salt Lake City



Delta Skyclub – Salt Lake City airport

It was a short flight to Boise where I took the shuttle van to the Airport Comfort Inn. As I checked into a nice room, it was just past 11:30pm, and I noticed that the front desk clerk had also been the shuttle van driver! The next morning, I took advantage of the delicious complimentary breakfast in the hotel before taking the shuttle back to the airport to pick up a rental car. I encountered light rain throughout the two-and-half-hour drive to Baker City on Interstate 84. Along the way, I stopped at the “TA Truck Stop” in Farewell Bend to get some coffee, but to my great surprise and disappointment, the truck stop was totally out of coffee! (I had to wonder what the truckers thought of the situation?) Light rain showers continued all the way to Baker City. It wasn’t long before I arrived at Lynn’s house and stowed my bag in the bedroom. Meanwhile, I caught a quick glimpse of her three cats who were not accustomed to “visitors”! Lynn gave me a quick tour of her new house and described the changes she had made, as well as those she intends to do in the future. I must say, the house looked beautiful, and Lynn agreed, with the exception of the “hideous” lime green paint in the kitchen! When she took me downstairs to the basement, I was a bit shocked to learn that apparently the former owners had used it for growing marijuana! She wasn’t sure just how she planned to deal with the basement!



Lynn’s house in Baker City

Later, we sat at the kitchen table with a cup of hot tea and talked about what she had experienced in the move back to Oregon from Illinois to be close to her stepsons and their families. She told me of her plan to have a “neighborhood” buffet dinner in her house that afternoon to celebrate my birthday, rather than inviting folks to go out for dinner. Everyone would be bringing a dish and Lynn would avoid cooking by providing “dishware” and some food from Albertson’s grocery deli! Wes, Dan and all the Baker City family would be gathering at Lynn’s house, and I was looking forward to it since a few years had gone by in the meantime. (Lynn confided in me that the reason we weren’t going to Wes and Chloe’s house was for two reasons. The first being their three little “yappy” dogs that insist upon being the center of attention. The second reason was that their house was so stuffed with things that it was almost impossible to move around! I took her word for it. Then she fixed another cup of tea, and we sat down to discuss the “Living Trust” documents I had finalized a couple of weeks before, since Lynn was designated as the “executor” of the trust. After going through the papers, there was still a couple of hours before everyone was expected to



arrive for the dinner party, so I headed to downtown Baker City to see “what was new”, “what was gone”, and “what was the same” – basically everything! Following a short walk along Main Street, I ended up at “Barley Brown’s Brewery”. I ordered a pint of their “Jackhammer IPA”, a very good west coast style IPA. As I sat at the bar, I noticed a college football game on the bar TV, and I was “stunned” by the score – Oregon 69 vs Oklahoma State 3!! Meanwhile, outside in the parking lot were over a dozen motorcycles and signs reading “Motorcycle Parking Only”. From Barley Brown’s I walked down Main Street to the “Geiser Grand Hotel Bar”, and along the way I passed a new establishment, the “477”, a local distillery, which I thought was a bit unusual for a small town in eastern Oregon.



“Barley Brown’s Brewery”



Geiser Grand Hotel bar

When I returned to Lynn’s house, I found the dinner party in full swing, and it wasn’t long before I met up with all the Baker City family, including Wes and Chloe’s daughters Chanda and Cheyenne whom I hadn’t seen for many years. They introduced me to their families, and we had a great time catching up on all that had happened since the last time we shared the Christmas holiday before Lynn’s husband Nils, their grandfather, had passed away. Then one of Lynn’s neighbors brought out a fantastic homemade Lemon Meringue pie to celebrate my birthday! It was a very nice way to spend the day. After the party wound down, Lynn and I talked about her experience of moving back to Baker City, both the better points, as well as a few unexpected things she will need to deal with. When I asked her, she felt the move was very much worth it and was looking forward to her future back in Baker City!

The next morning, we joined Wes, Dan, Chloe, and Chanda for breakfast at the “Truck Corral Café” – a classic truck stop diner just off Interstate 84! Dan, Chloe and I ordered chicken fried steak, eggs, hash browns, and toast, while Wes had eggs and four huge pork sausages. Meanwhile, Lynn ordered **one** pancake that filled a large plate, and Chanda opted for four slices of French toast. Needless to say, none of us went home hungry! (the waitress had to brew a new pot of decaf coffee for me) While we enjoyed the delicious breakfast, big rigs continued to roll by, and Wes found the newest edition of “Truck Magazine” in the shop next door. As we were leaving the café, we encountered a small “vintage car show” in the parking lot, and of course, Wes and Dan couldn’t resist inspecting the cars, all of which were beautifully restored.

From the café, we drove to Wes’s house to see his brand new, customized Kenworth big rig. It was a huge diesel truck painted bright turquoise, Chloe’s favorite color, and covered in sparkling chrome, including the two tall chrome-plated exhaust stacks! To my surprise, Wes explained that the stacks were only for show, since the engine’s exhaust was routed under the truck, not above it. By rerouting the hot exhaust, the chrome stacks would not be discolored or tarnished by the extreme heat from the engine! Wes and Dan spent almost an hour showing me virtually everything about the truck, especially the massive 560hp Cummins diesel engine, the 18-speed transmission, and the customized sleeper cab! It was very clear that they were very proud of the truck and looked forward to entering it in several upcoming truck shows! (note; the truck cost Wes’ company owner over \$350,000! But as Wes put it, the owner had given him a “blank” check for ordering the truck)



Wes and his new truck

After several photos of Wes with his truck (his baby), I bid everyone farewell and headed to Interstate 84 and the drive to Bosie to catch the flight to Anchorage via Seattle. The weather was clear, and it was an easy drive. Along the way, I stopped briefly to visit “Farewell Bend State Park” where the old Oregon Trail left the route along the Snake River to cross the mountains of eastern Oregon on the way to the Willamette Valley. The golden grass covered hills above the river shined in the brilliant sunshine.



Farewell Bend – Snake River

When I got to Boise airport, I turned in the rental car, a new Toyota Camry hybrid that got remarkable gas mileage – over 40mpg! Then I checked in for the Delta Airlines flight to Seattle and headed to the “Idaho Hop Taphouse” near the departure gate. As I sat at the bar, I noticed a large photograph of an old poster from the end of prohibition with men loading kegs of beer onto a wagon that had a large sign – “for beer, call Henderson 8030”! It was not about “Henderson” beer, rather it referred to the phone number to call for beer. None of the bar staff had a clue of what the poster was about when I asked them, so I went online and solved the mystery! (Henderson was the name of the telephone “exchange” in Cleveland and 8030 was the specific telephone number)





A short time later, I boarded the Skywest Airlines flight to Seattle that was scheduled to depart on time. However, we sat on the taxiway for 45 minutes due to an ATC (Air Traffic Control) “hold” because of traffic congestion at SeaTac airport! Unfortunately, Skywest wouldn’t serve any drinks while the aircraft was on the ground, so I asked for a glass of club soda with a lime in an attempt to “imagine” it was a Gin Tonic with a lime - it seemed to work! After we finally took off, it was a smooth flight to Seattle, but due to the delay leaving Boise, I missed the connecting flight to Anchorage. To make a long story short, I spent 4 hours in the Delta Skyclub and was booked on the next flight departing at 10:59pm! Although it was a long wait in Seattle, the time spent in the Skyclub was enjoyable, especially the bowl of famous “Ivar’s Clam Chowder”.



Delta Skyclub – SeaTac Airport

The delay in Boise meant that I arrived in Anchorage at 1:30am and then picked up the rental car. Before the trip, I had gone online and found a very interesting accommodation in downtown Anchorage called “Rustic Hideaway” which turned out to be a house overlooking Cook Inlet. I finally got to bed at 3:00am - very chilly weather (42 degrees), complicated by the fact that at that late hour I couldn’t figure out how to adjust the thermostat! The house was beautiful and very well appointed, but I was too tired to really appreciate it until the next morning.



“Rustic Hideaway” – Anchorage, Alaska

After a hot shower the next day, I drove to Barnes & Noble bookstore, one of my favorite places in Anchorage, for a delicious ham and cheese croissant, along with a large decaf Americano. Browsing through the bookstore, I found a couple of very interesting books. Then I drove to “Potter’s Marsh” on the south edge of the city to walk along the boardwalk and observe the waterfowl. At one point, I came to a place where Coho salmon were migrating up Rabbit Creek to spawn. Later in the afternoon, I went to Kincaid Park, an old Nike missile site where I took photos of the abandoned concrete bunkers that still remain. The park is now the location for World Cup Cross-Country Skiing Championships! As I left the park, the weather changed to very cloudy skies and light rain, typical of autumn in Anchorage.



Potter's Marsh – Anchorage, Alaska

Returning to downtown, I walked over to the “Glacier Brewhouse”, another one of my favorites, for a glass of their IPA and a bowl of the best seafood chowder in the world! The bar was very busy, even though it wasn't yet 4:00pm. From there I walked to “Whiskey and Ramen”, a new restaurant to check it out. As I entered the restaurant, I encountered a rather “snooty” guy at the front desk who “reluctantly” showed me to a seat at the kitchen counter. Then a very nice lady served me a cold pint of local “King Street IPA” and went on to explain in detail the dishes on the menu when I said I would be having dinner in the restaurant with friends the following evening. As I sat at the counter with my beer, I had fun watching the chefs cooking!

When I finished my beer, I walked over to “F-Street Station”, sat at the bar overlooking the kitchen, and ordered my favorite dish of halibut and chips, along with a pint jar of Alaskan Pale Ale. I watched the cook, a tall black man, prepare the orders, and I noticed he was very good at managing the orders, of which there were many. Then my server asked me if I wanted the “Alaskan” portion of halibut and chips, or the “Texan” portion – the Alaskan portion was twice the size of the Texan – an obvious slam on Texas! When it arrived, my order of halibut and chips was just as delicious as I remembered from many years of coming to F-Street Station. However, I am still unable to get their recipe! Later I noticed the chef's special for the evening was “fresh troll caught Coho salmon, and I was very surprised to see the cook “grill” the salmon filet on the flat top, rather than using a skillet, but the result looked great. I finished the evening with a beer at Simon and Seafort's Bar, but unfortunately, there was no gorgeous sunset view of Cook Inlet due to the heavy cloud cover.

I was up early the next morning and fixed a hot cup of coffee before preparing to “checkout”, which required that I strip the sheets off the bed and gather the towels for the laundry. The last step was to empty the trash bin and then I left the house – surprisingly, never once did I see or have any contact with the owner! Then I drove to “Sami's City Diner” on Northern Lights Blvd for a huge breakfast of eggs, hash browns, toast, and reindeer sausage. As I looked around the diner, it appeared like it had once been an old Denny's Restaurant with its classic red Naugahyde covered stools at the counter. After breakfast, I decided to drive down to Girdwood along the shore of Turnagain Arm, and it wasn't long before I ran into light rain that would follow me the rest of the way. When I arrived at the Alyeska Hotel, the rain had turned into mist and drizzle, but I noticed the summit of Mt Alyeska was clear of clouds, so I made a quick decision to take the tram to the top. It was a good choice as I had lovely views of the glaciers surrounding the valley, despite the heavy clouds hanging over the tops of the mountains. Upon exiting the tram at the top, I was suddenly hit in the face by a chilly wind – the temperature was barely above freezing! In spite of the cold, wet weather, I managed to take some photos of the mountains and the valley below. Then I headed to the “Summit Café and Bar” next to the tram station for a pint of King Street IPA as I sat in the lounge overlooking the Alyeska Hotel and the valley below.





View of Alyeska Hotel and Valley from Summit Café & Bar



Tramway

Soon it was time to board the tram for the return trip to the hotel, and our “driver” pointed out several places as we descended where bears were often spotted. Leaving Girdwood, the rain became heavier, and it was not fun driving back to Anchorage. When I got back to the city, I did a quick “drive by” of the duplex on Pussywillow St that Marion and I shared with Bob and Leslie when we first moved to Anchorage from Seattle. I also drove by the condo on Boundary Avenue where I lived for several years. What struck me about both places was how much they looked the same as they had many years ago!

Late in the afternoon, I checked into the Wyndham Hotel on Ship Creek for my last night in Anchorage. The front desk gave me a key card for room 308 on the top floor facing Ship Creek, as I had requested when I made the reservation. But when I entered the room, it hadn’t been cleaned! No other rooms were available on the top floor, so I had to take a room on the second floor. Once I stowed my bag in the room, I walked over to the Hilton Hotel Bar for a beer before joining Marion and Michael for dinner at “Whiskey and Ramen”. I arrived a bit early and was seated at a table downstairs, by the same “snooty” front desk guy, in order to wait for Marion and Michael. Then the lady who had served me the night before came to my table to say hi, and take my order for a glass of King Street IPA, which I appreciated. She also gave me her favorite recommendations for dinner. A short time later, Marion and Michael arrived – Marion looked beautiful, as always, but she appeared to be still in recovery from her recent hip surgery.

We ordered three appetizers – pork buns, Hamachi, and salmon crudo (an Italian version of Japanese sushi), along with two main dishes of “Dark Horse Ramen” and “Tokyo Ramen”! The presentation of the dishes was beautiful and impressive, but I found the plastic chopsticks were too “slippery” to eat the ramen, so I was forced to ask our server for “plain” wooden chopsticks! It was a very nice evening of conversation over dinner and the celebration of my birthday! And our server was excellent! After dinner, I walked to F-Street Station for a beer, and as I sat at the bar, an elderly couple from New Zealand sat down next me and started a conversation. Her husband and I had an interesting discussion about photography. It seemed they were headed to Vancouver, BC on a cruise ship the next day, and I gave them some recommendations for things to see and do in Vancouver, having lived there for three years while attending the University of British Columbia. Then it was time to walk back to the hotel in the cold light rain.

Early the next morning at 5am, I was awakened by an “elephant” in the room above me! Unable to get back to sleep, I finally got up and took a shower before going downstairs to the breakfast room, only to discover it was really crowded and didn’t have any decaf coffee! So, I checked out of the hotel and went to Starbucks for a hot decaf Americano. Soon it was time to go to the airport and turn in the rental car, after which I checked in for the Delta Airlines flight to Seattle and on to Ontario. The 3-hour flight was quite bumpy departing from Anchorage, but it smoothed out as we passed over Southeast Alaska. Unfortunately, the heavy cloud cover prevented us from seeing any of the rugged mountains or massive glaciers. The lunch we were served was an outstanding dish of spicy short ribs with roasted honey glazed carrots and garlic mashed potatoes!

Upon arriving in Seattle, I had a long 4 and half hour layover that I spent in the Delta Skyclub where I enjoyed “dinner” that consisted of a large bowl of Ivar’s Clam Chowder, Thai spring rolls with chili sauce,

sweet chili meatballs, shrimp fried rice – all from the huge buffet! And the glass of Lagunitas IPA went very well with dinner. Later in the evening, I was surprised to see that dinner was also served on the Skywest Airlines flight from Seattle to Ontario. The fresh Greek salad with grilled chicken breast was excellent, accompanied by a Gin Tonic with lime.



Delta Skyclub – SeaTac Airport

As we were nearing Ontario, the flight attendant put my Gin Tonic drink into a paper cup so that I could continue drinking it as we made our final approach to the airport. He called it a “cocktail to go”! He was an excellent flight attendant and a very nice guy - I couldn’t help thinking he must be gay! Upon landing I picked up my bag and walked to the terminal curbside to meet the driver from Prime Time Shuttle at 11:30pm – it was a nice ride home!

## **October**

The second week of the month I had arranged a trip to Spokane, Washington with the plan to visit a couple of places (Republic, WA and Bonners Ferry, ID) where I had worked more than 50 years ago and hadn’t been back since. So, I was looking forward to seeing what had remained familiar and what had changed! My trip began with a journey on the Metrolink train from Redlands to Rancho Cucamonga and the Express bus to Ontario airport, a route I’ve taken several times. After checking in for the Delta Airlines flight to Seattle, I went to the Aspire Airport Lounge, complimentary with my Diner’s Club credit card, and enjoyed the quiet, relaxing atmosphere, in addition to a glass of Tsing Tao beer and a tasty selection of snacks before boarding the plane. A delicious lunch of a roasted turkey breast and cheddar cheese sandwich was served shortly after takeoff, along with a chilled glass of Pinot Grigio. The flight was smooth and very nice, with a gorgeous view of sunset over the Cascade Mountains.

Upon arrival in Seattle, I spent a couple of hours in the Delta Skyclub prior to boarding the flight to Spokane, unfortunately a bit turbulent. When I arrived at the airport in Spokane, I experienced some hassle regarding the “hotel shuttle” to the Spokane Tribe Resort Hotel and Casino. When I called the resort to ask where the hotel shuttle was, I was told that I should have received a text message about the free “Uber” ride to the hotel – I had received no such message, which really pissed me off! So, I went to the taxi stand and got a taxi instead. To my amazement and frustration, the ride to the resort was more than 7 miles from the airport and cost me \$37.00! (not exactly an “airport hotel” as was advertised) When I finally arrived at the resort hotel, it was 11:30pm and I was mad! I complained to the hotel manager, and he claimed it was because of a communication problem with “Hotels.com” with whom I had made the reservation! (apologies were extended and accepted) The hotel room was very nice and the \$3.00 premium craft beer, “Cascade Fog IPA”, in the casino bar helped to ease the stress of the evening.

The next morning, I needed some cash to tip the Uber driver for the ride back to the airport where I would pick up the rental car. So, I went to one of many ATMs in the casino to withdraw \$20.00 – the “default” withdrawal was \$200.00! After the transaction I received a “receipt” that I had to take to the casino cashier to **complete** the transaction! There I encountered a very friendly and “chatty” lady who



informed me that I needed to apply for a casino “Club Card” that also gave me “free” casino money, which I wasn’t really interested in, but finally she gave me \$20 and the casino “Club Card”! Then I joined a lady from Pennsylvania for the shared Uber ride to the airport. She was on her way back to Pennsylvania to join family for a celebration. The Uber driver talked almost the entire time to the airport – I barely heard anything he said despite being seated directly behind him.

At the airport I picked up a new Nissan Sentra, but the agent was unable to find a local map for me. Perhaps the Budget Rental Car Company now assumes that we don’t need a paper map since there’s Google Maps online! Leaving the airport, I encountered a **very** long drive on US Highway 395 north out of Spokane toward Colville. There was also a massive traffic delay south of Chewelah due to an incredibly slow-moving machine painting lane lines on the newly paved highway. The northbound traffic was backed up many miles with no way to pass! (very frustrating) Finally, as I reached Colville, I picked up a large decaf Americano at Starbucks in the Safeway store, which I had been looking forward to for the past couple of hours since leaving Spokane.

From Colville, I continued north on US 395 to the village of Orient on the shore of Lake Roosevelt near the Canadian border. (Lake Roosevelt was created as a reservoir by the construction of Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River) At the small town of Kettle Falls on the Columbia River was the junction with State Highway 20 where I travelled west over the Kettle River Mountains toward Sherman Pass. I was surprised to see the route had been designated as the “Sherman Pass Scenic Byway” that included several “Heritage Sites” along the way. As I drove west on highway 20 to Republic, the beautiful fall colors of the forest followed me – bright yellow, gold, and red!



Lake Roosevelt near Orient, Washington



Sherman Pass Scenic Byway



Sherman Pass

When I pulled into Republic, the town appeared to be a lot like I remembered from the past, but as I drove up Main Street, I began to notice most of the old buildings were the same, although many were now



totally different businesses. Looking for accommodations, I chose the “Northern Inn Motel”, conveniently located on Main Street in the center of town. I checked into a single room on the second floor with a view of Main Street. The room was clean, but with just the basic necessities – nothing fancy.



Entering Republic, Washington



Northern Inn Motel - Republic

Later in the early afternoon, I drove north of town to Curlew Lake State Park to take some photos of the lake and surrounding mountains. There were some gorgeous colors among the trees around the lake which made for a picturesque autumn scene.



Curlew Lake State Park

When I got back to Republic, I spotted the “Republic Brewing Company” at the far end of Main Street, so it was time for a beer, and their “Widowmaker IPA” was a very nice west coast style IPA. Although the brewery was only a few years old, Republic once had a brewery back in the late 1920’s before it was forced to close by prohibition. As I sat at the bar, a group of local men were enjoying large pitchers of beer and plates of French fries after work. By now it was approaching time for dinner, and when I asked the lady at the motel for a recommendation, she told me the “Knotty Pine Lounge and Restaurant” was a good choice of the only two places to eat that were open in town! I walked across the street to the restaurant and was greeted by a young woman who highly recommended the “Chef’s Special” that night, “Steak Chimichanga” topped with sour cream and guacamole! When the plate arrived, it was “huge”, and although very tasty, I could only manage to eat about a third of it! The rest was boxed up and went into the frig in my motel room. I ended the evening with a beer at the “18 North Happenings Bar” down the street. I couldn’t help but notice a sign on the wall behind the bar that read “Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Control Board”! The first time I had seen the two substances being regulated by the same board. When I returned to the motel a group of cyclists were just arriving for the night, and their leader told me they would be headed to Canada tomorrow to cycle the “Selkirk Tour”. I bid them a safe journey and retired for the night.





Republic Brewing Company



"Steak Chimichanga"

The next morning, I was suddenly awakened at 6am by the loud noise from the shower in the room next door, something I hadn't expected after the stillness of the night! So, I got up a short time later and showered before heading down to the breakfast room for a delicious hot meal of scrambled eggs and biscuits with sausage gravy. The cook even made a special pot of decaf coffee for me. (I gave her a good tip) After breakfast I drove around part of the town I remembered when I worked for the US Forest Service on the Colville National Forest in an attempt to find the Republic Ranger Station where I had lived for two years. But what I found was a brand-new ranger station and nothing of what I remembered. (not surprising when I realized that the last time that I had seen the ranger station was over 50 years ago!)

After I checked out of the motel, I visited the new "Stone Rose Eocene Fossil Interpretive Center" and found it had a fascinating collection of incredible fossils from an ancient site south of Republic that had been discovered a few years ago. Before leaving town, I drove up Knob Hill Road to the old Republic Gold Mine, once the largest gold mining operation in the state, but now abandoned, having shut down many years ago. From Republic I headed south through the Colville Indian Reservation on State Highway 21 to catch the Keller Ferry across Lake Roosevelt. It was a lovely drive under sunny skies through the San Poil River Canyon with 500-foot-high rocky cliffs on both sides of the river. Along the way, I made a short detour to Swan Lake Campground in the Colville National Forest where there were beautiful views of the lake and the forest surrounding it – no one else in sight!



Entering the Colville Indian Reservation



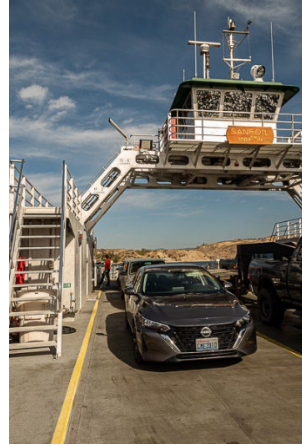
San Poil River Canyon – Highway 21

At last, I came to the Keller Ferry landing, and after about 20 minutes I joined a few other vehicles as we boarded the ferry boat named "San Poil". The 15-minute trip across Lake Roosevelt was very scenic and I spent much of the time outside on the deck taking photos with the wind in my face! Once on the far shore, I continued on highway 21 to the small town of Wilbur, filled up with gas, and then turned onto highway 174 northwest to Coulee Dam. Unfortunately, the Visitor Center was closed due to the federal government shutdown! I took photos of the massive dam before driving south to Coulee City where I discovered the "Banks Lake" Sinclair Station, Café, and espresso bar for a large decaf Americano!





Keller Ferry landing



Keller Ferry – “San Poil”

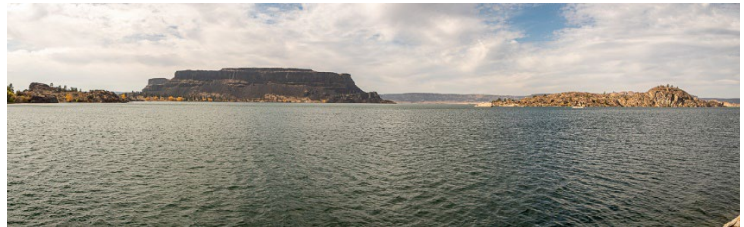


Crossing Lake Roosevelt

Further south of Coulee City on highway 17 I came to “Dry Falls State Park” with incredible, amazing views of the remains of ancient waterfalls that once covered the area millions of years ago! The Visitor Center had many very interesting exhibits that told the fascinating geologic history and phenomenon that formed the Dry Falls we see today!



Dry Falls State Park



Banks Lake near Coulee City

As the afternoon sun was beginning to approach sunset, I found a very nice place to stay for the night in Moses Lake – the “Best Western Plus Lake View Inn” where I checked into a lovely room with a balcony overlooking the lake! Then I headed for the “Paradise Bar & Grill” in the hotel for a cold pint of “Manny’s Pale Ale” brewed in Seattle, and to check my phone for email and messages – nothing urgent. Back in my room, as the sun was setting, I enjoyed a cold can of Hamm’s beer, a classic old brand from Minnesota, while sitting on the balcony with a gorgeous view of the lake. (very relaxing after a long day of driving) Now it was



time for dinner in the Paradise Bar & Grill, and my server highly recommended the “Chicken Cordon Bleu” with garlic mashed potatoes and fresh steamed broccoli! It was fabulous, but so huge that I could barely finish it. While I enjoyed dinner in the restaurant, I couldn't help noticing so many of the men continuing to wear their caps and cowboy hats as they ate! (it still amazes me)



Moses Lake – “Best Western Plus Lake View Inn”

After dinner, I retired to my room for the night, which was quiet and peaceful, until early in the morning I became aware of a loud, “gurgling” sound coming from the fridge! After half an hour, I couldn't stand it any longer, so moved the fridge out of the cabinet and unplugged it! Peaceful, quiet sleep returned.

The following morning, I woke up to heavy overcast skies and light rain – a big change overnight! The complimentary breakfast of scrambled eggs, country-fried potatoes, sausage and toast was a delicious start to the day. Meanwhile, I watched a couple of guys fishing from a boat in front of the hotel as the light rain continued to fall. Leaving Moses Lake I drove south on highway 17 to the small town of Othello and then east on Hwy 26 to the village of Washtucna where I turned south on highway 261 on the way to Palouse Falls State Park. I passed mile after mile of gorgeous golden wheat fields that are so typical of the Palouse region in autumn.



Wheat fields in the Palouse region of eastern Washington

When I arrived at the state park, I was stunned by the incredible view of the 198-foot-high waterfall, the highest in the state! The weather was windy and chilly (42 degrees), but well worth the visit! The Palouse Falls are a very unusual feature in the normally flat rolling hills of eastern Washington and would likely be unknown to the majority of travelers driving through the region. But it's an amazing geological feature that should not be missed! (I lived in Washington state for almost 8 years and never knew about the falls)



Palouse Falls State Park

As I drove further east, I came to the junction of US Highway 12 that took me to a crossing of the Snake River at “Lyon’s Ferry State Park”. From the state park there was a clear view of a massive old steel railroad bridge high above the river and still in use today. As I walked around the park along the river, hundreds of Canadian Geese were resting on the river and feeding on the green grass on shore.



Lyon's Ferry State Park



Snake River at Lyon's Ferry

Leaving Lyon's Ferry, I drove east on US Highway 12 toward Lewiston, Idaho, and along the way I stopped at a gas station/food mart in the tiny town of Pomeroy. There was a sign on the front door saying the shop was closed but the gas pumps were working for credit cards only. The gas pump accepted my credit card; however, the pump wouldn't work! Very frustrating so I left the town and continued on my way to Lewiston. Just then, I noticed the “low fuel” light came on shortly after leaving Pomeroy! A message on the dash screen indicated I had approximately 58 miles of fuel left, and when I checked my map, the next town, Clarkston, was 32 miles away. At that point I was wondering if I should trust the “expected” mileage, but I had no choice except to continue driving to Clarkston.

I passed miles of golden wheat fields and many tall grain elevators along an old, abandoned railroad. At one point the highway climbed steeply up to “Alpowa Summit” at an elevation of 2785 feet elevation and then suddenly became a very long steep descent to Clarkston on the Snake River across from Lewiston. I stopped at the first gas station I saw and then followed the signs for US Highway 12 through the center of Lewiston that became a very complicated route to the junction with US Highway 95 north. The highway climbed steeply from the city to the top of the infamous “Lewiston Hill” where there were stunning views of Lewiston and the Snake River far below! From the “scenic Viewpoint” I could see the old highway that was known as the “Spiral Highway” because of the countless 10-15 mph hairpin curves! And it was still open for travel by any adventurous drivers.



Scenic view of Lewiston, Idaho and the Snake River



The drive north on US 95 to Coeur-de-Alene was through continuous rain that became heavy at times, which made the trip less than pleasurable. But the forest covered mountains were lovely, even in the rain. Fortunately, there were several sections of the highway that were 4-lane limited access which made the long drive a bit easier. As I entered Coeur-de-Alene I spotted the “Trails End Brewery” and decided to stop for a beer, and their “Dry Hop IPA” was very good! The bartender told me that whenever someone asked for the location of the brewery, he would tell them it was next door to “Adam and Eve” adult store! (one couldn’t miss with those directions!)

Following the refreshment stop in Coeur-de-Alene, I continued north to Sandpoint and filled up with gas at the Exxon station. When I went to use the restroom, I noticed a sign on the wall above the toilet that read “to report the condition of this restroom, take a photo and send it to [xxx-xxx-xxxx]”! So why not tell the clerk at the checkout counter? The wet weather continued to follow me all the way to Bonners Ferry, my destination for the night. Upon entering the town, I passed a large road sign one would have to be blind to miss seeing – “Welcome to Trump Country, Love God, Guns, Family, Freedom, and your Neighbor”. I discovered a wonderful place to stay on the shore of the Kootenai River – “Kootenai River Best Western Plus Inn”, a new resort and casino operated by the Kootenai tribe. I checked into a lovely king suite that was decorated with many articles of Kootenai cultural significance.



Entering Bonners Ferry, Idaho



“Kootenai River Best Western Plus Inn” - Lobby

After dropping off my bags in the room, I walked over to the restaurant and bar for a bottle of Canadian “Kokanee Beer” that I remembered from the time I lived in Vancouver, BC. It still tasted like a classic Canadian beer, but the bartender told me it was now brewed in St Louis! For dinner, the bartender recommended her favorite, grilled fresh salmon from British Columbia, served with rice and steamed vegetables – superb! The restaurant had a beautiful view of the Kootenai River as well. After dinner, I paid a visit to the casino next door – a very loud, smoky environment where I watched a young couple as they poured several hundred dollars into a very complex slot machine. I was amazed when they made at least a couple of trips to the ATM to withdraw more cash! (they were still playing the machine when I left)

The next morning dawned cloudy but dry, so after a delicious breakfast of ham and eggs, along with very tasty whole wheat toast from a local bakery, I decided to walk around downtown Bonners Ferry. Although I didn’t recognize anything from the time I had spent a summer working on the Kaniksu National Forest over 50 years ago, I enjoyed taking photos of the old, historical buildings. Unfortunately, the Boundary County Historical Museum was closed, but there were several very interesting exhibits outdoors. From downtown, I drove a short distance to the Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge where thousands of Canadian Geese rest on their way south for the winter. Back in town, I searched for the old Great Northern Railroad passenger station where I had passed through in the winter of 1968 on the “Empire Builder” train, but the station no longer existed since the Great Northern was merged with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad.





Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge



Kootenai River – Bonners Ferry



Downtown Bonners Ferry



Moyie River

From downtown, I drove north to Moyie Falls where an old hydroelectric power plant continues to operate, and high above the river was an old steel arch highway bridge. As I hiked along the edge of the river, light rain began to fall, and the drive from Bonners Ferry to Sandpoint was not fun in the rain that became heavy at times! As I turned west onto US Highway 2 in Sandpoint the rain followed me all the way to the small town of Priest River, Idaho. When I reached the small town, surrounded by thick forest of Douglas Fir in the Kaniksu National Forest, I spotted the “Timber Town Brewery” downtown. So, I stopped for a pint of their “Fresh Cut IPA” and sat at a small table in the corner of the brewery overlooking Main Street. Meanwhile, a lively “cribbage tournament” was going on at a table near me where everyone seemed to know each other as if it were a regular event. (a lot of fun to watch) Before leaving the brewery, I explored the historic old building that housed the brewery and a couple of local craft shops where I discovered a fascinating exhibit about its history.



Priest River, Idaho



Driving around the small town, it was obvious by the sawmills that it depended heavily on the logging and timber industry. After enjoying the beer at Timber Town Brewery, I continued west on US 2 through Newport, WA on my way to Spokane, my destination for the night. At last, I came into downtown Spokane just as the rain turned into heavy drizzle. I checked into the DoubleTree Hotel overlooking the Spokane River, dropped off my bag in the hotel room, and made my way downstairs to “Spencer’s Bar” for a beer. Unfortunately, there was a very loud group in the bar, and combined with the price of the beer at \$15, I only stayed for one beer before heading out to find another much less expensive beer! A couple of blocks away was “Saranac Bar & Grill” that looked worth investigating, but as soon as I entered the crowded bar, I found it to be dominated by an extremely loud group, so I left immediately. Across the street was a small bar named “Zola’s”, and when I walked in, the first thing I noticed were the strangely dressed people sitting at the bar “painting pictures” – a bit too weird for me so I left. Nearby, “Chilis” was also way too loud with a large crowd watching the Seattle Mariners’ baseball game. Once again, I left and continued walking down the street until I came to the “Grand Davenport Hotel”, the oldest and most historic hotel in Spokane. Once I found the hotel entrance on the next street over, I followed the signs to the “Table 13 Bar and Restaurant”. I discovered it to be a lovely, quiet place with beautiful music in the background and no sound from the TV above the bar. In fact, I was the only customer in the bar! I felt bad for the young Hispanic bartender, so after a pint of “Firestone Union Jack IPA”, I asked him for his dinner recommendation. Right away he said the Vodka Pasta Fettucine with fresh Dungeness Crab was fabulous. It wasn’t cheap, but it was truly outstanding! All in all, the bar was the perfect place to relax from a long day of driving in the rain. After the delicious dinner, I walked back to the DoubleTree Hotel and enjoyed my complimentary chocolate chip cookies as I watched the evening news in my room. The weather the past two days had been “miserable” with constant rain, sometimes quite heavy, in addition to a “winter storm warning” issued by the National Weather Service with the snow level down below 4,000 feet elevation.

The next morning, I woke up to partly cloudy skies, no rain, very chilly weather (35 degrees) and gusty winds! After breakfast I took a long walk in Riverfront Park, the site of the “1994 World Expo” where I discovered the fascinating history of the fair that required the removal of an extensive railroad network downtown along the Spokane River, including the demolition of both historic railroad stations, the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific! The Great Northern Railroad clock tower was the only structure that was preserved, and it became a centerpiece of the World Expo! Fortunately, many of the 1994 World Expo buildings were preserved and remain the “essence” of Riverfront Park today, creating a gorgeous city park with lots of trails winding their way along the Spokane River. As I walked along the trails there were spectacular views of the Upper and Lower Spokane Falls, as well as the historic Washington Water Power Plant that continues to generate electricity. Riverfront Park is truly a “gem” in the city of Spokane, and a site not to be missed on a visit to the city!



Great Northern Clock Tower along Spokane River

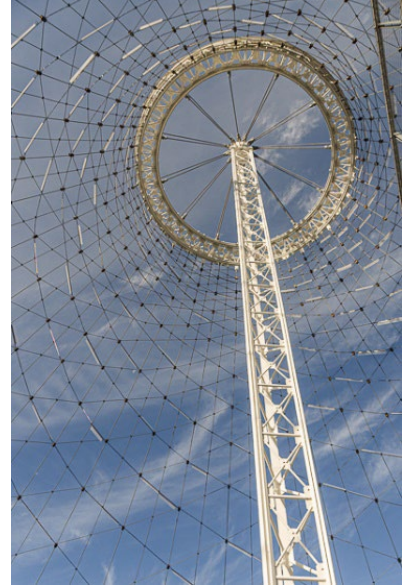


Lower Spokane Falls





Upper Spokane Falls – Riverfront Park



Centerpiece from World Expo

I checked out of the hotel and then drove west on US 2 to Davenport, and from there to “Porcupine Bay State Park” on the shore of Lake Roosevelt. Besides the lovely view of the lake and surrounding mountains, I noticed that several hundred Canadian Geese had taken up residence in the park which necessitated taking care to avoid stepping on the numerous goose “droppings” as I walked around! From Porcupine Bay, I drove to “Fort Spokane National Historic Site” and walked around among the remaining old buildings under sunny skies, but very windy weather. Unfortunately, the Visitor Center was closed due to the federal government shutdown. But I was able to take a lot of photos and there were plenty of interpretative signs around the site that provided a wealth of information about the history of the fort that was established in 1880 to protect the new settlements and the Spokane Indian Reservation.



Parade Ground – Fort Spokane



Guardhouse – now the Visitor Center

Leaving Fort Spokane, I headed back to Spokane International Airport to return the rental car and check in for the Delta Airlines flight to Seattle. On a side note, as I was returning the rental car, the Budget agent asked about my experience with the car. My response was the car was so low to the ground that “tumbleweeds” often got stuck underneath without my knowledge! Who knows how far I drove sometimes with a large tumbleweed stuck under the car? Later, I saw that I had driven over 1100 miles! I spent the time waiting for the departure of the flight enjoying a “Hop Valley IPA” at the “Fir and Pine Gastropub” near the gate. As I sat at the bar, the man seated next to me suddenly asked me to watch his bag while he went to the restroom – no problem. When he came back, he told me that he collected “vintage beer cans”! (apparently his bag was filled with them)





“Fir & Pine Gastropub” – Spokane International Airport

The flight to Seattle departed on time and was very smooth, as opposed to the previous flight from Seattle to Spokane. Upon arriving at SeaTac airport, I spent an hour in the wonderful Delta Skyclub before the departure of the flight to Ontario, which gave me the opportunity to savor another bowl of fabulous Ivar’s clam chowder!

As I boarded the Ontario flight, I enjoyed a Gin Tonic before takeoff that was followed by a delicious “charcuterie plate” for lunch once we were airborne. I find it unusual to be served such a dish on a domestic flight, but very enjoyable! The flight in first class was very comfortable, and the in-flight service was excellent. Late in the evening at 11:30pm we landed at Ontario airport, and after I picked up my bag, I called “Prime Time Shuttle”. And within just a few minutes I was on my way home – excellent service!

As I look back on the trip, although it was short, just 5 days, it had taken me back to places where I had lived but not seen in more than 50 years! The trip was something I had thought about doing for many years but had put off for many reasons. However, my experience on this journey was both very enjoyable and a bit disappointing. Even though I knew that I probably wouldn’t find things as I remembered, there were just enough things I saw that did bring back fond memories, and for that reason, I counted the trip a success! I also “confirmed” that these places in my life still exist, and although I remember them, they don’t remember me! And I’m OK with that.

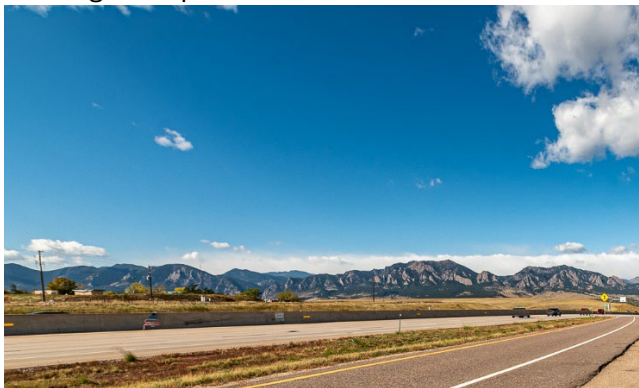
In the middle of October, I received an assignment to photograph seven “Bright Horizon Daycare Centers” in the Denver area. Once I had booked a roundtrip ticket on United Airlines from Ontario airport to Denver, I made arrangements for hotel accommodations in Denver. In looking at the locations of the daycare centers, I did my best to schedule the day and time for each photo shoot to minimize the driving time between each of them. Fortunately, I was able to schedule all seven on one weekend! The last task was to reserve a rental car. And to make the trip easier, I “pre-booked” a parking space at Ontario airport in lot #4 at a discounted rate of \$55 for the days I would be away, thinking that United Airlines departed from Terminal 4. But when I checked my ticket on the day of departure, I suddenly realized my flight departed from Terminal 2! Unfortunately, I couldn’t change the airport parking reservation, so I ended up parking in lot #2 across from Terminal 2 and had to forego the cost of the parking space reservation. But it meant that instead of a 15-minute walk to the terminal it was just over a minute!

After checking in for the United Airlines flight to Denver, I proceeded to TSA Precheck where to my disappointment I had to surrender my small pen knife that I had forgotten to leave at home. (I was tempted to ask the TSA agent, “what do you do with all the “confiscated” items?") Having successfully passed through the TSA security zone, I went to the Aspire Airport Lounge where I had a cold bottle of Tsing Tao beer, as well as a plate of Thai spring rolls and Swedish meatballs, since I knew there would be no meal service on the 2-hour flight to Denver, even in first class! (I had to explain to the lounge bar attendant how to properly pronounce “Tsing Tao” in Chinese) I spent 2 hours relaxing in the lounge before boarding the plane. As I settled into my first-class seat (1E) on the A320 aircraft, the flight attendant served us a chilled glass of

champagne in a plastic cup prior to takeoff – a nice touch! We left the gate on time, taxied to the runway, and prepared to take off. But just as the plane reached 100mph, we came to a **very** sudden and abrupt stop! Everyone, including the flight attendants, were wondering what had gone wrong? We taxied back to the gate, and then the captain informed us that we had experienced a “rejected takeoff” that automatically halted our takeoff. He said it was a mechanical problem with the avionic system and that we would need to deplane to wait for maintenance to resolve the problem. Luckily our gate was across from the “Tap-n-Pour Bar” where I ordered a glass of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale (at \$16 per glass!) and waited until re-boarding was called. To our pleasant surprise, our flight attendant served us another chilled glass of champagne – in a plastic cup of course! Once we had finally taken off, the flight to Denver was smooth and the onboard service was very nice, but we arrived an hour and half late! (11:30pm vs 9:30pm)

Then it was a long walk from the gate in Terminal B to the train and a 5-minute ride to the main terminal. On top of that, it was a 15-minute shuttle bus ride to the rental car facility. When I arrived at the Thrifty rental car office, I found myself standing at the end of a long line of people waiting to check in, and with only 2 staff at the counter! I was not happy by the time I got to the counter 45 minutes later! But I finally got keys to a rental car. As I left the airport, the exit gate attendant was “useless” in providing directions to Interstate 470! It took me a couple of U-turns to finally get onto I-470 for the trip to the Thornton Hilton Garden Inn. It was difficult to find the hotel late at night, but I finally checked into my room at 1:30am!

The next morning, I was up at 6:30am to be at the first photo shoot at 8am in nearby Westminster. The photo shoot went well and then I drove north to Loveland, taking the scenic but slow US Highway 36 through Boulder. Along the way I stopped at a rest area where there was a stunning view of the “Front Range” under sunny skies – magnificent! I arrived for the next shoot an hour early, so I took a short hike along the “Big Thompson River Trail”. Where the trail passed under the highway, I saw a very unusual sculpture that consisted of faces of important local people – strange! From the trail there was very nice view of the Big Thompson River and the mountains of the front range in the distance.



View of the Front Range – US Highway 36



“Faces” on the Big Thompson River Trail



Big Thompson Brewing Company



After the photo shoot, I still had some time before the next shoot in Fort Collins to stop at the “Big Thompson Brewing Company”, after having passed through a huge crowd of “No Kings” protestors! (there were many such protests all over the Denver area) I sat down at the bar and ordered one of the brewery’s best beers, according to the barmaid – “Float Away IPA”, a very respectable hazy IPA.

After finishing the shoot in Fort Collins, I spotted “Krazy Karl’s Pizza Place”. A very friendly, vivacious barmaid highly recommended the local “O’Dell’s IPA”, a very good hazy IPA, and at \$4.00 a pint during Happy Hour, it was also a great bargain. Sitting at the bar, I noticed a sign posted on the wall – “BABS, limited 2 per person”! When I asked what “BABS” were, the barmaid said it stood for “Big Ass Beer” in a 32oz glass, and indeed the limit was 2 “BABS” per person!



“Krazy Karl’s Pizza Place”

Leaving Fort Collins, the traffic to downtown Denver was very heavy and slow due to extensive road construction, making the drive less than enjoyable. But I finally arrived at the “Holiday Inn Express Downtown Denver Hotel”, a former “Comfort Inn”, conveniently located just off I-25. And as I checked in and made my way to the elevator, I passed a group of black folks “dressed to the hilt” in all black party outfits! So, I greeted them with, “looks like a party”, and they all laughed!

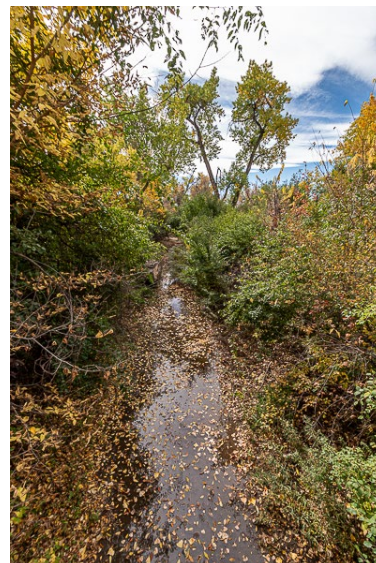
Later, I asked the front desk clerk for a dinner recommendation, and he immediately said “Mickie’s Top Sirloin Restaurant” about 5 minutes’ drive from the hotel. When I got to the restaurant, I found it was very popular, especially being Saturday evening, but I managed to find an open seat at the bar where I was greeted by a very friendly and vivacious barmaid. I began with a cold pint of O’Dell’s IPA and then asked her for a dinner recommendation. Her favorite was “grilled chicken parmesan” with homemade noodles and pasta sauce – it was incredible! After the fabulous dinner, I drove back to the hotel to retire for the night before three more shoots the next day.

Early the next morning, I enjoyed a very nice complimentary breakfast in the hotel before driving downtown to the first photo shoot. Due to a lot of street repairs, it was quite difficult to find a parking space, even though it was Sunday! In addition, the main Wells Fargo building was locked, so I had to call the director of the facility to unlock the door. She met me, along with one of the building security guards, and I went about photographing the daycare center. It was a beautiful new facility with a lovely view of a historical clock tower across the street. It was a short drive to the next two shoots in Greenwood Village south of downtown Denver. But at one point, as I followed the Google Map directions to I-25 south, I suddenly found myself driving the wrong way on a one-way street! I immediately stopped, and who should pull up directly in front of me, a Denver Police car! Fortunately, he saw the California license plates on the rental car and put on his flashing lights while he waited for the traffic to allow me to do a U-turn and get back on the other street to I-25! (Thanks)

It was a short 5-minute drive to Greenwood Village, a beautiful suburb of Denver with lots of trees decked out in their best autumn colors! After the shoots, I had about 4 hours until the departure of the flight to Ontario, and as I headed toward Denver International Airport, I passed a sign for the “Highline Canal Trail”. Being a sunny warm day, I decided to take time to hike part of the trail. I spent an hour hiking along the trail with gorgeous views of the mountains in the distance west of the city. The canal was originally developed in the late 1800’s to supply water from the South Platte River to farming areas east and south of Denver. Today it no longer functions as a canal, but at 71 miles long, it’s one of the longest urban trails in the country. It was a wonderful break from the stress of doing seven photo shoots in two days!



Greenwood Village



What remains of the canal today

But as I made my way on the freeways to the airport (DIA), I encountered ever increasing traffic. In fact, at the junction of I-225 and I-470, it was incredibly slow moving with bumper-to-bumper traffic – very aggravating! Finally, I reached the rental car facility, and even though it was a very quick return process, the long wait for the shuttle bus to the airport terminal was once again frustrating. After sitting on the shuttle bus for 15 minutes, I got off and asked the driver who was standing in front of it, a very friendly black lady from Nigeria, when would we depart for the airport? She asked me, “are you in a rush”? I replied, “I just don’t like waiting”! Suddenly she said, “well, let’s go”! We were finally on our way, but it was at an incredibly



slow pace. At last, I reached the main terminal, but it was so huge I had to ask where the TSA Precheck was located. Once I had cleared TSA, I made my way to Gate B-12, one of 100 gates in Terminal B that involved a crowded train ride and a very long walk to the gate. As I approached the gate, I spotted “Steve’s Snappin’ Dogs Bar and Craft Beer”. It was crowded, but I was lucky to find an open seat at the bar where I ordered a glass of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale from a very friendly bartender named “Steve”! A live broadcast of the Denver Broncos, New York Jets football game was on all the bar TVs, but unfortunately for the local Denver fans, the Broncos were behind. I decided to order a BLT to go as the United flight wouldn’t have any meal service. Then, just as I was leaving the bar, the Broncos’ half-back was hit severely at the two-yard line on 4<sup>th</sup> down! You could hear the “groans” from everyone in the bar! (it was devastating to watch)



“Steve’s Snappin’ Dogs Bar and Craft Beer” – Denver International Airport

The departure was on time, and it was once again a pleasure to be served “sparkling wine” before takeoff, even if it came in a plastic cup. My seatmate didn’t want the window shade open because of her sensitivity to sunlight, but she opened it briefly for me to enjoy the beautiful colors of the sunset as we crossed the Rocky Mountains! After takeoff, I ordered a Gin Tonic with lime, and she asked for vodka and soda with lemon. (she also requested the same for her colleague seated in economy class) When our drinks arrived, my drink had a lemon and hers had a lime! We both had to laugh! It was a smooth flight, and I found out she was the president of a healthcare company on her way to do a corporate presentation to her staff at the Lake Arrowhead Resort, but she had no idea that it was located high up in the mountains! (she was going to be in for a very surprising, but beautiful experience!)

Upon returning home, I suddenly realized that I had accidentally left my cell phone and glasses in the airplane seat! The next morning, I filed a lost item report with United Airlines. In the meantime, it was a very “unsettling” experience to be without the cell phone – no access to phone calls or text messages, especially those that involved “two factor authentication”. That’s when I realized how dependent we all have become on our cell phones! And yet, there was a time in my life when I travelled overland across Africa long ago where I had no access to any form of communication for weeks at a time! How times have changed!

At the end of October, Halloween rolled into town, and once again the city closed the street and set up a lot of games, rides, food trucks, and booths for the hundreds of kids who show up in our neighborhood each year to celebrate the “Trick or Treat” tradition. After spending over \$250 for candy last year, we decided to go “dark” this year.



Halloween in Redlands

## November

On the first weekend of the month, I attended the annual “Amber Waves of Grain Craft Beer Festival” in Corona, organized by the “American Riders” motorcycle club to benefit veterans’ organizations. It’s an event that I’ve attended for several years, and one that I really enjoy. Saturday morning, I drove to the Dos Lagos Center in Corona and checked into the “Hilton Home2Suites Hotel” that I had booked in October so as to avoid driving home Saturday night. After the opening parade I picked up my VIP wristband and souvenir beer glass, then explored the more than 40 local breweries for tastings. After that I went to the VIP tent in front of the entertainment stage where there were complimentary sandwiches, chips, and cookies. I spent much of the afternoon sitting in the VIP tent with my beer, listening to the band “Gino and the Lone Gunmen” as they played classic rock and southern country music. Their renditions of several Johnny Cash songs were fantastic – very enjoyable!



Opening Parade



VIP Tent

Meanwhile, Bill, the emcee, an ex-Marine sergeant, was his usual comic self and fun to watch. At one point, as he stood on stage, he made a comment about his free beer from “Lost Coast Brewery”, saying “their Mexican lager is very tasty, but not with ice in it”! Immediately everyone understood his joke! The VIP tent was also a great place to watch people as they strolled by or danced in front of the stage. Later in the afternoon, after the band shut down, a 93-year-old Marine Corps veteran named Harold stepped on stage and proceeded to sing an incredible version of America the Beautiful – very impressive! At the close of the event, Bill announced that \$100,000 had been raised in donations to benefit over 35 veterans’ support organizations, one donation being \$10,000 from a local plumbing company! Overall, it was a fun time with



nice folks, as long as politics was not part of the conversation, especially with those wearing red MAGA hats or “Charlie Kirk Memorial” t-shirts!

After the event closed, I walked next door to the “Stone Church Brewery”, a major event sponsor, but on the way, I accidentally tripped on one of the fence supports and fell to the sidewalk. I was immediately helped up by some nice folks, including one of the brewery staff who insisted on buying me a beer! Luckily, I didn’t suffer any injuries beyond a sore ankle. As I sat at a table in the brewery with my beer, I watched as a little girl and her brother played chess at a nearby table, as their father watched. Suddenly I noticed that she was moving the chess pieces in a random fashion while her father and little brother looked on. I guess she must have been playing “express chess”! As I looked around the bar, I spotted a guy dressed in a full “leopard suit” which he claimed he hadn’t had time to change since last night’s Halloween party.



Stone Church Brewery

From Stone Church Brewery, I walked over to the “All Stars Sports Bar” that was very crowded with Dodger fans watching game 7 of the World Series. While I drank my beer, I was surrounded by a lot of “bar coaches” trying to call the game, and it was fun listening to them, though their influence on the outcome of the game was “useless”!

Leaving the sports bar, I went across the street to the “Karl Strauss Brewery Restaurant” for dinner. It was also crowded with Dodger fans, but I managed to find an open seat at the bar – in fact, I realized it was exactly the same seat as I had last year at this same time! When I asked the barmaid what she recommended for seafood, she immediately said “Ginger Crusted Salmon” – the same as last year! The salmon was superb, along with a pint of Tower 10 IPA. And when it came to dessert, once again the recommendation of angel food cake topped with strawberry sauce and whipped cream was outstanding – the same as last year! Meanwhile, the Dodgers tied the game in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning and went on to win the World Series on a home run in the 11<sup>th</sup> inning. At that point, the entire restaurant erupted in shouts and applause! Personally, I had been hoping the Toronto Blue Jays would win, but I didn’t say anything that night. After the game, I walked back to the hotel and retired for the night.

The next morning, Sunday, was the return from Daylight Saving Time to Standard Time, and amazingly the clock in my room changed the time automatically, though I don’t know how! I enjoyed a delicious complimentary breakfast in the hotel before heading home to resume my normal Sunday morning routine. Looking forward to the event again next year!

On Veterans Day I went to the annual celebration organized by the American Legion in Jenne Davis Park. But this year there was a meager group of attendees though they were an enthusiastic audience. The local band did their best, but to be honest, they were not that great – the trombonist was especially off-key much of the time! There was only one kind of beer available, a “Double Red” – not my favorite, so I walked across the street to the “Benjarong Restaurant” for a cold “Chang Beer” from Thailand. They were about to close,

but they welcomed me to sit at the bar. Later in the afternoon, I went to the Elks Club for their annual free dinner for veterans. As I sat down at the bar in the club, the barmaid insisted upon going to the kitchen to bring me a delicious dinner of roasted chicken with herb rice and fresh steamed vegetables. As I enjoyed dinner, I listened to classic rock-n-roll music played by the band called “Tomcats” while many couples made their way to the dance floor. It was a very nice celebration of Veterans Day!



Jenne Davis Park



Elks Club

In mid-November, I attended the Celebration of Life for Mike Phoenix, a longtime friend and former Esri colleague who passed away in October as a result of Lymphoma cancer. I was shocked and saddened when I heard the news, especially since the last time I saw Mike there was no indication he was ill. I joined many of Mike’s friends and colleagues at the Episcopal Church in Redlands to honor his memory. Mike lived a very full life, in his own words, and everyone he touched had a wonderful memory to share. He was an ardent world adventurer and traveler, as well as being the heart of Esri’s software donations and technical support to countless educational institutions throughout the world! Mike, your legacy will endure for a long time my friend!

As Thanksgiving Day approached, I began preparations by baking three pies – apple, pumpkin, and cranberry walnut the day before. Also, I fixed a classic green bean casserole topped with crumbled bacon and a creamed corn casserole topped with fresh diced scallions. On the morning of Thanksgiving day, I baked butternut squash with maple syrup and roasted a turkey breast basted with fresh herbs and olive oil. I finished the menu for Thanksgiving Day with garlic mashed potatoes, gravy, herb stuffing, cranberry orange sauce, and hot dinner rolls with butter. Although it took several hours to prepare, I really enjoyed it! Unfortunately, our friends and neighbors couldn’t join us, so it was just Leslie, me and the cats at the dinner table. We enjoyed dinner, but it was a bit of a “challenge” for Leslie as she tried to maintain her strict vegan diet. I did my best to prepare separate portions of some dishes to meet her dietary restrictions, and we had a lovely Thanksgiving dinner!



Thanksgiving Day pies



## December

Around mid-December, I was invited to the “Inland Empire Professional Photographers and Videographers” (IEPPV) annual holiday party at the Eagle Glen Golf Club in Corona. I always enjoy getting together with my fellow members to celebrate the season and to see who were chosen to receive awards for their photography. The party began with a marvelous performance by a well-known local magician who stumped everyone with his sleight of hand tricks using a deck of playing cards, after which a delicious dinner of baked chicken breast, scalloped potatoes and honey glazed carrots was served. Dinner was followed by a number of wonderful desserts before the auction of many gifts began and the presentation of awards. During the evening, one of my longtime friends insisted on having our photo taken, which turned out to be a great way to remember the evening – thanks Kim!



Eagle Glen Golf Club lobby



Kim and Me

As the Christmas holiday nears, I plan another traditional turkey dinner with all the trimmings, including a couple of pies. Unfortunately, my sister Lynn will not be joining us this year as she will be celebrating the holiday with her Baker City family. However, invitations have been extended to our friends and neighbors to join us for Christmas dinner. Here's hoping all of you have a wonderful celebration with family and friends!



Christmas lights at our house





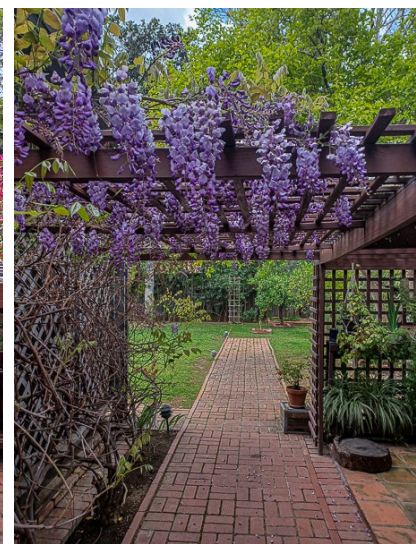
## Photo Gallery



Carter Estate Winery and Resort – Temecula

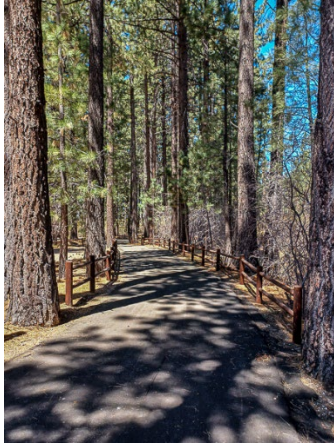


Ponte Vineyard and Resort – Temecula

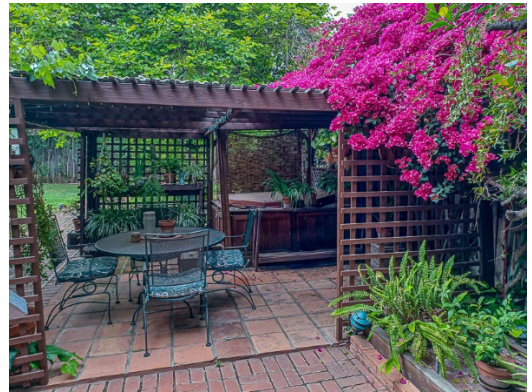


Blooming Wysteria in our Garden





Trail – Big Bear Lake City



Blooming flowers in our garden



Firefighter's Auto Show – Redlands



"Arts in the Park Festival" – Redlands





“Holt Mansion” – Redlands



With Michael Younan & his son - Esri User Conference – With Tito Castro



Map Gallery – Esri User Conference – Lobby artwork



Geiser Grand Hotel – Baker City



Eastern Oregon

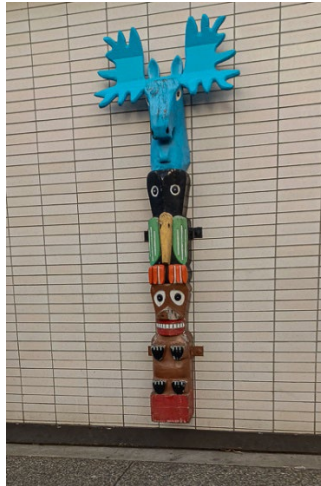




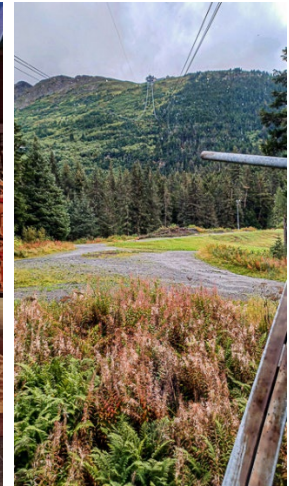
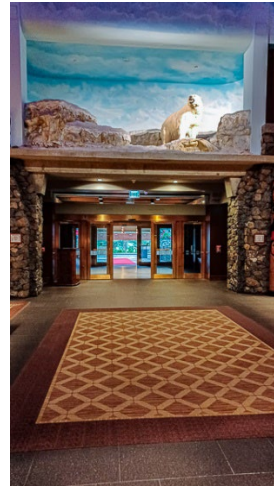
Abandoned Nike Missile Site, Kincaid Park – Anchorage



Visitor Center - Downtown Anchorage



Funny Signs in Anchorage



Alyeska Hotel - Mt Alyeska



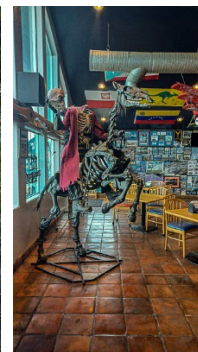
Kootenai River near Bonners Ferry



Bridge over Moyie River

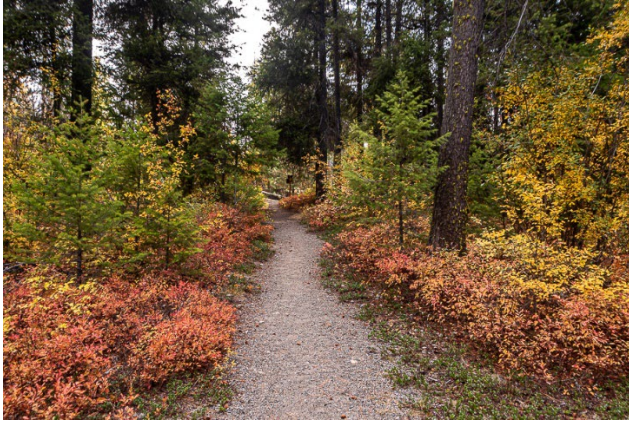


Wild Burros in San Timoteo Canyon



"Headless Horseman"





Trail to Swan Lake



Swan Lake – Colville National Forest



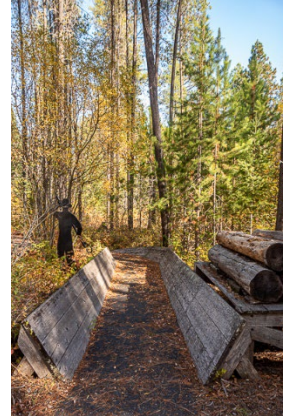
Downtown Republic



View of the town from the Republic Ranger Station



San Poil River – Colville Indian Reservation



Old Log Flume



Lake Roosevelt (Columbia River)





The Grand Coulee – eastern Washington



Wheat Fields – Palouse Region – eastern Washington



John Deere Tractor Dealer – Clarkston, WA



Livery Stable & Quartermaster Building - Fort Spokane



Lower Spokane Falls – Riverfront Park





Great Northern Clock Tower



Spokane River



Palouse Falls State Park

